

Progress Report: November 2025 – April 2026

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1. Ecology & Monitoring

1.1 Water voles

Discussion continues with Jacobs (consultancy working on the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme) about the possibility of translocating water voles to the Letcombe Brook upstream of Wantage. Ecologists from Thames Water have similarly enquired as part of preparations for the White Horse Reservoir. Jude is liaising with both groups.

The Letcombe Brook is due a full survey for water voles this year as part of BBOWT's mammal project; this will give us up-to-date information on water vole presence/absence.

1.2 Mink eradication

Significant progress has been made upgrading our network of mink rafts to 'smart' live-capture traps, in partnership with BBOWT. This is a more effective way to control mink and is also less labour-intensive. Huge thanks are due to the volunteers monitoring traps as well as the landowners hosting them. No mink have been caught to date.

1.3 Riverfly monitoring

We had a great response to our call for new survey volunteers, with twelve people attending our training course to learn how to carry out monthly surveys of river invertebrates. As a result, we can initiate monitoring at six new sites, bringing our total up to 12 sites in strategic places along the length of the brook.

1.4 Water quality monitoring

The Citizen Science survey run by Thames21 is expected to finish in August. Volunteers have been carrying out monthly tests for nitrate, phosphate and turbidity. Results have shown a consistently high nitrate right from the source of the brook, due to contamination of the aquifer from historic (and likely current) use of agricultural fertilisers. Phosphate levels have been much more variable and closer analysis of results is needed.

2. Engagement

2.1 Volunteering

Number of sessions held	10
Average number of volunteers	12*
Total in-kind contribution	£2,771.25
Cumulative in-kind contribution (since May 2024)	£7,340.87

*Increase from last reporting period

Over the winter, we focussed on bramble removal at three sites in Grove (Sharland Close and upstream and downstream of School Lane), as well as at Smiths Wharf and Willow Walk in Wantage. We cleared litter from a long stretch between Willow Grange and Mill Street, and carried out the annual cut and rake of the meadow at Millennium Green in Letcombe Regis.

2.2 Education

Cat Boaz joined the team part-time in January 2026 as our Education and Outreach Officer, to engage local schools and our community with the brook. As well as having a long career as a primary school teacher and science specialist, Cat has also been a senior lecturer in science education. Cat has created a clear series of sessions to be delivered on site and in class that meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and engage a wider variety of age groups within primary schools. Our main period for working with schools is between May and July and nearly all our sessions are now booked. We have also supported Sustainable Wantage with advice on relevant activities they can offer that will support schools to teach the science curriculum.

2.3 Wider community engagement

Outline plans are coming together through Cat's project for a wider programme of engagement. We have made links with the social prescribing unit at Mably Way Surgery to promote our volunteer work as an opportunity to support wellbeing. We are also working with Wantage Museum to provide family activities during school breaks.

Activity	Who for	No. of participants
Talk	Vale & Downland Museum	14
River dipping demo	New volunteers, local community	30
Talk	Challow Warm Spaces	13
Riverfly workshop	New volunteers	12
Corporate volunteering & talk	MacDermid Alpha	16
Total number of people engaged:		85

2.4 Landowners

There have been very few requests for advice this period, with only one visit carried out in Letcombe Regis. An in-person meeting was held with a local farmer in November, and the LBP attended a consultation about flooding around the Old Mill in Wantage, arranged by the Future Flood Resilience Group on behalf of the owner of the mill.

2.5 Partners

The table below summarises any partner activity over the last six months.

Organisation	Activity to report
VWHDC	Regular contact over Vale-owned sites in Wantage, particularly Willow Walk.
Letcombe Regis Parish Council	LBP organised annual cut and rake at Millennium Green in November and have been in discussion with Councillors about mink trapping and riverfly surveying.
Wantage Town Council	Nothing to report this period
Grove Parish Council	Active contact with Parish Clerk and grounds maintenance team; attended Committee meeting in January; also a big thank you for the use of meeting rooms at Old Mill Hall.
East Hanney Parish Council	Nothing to report this period
Sustainable Wantage	Regular contact and collaboration
The Hanneys Flood Group	Nothing to report this period
Environment Agency	Regular contact about Dandridge's Mill, funding and projects for the future
Freshwater Habitats Trust	Regular contact about projects/sites and opportunities to collaborate
Ock Catchment Partnership	Attended all meetings
Thames Water	Regular contact re. White Horse Reservoir
Future Flood Resilience Group	Regular contact and information sharing; supporting calls for upgrade to Sewage Treatment Works and other improvements to sewage network
BBOWT	Active partnership over mink eradication and water vole surveying
Williams F1	Attended site visit in December
MacDermid Alpha	Activities delivered in April and multiple activities planned for the future

2.6 Communication

Our inaugural newsletter was issued in February 2026, summarising our work in Winter 2025/26. It was sent to around 200 people, and our mailing list is continually growing. The Spring edition was sent in early May. We are keen to expand its reach to increase awareness and support for our work, so please do share the newsletter with your contacts or ask them to join our mailing list by emailing projectadmin@letcombebroom.org.uk.

We have also been developing our presence on social media by publishing photos of our work parties as well as details of our events. As well as the very active 'Letcombe Brook Project' Facebook group, which we administer, we are developing a 'Letcombe Brook Charity' Facebook page and Instagram account which, once up and running, will showcase the work of the charity and enable us to grow our support.

2.7 Interpretation

We have obtained almost £5,000 of Section 106 funds for interpretation about the brook, including a short film and new display material for use at community events. We look forward to sharing the new film with you in the autumn. A big thank you to Grove Parish Council for their help and support with this application.

3. Physical Restoration

3.1 Dandridge's Mill fish passage, East Hanney

Dandridge's Mill is the first impassible barrier for fish travelling up the Letcombe Brook. This project will create a new, fish-passable inlet for the mill by-pass channel, enabling movement along 6.5km, over half of the brook's total length and an extra 3.3km to the present situation. It will reinstate fish species currently absent upstream of Dandridge's Mill. This is a strategically and ecologically important project.

We hope to proceed with construction of the new inlet in autumn 2027. In 2026, our focus is on gathering more data on flow rates in the various channels around the mill, to ensure we have as good an understanding of the current situation as possible. We will then review the design and make adjustments if necessary. The Environment Agency is taking the lead on monitoring; we are happy to discuss their approach and share results with all interested parties – please speak to Jude for more details.

4. Fundraising

4.1 Summary

The last year has seen strong consolidation in our fundraising efforts. We are very grateful to have received ongoing financial support of £10,000 from Williams F1 and a repeat grant from Vale of White Horse District Council of £5,000 a year for the next three years to help support our core activities.

In addition, we are very grateful to our ongoing committed funders: Wantage Town Council, Grove Parish Council, East Hanney Parish Council, Letcombe Regis Parish Council.

We have been successful in securing £27,100 from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation over the next two years to increase our outreach work to encourage people to spend time in nature along with £19,900 from Awards for All at the National Lottery to support additional outreach work.

We are delighted to welcome MacDermid Autotype to the fold. Their parent company, Element Solutions Inc. have kindly supported our work with a contribution of £5,000.

4.2 Next steps

As you can see, most of this funding relates to education and outreach work, so the next focus area will be on securing funds to improve the biodiversity of the brook. With this in mind, there are three projects which we hope to progress over the next year or two:

1. **Dandridge's Mill.** We will need additional funding to support the Environment Agency's contribution. Biffa is one option. There are others. TOE are keen to support us in our first "Public fundraising drive".
2. Restoration of a **rare alkaline fen** near Letcombe Regis. This would be in partnership with Freshwater Habitats Trust who have already conducted an extensive feasibility study. We are planning to apply to Thames Water for funding for this.
3. Another major barrier beyond Dandridge's Mill is **Wantage Mill**. We would like to commission a feasibility study looking at how viable a fish passage would be here, with the additional aim of reducing flood risk. Initial costs for a full feasibility study are likely to be at least £25,000.

Other than that, Rachel is working on building a regular giving programme over time. In order to make this work, we will need to communicate regularly with people about what we are up to, so strengthening our content is an important step in this process. For that reason, Rachel is involved in the work to deliver a new website and social media strategy, as well as in setting up the giving mechanisms.

One possibility to launch ourselves as a "fundraising" charity to the local community would be to take part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge, but in order to qualify, we would need to be able to secure a minimum of £1,000 in pledges. We would then aim to raise £1,000 in online donations during the week of the campaign. Are we ready for that?

5. Incidents

We have responded to three incidents during this reporting period. One was a report from a member of the public about abstraction, thought to be unlicensed, which we reported to the Environment Agency; another was concern from a number of local residents about habitat clearance at Locks Lane in Wantage, which was reported to both the Environment Agency and the local Planning team at VWHDC.

The third incident was more serious, involving the clearance and widening of 500m of riverbank where water voles (a protected species) were known to be present. After a conversation with the Environment Agency, it was decided to report this to the police, who subsequently investigated and have issued the landowner with a Community Resolution. This was a difficult situation, given our links with local people and recognising flood prevention as the motive for the work; we would always try to balance the needs of people and wildlife where there is a perceived conflict, and offer advice to riparian owners on their options. In this case, we could not turn a blind eye to the illegal destruction of water vole habitat and modification of the watercourse, which will take years to recover. Unfortunately, the widened channel is unlikely to help reduce flooding, since over-widening slows the flow of water, encouraging deposition of silt and growth of marginal vegetation.

6. Project Team and Administration

6.1 New Staff

We welcomed Bev Ayling as our new Admin & Marketing Support Officer (one day a week) in November 2025. Bev has been incredible at organising us behind the scenes, for example organising our new database and newsletter.

Our new Education & Outreach Officer, Cat Boaz, started with us in January 2026, initially for one day a week, moving up to two days a week from mid-April. Cat has already brought a wealth of experience and ideas, and we are delighted to have her on board.

We have also adjusted Tom's role to give him joint responsibility for running volunteer working groups and allow him greater time and scope to lead projects.

All these changes mean we have significantly increased our delivery capacity.

6.2 Trustees

We have also welcomed a new Trustee, Jane Prior, to the team, and look forward to getting to know her better over the coming months. We now have five Trustees on our board, and a volunteer Treasurer.

6.3 Marketing

Our current website hosting is coming to an end in the autumn, and we are taking the opportunity to update our website to a format that will be more engaging and user-friendly. Alongside that, you will notice a slight change to the LBP logo.

Letcombe Brook Project
11 May 2026

Appendix 1: Hydrology reports

Copy of the Thames Area Water Situation Reports, issued by the Environment Agency's Groundwater Resources and Hydrology team. Reports are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/water-situation-report-south-east>

October 2025:

- Rainfall was normal Thames Area in October, as 92% of the long-term average rainfall was received.
- Rainfall in October largely occurred across 4 days: the 3rd October, and then in the 3 days leading up to Storm Benjamin, the 19th, 20th, and 22nd.
- Soils remained drier than average across the area due to the dry summer.
- Rivers across the area responded to this rainfall with daily mean flows peaking, however the majority of sites recorded monthly mean flows that were below normal or normal.
- Groundwater levels continued to decline with the majority of indicator sites ending the month below normal or normal for the time of year.

November 2025:

- Thames area received 102mm of rainfall in November, which was 122% of the long-term average.
- Soil moisture deficits decreased across Thames area from 123mm in October to 45mm by the end of November.
- The majority of monthly mean river flows were normal for the time of year.
- Groundwater levels decreased at 3 of the indicator sites and increased at 8. The majority were normal for the time of year.
- Farmoor reservoir was above average for the time of year, while the Lower Thames reservoirs were below average.

December 2025:

- Thames area received 90mm of rainfall in December, which was 118% of the long-term average.
- Soil moisture deficits decreased across Thames area to 9mm, which is below average for the time of year.
- The majority of monthly mean river flows were normal for the time of year.
- Groundwater levels have risen at 8 of our indicator sites. The majority are normal for the time of year however levels range from normal to exceptionally high.
- Farmoor reservoir is above average for the time of year, while the Lower Thames reservoirs are below average.

January 2026:

- Thames area received 137mm of rainfall in January, which was the wettest January since 2014.
- The majority of areal rainfall units were exceptionally high, Loddon, Lower Wey, and Wey Greensand, had over double the long-term average rainfall.

- Soil moisture deficits were negligible in all areal units by the end of the month. Saturated soils allowed significant effective rainfall to occur, with 202% of the long-term average.
- The majority of monthly mean river flow sites were normal for the time of year, however 4 were exceptionally high.
- Groundwater levels increased at all of our indicator sites in January. Four sites, Ampney Crucis (great oolite), Long Sutton (chalk), and Frith Cottage, and The Flashes, both in the lower greensand, were exceptionally high.
- Both Farmoor reservoir and the Lower Thames reservoirs were below average for the time of year.

February 2026:

- Thames area received 108mm of rainfall in February, which was 199% of the long-term average. It was the third wettest February in Cotswolds East.
- Soil moisture deficits were negligible in all areal units by the end of the month. Saturated soils allowed significant effective rainfall to occur, with 248% of the long-term average for the area.
- Monthly mean river flows increased at 14 of our indicator sites in February. Seven of our sites were exceptionally high, while 7 were notably high.
- The rivers Cherwell at Banbury and Wey at Tilford recorded their second highest February flows on record.
- Groundwater levels increased at the majority of our indicator sites in February in response to the above average recharge. Five sites were exceptionally high.
- Farmoor reservoir was above average while the Lower Thames reservoirs were below average for the time of year.
- In February, a total of 22 fluvial alerts, 6 groundwater alerts, and 8 flood warnings were issued.

March 2026:

- Thames area received 30mm of rainfall in March, which was 61% of the long-term average.
- Soil moisture deficits increased to 18mm, which was slightly higher than the long-term average.
- The drier weather meant that effective rainfall dropped to 38% of the long-term average.
- River flows responded to the reduction in rainfall by decreasing at the majority of our key indicator sites compared with last month.
- Groundwater levels declined at the majority of indicator sites in March and ranged from below normal to exceptionally high, but mostly normal and notably high.
- Farmoor reservoir was above average while the Lower Thames reservoirs were below average for the time of year.
- In March, a total of 3 fluvial alerts, and 5 groundwater alerts were issued.