



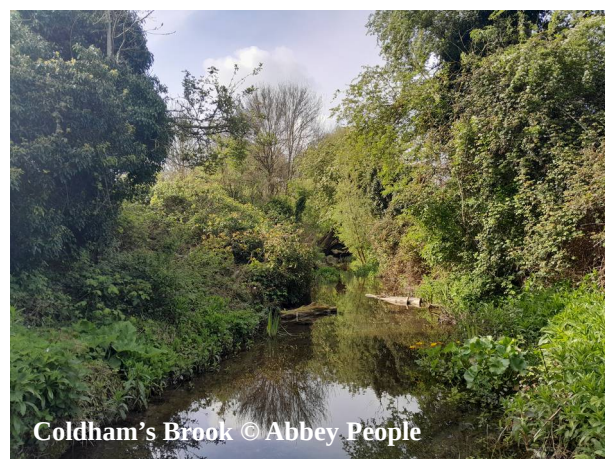
## Occasional Titbits, Issue 77, July 2025

[www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

### Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks

At the AGM in March this year the motion was passed to expand the remit of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook to cover the area of Coldham's Brook and the activities undertaken by the Coldham's Brook volunteers, who are supported by the local charity Abbey People. Our new name and logo above reflect this – many thanks to Jón Fairbairn for the quick redesign! The regular volunteer group created for Coldham's Brook has thus merged with Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook, allowing us to all work together to protect this vital Cambridge chalk stream. The merger brings the following benefits:

- One organisation to co-ordinate and provide oversight of a single watercourse, that will benefit from the expertise available within Abbey People for organising community activities, fundraising and grant management.
- Improved collaboration with the work planned under the City Council's Greater Cambridge Chalk Streams Project (see below).
- A larger network of volunteers for activities on both Brooks, with greater potential for sharing experiences and knowledge.
- More opportunities for achieving long-term sustainability of the many volunteer activities that are underway and being proposed for this important watercourse.



Since the AGM the expanded group has been renamed Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks (FCHCB) and our expanded committee includes representatives of both groups of volunteers. The new committee will be clarifying roles, identifying officer positions to be filled and seeking new volunteers, and developing a joint programme of activities. **Please contact us if you would like to be involved – we still urgently need more helpers!**

*Caitlin Herman, Sustainability Coordinator at Abbey People under the River Cam CAN funding, explains the rationale and describes some of the activities that Abbey People have been undertaking.*

Cherry Hinton Brook becomes Coldham's Brook immediately after the culvert which allows the watercourse to flow under Barnwell Road. Over the last three years Abbey People has been working with volunteers to conserve and improve Coldham's Brook, in partnership with the City Council's biodiversity team. This has included installing flow deflectors to help in-channel flow, planting marginal plants, adding gravel in areas to create oxygenated riffles, and managing the banks to create more light to benefit the chalk stream, and give better access for people to enjoy the Brook.

We have installed three information boards along Coldham's Brook detailing these improvements, and the wildlife that can be found in the Brook. A group of volunteers meets regularly to do Riverfly monitoring (the technique also being used by Cherry Hinton Brook volunteers at Daws Lane – see previous FCHB newsletters). Like the Cherry Hinton Brook volunteers, we also have support from RiverCare to run monthly volunteer litter picks on the fourth Wednesday of the month.

We also raise awareness about chalk streams through communications and community events including bat walks. We have received funding through Cambridge Water's Pebble and Flourishing Environment fund, and currently through the River Cam CAN (Climate Action through Nature) Project, a 2-year National Lottery city-wide project managed by Cambridge Past, Present & Future.

## **AGM report**

We held our AGM this year on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 at East Barnwell Community Centre. Many thanks to Abbey People staff and volunteers for their help.

The main item on the agenda was of course the merger with Coldham's Brook volunteers, the motion for which was passed unanimously (see above). The Chair reported on the many activities that FCHB had been involved with over the previous year, including litter picks, Riverfly monitoring, the production of merchandise with Rowan with designs based on the mural at Sainsbury's, and public awareness raising activities including the March for Clean Water in London in November 2024. The committee was elected (see below). This was largely a case of re-election: we are extremely grateful to the many individuals who have stayed on the Committee for so many years in the absence of new volunteers coming forward.

We had an update on the planning application that will include the opening of the lakes which, we understand is being deferred until at least next year, and also on the development of a new Science District on the landfill site to the north of the lakes. A representative of CHARLIE – Cherry Hinton Against Re-use of Landfill In Spite of Evidence – spoke of major concerns about the potential toxic pollution that could arise from the construction of the Science District.

The meeting ended with presentation by Guy Belcher on the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (see below for more information) and a brief introduction to future Cambridge Water brook restoration activities (see below) by Sarah Sanderson.

The new committee are Sue Wells (chair), Monica Frisch (treasurer), Emmy Smart (membership Secretary), Jón Fairbairn (webmaster), Caitlin Herman (representative for Coldham's Brook); Sarah Bowden, David Brooks, Shona Douglas, Tom Maddox, Caroline Murray, Stuart Newbold, Anne Patel.

## **Cambridge chalk stream management and restoration projects – new initiatives**

Over the last 15 years or so, FCHB supporters have helped with various activities to improve the habitat of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks, including putting in riffles and water flow deflectors. Although these have been successful in some locations, in others the silt has rapidly returned. We are hoping that two major new projects will help to create the changes urgently needed. To make sure the results are permanent, we are also hoping that Cambridge Water will be working in parallel to ensure that over-abstraction of the water table does not lead to the drastic reduction in the level of the Brooks that we saw in the 2022 drought, when some locations dried out completely.

### **Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project**

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/greater-cambridge-chalk-stream-project>

Cherry Hinton Brook, Coldham's Brook, and the East Main Drain — stretching from Giant's Grave to the River Cam — are part of the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (GCCSP). This initiative is led by Rob Martyr, with Emma Dominic as Research Assistant and Coordinator. Funding is from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Anglian Water, South Staffordshire, and Cambridge City Council, and supported by the expertise of Natural England and the Environment Agency. Based on a case study approach, the project includes sites along Cherry Hinton Brook, Coldham's Brook, Hobson's Brook, Vicar's Brook and Nine Wells that will be used to test and showcase habitat restoration techniques.

Ecological monitoring of Cherry Hinton Brook by the project in the spring showed that conditions are suitable for sensitive species like mayfly, caddisfly larvae, and starwort, which depend on high oxygen and clean substrates. However, pollution events are a major concern and mitigation of this is a central aim of the case study work.

The consultancy Aquamaintain is undertaking topographic surveys in July. Anglia Ruskin University will begin surveying the aquatic plant life to help inform the design of future improvements and management. Information from weekly water quality testing and a 24-hour electroconductivity data logger will record changes over time, with draft restoration plans expected for public comment later this month. The aim is to reshape some of the existing riffles and flow deflectors to better reflect local hydrology, and add sand and smaller gravel to replace materials previously added which are now thought to be too large. This should create a more natural and diverse chalk stream habitat.

The project offers plenty of ways to get involved, from water quality testing to fixed-point photography and sediment tracking. To volunteer, contact: [ecd1@aru.ac.uk](mailto:ecd1@aru.ac.uk). A community volunteer day is planned for the week before World Rivers Day in late September.

The GCCSP will be formally launched at a public conference on 16<sup>th</sup> July at Anglia Ruskin University. All are welcome, but booking is essential: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/greater-cambridge-chalk-stream-project-gccsp-launch-conference-tickets-1407358650609>

### **Cambridge Water Company – five year programme to improve chalk streams**

Cambridge Water is developing a programme of chalk stream work to improve habitats and make the streams more resilient to lower flows. Initial funding is available for a five year programme through the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) in agreement with the Environment Agency. Seven chalk streams (Rivers Granta, Mel, Shep and Mill, and the Vicars, Cherry Hinton/Coldham's and Hoffer Brooks) have been selected for work under this programme, on the basis that they have good potential for restoration.

Initial brief surveys of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks were undertaken in 2023 by consultants and a set of potential restoration opportunities were identified. Further baseline studies are being undertaken on water flow and habitat quality in 2025. Members of the FCCHB Committee met with Cambridge Water in May to discuss the plans and how these will relate to the City Council's Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project to ensure that the two sets of work complement each other.

Restoration activities are expected to begin in summer 2026. This programme will complement reductions to abstraction licences to be made by 2032, some of which have already been made. These are reductions to the licences and do not necessarily translate directly into reduced abstraction of water, but it is a step towards this.

### **Spring litterpick – 23<sup>rd</sup> March**

Bottles, cans, cigarette butts, dog poo bags, plastic carrier bags and sweet wrappers were among the rubbish pulled out of the Brook and its banks by volunteers from Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook.

Two groups of nine people, including four members of the committee, gave up two hours of their Sunday to walk along the length of Cherry Hinton Brook, from Daws Lane to Sainsbury's, armed with litter-pickers, long-handled hooks and nets, and plenty of rubbish bags. Teamwork between volunteers in chest waders in the Brook and those on the bank meant that even rubbish on the far side of the stream bank could be reached, retrieved and put in litter bags.

*Monica Frisch*



### **Tea-towels**

You remember our mural celebrating Cherry Hinton Brook on the wall outside Sainsbury's? This was done by the team at Rowan (an arts centre and forest school for adults with learning disabilities, based in Cambridge) with the help of FCHB. Tea towels with two great designs inspired by the project are now available online. These mark the end of the project we undertook with our grant from Cambridge City Council. All the mural-inspired merchandise can be purchased here:

<https://www.rowanhumberstone.org.uk/product-category/wildlife-of-cherry-hinton-brook/>

*Emmy Smart, project coordinator*



## Birdlife along the Brook, Summer 2025

So many small birds have nested along the Brook, although the vegetation makes it difficult to spot them. Instead they can be located by their call: chiff chaffs and blackcaps have been singing through the Spring continuing into early Summer. The chiff chaff song has a regular two beats - chiff / chaff, and the blackcap has a melodious, fluty song. These warblers are migrants and have been here since their arrival in March. Reed warblers too, arriving later in April, can also still be heard from within the lakes. Resident birds such as blackbirds are easier to spot, often perched on the top of a bush or tree although many of the smaller birds, such as robins, wrens and the tit family are less visible as they are nesting and feeding their families. The tiny fledglings cheeps can be heard from deep within the bushes. If you are lucky you might see young robins – with a speckled rather than a red breast, but still with their unmistakable upright stance and longish tail. A colony of jackdaws have nested along Snakey Path again and can be seen en masse calling and flying around in a large flock. They make an impressive spectacle in the early evening.

A few swifts have been spotted flying over the lakes although sadly they still have not used the swift boxes on the eaves of some houses along Burnside. These were erected years ago in the hopes that young adult swifts would investigate and use them. Numbers of swifts and hirundines (swallows and martins) are declining throughout the UK and the numbers locally sadly are part of that trend. Although some species, such as little egrets, are becoming more common, overall the numbers of what were common birds in the UK have declined, making it even more important to protect a green corridor such as Cherry Hinton Brook.

*Holly Anderson*

## Wildlife along the Brook, Summer 2025



The photo of the grass snake (left) was sent to us by Geoff Oliver at the beginning of May. He said “the grass snakes have now fully emerged from winter, I saw 3 of varied size mainly at the Burnside end of the brook. They winter under a large pile of thick black rubber mat on the lake side, I've seen them emerge.”

We were delighted to hear from one of our members that she had seen a young vole. She said “it was pottering about, kind of balancing/clambering on a fallen branch in the brook but when I made a fast step aside to give way to a cyclist, it decided to go for safety and vanished among the plants. I saw it only for a few seconds. It was still quite small, maybe just about independent.” It is encouraging to have evidence that they are breeding. Another report was from a couple who had seen 2 adults (almost black) in the Brook at end of Burnside, opposite house no. 109.

Please do send reports of water voles – one was seen recently from the path to Sainsbury's – and other wildlife sightings to [wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](mailto:wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) so we can monitor what is using the Brook and the areas alongside it.

*Monica Frisch*

**Data protection** To ensure that we comply with the General Data Protection Regulations, we inform you that you are able to withdraw your consent to be on the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook mailing list should you wish. Your email address and contact details are currently held in our database to receive our email newsletter and other occasional messages about our activities and your membership. We do not sell or share your details with anyone outside the committee of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook. Should you have any concerns whatsoever about the way we use your data, or wish to withdraw from our database, please let us know.

**JOIN US!** See [www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) for our aims and activities.

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To be taken off our email list, please email [membership@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](mailto:membership@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

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**8<sup>th</sup> July 2025**