An initiative of the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is a partnership which aims to conserve and enhance all major chalk streams in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and to encourage enjoyment and understanding of them. The Project provides advice to landowners on riverside management, carries out practical projects to enhance the streams for wildlife, improves access where appropriate, undertakes surveys and provides educational materials for schools.

The Chiltern Hills were designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1965. This is recognition that the Chilterns countryside is amongst the finest in England and Wales. The Chilterns Conservation Board works to ensure that the special qualities of the area are conserved.

Last December, the water companies submitted their latest business plans to Ofwat for approval. In their plan Affinity Water, the company that supplies water throughout much of the Chilterns area, propose an ambitious programme of groundwater abstraction reduction alongside strategies to reduce household demand, and leakage. In April Ofwat announced that it had granted the Plan ‘Enhanced’ status, in recognition of its high quality. The news is very positive indeed particularly for the Chilterns and Hertfordshire Chalk Streams as the plan includes significant reductions in abstraction for many of them. Of course the hard work of delivery begins and the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) welcomes the chance to be part of this process.

In July the CCSP was awarded the Bowland Award from the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Beauty. The Award was given in recognition of the Project’s outstanding contribution to the conservation and well-being of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although it is not the done thing in this country to blow one’s own trumpet (your scribe plays cornet, thank you!), it is nice to occasionally receive a bit of recognition for the work you do.

All good things have to come to an end they say, and indeed it is true for the Project this year. After 11 years as Chairman of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP), Peter Hinde has decided to step down. Since retiring from his professional career, Peter has devoted his ‘retirement’ to wildlife conservation and landscape management working for organisations such as the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust and the Royal Society for Nature Conservation. He has been chairman of the CCSP since 2003. Peter’s years of hard work and commitment were deservedly recognised earlier this year when he was awarded the MBE for services to the environment in the New Year’s Honours list.

The Partners would like to record their thanks to Peter for his years of hard work in support of the Project and wish him well for the future. Although it is sad that Peter is leaving us, he is departing with the Project on a secure footing with an impressive portfolio of work behind it and an exciting future ahead.
It has been another exceptionally busy year for the Project with its share of highs and lows. The year began with many of the area’s rivers flowing better than they had since 2001. Indeed the wetter than average winter, coming close on the heels of the wettest summer on record, prompted some rivers like the R. Wye to rise above their recognised sources, something most felt would not be seen again for sometime.

With the climate of cutbacks and belt tightening continuing in 2013/14, the Project has continued to work in new ways to achieve more for the area’s chalk streams whilst securing the future of the Project. The Project has begun working with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to set up a Riverfly training hub for the Chilterns and Hertfordshire area, which will provide training to volunteers in the Riverfly Partnership’s Anglers’ Riverfly Monitoring Initiative survey technique from 2014.

At a landscape scale the Project has been involved with delivering the second year of the Chilterns Farm Advice Project, which is a £70,000, three year joint initiative between the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Environment Agency. Its main aim is to improve soil and water quality through more sustainable land management practices. It has also continued to work with partners to develop Defra’s Catchment-Based Approach in the Colne and Thames and South Chilterns catchments.

Encouraging local volunteers to get involved with practical conservation of the Chilterns rivers continues to be a major focus for the Project. This year it has worked with the Environment Agency, the Wild Trout Trust, water companies and local groups to deliver a series of habitat enhancement workshops across the area.

On a sad note, in 2013, the Chilterns chalk streams lost three of their most ardent defenders, Nick Blakeney-Edwards, Beryl Buckingham and John Norris. Long time members of the Chiltern Society’s Rivers & Wetlands Conservation Group, Nick, Beryl and John campaigned doggedly for the rejuvenation of their local chalk streams. John especially, studied the fortunes of the area’s rivers and his beloved Misbourne, in particular, for many years. His careful, scientific approach and quiet but tenacious pursuit of a solution to the problem of over-abstraction was respected and admired by all and did much to ensure that the issue was addressed appropriately by the Environment Agency and water companies.

As a Met Office forecaster in his professional life, I am in no doubt that John would have been amazed at the wet and stormy weather that gripped the UK this past winter. Indeed, when the last ‘wettest winter on record’ occurred, aware of the importance of documenting such events, John masterminded the compilation of a detailed record of the 2001/02 winter called the ‘Great Deluge’. I’m sure that he would have wanted to repeat the exercise this year as for the second time in 13 years, persistent, heavy rain brought about record groundwater levels, flooding and pollution from overloading of sewerage systems across the area.

With the return of more clement weather in the spring and the seasonal decline in groundwater levels beginning, pollution and flooding issues have subsided allowing residents and visitors to the Chilterns a chance to enjoy our chalk streams at their very best.

Allen Beechey, Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Officer

Highlights from 2013/2014

Project Development

- Work on the Sarratt Meadows Project continued in 2014 with fish pass consultants being commissioned by the Thames Rivers Trust to design a pass to enable fish to move around the weir at Sarratt Mill. The Environment Agency carried out a fish survey of the bypass channel to assess the fish population prior to the works being carried out.

- The Revive the Wye initiative, working in partnership with the Wild Trout Trust, secured funding for a project to restore the River Wye to a more natural chalk stream through Desborough Recreation Ground in High Wycombe. The work, which will include the removal of concrete bank lining and regrading of the river to improve fish passage, will be carried out in 2014 managed by Wycombe District Council.
Highlights from 2013/2014

**Enhancement Work**

- In November, the CCSP working with the Environment Agency and partners of Revive the Wye held three **habitat enhancement workshops** on the R. Wye as part of **Rivers Week**. The workshops were sponsored by Thames Water who also gave lunchtime talks on water efficiency and the issues of waste water misconnections. Over the three days 38 people received training and 320m of river was enhanced. As part of the week's events the Chiltern Society led a guided 'Mills of the Wye' walk.

- The Project supported the Wild Trout Trust and Environment Agency in holding a series of **six habitat enhancement workshops** in April and May. The Project held riverfly monitoring taster sessions during the days which were held on the rivers Ver, Gade, Colne and Wraysbury.

- Working with the River Chess Association (RCA), the CCSP completed the second phase of a scheme to **improve fish passage** along the R. Chess at Sarratt Bottom by removing a wooden weir which was restricting fish movement. It had been intended that large woody debris features would be installed in its place but this work has been delayed due to persistent sewage pollution from Chesham Sewage Treatment Works.

- Following on from the two habitat enhancement workshops held on the R. Ver at Drop Lane near Colney Street in April, a further two phases of work were completed by the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service and volunteers from the Ver Valley Society in October and February 2014.

- Work to repair and **naturalise banks** of the Wycombe Marsh Brook and R. Wye at Rye Mead in High Wycombe was completed in May by Wycombe District Council. The £100,000 Council-funded scheme, originally identified by the Project in the action plan for **Revive the Wye**, was designed by the Wild Trout Trust.

**Education and Monitoring**

- Working with Bucks, Berks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the River Chess Association, the Project held a water vole surveying workshop for 40 volunteers in April. The Project supported the Association in carrying out a survey of the R. Chess as part of the ongoing **Water Vole Recovery Project** on the river. The results of the survey revealed a decline in the population of 32%.

- With funding support from the Thames Rivers Trust, a **riparian landowner advice leaflet** for the River Chess was published by the Project in September. The leaflet is available in print form or as a download.

- Working in partnership with the River Chess Association the successful **Trout in the Classroom** project was expanded further to **five schools** in the **Chess Valley** in 2014. All schools successfully reared trout from eggs delivered in January, releasing them into the Chess between March and July.

- The CCSP working in partnership with H&MWT's Hertfordshire Living Rivers Project secured £11,000 to set up a Riverfly training hub in 2014.

**Raising Awareness**

- The Project participated in the launch of the **Charter for Chalk Streams** which was held on the banks for the R. Beane in Hertfordshire in May. Developed by the Angling Trust and the Salmon & Trout Association, the Charter calls for greater protection of England's chalk streams and for an end to damaging levels of abstraction.

- Two workshops were held in the Autumn as part of the **Chilterns Farm Advice Project**. 70 farmers and landowners attended the days. Following on from the workshops a total of 11 farm advisory visits were carried out by ADAS, funded through the project. £25,000 has been secured to enable the advice project to continue in 2014/15.

- The Annual Forum of the Project was held on 28th September 2013 at Wooburn Green in the Wye Valley. 40 delegates attended. Speakers included writer and broadcaster Charles Rangeley Wilson, who talked about his latest book, on the R. Wye, **Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River**.

- Seven **visits** were made to sites along four of the Chilterns' rivers to give **advice** on river and riparian management and to assist with the development of enhancement schemes and three talks were given to local groups.

**Launch of the Charter for Chalk Streams in May**
Financial Statement 2013/2014

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* £11,948 will be carried forward to support project work in 2014/15.

2014/2015  Work in progress ...

- More habitat enhancement ‘masterclasses’ on Chilterns rivers
- First Riverfly training workshops to be held - June
- Launch online of the catchment plan for the Colne
- Wild Trout Trust Annual Conference at Latimer
- Trout in the Classroom
- Enhancement of the R. Wye at Desborough Park, H. Wycombe

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Led by the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is a partnership of the following organisations:

A Working Partnership

The considerable achievements of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project would not have been possible without the committed support of the partner organisations, many of whom provide significant staff time to help deliver the Project’s work programme. Many thanks are due to all involved in the Project.

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