



**Hampshire &
Isle of Wight
Wildlife Trust**

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Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
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United Kingdom

20 April 2026

CC: Minister of State, The Rt Hon Matthew Pennycook MP
CC: Minister for Nature, The Rt Hon Mary Creagh CBE MP
CC: Minister for Water and Flooding, The Rt Hon Emma Hardy MP

Re: Planning reform must help save our chalk streams

Dear Secretary of State,

As responses to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation are collated, we urge you to consider the dire state of English chalk streams and the scale of public support for policy to protect these rivers as irreplaceable habitats.

On 13 November 2025, Minister Pennycook committed to 'explicit recognition of chalk streams in the suite of national policies for decision-making'. On 3 December 2025 he added that this will ensure 'clear expectations are set for plan-makers...in respect of managing the impacts of development on these sensitive waterbodies'. However, as drafted, the National Planning Policy Framework does not adequately deliver on these commitments. Within the text, chalk streams are an example and just something to identify rather than actively protect. We urge the Government to honour its commitments by granting irreplaceable habitat status to these rivers – providing much needed protection and clarity. This, along with other changes to remedy the omission of clear guidance, was recommended by the Save Our Chalk Streams campaign and backed by more than 5400 people.

Only seventeen percent of chalk stream waterbodies achieve good ecological status by Water Framework Directive standards, and none are in good overall health. Eighty-five percent of the world's chalk streams are found in England and, when healthy, they thrive with life, providing habitats for rare species including water vole (protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) and Atlantic salmon (classified as endangered by the IUCN). Chalk streams have cultural significance and have been the muse of great English poets and authors, inspiring iconic works like *The Wind in the Willows*.

Healthy chalk streams are not just a 'nice-to-have', but a necessity. In southern and eastern England, we are heavily dependent on abstraction from chalk streams for our water supply. More than a third of chalk streams are affected by abstraction. They are also vulnerable to pollution. In 2025, forty

percent of chalk stream waterbodies were subjected to more than ten hours of storm overflows. These rivers are important to our wildlife, our culture, our history and should be a source of national pride.

The NPPF defines irreplaceable habitats as technically very challenging or time-consuming to restore, considering factors such as age, uniqueness, the number of species found there, or rarity. Chalk streams meet all the necessary requirements. These rivers need very specific conditions to even exist, like the chalk bedrock that filters the water making it cool and clear. This is why it is impossible to recreate them elsewhere. They are also vulnerable to damage, and relatively incapable of self-repair. In other words, chalk streams are irreplaceable and should be classed as such within Government planning reforms.

This consultation on the NPPF comes at a time when the protection of chalk streams is firmly on the agenda across Westminster. During the passage of the Planning and Infrastructure Act, chalk streams featured prominently in debates at both Commons and Lords stages, with 130 MPs voting to retain Lords Amendment 38, which would have provided explicit protection for chalk streams within Spatial Development Strategies. More recently, Pippa Heylings MP introduced the Chalk Streams (UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site) Bill, recognising the national responsibility to safeguard these unique habitats. Both have attracted significant cross-party support, underlining the broad parliamentary consensus on the need for stronger protections.

The Government's stated objective of 'protecting and recovering chalk streams' within the 'A New Vision for Water' white paper is welcomed. With the Water Reform Bill forthcoming, we urge the Government to take on recommendations by the '[Clean Water Now](#)' campaign, led by Wildlife & Countryside Link to achieve this stated objective. The Bill must take a holistic approach to recovery, ensuring that the new regional water planning system includes special provisions in chalk stream areas to agree abstraction and development limits to help struggling chalk streams to recover, as well as habitat recovery along riverbanks to help those streams come back to life.

At this pivotal moment for the planning system, the Government has a clear opportunity to embed the protections that irreplaceable chalk streams require within the revised NPPF and Water Reform Bill, fulfilling our international responsibility to safeguard these exceptional habitats. We stand ready to support the implementation of these measures and to work collaboratively to aid the recovery of our chalk streams.

Thank you for considering this urgent issue and we look forward to hearing from you. To discuss the concerns raised in more detail, please email lorna.selby@hiwwt.org.uk to arrange a meeting with a delegation of the signatories.

Yours sincerely,

Debbie Tann MBE, Chief Executive, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Signed:

Ali Morse, Chair, CaBA Chalk Streams Restoration Group

Brian Eversham, Chief Executive, Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire

Charlotte Hitchmough, CEO, Action for the River Kennet

Dave Rumble, Chief Executive, Wessex Rivers Trust

David Mooney, Chief Executive, London Wildlife Trust

Ed Bramham-Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Norfolk Rivers Trust

Eliot Lyne, Chief Executive, Norfolk Wildlife Trust

Estelle Bailey MBE, Chief Executive, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust

Evan Bowen-Jones, Chief Executive, Kent Wildlife Trust

Jamie Cook, CEO, Angling Trust

Jo Lewis, Chief Executive, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
Joan Edwards OBE, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
Laura Burrows, Chief Executive, Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.
Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust
Nic Scothern, Chief Executive, Sussex Wildlife Trust
Stuart Singleton-White, Chair, CaBA Chalk Streams eNGO sub-group
Tom Beeston, Chief Executive, Chiltern Society