# Ivel River Restoration Stakeholder Feedback Form

Information on the Ivel Springs project being led by Affinity Water can be found at:
https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/corporate/environment/restoration/river-ivel

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this form, your feedback is valuable for the success of the project and will be reviewed to help inform the project going forward.

## Communication

**Question:** How have you found the project teams communication regarding this project and is there anything that could have been improved?

**Response:**

We are delighted that the river Ivel is receiving focus and we would like to thank Affinity Water for its interest and attention. Jack, Melissa and their team have been professional, approachable and listened to our feedback.

It would be useful if the project timelines could be published. We have been advised this is not possible due to uncertainty around risks and issues (but all projects experience this). All schools of project management theory/ best practice underline that no project should ever get off the ground without a project plan which should be flexed as needed.

Please share the draft project plan.

What is the project budget?

## Project View

**Question:** Do you agree with the project objective of 'enhancing chalk stream characteristics through Ivel Springs, Baldock'?

**Response:**

Per the Affinity Water website, the objective is **"**We are working to revitalise the River Ivel by supporting the river with groundwater and improving chalk stream characteristics through a river restoration scheme".

The proposed wetlands area should help filter and store pollutants from the surface water outfall pipe. Sensitive enhancing of river features e.g. introducing meanders and silt removal should benefit the river and biodiversity. Also, the kingfisher nesting bank sounds lovely in principle ……. except kingfishers eat fish and if there is no water in the river, there will be no fish in the river, therefore no kingfishers. The "nice to have" landscaping measures are not useful in isolation if the underlying all-pervasive issue of over-abstraction is not tackled.

The main issue unaddressed by this project is that the springs have stopped flowing in the upper chalk reaches (June 2022) meaning the river at Ivel Springs is dry and dying due to over-abstraction.

The groundwater support (augmentation) planned is minimal e.g. 0.55Ml/d (maximum borehole pumping capacity of 3Ml/d) in the context of what is needed. The existing abstraction licence of 14.8 Ml/d would need to be reduced to 2.4 Ml/d to achieve the CaBA recommendation that abstraction should comprise no more than 10% of the recharge rate, to ensure sufficient flow for a healthy chalk stream.

The project objective should rather be "to restore healthy flows to all reaches of the Ivel, then biodiversity will return and thrive".

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## Concerns

**Question:** Do you have any concerns about the project?

**Response:**

1. The surface water outfall pipe behind the sewage pumping station discharges not just rainwater but also urban runoff and sewage/ sewage related items (due to misconnections). A foul pond has built up e.g. condoms, sanitary products, smell of effluent on NHDC land. Has NHDC really agreed to clean up this foulness? Is NHDC aware of the cost and Health & Safety (H&S) implications? For example, there should be maintenance and dredging (and disposal) plan based in annual inspections. Regarding sediment build up; this would involve taking representative samples and organising specialist disposal if required. Per the FAQ page of the website, volunteers will do jobs like vegetation management; this is a hazardous job with H&S implications. Volunteer groups do not have the ability to deal with deep water and silt. Our concern that it will be done once then discontinued due to unpleasantness and H&S concerns.
2. Affinity Water has undertaken recent sampling of sediment and of surface water from the surface water outfall pipe at Ivel Springs: Rose Shisler of Anglian Water has written to Melissa Ahmet confirming that the full (raw) dataset of recent sediment sampling may be shared with RevIvel. Please share as agreed.
3. Augmentation at "the Ivel drain" site will move the start of the river c500m downstream; this will adversely impact the reedbed area where the springs have been rising for centuries (Ivel Springs) and also impact the second smaller reedbed area e.g. reed warblers, moorhens and voles use these reedbeds as habitat. Please consider how these reedbeds can be preserved. It is a nature reserve after all.
4. Augmentation amount: this will be tested. Please involve RevIvel in the testing on a timely basis. We have concerns about water quality (e.g. consider the proximity to the old gas works) and also there might be a detrimental knock on effect to 3rd and 4th springs (e.g. The Compasses). Affinity Water highlighted this risk at a recent meeting we attended, demonstrating the high level of uncertainty about the viability of the augmentation element of the project.
5. Augmentation to achieve flows of 0.55Ml/d is insufficient to be helpful and there is concern that the augmentation water will simply sink/ seep away anyway (known as "bedloss") due to the artificially low GW level due to over -abstraction.
6. The current trigger point for augmentation is the GW level when the main spring is expected to stop flowing. RevIvel have already challenged Affinity Water on this trigger point. Please review this trigger point.
7. Affinity Water needs to calculate levels at the "real" spring source, not where it has decided the river starts and is currently taking samples. Any difference in vertical elevation between these 2 points should be factored in when considering augmentation trigger points.
8. This project is described to audiences and on the website in perhaps a rather misleading way i.e. there is a lot of detail about delightful features to be introduced such as the kingfisher nesting bank but the underlying dire state of the water-less river is not mentioned. If there is a question about lack of water, Affinity Water advises that "there will be testing to determine what volume of augmentation is needed", leaving listeners with the mistaken impression that this project will solve the flow issue. When describing this project to audiences, please make it clear that this project will deliver largely cosmetic, nice-to-have outputs but it will not address the lack of flow, which is the fundamental issue (some would even say the only issue).
9. The main concern unaddressed by this project is that the springs have stopped flowing in the upper chalk reaches (June 2022) meaning the river is dry and dying due to over-abstraction. Abstraction needs to reduce to 2.4Ml/d for a healthy chalk stream.

## Alterations

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**Question:** Are there any changes or alterations to the project you would make; this can be either a dream goal, or realistic changes you would like to see considered or implemented for the project going forward.

**Response:**

1. We would like to see the headwaters of the river remain in the same place as they have for centuries (not move downstream). Please reconsider the location of the augmentation points.
2. We would like Anglian Water to tackle misconnections. Public education is needed in the first instance to enable householders to understand when they have a misconnection. A fund needs to be established to pay for the cost of correcting the plumbing (otherwise for cost reasons householders are likely to take no action and problem continues).
3. Affinity Water needs to increase its profile in the Ivel catchment. It has been notably absent from environmental and community events in the past months. The leakage issues in Baldock and Letchworth should be addressed and there is need to publicise the "Save Our Streams" campaign in the locality.
4. We would like input into design and content of signage e.g. a notice informing dog owners to keep dogs out the river after applying tick/ flea treatments topically (i.e. on the skin). We suggest other stakeholders and community groups (e.g. FoBGS) may also have interest in getting involved.
5. We would like the project to incorporate meaningful reduction in abstraction.

## Any Other Feedback

Please use this space to include any other comments, questions, or feedback you'd like to give.

RevIvel together with John Lawson and Charles Rangeley-Wilson proposes an innovative and elegant solution to enable abstraction to decrease to sustainable levels in the local aquifer:

- To achieve a healthy chalk stream, the water company needs to take 12.4 Ml/d less from the aquifer
- The water supply needs of local households and businesses would have to be met in another way
- The proposal is to supply this need from Grafham Reservoir (there is an additional 50Ml/d coming online in the next few years) *Note 1*
- Impact: the aquifer replenishes, the springs flow, the river flourishes, the community benefits, biodiversity thrives and the water company is applauded
- Within 18 months, the model suggests that Grafham Reservoir would benefit from 7.9Ml/d in terms of inflows from the now flourishing river Ivel
- Hence the net water cost of this scheme is only 4.5Ml/d (12.4-7.9Ml/d)
- Plus, in severe drought conditions, the now water-laden aquifer could provide emergency relief water (upto 15Ml/d) to Grafham Reservoir

*Note 1: The replacement water could also come from out-of-catchment*

Finally

Affinity Water has stated its commitment to restoring the river Ivel; this water transfer scheme would truly restore the river. There are only 225 chalk streams in the world. Chalk streams are rare and precious thus deserve special designation and innovative measures to save them before they are gone forever. Please help achieve this.