



Ver Valley Society

NEWSLETTER

Published quarterly for members of the Ver Valley Society

Number 135 - October 2017

www.riverver.co.uk

President: Peter Fox, MBE

NOTICE OF 41st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This will be held on Tuesday 24th October 2017 at
St Michael's Parish Centre, St Albans 7.30 pm
Free parking in the Museum car park after 6.30 pm.

Nominations for Chairman and Committee are invited and should reach the
Secretary, John Fisher, by Friday 20th October.
Proposers and seconders will be required.

All the present committee are willing to stand for a further year.

After refreshments the speaker will be

DAVID JOHNSON

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Talking about his work as the Living Rivers Officer



*Little egrets in
Verulamium Park.*

[Kevin Garrett]

River Ver Archive: St Albans Central Library (Local History Reference Section)
Over 1,000 pages of information

We were very pleased to co-opt Richard Wallis, a keen Action group volunteer, onto our Committee at our September meeting and anticipate him taking over organising the Action Group from Sue Frearson after the AGM. Sue, with Martin, has been very committed to this group and is owed a considerable debt of gratitude for all she has done. She intends to continue co-ordinating the River-fly monitoring.

I hope many of you have been able to see the regular Facebook or Twitter updates and photos, which can also be accessed on our website. These are thanks to John Pritchard, who as our Membership Secretary is now chasing up those members who need to renew their membership this September. It is intended that our website will be renewed by the end of this year by our Webmaster, Paul Foster, with the help of a sub-committee.

In early August Affinity Water Company issued their draft of the next 5-year Water Resources Management Plan and asked for comments at rather short notice. We asked for and managed to get a 2-week extension on the time scale and several committee members have worked on our response to be sent in – see summary later in this Newsletter.

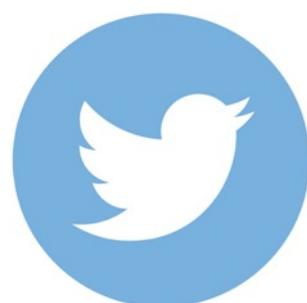
I'm sure you are all aware how low the river is this summer after the dry winter and spring, indeed it is actually dry from Redbourn north. Much of the early summer was hot and dry also which only added to the problem. Meaningful recharge of the aquifer only happens in the winter and early spring so we cannot look for improvement in the sorry state of the Ver in the near future and must hope for plenty of rain this autumn and winter - see the bailiffs' report for facts and figures.

I have had a helpful meeting with Martin Ketcher the HMWT Water Vole Officer to discuss the possibility of reintroduction on the Ver. The first stage would be to put out some new mink rafts at suitable sites, which we discussed. These would need people to monitor them regularly after training. We will consider this further next year when hopefully the Ver is in a healthier condition.

Social Media @VerValleySoc



Our Facebook and Twitter presence has begun to build since the relaunch earlier in the year. We are posting a mixture of river reports, nature notes and plenty of photos showing the state of the river - come and take a look. The VVS has open pages, so you don't need a Facebook or Twitter account.



The most popular post of the summer reached over 6,000 people and encouraged them to save water, and the river, by enjoying a brown lawn!

Bailiff's Notes

I'm sorry that the bailiffs have had a river in such a sad state to report on this summer; from Redbourn north there has been no flow to measure but a 'no flow' record is important evidence to have available for Affinity Water Company and of course there is still wildlife to record. The main problem was that most months from last December to this April had below average rainfall and the very hot, dry June didn't help! You can see from the table below that the groundwater was furthest below the average in July, -7.15 metres from the mean. The difference of -5.1 metres, from the September average, is some sort of improvement and rainfall from July and onwards has been about or slightly above average, with the first half of September having had some rain, although heavy downpours mainly just result in run-off.

Month 2017	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [± average] (figures from Chris Hall at Rothamsted)
June	127.02 [133.32]	39.1 [-14.12]
July	126.08 [133.23]	72.6 [+22.69]
August	125.92 [132.56]	66.6 [+2.9]
September	125.77 [130.77]	Not yet available

With little flow to clear it, there has been much vegetation growth in the river channel, watercress, reeds grasses etc, making flow measurements tricky even where there is flowing water. However despite this our excellent Bailiffs still find plenty to report each month. Although many flowering plants are now over there are still plenty being reported, among them greater willowherb, water forget-me-not, hemp agrimony, michaelmas daisies and some purple loosestrife; the bushes beside the Ver are being brightened by plenty of berries now ripening up.



Dry River Bed at Waterend Lane, Redbourn. [John Pritchard]

There are still damselflies and dragonflies, like common darters, to be seen as well as other insects. On sunny days butterflies such as speckled woods, meadow browns, tortoiseshells, commas, whites, a painted lady and even a brown argus have been seen. Despite the low flows, where there is water the river-fly reports are reasonably satisfactory and it is good to have two new people monitoring so most of the Ver is now quite well covered.

The birds being reported include kingfishers, grey wagtails, red kites, buzzards, sparrow hawks, ring-necked parakeets, red-legged partridges in Gorhambury, and egrets, two pairs of which nested in Verulamium Park when the herons had left. The swifts have now departed but some swallows and martins are still about. John Fisher has the good news about owls in his Bird Notes.

Animals reported recently, as well as grey squirrels and rabbits, have been foxes, muntjac, occasional stoats and/or weasels, with signs of badgers and moles. Fish numbers are probably reduced by the lack of water but some sightings of chub, roach, brown trout, bullheads and minnows have been recorded.

Sadly in the Sopwell Nunnery area there have been pollution incidents, reflected in earlier river-fly results there, but these were reported to EA and Thames Water who appear to have dealt with the problems. In the same area some large willows have come down across the river in some stormy weather causing blockages which have been reported to EA and SADC.

I mentioned in the July newsletter that we are going to lose our Bailiff for Markyate, David Coasby, this autumn when he moves to Devon with out thanks for his efforts over the past year or so. We thank him most sincerely for all he has done. There is rarely much of a river there on which to report even in a normal year, so a fairly general report mentioning wildlife and flagging up other issues in the area every couple of months or so is what is needed. **If anyone from the top end of our valley might be interested in taking over please contact me.**

It seems early to mention this but Bailiffs will be welcome to join the Committee and Action Group on Sat 16th Dec for a pre-Christmas drink at the Chequers pub, Redbourn after the working party finish there at 12 noon.

We have had another good year with the Ver Valley Barn Owl Project with three of our boxes used and ten youngsters reared. A fourth box was used by a pair of little owls and they had four owlets when I checked the box in June but sadly when we returned for the ringing only one had survived. There were feathers on the ground below the box which indicated that one or more of the youngsters had left the box before they could fly and had been predated.



Little egrets with colour rings. [Kevin Garrett]

We have now ringed 99 owls from our boxes since 2006. Maybe get a bottle of champagne for the first one next year! We also monitor the boxes on Rothamsted and this year they had two broods of three. I do not include these in the totals but it does mean we have five active pairs in area.

Josh Kalms, who is in training to be a BTO ringer, was able to join us and actually ringed some of the owls under Peter Wilkinson's guidance. Josh has been volunteering with the VAG for several years and has just graduated with first class honours. Congratulations Josh!



Little egret chicks being fed by a parent. [Kevin Garrett]

On Heron Island in Verulamium Park six pairs of grey herons bred successfully and for the first time three pairs of little egrets also bred. This is the fourth year they have bred here

so they are now firmly established at this site. You will see from the picture that they are colour ringed to enable them to be identified in the field. If you see one of the many little egrets along the Ver and you can note the colour of the rings please let me know and I will pass on the details to Barry. He needs to know the colours on each leg. In the last few years they have been seen at Redbournbury, Lemsford, and Dunstable Sewage Works and in Carmarthenshire and Warwickshire.



Other notable birds along the Ver have been two reeling grasshoppers found by John Pritchard near Shafford and a number of whinchats passing through on their return migration in September.

If you have any interesting bird sightings I would be pleased to hear from you on (01582) 792843 or email john.fisher@btclick.com.

Peter and Josh ringing a little owl.

[John Fisher]

VER VALLEY SOCIETY - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA
Tuesday 24 October 2017 at 7.30 pm.

Nominations for the Chairman and Committee are invited. These should reach the Secretary, John Fisher, by Friday 20 October.

All the present committee are willing to stand for a further year.

Richard Wallis was co-opted to the committee in September 2017.

1. Signing in.
2. Chairman's welcome
3. Apologies for absence.
4. Minutes of the AGM October 2016 as circulated with the newsletter.
5. Matters arising
6. Amend VVS Constitution to 3 Open Meetings per annum
7. Chairman's Report
8. Treasurer's Report and accounts
9. Bailiff Coordinator's report.
10. Ver Action Group Coordinator's report
11. Election of Chairman
12. Election of Committee – Nominees must be willing to stand with a proposer and seconder. Officers will be appointed at the first committee meeting in January 2018.
13. Future Open Meetings
14. Tuesday 27 February 2018 – Redbourn Village Hall
15. Any Other Business

BREAK –

Presentation by David Johnson of the Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust.



VER VALLEY SOCIETY

Web Site: www.riverver.co.uk

VER VALLEY SOCIETY MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING St Michaels – Tuesday 25 October 2016 at 7.30 pm.

1. **Signing in:** - 60 members signed in.
2. **Chairman's Welcome:** - As Jane Gardiner had undergone recent eye surgery she was absent so secretary John Fisher welcomed everyone to the 40th Annual General Meeting of the Society. ,
3. **Apologies:** -. Six members had sent apologies – list available from the secretary
4. **Minutes of the previous meeting:** - These had been circulated with the October Newsletter. Acceptance as a true record was proposed by Mandy James and seconded by Barry Welsh and they were unanimously agreed as a true record.
5. **Matters Arising:** - all on the agenda.
6. **Chairman's Report:-**
 - 6.1 After 40 years no original members are now with us. John Cadisch joined soon after 1976.
 - 6.2 We are proud of our achievements notably the Friars Wash PS turn off in 1993 and the Walk Project in 2011
 - 6.3 Bow Bridge PS was moth balled in April 2016.
 - 6.4 Another study on Verulamium Park is being commissioned by SADC
7. **Treasurer's Report: -**
 - 7.1 The balance was £26,074.01, which included £4,107.62 of Friends of Ver Park monies which were no longer ring fenced but it was intended that they would be held for Verulamium Park expenditure for the time being.
 - 7.2. Paul Hutt ACA had audited the accounts and signed them on 16th September 2016.
 - 7.3 Attention was drawn to the bank charges which should be zero
 - 7.4 Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Martin Frearson, seconded by Janet Southwood and accepted unanimously.
8. **Bailiff Coordinator's Report: -.**
 - 8.1 Generally as the October 2016 newsletter.
 - 8.2. September rainfall was 22% above but 2016 was 6% below average. The crucial winter rain was well below average.
 - 8.3 The aquifer level was now 2m below average and 10m below the level in early 2014
9. **VVS Action Group:-**
 - 9.1. Generally as the October 2016 newsletter.
 - 9.2. We have been nominated for a CPRE Award.
10. **Election of Chairman:** - Jane Gardiner was proposed by John Fisher, seconded by Martin Freason and duly elected unanimously.
11. **Election of Committee:** - Election of all the existing committee members was proposed by Jacqui Banfield- Taylor, seconded by John Bell and duly elected unanimously. The other posts, apart from the chairman, would be allocated at the next committee meeting on 21st November 2016.
12. **Future Open Meetings:-**
 - Thursday 26th January 2017 – Redbourn Village Hall.- Ian Pigott -Ver Valley Farmer.
 - The 2017 AGM would be Tuesday 24th October – subject to confirmation.

After refreshments members were given a Presentation by Jennifer Gilbert of HMWT about Panshanger Country Park and Nature Reserve.

Ver Valley Society

Balance Sheet as at 31 August 2017

Liabilities			Assets		
£			£		
31-Aug-16		31-Aug-17	31-Aug-16		31-Aug-17
	Accumulated Fund			Balance at Bank	
22248.64	Balance	22207.60	16716.15	Current Ac	17174.41
-41.04	Excess	433.09	9619.07	Business Ac	9623.90
<hr/>			<hr/>		
22207.60	Expenditure over Income	22640.69	26,335.22		26,798.31
<hr/>			<hr/>		
	FVP funds no longer ringfenced 10.10.16	4,107.62	-20.00	Uncashed cheques adjustment	-50.00
<hr/>			<hr/>		
22,207.60	VVS Total	26,748.31			
<hr/>			<hr/>		
4107.62	Friends of Ver Park(ringfenced until 9.10.16)	-			
0	less expenditure				
<hr/>			<hr/>		
4,107.62					
<hr/>			<hr/>		
26,315.22		26,748.31	26,315.22		26,748.31
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- Friends of Verulamium Park, former society funds. As per the original agreement with FVP from 10.10.2016 the remaining balance is no longer ringfenced from the main VVS funds and so will not be shown separately. However it has been agreed that applications can continue to be made to the VVS committee for funds to be used for Verulamium Park, and where granted these are likely be shown as FVP related VVS expenditure.

We have reviewed the accompanying Balance Sheet of Ver Valley Society at 31 August 2017, and the Income and Expenditure Account for the year then ended. These financial statements are the responsibility of the Society's Management Committee. Our responsibility is to issue a report on these financial statements based on our review.

We conducted our review in accordance with the International Standard on Review Engagements 2400. This Standard requires that we plan and perform the review to obtain moderate assurance as to whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. A review is limited primarily to inquiries of Society officers and analytical procedures applied to the financial data and thus provide less assurance than an audit. We have not performed an audit and, accordingly, we do not express an audit opinion.

Based on our review, nothing has come to our attention that causes us to believe other than that the accompanying financial statements do give a true and fair view of the financial affairs of the Society as at 31 August 2017.



Paul Hutt, FCA

Absolute Accountants Limited

12-Sep-17

Ver Valley Society
Income & Expenditure Account
for the year ended 31 August 2017

2016	Expenditure	2017	2016	Income	2017
£		£	£		£
-	Projects	201.36		Subscriptions	
331.00	Hall Hire	175.00	775.00	5 Year	708.00
225.00	Printing	170.00	199.00	Annual	88.00
20.00	Gifts	159.46	207.00	SO	342.00
196.76	Insurance	115.50	186.95	Donations	280.00
-	FVP	93.18	-	Open Meetings	80.37
40.00	Speaker Fees	50.00	-	Bank Refunds	47.23
114.90	Bank Charges	42.05	25.00	Peggy Pollok	-
40.00	H&M Wildlife Trust	40.00	6.01	Interest	4.83
36.00	C P R E	36.00			
67.00	Webhosting	34.79			
177.86	Admin/Sec/Travel	-			
98.69	Bailiff	-			
92.79	Membership Admin	-			
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1,440.00		1,117.34	1,398.96		1,550.43
			41.04	Excess of Expenditure over Income	-433.09
<hr/>		<hr/>	<hr/>		<hr/>
1,440.00		1,117.34	1,440.00		1,117.34

Riverfly Monitoring along the Ver

Sue Frearson

June-September 2017

Despite very low flows and shallow water along the Ver, most of our ten Riverfly monitors have been able to send in records of samples of river invertebrates, which fortunately are all above the trigger levels, so do not require further investigation by the EA. Only Luton Lane has completely dried up: the last sample that Ernie Leahy was able to submit contained a few water shrimp in May 2015.

Our team of 10 welcomes Dick Downs upstream and downstream of the Frogmore Road Bridge, and Graeme Robertson who has taken over from Clive Pickering at Dolittle Mill, Redbournbury Mill and Redbourn Fisheries. Clive hopes to continue at a new site at the bottom of Holywell Hill in Verulamium Park. This will alert us to any future problems due to misconnected drains in the City or other forms of pollution. Catherine Mackenzie's results from Sopwell Nunnery Green, under the Alban Way, where she had no invertebrates in her samples for two months, alerted the EA of misconnections in the London Road. Area.

The aim is to have monitors at key sites such as those affected by road run-off, at intervals of about a mile along the river. If any of you would like to be a Riverfly Monitor, taking samples once a month ideally, please contact me Sue.frearson@which.net or phone me on 01727 761878. I can then arrange training and the supply of the Riverfly Kit.

Summary of the VVS response to Affinity Water Resource Management Plan Consultation (WRMP19)

2017 has demonstrated that it takes just one year of 'below normal' rainfall to reduce the river to a perilous state. Despite all the good efforts of Affinity to balance managing water resources with environmental concerns including the closure of Bow Bridge pumping station we are disappointed that the River Ver, especially in the upper reaches, is still suffering with little or no flow on an increasing basis.

The Ver Valley Society (VVS) believes that this is an unacceptable situation for one of the world's 200 chalk streams and a river which Affinity recognises 'has high conservation value, as well as recreation values and a record of cultural history in the landscape. We would like WRMP19 to deliver a healthy flowing River Ver with

1. No water trading at the Ver's expense
2. Full closure of Friar's Wash and reduced take from Kensworth
3. Agreed benchmarks for the Ver as a 'good' chalk stream
4. Ambitious targets for leak reductions and metering savings
5. More investment in customer engagement and education

Future Open Meetings

John Fisher

<u>Tuesday 27th February 2018 at 7.30 pm</u>	At Redbourn Village Hall
<u>Tuesday 5th June 2018 at 7.30 pm</u>	At Bricket Wood
<u>Tuesday 24th October 2018 at 7.30 pm</u>	At Michaels Parish Centre – Our AGM

Very Important:

All meetings are free entrance to members and non members - If you are coming to one of our meetings please check our newsletter or the web page a few days prior to the meeting in case of any late changes. If you require directions to any of the venues please contact a committee member. (See contacts page). Although our meetings are free entry to members and non members we welcome donations towards the cost of refreshments, hall hire etc. Suggested £2 pp

Membership

John Pritchard

A very warm welcome to our newest members, Neil and Jenny Ventris and Diana Spence. We look forward to seeing you all at our Open Meetings and along the River Ver.

Reminders have been sent to all members whose were due to renew in September. We are still chasing a number of outstanding payments, so please attend to your paperwork if you are one of the guilty few!

Our efforts have been concentrated on clearing Himalayan Balsam from its known limit, north of Park Street Mill, through Frogmore Pits, Moor Mill and Riverside Way down to the confluence with the Colne. Our thanks to the many volunteers, including the Wednesday CMS volunteers, who have helped with this never ending task. It is amazing how far from the

river it spreads, including high up, along the permissive path in Frogmore. If you see it, please even at this late stage in the year; pull it up to prevent it spreading its thousands of seeds downstream.



One man working and four men watching! [Sue Frearson]

The team led by Bruce Banfield-Taylor and Richard Wallis have also helped clear the river of fallen trees and debris at Riverside Way and I am particularly grateful for their efforts in keeping the Permissive Path open at Frogmore Pits, in preparation for the World Rivers Day Walk on Sunday 24th September from Moor Mill. (A modified version of Ver Valley Walk 8).

This will be my last report on the activities of the Action Group as I will be handing over to the very able hands of Richard Wallis, from October. So my thanks to over 30 different volunteers who have helped to look after the river from Redbourn down to the Colne confluence in Bricket Wood from our first efforts at New Barns Mill in 2012.

VVS Action Group Programme:

Saturday 21st October 10.00-12.00 Sopwell Nunnery Green N.R. near the Alban Way Bridge.

Parking is off Cotton Mill Lane, at the allotment car park near Sopwell Mill Farm.

Task 1: Removal of two fallen willow trees in the river by the Alban Way Bridge.

Task 2: Clearance of bramble and saplings from the meadow and under the laid hedge.

Saturday 18th November 10.00-12.00 Shafford (off the St Albans to Redbourn Road).

Parking is in Graham White's paddock.

Task 1: Coppicing the crack willows.

Task 2: Removal of any debris embedded in the mud / river.

Saturday 16th 10.00-12.00 The Chequers Redbourn. 12.00 Christmas Social in the Chequers.

Parking is in the Chequers car park.

Task 1: Removal of any fallen trees in the Red or Ver.

Task 2: Litter and rubbish collection

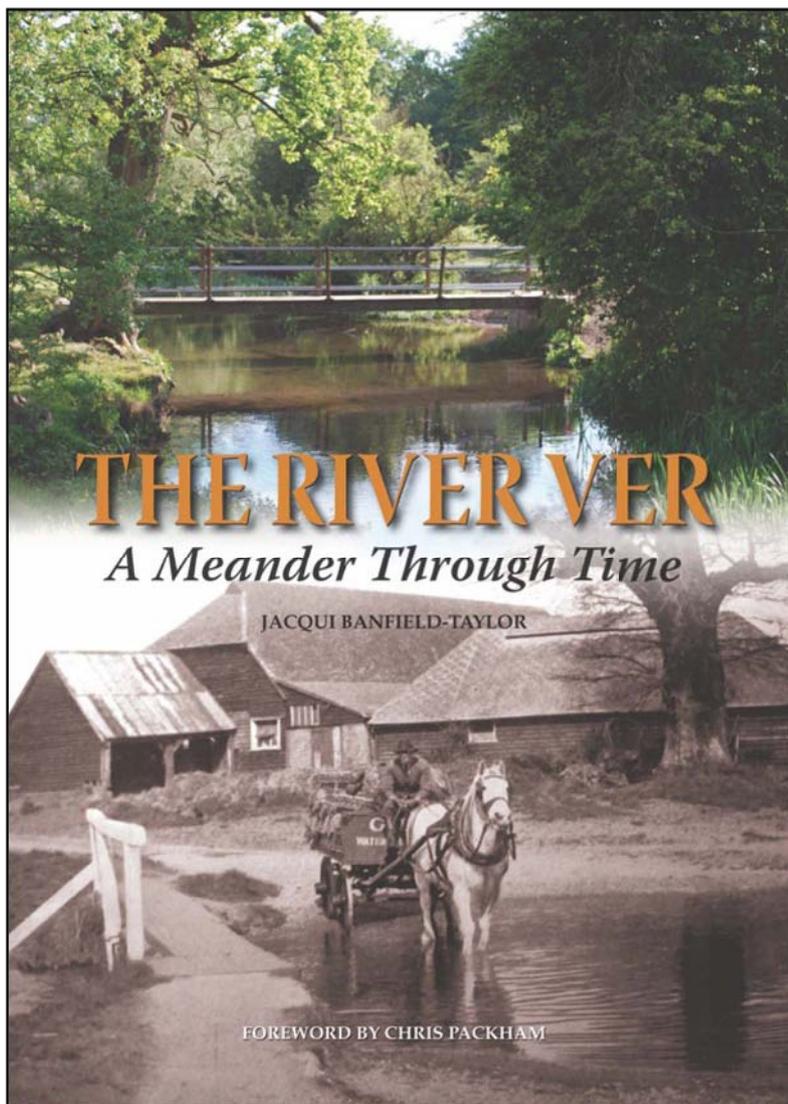
Saturday 20th January 10.00-12.00 Task to be decided, but possibly returning to Sopwell Nunnery Green to finish clearing bramble, and saplings

The group will continue to work on the third Saturday of the month 10.00 -12.00, and will try to remind you a week ahead, sending out a description of the task and a Risk Assessment. Please let Richard know if you intend to help so that we can borrow any necessary tools from the CMS.
Richard_wallis@btconnect.com

*Martin Frearson with an armful of Himalayan balsam.
[Sue Frearson]*



The River Ver - a Meander Through Time By Jacqui Banfield-Taylor



This large, hardback book about the River Ver by Jacqui Banfield-Taylor covers all aspects of the river from pre-history to present and includes not only the history connected to the river but also flora and fauna, geology and archaeology.

Jacqui's father, Ted Banfield was a founder member of the VVS and spent many years collecting Ver related images and information. After his death Jacqui gathered this and much more material working for several years to produce this comprehensive work.

With a forward by Chris Packham and over 350 colour and black and white illustrations, some never before seen in print, this important work on our local chalk stream is available from the author for a special price of £20, saving £4.99 off the cover price.

The book can also be signed and dedicated and delivered free within a ten mile radius of St Albans.

To order a book or for more information please contact Jacqui at riverver@btinternet.com or 07792 588892.

Chairman, Bailiff Co-ordinator

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Newsletter Group

John Cadisch, John Fisher, Sue Frearson,
Martin Frearson and Jane Gardiner

Committee Members

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Membership Secretary

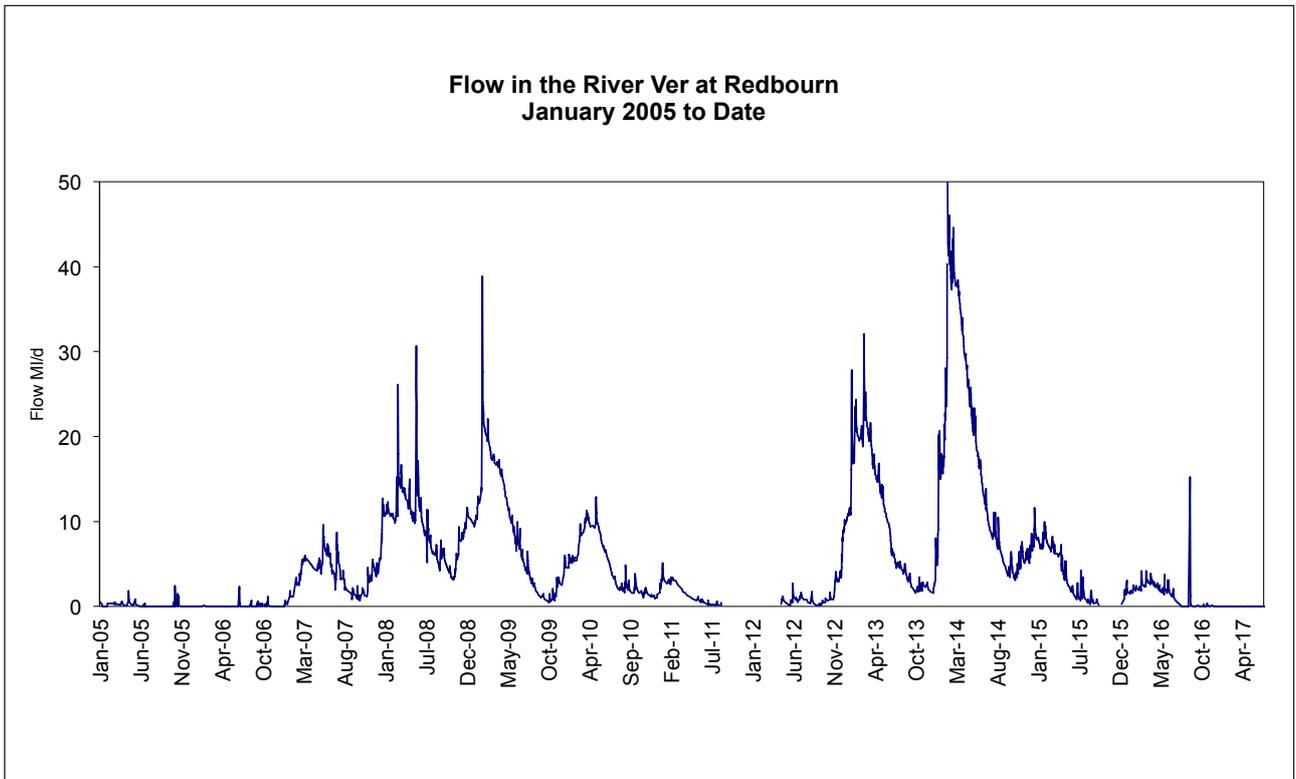
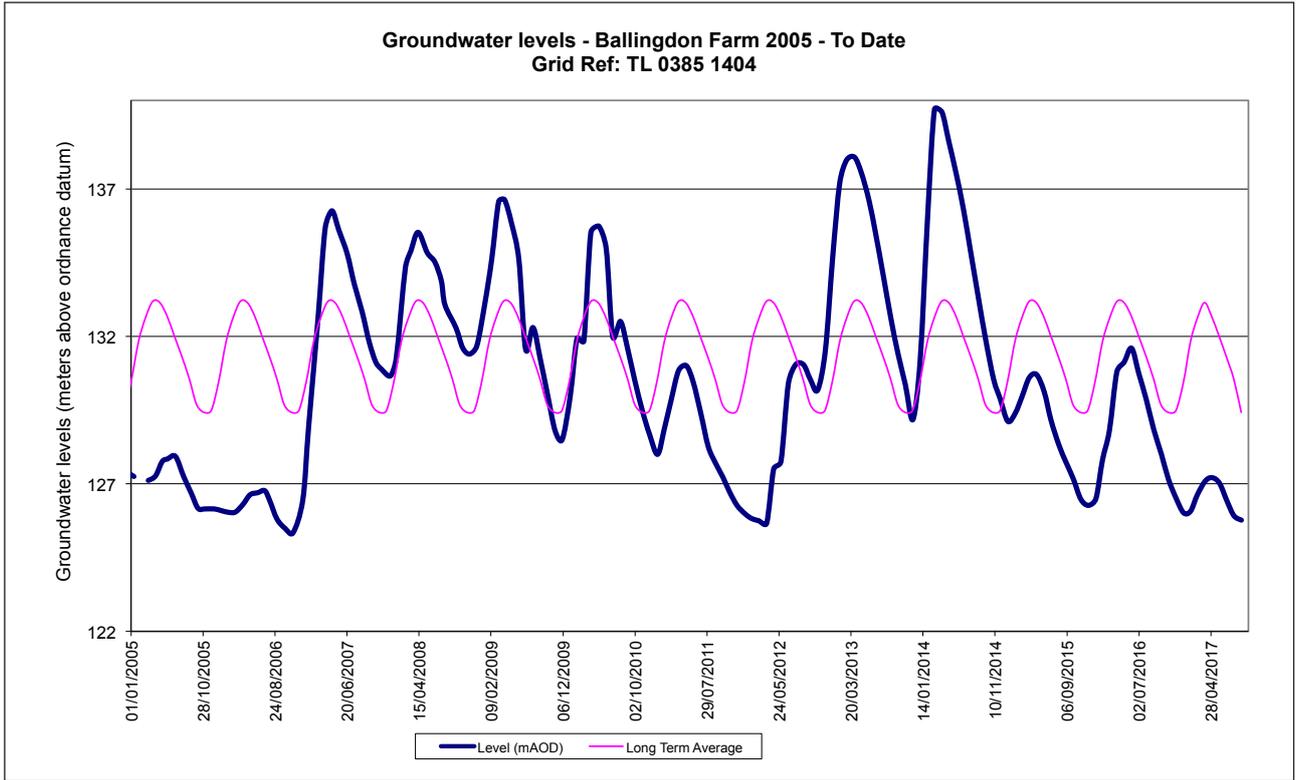
John Pritchard
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Newsletter Layout

John Trew

HOTLINES

EA Incident Hotline: 0800 807060
("Report all environmental incidents")
EA Floodline: 0845 988 1188
Cleaner St Albans/Fly tipping reports:
01727 809019 (Veolia)
[email: a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk)
Water Leaks (Affinity):
0800 376 5325



We are grateful to Affinity Water for supplying the ground water and flow charts and to Veolia Environmental for printing and distributing our newsletters.