

Gadebridge Park river restoration project: Frequently asked questions

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Chalk streams

1. I understand that the River Gade is a chalk stream, but what is a chalk stream and why are they so important?

In England there are over 280 chalk streams, which is approximately 85% of their global distribution. Unlike most rivers, chalk streams are fed from chalk aquifers – underground porous rock formations which store water. Chalk streams are directly connected to these aquifers, making their water mineral rich, clean and at a consistent temperature. This unique habitat provides the ideal conditions for a diverse range of plants and animals, including some of our most threatened species, such as the water vole and brown trout. The UK has a global responsibility to protect these rare and valuable habitats.

Because of their rarity and value, chalk streams in England have been designated a priority habitat, detailed within the qualifying criteria of the [UK Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\) Priority Habitat Descriptions for Rivers](#). However, all chalk streams in

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England, including the River Gade, face vast challenges and pressures from decades of mismanagement.

Only 17% of the chalk streams in England currently meet 'Good Ecological Status' under the [Water Framework Directive](#) (WFD). The stretch of the River Gade that flows through Gadebridge Park is currently classed as having a 'Poor Ecological Status' under the WFD.

2. What problems are chalk streams facing?

Chalk streams are a rare and valuable habitat but the problems they face are complicated and expensive to solve:

- Degraded habitats due to historical human-made impacts, such as straightening channels and barriers to fish migration.
- Low flows due to unsustainable abstraction, population growth and climate change.
- Poor water quality due to storm overflows, discharges and run-off from farms and roads.
- Invasive non-native species, such as Himalayan balsam and signal crayfish, which spread and have a harmful impact on the environment.

Historically, industry practice, dredging and structures which slow flows, have also contributed to their degradation.

Population growth and climate change exacerbate problems by increasing the pressures on water supply and reducing the resilience of chalk streams.

3. What's being done about it and how can I help?

Like-minded individuals and organisations are working together to improve chalk streams and the wider water environment. People have come together to form 'catchment partnerships', to develop a shared vision and plan for their rivers.

The catchment partnership for the Colne, the Colne Catchment Action Network ([ColneCAN](#)) ties together a number of existing groups, such as the Colne Valley Regional Park and the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project and includes partners such as the Environment Agency, water companies, local authorities, charities, anglers, conservationists and local residents to ensure catchment-wide thinking and local action. They work together to improve the River Gade and many other rivers in the area.

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The Gadebridge Park river restoration project is part of Revitalising Chalk Rivers, a wider programme of projects led by the Environment Agency and Affinity Water that aims to protect and restore rare chalk streams like the River Gade. As part of this programme, Affinity Water has completed a project in the upper section of Gadebridge Park to provide new river habitats for wildlife and to improve the river's water quality – you can find out more about this project at <https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/sustainability/restoration/river-gade>.

What you can do to help:

- Use the water from your tap wisely - using less water means that we can minimise the amount of additional water being taken out of our rivers and aquifers. Visit <https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/saveourstreams/tips> for ideas on reducing your water use.
- Toilets, sinks, washing machines or dishwashers that have been misconnected into surface drains rather than sewers cause significant pollution of our rivers and streams. Find out how to check your property at <https://www.water.org.uk/developers/plumbing-and-drainage-misconnections>
- Report any suspected pollution incidents to the Environment Agency incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 so we can investigate it. Find out more at www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident.
- Support the local catchment partnership, ColneCAN, by visiting <http://colnecan.org.uk/>.

The River Gade

4. Where does the River Gade start?

The River Gade rises from a spring in the chalk of the Chiltern Hills at Dagnall, Buckinghamshire.

5. The river looks fine – why does it need improving?

Like many chalk streams, the River Gade faces pressure from low flows and historic modifications to its channel that limit the river's habitats and the wildlife it can support. The stretch that flows through Gadebridge Park is currently classified as having a 'Poor Ecological Status' under the [Water Framework Directive](#) (WFD).

In Gadebridge Park the River Gade flows down an artificial channel created to supply water to the now demolished Bury Mill. The artificial channel is 'perched', meaning that it sits at a higher level than the valley bottom - the natural course of the river through the park. This means that the river is disconnected from its floodplain.

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When flooding occurs in the valley bottom, the water remains in the park for long periods of time because it is unable to flow back into the channel.

The river's perched position also means it is disconnected from the groundwater table beneath its original course. Without this source, it lacks the natural characteristics of a chalk stream. These unique characteristics – including mineral rich, clean water with an alkaline PH and a stable temperature all year round – are vital for supporting the diverse range of plants and animals that chalk streams are home to.

The artificial channel is much wider and straighter than a natural chalk stream would typically be. This often leads to a build-up of sediment along the bank and associated excessive vegetation growth, which gradually narrows the channel.

The Environment Agency's gauging station and weir, located at the bottom of the park, is used to monitor low flows and flood flows on the River Gade. The weir, as well as other remains of historic in-channel structures, acts as a barrier to fish. These structures can also cause sediment and vegetation to build up, impacting on river habitats and wildlife.

Low flows

The River Gade often suffers from low flows and has little resilience to drought conditions due to:

- Spring flows (groundwater emerging at the surface) being diverted into an underground tunnel (culvert) rather than feeding the River Gade. The culvert was built to reduce the risk of flooding in Hemel town and discharges into the fishing lake at Kings Langley – about 5km downstream of Gadebridge Park. Spring flow is therefore lost to the River Gade until this point.
- Being disconnected from the groundwater table. For a chalk stream, where over 70% of its flow is from groundwater, this can have a significant impact on its resilience during periods of low flows and to wildlife in the channel.
- Water being taken (abstracted) for public water supply.

Most water we drink in the South East comes from rainwater stored deep beneath our feet in natural chalk 'aquifers'. These also feed our chalk streams. In 2018 Affinity Water reduced net abstraction in the Gade catchment by 2,342,400 m³/year (that's an average of 6.4 million litres a day). However, demand for water in the South East remains high.

6. Why can you not just leave the park as it is?

There simply is not a 'do nothing' option. 'Rivers, lakes and coastal waters are vital natural resources: they provide drinking water, crucial habitats for many different types of wildlife, and are an important resource for industry and recreation. A significant proportion of them are environmentally damaged or under threat. Protecting and improving the environment is an important part of achieving sustainable development and is vital for the long term health, well being and prosperity of everyone' (Joint Nature Conservation Committee, February 2010. Read more [here](#)).

The River Gade is a chalk stream, which is a globally rare habitat. A chalk stream's unique habitat provides the ideal conditions for a diverse range of plants and animals and they are home to some of our most threatened species, such as the Water Vole and Brown Trout. 85% of the world's chalk streams are in England, but only 17% of these currently meet 'Good Ecological Status' under the [Water Framework Directive](#) (WFD). The stretch of the River Gade that flows through Gadebridge Park is currently classed as having a 'Poor Ecological Status' under the WFD.

The Hertfordshire State of Nature Report 2020 has identified that nature in Hertfordshire is under threat and declining at significant rates. Climate change will accelerate this trend. In a 'do nothing' scenario, this pattern of decline and extinction will continue to degrade our valuable habitats, such as the River Gade, that are essential for societal well-being. High biodiversity is a proven indicator of a habitat's health and resilience to climate change and is essential to help mitigate impacts. You can read more about the state of Hertfordshire's rivers and wetlands here: <https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/stateofnature>

The river improvements as part of the Gadebridge Park river restoration project will contribute to:

- Improving the River Gade towards reaching Good Ecological Status, removing the risk of deterioration and meeting the UK's desire to improve the health of our water environment.
- Meeting the Environment Agency's obligations under the Water Framework Directive (for instance, addressing the risk of deterioration is a statutory requirement), the commitments expressed in the Thames River Basin Management Plan and the Government's Five-Year Environment Plan.

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- Mitigating the impacts of climate change by establishing sustainable habitats more capable of adapting to future climate scenarios, improving resilience to low flow events and drought conditions when water availability is reduced, and improving floodplain connectivity and drainage when rainfall is high.

These benefits are consistent with the Dacorum draft Local Plan which has references to the importance of protecting chalk streams and mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Project objectives and proposals

7. What does the project aim to do?

The Environment Agency, Dacorum Borough Council and Affinity Water want to:

- Improve the River Gade and the adjacent parkland for wildlife.
- Provide more opportunities, accessible to everyone, for people to get closer to the river and enjoy nature.
- Improve floodplain connectivity, but reduce the impact of flooding – i.e. flood water can be stored on the floodplain when needed, but doesn't sit on the parkland for long periods of time.
- Improve the river's resilience – its ability to cope with and adapt to the pressures of low flows, high flows and climate change.
- Improve biodiversity in the River Gade, so that it supports Good Ecological Status under the European Water Framework Directive.
- Reduce the barriers to fish movement and impoundment caused by river structures, including the Environment Agency's Bury Mill gauging station.
- Improve flows in the river, to lessen the build-up of sediment and vegetation and to reduce the need for maintenance.
- Replace the Environment Agency's gauging station to improve the ability to monitor river flows and provide flood warnings.
- Provide more opportunities to learn about the River Gade, both its historical importance to the landscape and its value as a rare chalk stream.

8. What are the current proposals?

Our latest proposals include:

- Realigning the part of the River Gade located downstream of the Grade II listed White Bridge back to the valley bottom (through the centre of the park at its lowest point). This will reconnect the river to its floodplain and to the groundwater table below.

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- Re-routing spring flows - which are currently diverted through a culvert (underground tunnel) and discharged into a fishing lake at Kings Langley 5km downstream - into the new realigned channel. This will provide additional flow to the river, increasing its resilience to low flows, improve the river's water quality and help to restore natural characteristics of a chalk stream such as a more alkaline PH and a stable temperature all year round.
- Replacing the existing Bury Mill gauging station with a gauging station on the new realigned channel that is passable to fish and has a reduced impact on the river.
- Creating vegetated riparian margins alongside the river channel and a wildflower meadow, to provide new habitats for wildlife.
- Following a Water Vole mitigation programme to ensure this species is protected during all phases of the project.
- Providing new footpaths alongside the river, a fully accessible bridge crossing the new realigned channel from the Queensway car park to the Bowls Club and an informal crossing point in the centre of the park - all for people's enjoyment of the river.
- Providing dipping platforms and access points along the river for people to get closer to nature.
- Installing information boards within the park to share the River Gade's historical importance to the landscape and help people to understand and value our rare chalk streams.

You can view the proposals on a map of the park at <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/hnl/gadebridge-park-information-page>

9. What will happen to the old channel?

The existing channel (mill leat) downstream of the White Bridge will be preserved in situ. Material that is excavated from the creation of the new channel will be used to infill the existing channel. By effectively burying the mill leat, this historical feature will remain undisturbed and suffer less erosion and human/animal damage. Its preservation allows for any future archaeological investigations to take place. Before this work is completed, a number of tests will take place to ensure the soil is of a suitable quality. The area will then likely be seeded with a species-rich grass mix.

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Dacorum Borough Council plan to work with local groups, including the Hemel Hempstead History and Museum Society, to install an information board adjacent to the existing channel. The board will feature historical information about Gadebridge Park, including its former mill leat.

10. What will happen to the old gauging station?

The brick structure will be removed and the concrete flume (which runs around the corner of the carpark and under the Queensway Bridge) will be filled in.

11. What will the new gauging station look like?

The equipment used for the new gauging station will be housed beneath the bridge that connects the southern car park to the Bowls Club. The photograph below indicates what the equipment will look like on the base of the new channel. We have reduced the amount of concrete required as much as possible, but some concrete is still necessary to ensure accurate flows are recorded.



12. Why is there no river restoration planned for the area north of the White Bridge?

This area was ruled out for restoration during the feasibility and options analysis stage of the project. The valley bottom and its associated groundwater springs are located to the east of this section of the park. If we were to realign the river in this location, it would run through the middle of Dacorum Borough Council's main event space. A heritage assessment also identified that we are unable to alter the flow beneath the Grade II listed White Bridge, making it significantly more challenging to

achieve realignment north of the bridge.

13. Can't you just clear out all the overgrown vegetation?

Clearing vegetation and silt from the river is not sustainable – over time it would simply return and require clearance again. Not only would this process increase long-term maintenance costs, it would also cause damage to wildlife habitats. Any benefit from doing so would be very marginal (if any) and short-term.

By restoring the river to a more natural state, we will improve flows and lessen the build-up of sediment and vegetation. We do not expect in-channel maintenance such as desilting to be needed following the project's completion downstream of the White Bridge.

14. Isn't moving the river closer to the children's playground dangerous?

Once the project is complete, flood waters will recede more quickly into the new channel. This means that flooding will have less of an impact on people's enjoyment of the park, including the play areas. Also, floodwaters can be dangerous - standing water quickly becomes a breeding ground for bacteria and insects such as mosquitos. Public Health England say children should not play in floodwater.

15. Is this all so the council can build more houses?

No. The Environment Agency is leading the project, alongside its partners Dacorum Borough Council and Affinity Water. The project will provide multiple benefits, including improved habitats for wildlife, the protection of water resources for both people and the environment, improved resilience to flood flows and climate change, and allowing local residents and visitors to get closer to the river and enjoy nature.

As landowner, Dacorum Borough Council has a duty to prevent any deterioration of a water body under the Water Framework Directive.

This project is part of Revitalising Chalk Rivers, a wider programme of environmental projects that the Environment Agency and Affinity Water are working on that aims to protect and restore rare chalk streams like the River Gade.

Project timescales

16. When will it start?

Subject to completing all the required preparatory work and securing the necessary funding, we hope to begin the restoration works on site in early autumn 2024. Any necessary ground investigations and Water Vole mitigation plans will begin beforehand.

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We have considered the timing of the construction phase carefully to balance the needs of the local ecology, the council's events programme and school holidays. We're aiming to complete the main works to the river channel outside of the fish spawning season in the winter months, while also avoiding as much disruption as possible when the park is at its busiest during July and August.

17. How long will the works take?

The works are planned to finish by spring 2025.

18. Will events in the park go ahead during the construction phase?

Yes – we will work closely with Gadebridge Park's managers at Dacorum Borough Council to ensure we are kept up-to-date of the park's event programme for 2024 in order to minimise disruption. Most events in Gadebridge Park use the space north of Gadebridge Lane and this will be available for use at all times.

Pedestrian access from the Gadebridge Lane car park and the White Bridge will remain open during construction.

There is likely to be some short temporary disruption to the Queensway car park towards the end of the project while our existing gauging station and flume is decommissioned. We will provide more details on this as soon as we can.

In all cases, together with Dacorum Borough Council, we will carry out risk assessments and any necessary actions, for example temporary fencing and signage, to ensure everyone's safety at all times.

Wildlife considerations

19. Why was the wetland area removed from the designs?

The proposed wetland area upstream of Gadebridge Lane was removed from our designs because we found it would be too small to function effectively. Also, it was likely to have impacted on the use of the events space in the park.

20. What are you doing to help wildlife and improve biodiversity?

By creating a narrower, sinuous river channel that is in contact with the groundwater below, we will ensure that the habitat is more resilient to climate change, providing refuge for wildlife during drought and flood events. We will create a management plan for all the habitats created to ensure they are suitably looked after in the future, ensuring the longevity of the project.

Downstream of the White Bridge, we will create vegetated riparian margins along the banks of the new channel. Riparian margins provide important habitat for many species. Their mix of semi-aquatic tall herbs, grasses and trees provide a range of services for our wildlife - for example, a habitat and a source of food for aquatic insects at different life stages, cover from predation for Water Voles and a migration corridor for Otters.

As well as providing habitat, riparian margins also play a role in filtering sediment and reducing nutrients entering the watercourse, helping to improve water quality. They slow flood flows and help to reduce erosion of banks, providing a natural flood management solution. They are also critically important in retaining the connectivity of the river environment, both laterally with its flood plain and longitudinally with upstream and downstream reaches of the river.

To help support wildlife and meet biodiversity net gain targets, we are also creating a wildflower meadow with both pollen and nectar species, between the right bank of the channel and the Queensway car park.

As part of our initial ecological assessments, we discovered that the area of grassland adjacent to The Bury was the most species rich in the park for wildflowers and grasses. Wildflower meadows provide habitat for a variety of species of invertebrates (including pollinators), birds and small mammals. Since the 1930s we have lost over 99% of our 'unimproved grasslands' and so encouraging the restoration of this habitat in the park is a great opportunity for wildlife.

By simply changing the management of this area, to include consistent mowing and the removal of the arisings, we will further improve this area. Removing the arisings helps to remove nutrients and create a nutrient poor area that is favoured by lots of wildflower species. Mowing also ensures that this area remains a meadow area and doesn't succeed into scrub or woodland. We hope that including this area in the management plan produced for the site will provide clear guidance to the landowners on how to ensure the higher biodiversity is retained into the future. This area will also include a mown path, maintained March to September, to allow access and enjoyment for all.

21. How are you reducing disruption to wildlife in the existing channel during construction?

Works will be carried out to our high ecologically sensitive standards and we will avoid disturbance as much as possible.

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Bird Nesting season as stated by Natural England is 1 March to 31 August each year, however we know that this can vary in the South East dependent on the weather. Where tree works are unavoidable during this period we will carry out a bird nesting survey beforehand and appoint an 'Ecological Clerk of Works' to ensure minimal risk to both birds and bats. See question 22 for more details of nesting birds.

Prior to works starting, we will cut back the vegetation in the existing channel to discourage fish, mammals and invertebrates from taking up residence here over the next few months. Eventually, the old stretch of river will be infilled. But don't worry, any remaining animals will gradually leave in search of better habitat, and we'll safely transfer any fish to the new channel (see the 'Fish' section for more details). The new channel will have a variety of in-river features and habitats that will help support a diverse range of wildlife.

We have considered the timing of the construction phase carefully to balance the needs of the local ecology, the council's events programme and school holidays. In particular, we want the works in the river to be completed outside of the fish spawning season in the winter months.

See question 24 below for information about what we are doing to protect water voles.

Although there may be short-term implications on some species currently found in the existing channel during construction, the new channel will provide an attractive new habitat for many species.

22. What will be done to protect nesting birds during construction?

In July 2018, ecologists from our consultant, JBA, carried out a survey of marginal vegetation along the banks of the River Gade. The survey indicated that there is ample potential for breeding birds typical of the woodland edge and urban habitats to nest and forage in the river's reed margins (specifically waterfowl and waders). However, this is limited by people and dogs in this busy park causing disturbance, particularly in the area to the south of the White Bridge. The only exception is the short reach between the flood culvert at the Queensway bridge and the Bury Garden where there is less public access.

The park's hedges are dominated by Hawthorn and are not very dense. This limits opportunities for nesting birds.

Given the public nature of the park and the presence of trees, there is currently limited likelihood of the site being used by wintering or breeding waders.

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We will take particular care to protect any breeding birds during the bird nesting season, between the months of March and September. While we could have carried out the necessary tree works before March, we did not have certainty at that time that the project would progress to construction. As a result, the tree works could have been unnecessary. We are confident that our approach to the tree works will ensure that nesting birds are protected.

Prior to any tree works, a suitably qualified ecologist will carry out a nesting survey to identify active nests that may be disturbed or destroyed. If active nests are present, a buffer surrounding the nest will be left in place until the young birds have fledged. Site clearance activities, including vegetation management within the channel, will deter any further habituation during the works. The site clearance activities will take place in the presence of a suitably qualified ecologist.

The diversion of flow from the current channel to the new one and the infilling of the old channel will take place in the autumn, outside of bird nesting season.

234. What about water voles?

Water voles are a protected species so it is important that we understand whether there is a population living in the River Gade in Gadebridge Park before we begin construction.

Water vole were spotted in the park for a few weeks back in Autumn 2020 following their reintroduction further upstream on the River Gade by the Box Moor Trust. In 2021 our officers also found potential signs of their presence in the park, including possible footprints. As a result of these sightings we arranged for a comprehensive water vole survey to be carried out in September 2021 to establish whether water voles had migrated into the park. Despite the possible sightings, however, the survey found no current signs of water vole.

We arranged for another survey to take place at the end of May 2022. The survey found a 'probable' sighting of a water vole. Although it was a very brief sighting, the mammal's tail suggested it was much more likely to be a water vole than a rat. The survey also found feeding remains which provides further evidence to support a positive sighting.

As a result, we developed a water vole mitigation programme to ensure this species is protected during all phases of the project. As part of this programme, we carried out a survey in September 2023 to reassess the population size and any mitigation measures required. This survey didn't find any conclusive evidence to suggest that a resident water vole population is present within Gadebridge Park. As a result of the findings (or lack of), we decided to carry out more detailed monitoring, including the

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use of temporary rafts (platforms that water vole can use as feeding stations or territory markers) and camera traps. This, too, did not reveal any signs of water vole. Taking account of previous surveys, we think this supports the view that the leat is being used as a migration corridor, with any water vole presence being intermittent and due to the occasional animal passing through.

Despite no recent signs of water vole, we are taking a precautionary approach and are continuing our monitoring, especially throughout the breeding season which began in April. We will then carry out another survey before we start construction. Although it is unlikely, should we find any water vole, we'll work closely with Natural England and an ecological consultant to ensure that they are safely relocated. We are hopeful that any relocation will be in close proximity to the project, allowing them to recolonise the newly restored river soon after the works are complete.

By restoring this stretch of the River Gade and providing suitable habitats, we hope that water voles will be spotted here much more regularly in the future!

24. By adding river access points and encouraging children and dogs to enter the river, will this not damage the river and harm wildlife?

We want to protect the river and its wildlife, but we also want to help people get closer to the river and enjoy nature. It is a careful balance. Access to the existing river is uncontrolled and is causing significant localised damage.

Our latest proposals include 2 areas of gravel on the inside of bends in the river. These areas will provide designated access areas for people and dogs to enter the river. The naturally larger sizes of sediment in these features and the faster flow of water should prevent the movement of finer sediments in the water, and therefore reduce the impact of people and dogs accessing the river. These areas will also be less susceptible to erosion of the banks.

In other areas, a 'buffer zone', between 5 and 10 metres from the riverbank, will help protect the river's wildlife. The buffer zone must remain undisturbed by development, with no fencing, footpaths, lighting, formal landscaping or other development. Any mowing will be limited to allow plants to flower. This area will provide multiple benefits including the protection of water vole burrows up to 5 metres within the bank, natural flood management, a link for habitats to benefit local biodiversity, and a more attractive river for the enjoyment of the park's visitors.

Our plans also include the installation of information boards, including one specifically about chalk streams. We hope this will help people to value and protect these important habitats.

25. How will you prevent the spread of non-native invasive species like Orange Balsam and American Signal Crayfish during construction?

Being vigilant is important. We will ensure that regular 'toolbox talks' (involving short presentations and informal discussions) are provided to on-site staff and all visitors concerning non-native invasive species.

The main risk in spreading these species is when vehicles and people leave the park, including the public, carrying propagules (eggs and pieces of vegetation) to other rivers, streams and ponds. During construction, our contractors will therefore adhere to a strict biosecurity plan, including the 'check clean dry' methodology and the use of wheel washes and exclusion zones. Pre-emptive pulling of non-native invasive plant species will take place where necessary.

The new channel will not remain free of non-native invasive species as they will be carried into it by the flow of the River Gade. The continued vigilance of the Parks and Recreation Team at Dacorum Borough Council will be required to eradicate any new infestations - as they have successfully done to date.

Fish

26. Are fish currently in this stretch of the river? How will the proposals help fish?

In our latest fish survey, we recorded good results 100 metres upstream (in the stretch already restored by [Affinity Water](#)) - a few minor species and 8 Brown Trout from a range of size classes (including one very small juvenile). Further downstream, within the stretch of the River Gade we plan to restore, results were described as 'near desolate'. The upper stretch receives far less disturbance, has much more cover for fish and more vegetation to act as a buffer from people and dogs.

By restoring this stretch of the River Gade and providing suitable habitats for fish and other wildlife, we hope that we can significantly improve these results in the future.

The new re-aligned channel has been designed to create a natural chalk stream and includes a variety of features such as riffles, pools and berms. The variety in habitat should support a wide range of species, including fish. Fish have different habitat requirements throughout their life cycles. Providing a diverse channel is vital in order to give fish the best chance possible at each life stage, and to create a habitat that can support a self-sustaining population. For example, marginal planted areas will provide refuge from predators for juvenile trout. Adults will benefit from the deeper pools for cover as well as riffles and clean gravels for spawning.

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The proposed new gauging station will also allow movement of fish into Gadebridge Park from downstream sections which was not previously possible.

27. How will you transfer fish to the new channel?

Fish will be moved from the old channel to the new one using a method called electro-fishing. This is a well-known technique that fisheries scientists use to monitor fish populations. We use it many times each year to provide an indication of the ecological quality of our rivers.

Electro-fishing involves walking upstream with equipment that creates a mild electrical current within the water. This causes a response in fish making them swim towards the source of the electrical current where they can be safely caught. A high level of training is required to ensure that fish are not harmed in the process and it will likely take many attempts to provide us with the confidence that all the fish have safely been rehomed into the new channel.

28. Will you restock the new re-aligned channel with fish following project completion?

We don't expect this to be necessary. One of the main aims of the project is to remove the barriers to fish movement, for example by replacing the current gauging station with one which allows fish passage. The relocation of the River Gade to valley bottom and the installation of a new, more sustainable structure will allow wild fish to recolonise the area, with the aim that a self-sustaining population will become established without the need for stocking. We will carry out a fish survey once the work has been completed, and again once the new channel has established, to understand how the fish population has changed following the habitat enhancements.

Archaeological finds

29. What did you find during the archaeological works?

Between 4 and 10 March 2020, we arranged for archaeological trenching to be carried out along the proposed route of the new channel to ensure our planned works would not affect any undiscovered historical structures or artefacts. A number of interesting pieces were found, including a brick culvert, most likely related to the water gardens or mill known to surround the site, a handle shard from a late 18th to early 19th century Creamware jug, a large nail, and a horseshoe!

The size and dating of these finds mean they are of little archaeological value and there were no recommendations for any further archaeological work. A 'heritage watching brief', where an archaeologist monitors the site, may still be required during construction.

Flood risk

30. Won't connecting the river back to its floodplain make flooding worse?

In Gadebridge Park the River Gade flows down an artificial channel created to supply water to the now demolished Bury Mill. The artificial channel is 'perched', meaning that it sits at a higher level than the valley bottom - the natural course of the river through the park (the channel is half a metre higher than the bottom of the valley). This means that the river is disconnected from its floodplain. When flooding occurs in the valley bottom, the water remains in the park for long periods of time because it is unable to flow back into the channel.

The new channel will be connected to the floodplain and is designed to cope with high flows. Our flood modelling in November 2021 showed that our proposals will reduce flooding in the park and will not increase flooding elsewhere. This has been confirmed through remodelling in line with changes to our designs and through a sensitivity analysis we carried out in May 2022.

The figures below show a comparison of the flood outlines pre and post restoration. Currently a portion of the park floods when water spills eastwards from the perched channel. This creates a shallow area of flooding, which frequently ponds because water cannot flow back into the channel. Following restoration, the flood risk within this area of the park will be reduced as the floodplain and river channel will be better connected. Flood water will be able to drain back into the channel as flood water recedes.

Figure 1: Maps showing the existing surface water flooding risk in the park (pooling following heavy rainfall) on the left-hand side and the improved situation on the right-hand side.

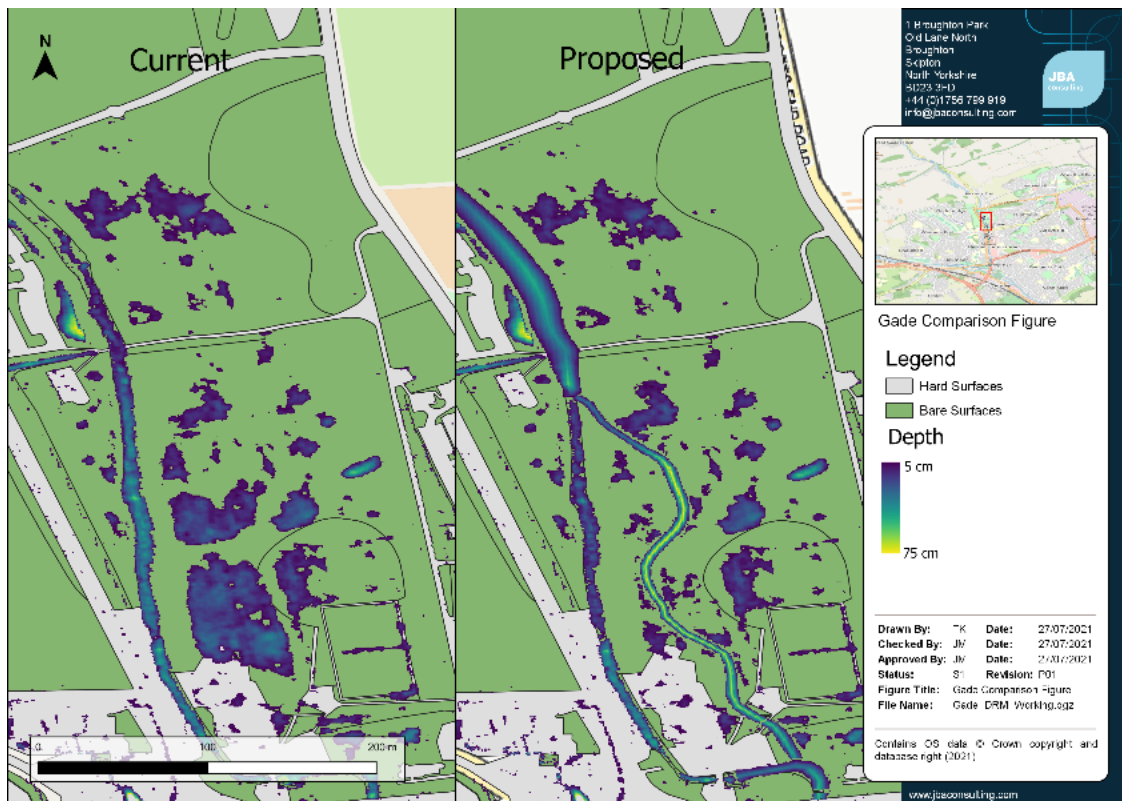
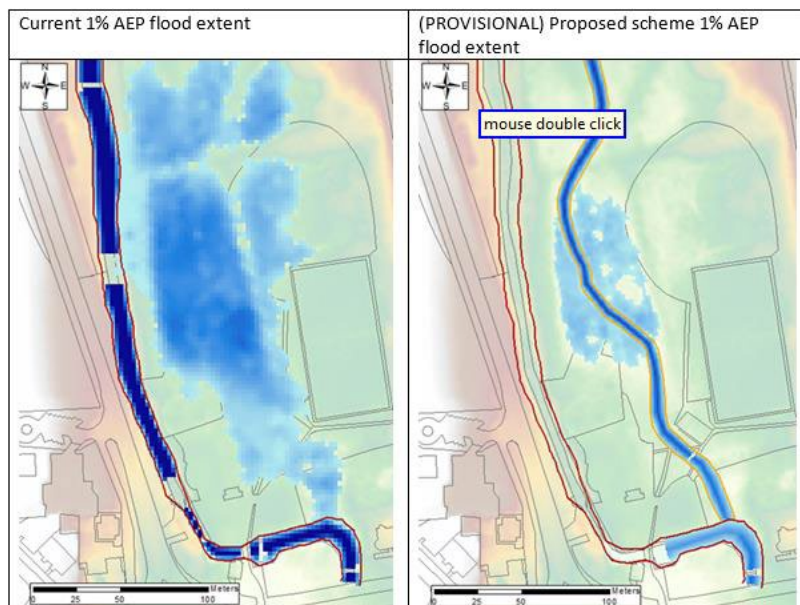


Figure 2: Maps showing the current and post-completion extent of flooding in Gadebridge Park during a flood event which has a 1% chance of happening in any one year.



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The flood culvert that was built to stop Hemel town from flooding will remain operational, however the flow of the River Gade into it will be from East to West rather than West to East as it is now.

31. What's wrong with just letting the park flood? Where will the flood water go after the project is completed?

Our flood modelling in November 2021 showed that our proposals will reduce flooding in the park and not increase flooding elsewhere. This has been confirmed through remodelling in line with changes to our designs and through a sensitivity analysis we carried out in May 2022. After heavy rainfall flood water will still divert to the existing flood relief culvert, built to reduce flood risk to Hemel Hempstead back in 1959. Flood water flows through the culvert, bypassing the town, and eventually flows into the fishing lake at Kings Langley, about 5 kilometres downstream of Gadebridge Park. This system will work in the same way, regardless of whether floodwater pools in the park as it does now or flows back into the channel following completion of the restoration works.

Reducing the risk of flooding to the park is just one of the multiple benefits the project provides, however.

The River Gade is a chalk stream, a rare and valuable habitat. Unlike most rivers, chalk streams are fed from chalk aquifers – underground porous rock formations which store water. Chalk streams are directly connected to these aquifers, making their water mineral rich, clean and at a consistent temperature. This unique habitat provides the ideal conditions for a diverse range of plants and animals, including some of our most threatened species, such as the Water Vole and Brown Trout.

85% of the world's chalk streams are in England, but only 17% of these currently meet 'Good Ecological Status' under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Although the River Gade in Gadebridge Park may look fine, this stretch is currently classified as having a 'Poor Ecological Status' under the WFD.

32. Why is there no restoration planned for the area north of the White Bridge? The river often overtops the banks in this location, causing flooding to the children's playground and other areas.

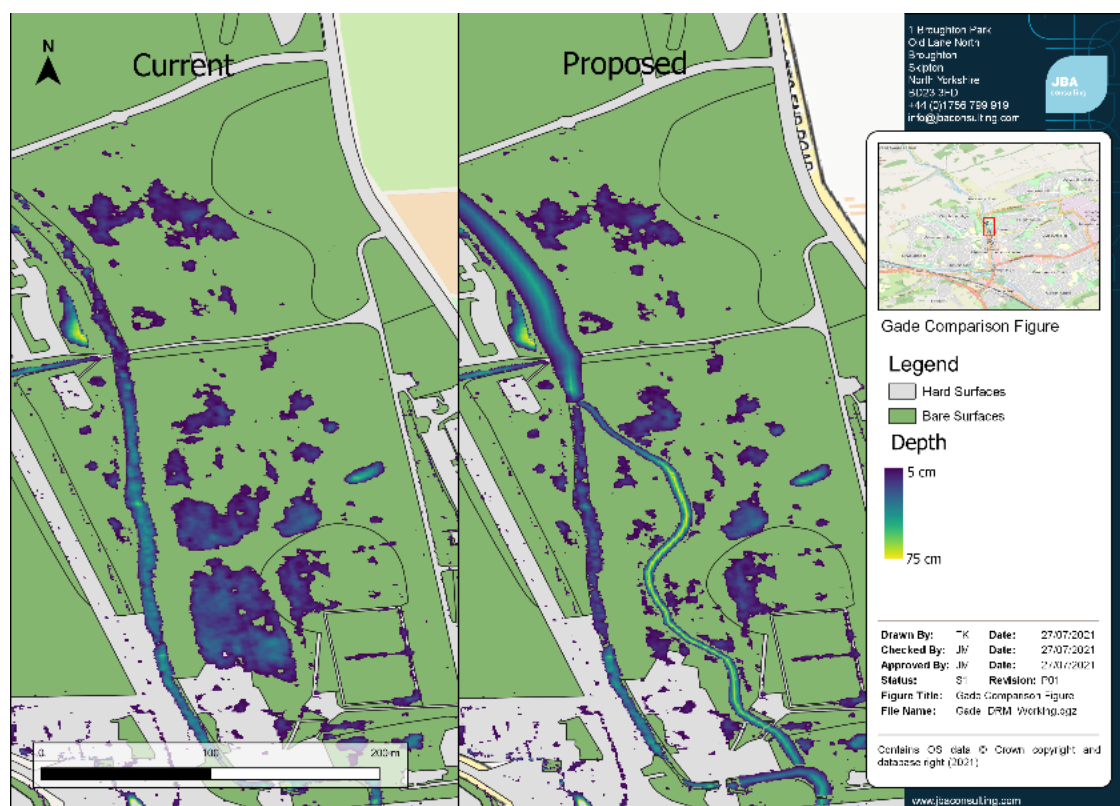
This area was ruled out for restoration during the feasibility and options analysis stage of the project. The valley bottom and its associated groundwater springs are located to the east of this section of the park. If we were to realign the river in this location, it would run through the middle of Dacorum Borough Council's main event space. A heritage assessment also identified that we are unable to alter the flow beneath the Grade II listed White Bridge, making it significantly more challenging to achieve realignment north of the bridge.

We are aware that the river often overtops the banks north of the White Bridge, causing water to pool. During high flows the White Bridge restricts flows heading

downstream, which causes water to back up and overtop the banks. The pools in this section of the park are directly linked to the level of the water in the river, and quickly recede once river levels reduce. As we are unable to alter flows beneath the bridge, our original proposals aimed to utilise this 'pooling' by constructing a wetland area in this location. However, this was later removed from our designs because we found it would be too small to function effectively. Also, similarly to the option of a full realignment of the river here, it would have impacted on the use of the council's main events space. While we could investigate other options to alleviate flood risk here, any option would require ongoing maintenance. The associated costs would be difficult to justify given that the overtopping is occurring in the river's natural floodplain and no properties are impacted.

Following completion of the project, while the overtopping currently occurring in the area north of the White Bridge is unlikely to reduce, it will also not be made any worse – water will recede back into the channel as it does now. Despite improvements downstream to reduce the build-up of vegetation and silt, flow conditions will remain the same upstream due to the impact of the White Bridge. The park south of the White Bridge, however, will benefit from reduced surface water flooding as part of the project, including areas near to the children's adventure playground (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Maps showing the existing surface water flooding risk in the park (pooling following heavy rainfall) on the left-hand side and the improved situation on the right-hand side.



Surface water pollution

33. What's a surface water outfall?

Surface water outfalls are where rainwater, for example from roads, enters a river. The water quality from surface water outfalls can be poor as the rain water can carry pollution into the river.

34. What impact will surface water outfalls have on the new river?

A set of manholes located in the centre of the park (visible between the Queensway car park and the path between the Bowls Club and the coffee kiosk) collect the spring flow entering the existing floodplain within the park from the valley sides i.e. the flow that cannot drain naturally.

During construction, this main pipe will be blocked upstream of the car park where it passes underneath the new channel. This will allow the spring water flow from upstream to recharge the river channel and groundwater in this location - this spring water flows 365 days a year and can be seen on the east side of the entrance to the flood culvert from the bridge into the Queensway car park.

The downstream section of this pipe collects surface water flow from the Queensway car park and will be kept open. Surface water flows from Leighton Buzzard Road are currently directed into the River Gade, but this will stop following construction - the new channel will be much further from the road and the flows will be collected in new pipework that will be laid in the base of the old channel (mill leat) before it is filled-in. These pipes, as with the flow from the Queensway car park, will be diverted to the flood culvert (where they all discharge at present).

35. Where will the road water run-off from Leighton Buzzard Road go after the project is complete?

Surface water run-off from Leighton Buzzard Road currently flows directly into the River Gade, carrying pollution into the river. The new channel will be much further from the road and the flows will be collected in new pipework laid in the base of the old channel before it is filled in. These pipes will be diverted to the flood culvert and not into the River Gade.

River flows and groundwater

36. Why is it important to divert the spring flow into the new channel?

Spring flows occur where groundwater emerges at the earth's surface. Spring flows are an important feature of chalk streams. Unlike most rivers, chalk streams are fed from chalk aquifers – underground porous rock formations which store water. Natural chalk streams are directly connected to the chalk aquifer, making their water mineral rich, clean and at a consistent temperature. This unique habitat provides the ideal conditions for a diverse range of plants and animals.

37. How will you ensure the correct flow travels down the Gade into Hemel Hempstead?

As the River Gade flows down its new route through the Bury Garden, it will reach a culvert (an underground tunnel) under the Queensway bridge. This culvert only allows a limited volume of water to flow through to Hemel Hempstead, protecting the town from flooding. At higher flows, where the maximum volume has been reached, water will back-up into a grassed swale (an area of low ground adjacent to the main river channel designed to convey floodwater). The swale runs parallel to the Queensway bridge and has been designed with a gentle slope to direct flows towards the existing flood relief channel, bypassing the town centre. The swale will only convey water at high flows and will remain dry for the majority of the time. We have run computer modelling to test the design of the channel, ensuring there is no increase in flooding within the park or downstream.

By realigning the channel through the centre of the park, the river will approach the culvert under Queensway Bridge from the Bury Garden, rather than its current route along the gauging flume, between the Queensway car park and Leighton Buzzard Road. Currently, retention boards must be manually inserted into slots at the top of the flood weir during periods of low flow to ensure enough water remains in the River Gade and is not lost to the flood relief channel. This will no longer be required following the realignment – during periods of low flow, the River Gade will naturally retain all its flow.

The image below explains this in more detail. The blue arrows show the flow of the realigned river through the Bury Garden into the culvert under Queensway Bridge. The yellow arrows show the current route past the flood weir, where flow can be lost to the flood relief channel (purple arrow). The thick red arrow shows the location for the new grassed swale area where water will back up in times of high flows and flow towards the existing flood relief channel.

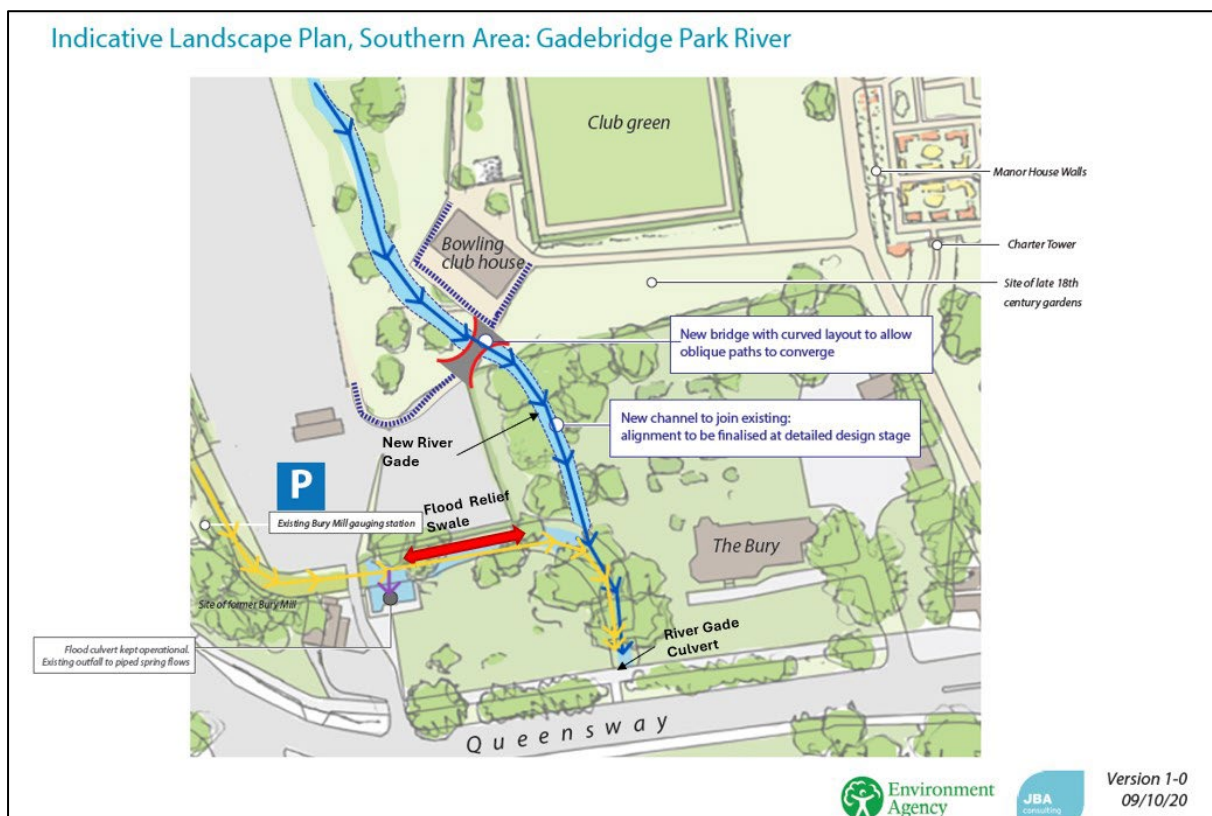


Image showing new route of River Gade into the culvert under Queensway Bridge.



Image showing flood weir and where retention boards are currently inserted (red box) during periods of low flow.

38. How will river flows be affected? Will the new channel dry out?

The existing channel loses water through its bed due to its perched position to one side of the valley bottom.

We have identified a number of springs that discharge into the bed of the current river channel near the Queensway car park. Although this shows that there is a connection between the existing channel and the groundwater below in this location, the new channel through the valley bottom is likely to intersect more with its groundwater and the deculverted springs from the north east of the park. This should result in an improved, more natural flow. Flows will always be dependent on weather conditions each year, however, and how much rain falls each Winter.

We have carried out modelling to determine the likelihood of water losses once the new channel is complete. The modelling shows that water loss will be no worse than from the current channel, and the river would, to some extent, run dry in a range from 1 in 10 years to 1 in 20 years. The channel will need a period to 'bed in', and for the first 5-6 years following the project's completion, while sediment seals the bed, the river could potentially run dry once a year. A natural feature of chalk streams is that they on occasion run dry, again, depending upon weather conditions and rainfall.

39.. What about abstraction by Water Companies? Will this affect flow in the river?

Prior to 2018 Affinity Water abstracted up to 20.5 million litres of water per day from two sites in the area; one upstream of Gadebridge Park and one downstream in the

town. The water is not taken directly from the river, but from the groundwater which feeds the river.

Affinity Water agreed to voluntarily decrease their abstraction from 2018, reducing the total water abstracted from both sites by an average of 6.4 million litres per day, down to an average of 14.1 million litres per day. Once the redevelopment of the Civic centre is complete, a permanent change to the conditions of Affinity Water's abstraction licence will further reduce the water abstracted upstream of Gadebridge Park, while allowing for an increase downstream. This won't change the overall reduction in abstraction, but will mean significantly less water will be taken in the more sensitive upper reaches of the river, benefitting flows in the River Gade through Gadebridge Park.

40. What impact will the project have on water levels in the aquifer? If floodwater just flows back into the river then it won't filter down and recharge the aquifer?

Overall the project will not have a negative impact on aquifer recharge. The existing spring water culvert under the park will be intercepted and the flows that are currently lost to the River Gade upstream of Hemel new town will be restored to the river/ groundwater system in Gadebridge Park. This is likely to have a positive impact on water levels within the underlying aquifer, although small.

Trees

41. Why are you cutting down trees as part of your plans?

Although we have designed the new channel to avoid trees wherever possible, the proposals will require the removal of a small number of individual trees and a group of 6 saplings. The removal of a dead tree has also been recommended but is not required in order to complete the project. We will not be removing the dead Metasequoia or the Silver Birches within the Bury gardens.

We plan to carry out tree pruning works to another 20 trees, to improve their form and their relationship to the river. A young flowering Cherry tree will also be relocated to a gap in an existing avenue of Cherry trees alongside the path from the walled garden to the Bowls Club. In addition, we plan to remove a small section of hedge from around the Bury, in order to allow the River Gade to flow through.

All other trees will be protected in accordance with BS5837:2012 for the duration of the works. We plan to plant additional trees to replace those that we have removed.

Footpaths

42. Will the footpaths be accessible?

The new formal footpath alongside the river will be of DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) standard.

43. Will the proposed paths be wide enough to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists safely?

Our current plans include paths that are 2 metres wide, designed to be used by pedestrians and wheelchair users.

2 metres is the recommended width for a footpath for pedestrians, wheelchair users and cyclists, however footpaths that accommodate cyclists also require suitable lighting, signage and surface markings. We discussed this option with Dacorum Borough Council and our consultants Jeremy Benn Associates Ltd and agreed that the additional requirements necessary did not align with the project's objective to provide a more naturalised chalk stream environment. The current cycle path through the park has already been upgraded separately by Dacorum Borough Council.

44. How will the footpath located between the river and Leighton Buzzard Road be accessed?

The footpath located between the new channel and Leighton Buzzard Road will be accessed at 3 locations – next to the White Bridge via the Gadebridge Lane carpark or underpass, via a bridge opposite the play areas and via the Queensway car park through an informal mown path through the meadow area, which will be maintained March to September.

Post-completion monitoring and maintenance

45. Who will maintain the new channel?

Dacorum Borough Council will continue to manage any required maintenance in the park, including the new river channel. This will be carried out in-line with an agreed maintenance plan. Following completion of the project, however, we expect there to be minimal maintenance required.

By restoring the river to a more natural state, we will improve flows and lessen the build-up of sediment and vegetation. We do not expect in-channel maintenance such as desilting to be needed following the project's completion.

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The project completed by Affinity Water on the Upper Gadebridge Park reach of the river demonstrates that once the natural shape of the channel has been restored, there is less need for maintenance. The narrower, faster flowing channel has become self-sustaining - the river gravels are visible and silt deposition and plant growth is mostly limited to the margins.

46. How will the new Bowls Club bridge be maintained?

Dacorum Borough Council will be responsible for the maintenance of the Bowls Club bridge, in line with an agreed maintenance plan.

47. Is there a group I can join to help look after the park?

Yes, Friends of Gadebridge Park. For more information, contact Rob Cassidy at robert.cassidy@dacorum.gov.uk or phone 01442 228 853.

48. How will you monitor improvements?

We will track improvements made to the river from the restoration project by carrying out several monitoring programmes, including vegetation surveys, water quality monitoring, fisheries surveys and aquatic wildlife surveys.

We also plan to monitor changes that occur from the additional spring flow being introduced to the channel downstream of the White Bridge.

Impact on the park's existing services

49. Will utilities be affected?

No. There is a water main from the Queensway car park to the kiosk and splash park which is at a depth of over 4 metres below the current ground level. Due to its depth, it will not be impacted by the project.

50. Will children's play areas be impacted?

No. The construction of the new channel will not restrict access to the play areas. The construction compound will be fenced off for safety throughout the works.

Once the project is complete, flood waters will recede more quickly into the new channel. This means that flooding will have less of an impact on people's enjoyment of the park, including the play areas.

51. Will the construction of the new channel permanently remove any car parking spaces?

No - the new channel will not cut across any car parking spaces.

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52. Will we still be able to use the car parks during construction? Will any spaces be used up by machinery etc?

Use of the Gadebridge Lane car park should remain unaffected by the works. There is likely to be some short temporary disruption to the Queensway car park towards the end of the project while our existing gauging station and flume is decommissioned. We will provide more details on this as soon as we can.

Other

53. I have a question/concern about the restoration works that were completed north of the bridge. Who can I contact?

The restoration project north of the White Bridge is now complete and Dacorum Borough Council is responsible for the area's maintenance.

You can find out further information about the project at <https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/sustainability/restoration/river-gade>. To ask a question about the area now, including its maintenance, please contact Dacorum Borough Council at robert.cassidy@dacorum.gov.uk.