

Chalk Streams and the R Ivel

There are 210 Chalk streams in the world of which the Ivel is one with 160 in UK (Guardian 1). ie 76% of the worlds chalk streams are in the UK! Yet the vast majority of these are impacted on by the human race largely through over abstraction. Chalk streams are a unique habitat and a biodiversity hotspot. We cry out when the Amazon is cut down yet turn a blind eye to the loss of internationally important chalk streams.

The river Ivel in Baldock is a chalk stream and through lack of rainfall and abstraction the head waters have dried out and the river has migrated downstream. The remaining river has very reduced flow.

To counter this Affinity Water have conducted a study on the Ivel with a view to improving its condition (Through the EU WFD). To improve flows they propose the installation of a BH at the springs to pump water out and release it into the river.

The question is why further pump an already over abstracted aquifer? This was even quoted on a FB comment on the FOBGS FB page! There is a disconnect between Affinity Water (Potable water supplier), and Anglian Water (Waste Water supplier). As Affinity Water here are the licence holders and abstracters it falls to them to mitigate the impact of their abstraction. My question is how involved have AW been in this process? There was a STW at Ivel Springs that released its treated water into the Ivel and maintained flow. Sewerage is now pumped to Letchworth for treatment and released into the Pix. Whilst more expensive could some of this water be pumped back to Baldock and released into the Ivel?

Now we are grateful for the proposed support scheme but feel it is a poor solution. In Cambridge all chalk streams are supported by such schemes. In some cases, they are supported by multiple BHs and these are running dry with the EA questioning how effective this solution is. At other sites this water simply disappears down the spring holes. In the Ivel will this water even make it over the weir downstream of Ivel Springs or past the large mill pond at Radwell?

What we need is more rain but we can't influence the weather. With climate change rain fall is likely to become even more un-predictable. What we need is for people to realise these unique habitats and reduce their water usage dramatically. Could we start installing smart water meters and encourage friendly competition between neighbours to use less water as has been done elsewhere!? With groundwater already over abstracted and large new developments proposed could these be supplied by surface water from Grafham in a closed supply network (to counter the water quality problem of mixing ground water and surface water)? These are just a few ideas but Im calling on you to join the conversation and help conserve these endangered habitats.

1: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/jul/24/threat-chalk-streams-unique-contribution-global-ecology>)