



AGM: Notice of 47th Annual General Meeting

Thursday 19th October 2023 at 7.30pm

St Michael's Parish Centre AL3 4SL

As per the Society's constitution at each AGM the Officers and Executive Committee shall retire but may be eligible for re-election.

Nominations are invited.

These should reach the Secretary, Joe Randall, by Thursday 12th October. Proposer and seconders from the membership will be required.



Allen on the Ver

Guest speaker: **Allen Beechey**
Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

What next for citizen science in the Chilterns?

Good water quality is a key component of a healthy chalk stream. What more can volunteers do in the Chilterns and especially on the Ver, to help identify the trouble spots? Allen will include a look at how Riverfly monitoring has led the way and why Silt Spotting in the rain might be the next logical step for our volunteers.

There will be brief reports on the state of the Ver, the latest Ver Valley news and voting by Society members for the 2023/4 committee.

A healthy Ver at St Michael's Ford Aug 2023



LATEST NEWS



Purple Passion

Purple Loosestrife is a stunning native plant that likes river edges and wetland areas. This year a handful of volunteers has been trialling how we might encourage it along the Ver, especially to replace the invasive Himalayan Balsam pulled by the Action Group. We've had some success by taking cuttings from mature plants and grown more from locally collected seeds. More news soon and advice on what you can do to help.



SAVE THE DATES

Next Open Meetings:

Thursday 22nd February 2024 – Redbourn Village Hall, AL3 7LW, details tbc

Tuesday 18th June 2023 – St Stephen Parish Centre, Bricket Wood, AL2 3PJ, details tbc

Help!

The Society requires a few more project leaders and/or committee members to shoulder the workload (desktop or fieldwork), particularly as coordinating Citizen Science work is coming to the fore. Please contact Melanie or John if you would like to help.

The River Ver has made it through the summer with above average flows for the most part which is always a blessing. The fish and river invertebrates have had a relatively stress-free time and continue to recover from the 2016-19 drought.

Headwater abstraction

Wouldn't it be good if all summers were like this? Well, we are creeping nearer the possibility. Affinity Water's plans to reduce abstraction from the headwaters remain on schedule with the Secretary of State for the Environment set to sign off the paperwork this autumn. What could possibly go wrong?!

Water Quality

If, just for a moment, it's possible to relax on the prospects of more water in the river, it's certainly not time to let up on the pollution that enters the Ver. The EA has helpfully sited three sondes in the river in St Albans to monitor a whole range of variables. Essentially the data is looking to explore the impact of road runoff and why the city river is underperforming relative to the country sections. Data is still being collected but it's already evident that the river's temperature over the summer is much higher than the 10-12C of a groundwater fed chalk stream. On occasion it has reached 20C in the river at Holywell Hill – that'll probably be caused by the slow mill stream sections and Verulamium Lake encouraging the water temperature to climb. Bear in mind a keystone chalk stream species, the Brown Trout, finds temperatures over 18C a bit too hot to handle.



A sonde goes into the Ver

The Local Plan

The Society's recent response to the Local Plan concentrated on making the most of the funds from developments (Section 106 Agreements) to improve the water quality of the Ver. Already the road run off and silt entering the river is affecting the Red and Ver. We'll be seeking to ensure that the best Sustainable Drainage Solutions (SuDS) are employed on the new developments and some of the funds are directed to reduce the impact of existing problems in other areas of the Ver catchment.

The Next Election

A recent consumer survey* found that discharges into rivers and seas will affect how more than 56 per cent of people vote at the next election. It's never been more important to keep our MPs and candidates on their toes than over the next year, especially as we approach a pivotal election from the environment's point of view. The new constituency of Harpenden & Berkhamsted will have the best and worst of the Ver in it – from Bluehouse Hill on the edge of St Albans all the way to the dry channel at Markyate. I recently talked chalk streams with the prospective Liberal candidate, Victoria Collins. Victoria is the only candidate to have declared so far but it was good to get in early. No photos of the meeting, so here's a recent one of me with Daisy Cooper, MP for St Albans and the lower portion of the Ver!

** Surveyation Fieldwork carried out between 26th May and 26th June 2023. Population sampled: residents aged 18+ living in Britain. Sample size: 6,086 respondents.*



Spider Time

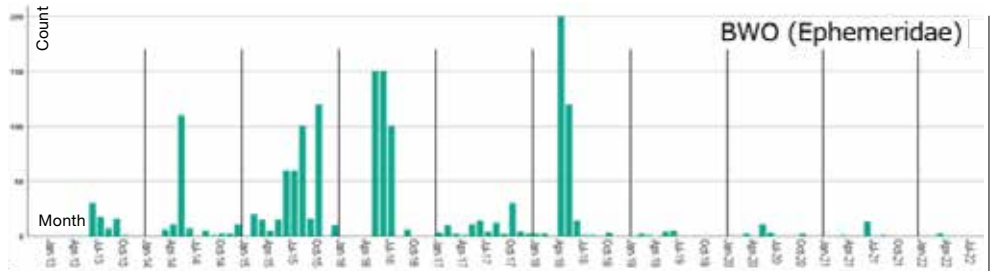
And finally, it's uplifting to report that my tiny garden patch of Greater Knapweed and wildflowers sown over the covid lockdown has attracted a Wasp Spider. These very large (harmless!) spiders have been spreading through Herts in past years, although this might be the first Ver Valley record. Build it and they will come.



Wasp Spider
©George Moreton

Many thanks to all our Riverfly monitors who have enjoyed above average flows through the summer and the invertebrates have enjoyed it too! A warm welcome to Peter Tallentire who is looking after the Red on Redbourn Common, Bill Wolvey who has stepped into the Ver at Dolittle and Alan Winn who has joined Josh Kalms at Moor Mill. A special thank you to Bob May who has been monitoring the Ver behind the Chequers in Redbourn and at Bow Bridge for a number of years. Bob has reluctantly stepped down and leaves very big boots to fill.

Nathan has been seeing an increase in species in Verulamium Park. His first Blue-winged Olives for the site appeared in May and during June a similar but different nymph posed an ID puzzle. Referring to Allen Beechey at Chiltern Chalk Streams, we were able to discover that the mystery invertebrate is a Caenis nymph. The adult is a small upwinged fly often hatching in vast numbers, earning the name ‘The Angler’s Curse’ as there



are so many real insects that the trout fail to see the small artificial fly cast to catch them.

We now have over a decade of data for the Ver and recently Society member Dr Daniela Fecht of Imperial College London, stepped forward to see what we might learn from it. It’s especially illuminating to see how the invertebrate scores have changed over time and here’s just one example of representing the data graphically. The monthly 3-minute kick sample by Sue and Martin Frearson at Drop Lane, not far from the confluence with the Colne, regularly contained good numbers of Blue-winged Olive (BWO) nymphs right up until 2018. However, since then, the species has been almost absent. We hope to share

more information in due course and if possible, identify the causes and pursue action to remedy any declines.



Riverfly invertebrate monitoring is a form of Citizen Science in which trained volunteers monitor the health of rivers across the country. Each site has a trigger level set dependent on the number of species and their usual abundance. If the score falls below the trigger level this usually indicates contamination of the water and the EA are informed. The VVS monitors 19 sites on the Ver.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

A hat tip to our 10 Monitors who were out sampling at their regular spots in July. Again, the results were patchy with River Hill at Flamstead (very high nitrates and grey coloured water) and Hyde Lane at Frogmore (high phosphates and brown turbidity) the two spots recording ‘poor ecological status’. Verulamium Park at St Michael’s recorded another ‘moderate ecological status’ mainly due to the above average nitrates score. Other spots were ‘very good ecological status’.



MEMBERSHIP

Membership remains buoyant with 11 new members joining since the last newsletter. A warm welcome to those new members: Penny Dear, Sonia Redwood, David Worcester, Susannah Edwards, Alastair Davidson, Warwick Haycock, Brian Gibbard, Dianne Jolley, Nicholas Verlaine, Keith Chaudhary and James Edgar. May you enjoy the Society’s events and with your fellow members we hope you will support the actions to improve the Ver and its environment.



Not a member?
It's only £8 a year to join.

Full details at riverver.co.uk/join-us

A very big thank you to three long-serving Bailiffs, who have recently stepped down – Sue Rowe (Flamstead to Markyate); Bob May (Dolittle Mill to Redbourn) and Dick Downs (Moor Mill to Park Street). A warm welcome to Cathy & Phil Comfort (Flamstead) and Neil Leverton (Dolittle) for volunteering; **a volunteer is needed for Park Street**. Could it be you? Please contact Melanie if you'd like to help.

Continuous flow at the end of August began at Luton Lane, east of Redbourn. Pooling, ponding and occasional flow reported upstream at Verlam End, Chequers Hill and through Majestic Trees at Flamstead. Flow levels peaked across April/May and are dropping steadily to their lowest for 2023.

The water is generally good to very clear with gravel showing in many places and emerging in the Holywell Hill/Alban Way section. Heavy silt remains, notably at River

Hill, Flamstead where a brown scum persists too.

Plant profusion

Water Crowfoot has unexpectedly appeared behind the Chequers Inn at Redbourn (our most upstream site). A typical summer plant report comes from Bailiff Bruce between Park Street and Sopwell: "Watercress in flower, Water Crowfoot in flower, Water Dock, Water Mint, Water Forget-me-not, Butterbur, Purple Loosestrife, assorted Thistles, Meadow Buttercup, Reed Mace, Tufted Sedge, assorted Umbellifers, Water Dock, Ragwort, Amphibious Bistort and Stinging Nettles".

Wildlife sightings included Water Vole activity reported on Section 8 above Shafford. Roach, Chub, Minnows, Stickleback seen in several places and a 12" Chub reported by the Fighting Cocks in May.

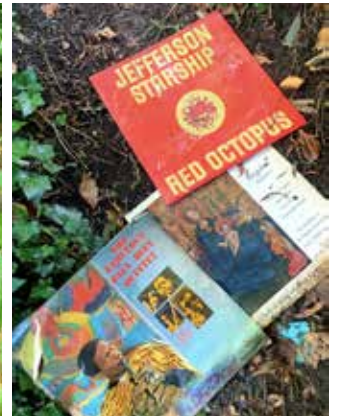
Grasshoppers seen in the few meadows. Butterflies, Damselflies



and Dragonflies all reported greater numbers in late summer in improving weather.

The city stretches tend to see the most regular rubbish in the river events. Well done to Lee for retrieving a collection of vinyl records from the water near Holywell Hill, along with removing a small tree in the river too.

Damselfly in June; Figwort; Umbellifer; Meadow Grasshopper, Neil in training, Lee and his Record collection. Photos ©Melanie Woods, Jane Gardiner & Lee Wood.



LIST OF BAILIFFS

Below is the list of the team and their stretches. Please say hello if you see them when you are out and alert them if you notice any issues.

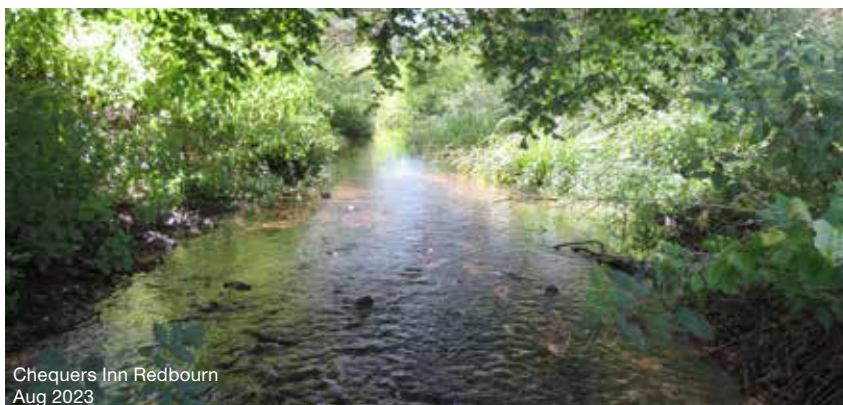
1. R Colne to Moor Mill	Sue and Martin Frearson*	sue.frearson@virginmedia.com
2. Moor Mill to Burydell Lane	Vacant	
3. Burydell Lane to New Barnes Mill	Bruce Banfield-Taylor*	via mellorwoods@gmail.com
4. New Barnes Mill to Sopwell Mill	Giles Harrison	gpharrison13@gmail.com
5. Sopwell Mill to Holywell Hill	Lee Wood	ember.designs@yahoo.co.uk
6. Holywell Hill to Bluehouse Hill	Vivien Gates	via mellorwoods@gmail.com
7. Bluehouse Hill to Bow Bridge	Roger Hall	via mellorwoods@gmail.com
8. Bow Bridge to Redbournbury	John Pritchard*	johnp@riverver.co.uk
9. Redbournbury to Dolittle	Jane Gardiner	janegardiner@madasafish.com
10. Dolittle to Redbourn Bypass	Neil Leverton	neil.leverton@gmail.com
11. Chequers to Verlam End	John Fisher & Peter Hill	john.fisher2023@outlook.com
		members@riverver.co.uk
12. Flamstead to Markyate (and Kensworth Lynch occasionally)	Cathy & Phil Comfort	phil_cathy_comfort@yahoo.co.uk
13. River Red	Joe Randall	joe.w.randall@hotmail.co.uk

* indicates those who are also Riverfly monitors.

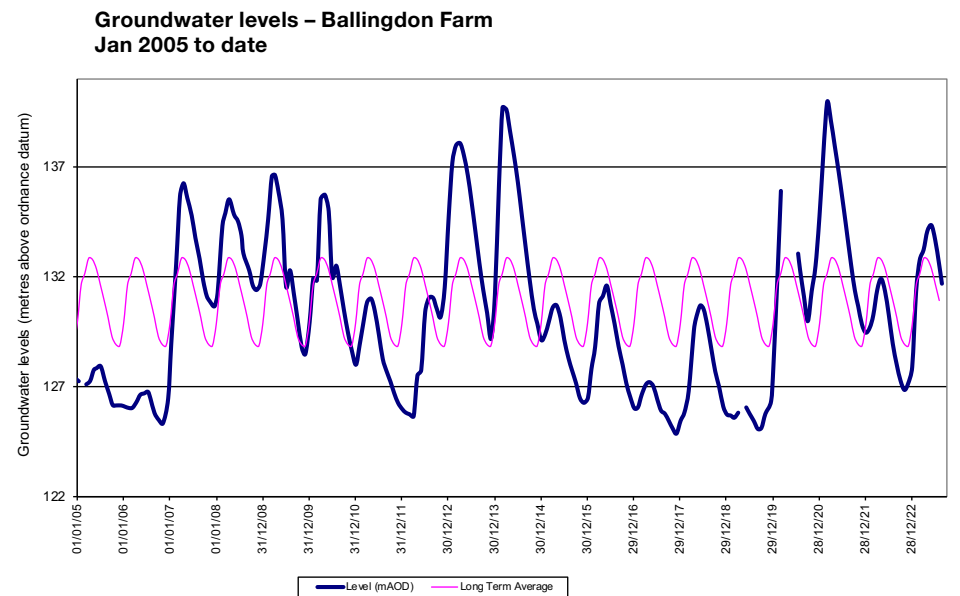
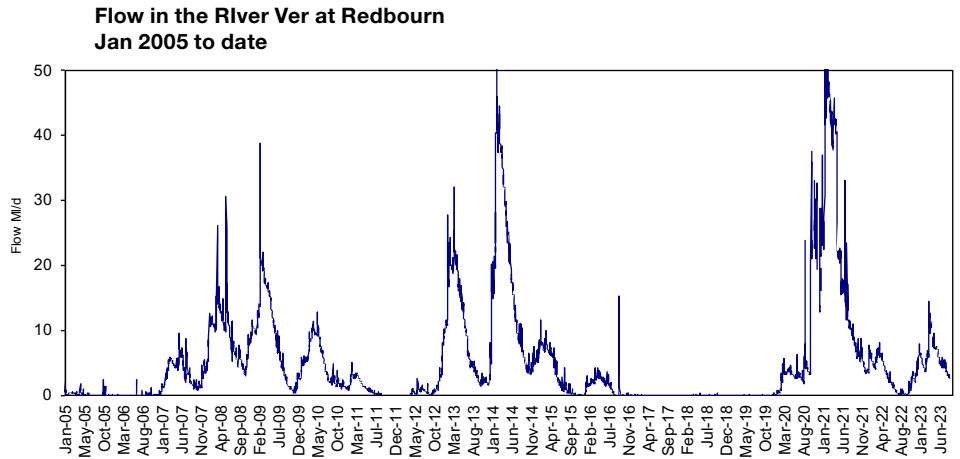
Ups and downs

The 2023 pattern of fluctuating wet and dry months continued over the summer. The Ver's flow has been above the mean throughout, thanks mainly to a wet spring and the well above average July rainfall. This has helped to encourage a widespread clean gravel bottom in the river and left wet spots in the water meadows through the summer. The Ver has also benefitted from slightly below average temperatures that encouraged less demand for water from flora, fauna and local residents alike.

We are grateful to the Environment Agency and Affinity Water for supplying groundwater and river flow charts.



Months 2023	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [± average] (figures from Rothamstead)
June	134.50 [134.20]	16.0 [-38.9]
July	133.68 [133.23]	97.8 [+42.3]
August	132.57 [132.05]	50.5 [-21.5]
September	131.32 [130.35]	Not available yet



Chequers Inn Redbourn Aug 2023

Hedges Farm, Park Street June 2023
Photos ©Bruce Banfield-Taylor & Vivien Gates

St Michael's Ford

It was good to join the Herts CRoW (Countryside Rights of Way) and SSMK (Society of St Michaels and Kingsbury) volunteers in a project to improve the wilder aspect of the ford at St Michael's bridge. High Ver flows (hooray!) postponed the work but eventually over 20 people, including Peter White, Lee Wood, Ian Sparrow and others from the VVS fixed posts and brash bundles to channel the flow. This will allow the ford apron to be sown with the seeds of native water meadow plants, supplementing a number of plug plants. It should begin to look more like a water meadow next spring.



Cathedral Day

The Society was delighted to join other local charities and voluntary groups to showcase their wares in St Albans Cathedral in June.

The Communities Showcase was a great opportunity to meet locals and visitors alike and all the more appropriate happening during the Sustainable St Albans Festival.



Richard meets Mayor Anthony Rowlands



Signage Makeover

More great work by Mel and her midweek team of volunteers. This time, cleaning and reproofing the damaged information board on the River Ver Trail near Holywell Hill. SADC and Herts CRoW have agreed to fund and replace the central acrylic panel to complete restoration of the board. We are expecting their team along very soon.

Vole news

The voles have been spreading far and wide, especially upstream. In fact vole signs were discovered north of Redbourn Golf Club and a probable sighting came in from the River Red on the Moor. Josh Kalms HMWT Water Vole Officer reports that data collected by volunteers (thanks to the VVS cohort especially!) shows Water Vole occupancy in the Valley has more than doubled this year.



Water Vole signs, Luton Lane ©John Pritchard

MEMBERS' COMPETITION JOE RANDALL

Take part in our 2023 Photographic Competition

Please take the time to enter our 2023 Photographic Competition, exclusively for members and their families. There are monthly winners but most importantly the best photos go into a final judging session to win

Ver inspired prizes kindly donated by Ye Olde Fighting Cocks, Inn on the Park and Redbournbury Mill. We'd like hundreds of entries of all standards(!), so please take out your phones and cameras. See www.riverver.co.uk/photographic-competition/ for full details.

Right: Bill Free's winning August shot! ©Bill Free
Below, Prizes: Lunch at YOFC, Tea at Inn on the Park, Buns and Bread from Redbournbury Mill



The Peregrines nested for the second year on St Albans Cathedral, successfully fledging three young in June. The Leica sponsored live camera worked really well and I know many folks enjoyed watching these stunning birds. There is plenty of Pigeon and Parakeet prey for them, so the young were well fed and safe in the nesting tray behind the parapet. Peregrines seem to be devoted Anglicans as so many cathedrals are now host nesting Peregrines.

Owl versus Kestrel

Our local Barn Owls are doing fairly well this year with two pairs raising two young each to the fledging stage. Sadly, a third youngster had left one of the boxes before it could fly, and it perished on the ground by the box. In another barn owl box, a pair of Kestrels had laid five eggs but as they hatched the box was taken over by a pair of Barn Owls. When we went to ring the Kestrels, we were amazed that two Barn Owls flew from the box. There was no sign of the young Kestrels dead or alive. Nature can be cruel and in this case the owls had ousted the Kestrels, eaten the young and were preparing to nest themselves. However, a later check revealed that the Barn Owls did not succeed in breeding probably because July was such a wet month and it hindered their nightly hunt for prey.



Chalk Grassland

Some of you may have noticed the work carried out in the spring on the embankment on the Harpenden side of the Redbourn bypass roundabout. In 2007 we organised joint work parties with members of the Ver Valley Society and the Friends of the Nickey Line. The aim was to clear the encroaching scrub on a section to allow the chalk grassland species to prosper. This worked well and we had great displays of Poppies and Oxeye Daisies each year, which you could easily see from the road. Not so easy to see were dozens of Pyramidal Orchids, the Birds Foot Trefoil, Kidney Vetch and at least two Fragrant Orchids. Most spectacular were the butterflies with many Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns, a few of the fairly rare Small Blues and Small Skipper. Looking at the bank during early 2023 it certainly needed another clearance, so it was much to my relief and delight that the Herts CRoW sent in contractors who did a really thorough

Barn Owls;
Pyramidal Orchid;
Marbled White;
(below) Bypass
Embankment
©John Fisher

Small Blue (right)
©Malcolm Hull

clearance just in time, before the spring flowers came through. You can see the flowers and butterflies from the footpath that runs along the top of the embankment. Watch out next spring, it is a treat!

I am always pleased to hear about sightings. Please note my new email is john.fisher2023@outlook.com (tel 01582 792843 or 07845 152570).



EVENTS

There are two more events in the calendar and both highly recommended! Watch the website for details to be announced.

Sunday October 22nd Tree Walk

led by Kate Bretherton.
A circular morning walk from Flamstead down to the fledgling River Ver at Chequer Hill along the dry valley towards Trowley Bottom and back to Flamstead. Veteran Oaks, tall Elders and prickly Holly all feature as we explore this infamous damp corner of the Ver Valley.



November tbc
Society Quiz Night at Ye Olde Fighting Cocks. A new venture for the Society and a great opportunity for a bit of friendly fun with food served and the chance to talk chalk streams and more in fine company.

River Ver - Himalayan Balsam Report 2023

It's been a summer of action focused on removing the invasive Himalayan Balsam. It's helped greatly that in mid-summer we were invited to work on the most upstream stands of balsam for the first time – which presents us with the opportunity to concentrate on removing the plant completely upstream of Watling Street bridge, over the next five or six years!

Session 1 – 20th May Frogmore

The Balsam was just through the ground and much of the pulling for the team of 6 was on hands and knees in the area immediately across the Hyde Lane ford where there was a good show of plants at about 10cms tall. Leaflets were dropped in 150 local properties to explain the invasive species programme for 2023.

Session 2 – 17th June Moor Mill

A wet team of 3 crossed the river bypass and cleared balsam on the side of the M25 and into the wood skirting the bounds of Moor Mill. The dry team of 9 tackled the known spots where the river turns south

along the boundary of the property and where the river turns east to rejoin the original course below the mill. Balsam was also found and cleared where the river crosses Smug Oak Lane.

Session 3 – 13 July Drop Lane

Confluence The VVS welcomed a party of 10 from Land Improvements who had volunteered to pull Balsam for 2 hours as part of the company day out scheme. Three VVS members guided & managed the session.

Session 4 – 15th July This was the first session north of Burydell Lane. The pre-site survey had identified that the highest point of the Balsam and the team pulled balsam down through the water cress beds including an area at the bottom of the site along the side of the river to the weir. Having accessed the area close to the weir Balsam was sighted in the area between the cages and the river.

Session 5 – 22 July An additional session to tackle the balsam in Park Street, it was cleared on the bankside on the southern side of Burydell Lane, The Tansleys and along the redundant outfall from Park Street Mill. The team

The Autumn Programme will be mostly willow pollarding, usually at Redbournbury Mill, Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Drop Lane. See www.riverver.co.uk/current-year for latest details and if you'd like to sign up for email updates, please contact Melanie Woods (see contact details below). Action Group sessions are 10am – 12 noon on the third Saturday of each month. Sat 21st October, Sat 18th November, Sat 16th December & Sat 20th January 2024

of 5 went back north of Burydell Lane and made an initial pull on the area between the river and the cages. In several areas balsam had become the dominant species which made a refreshing relief from the nettles.

Session 6 – 1 August This was a continuation of Session 5 and continued balsam pulling north of Burydell Lane.

Session 7 – 9 August Follow on from Session 6 - a further 3-hour session was run where we did a sweep of the balsam around the cress beds where there had been some new growth. We also found some new emergence in the lower area previously worked.



YOUR COMMITTEE

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Vice Chairman & Action Group Co-ordinator

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Bailiff Co-ordinator

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Riverfly Co-ordinator

John Pritchard

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mfrearson@ntlworld.com

Committee Member

Lee Wood
07879 496220

HOTLINES

EA Incident Hotline:
0800 80 70 60
(Report all environmental incidents)

EA Floodline: 0345 988 1188

Flytipping reports
St Alban's Council:
01727 809019
email:
wastemanagementservices@stalbens.gov.uk

Water Leaks (Affinity Water):
0800 376 5325