



NEWSLETTER

Published quarterly for members of the Ver Valley Society

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www.riverver.co.uk

President: Peter Fox, MBE

OPEN MEETING

Tuesday, February 27th, 2018 - 7.30 pm
Redbourn Village Hall, Centenary Suite

"Chalk Aquifer and Abstraction in the Ver Valley



*Speaker: Dr Ilias
Karapanos Asset
Specialist at Affinity
Water*

Dr Ilias Karapanos is a water resources specialist with over 15 years experience in the field of hydrogeology. Working as an Asset Specialist for Affinity Water since 2011, his research has focused on low flow studies and the impact of public water supply on river flows and groundwater levels in the Chilterns Chalk.

Following the implementation of the Alleviation of Low Flow schemes in the early 90s in the Ver Valley, abstraction was reduced from the Upper and Middle Ver to support local environmental objectives to improve the ecology of the river. Dr Karapanos will present on the benefits seen to date, the recovery in groundwater levels and river flows and the dynamic relationship between these factors over the years. The results suggest a dynamic response that is indicative of a complex geological setting in the Chalk aquifer.



*The Ver Action Group
First XI prepare for action
on the Ver near the
Chequers pub in Redbourn.*

*The December snow did
not deter these hardy souls.*

*Our new Ver Action Group
Co-ordinator, Richard
Wallis is fourth from the
right.*

STOP PRESS: Verulamium Park improvements - Environmental consultants AECOM have just delivered their report to St Albans Council on improving the lake and the River Ver through the city. The VVS is expecting to be briefed ahead of the public consultation scheduled for May 2018. We will keep our members informed as the process unfolds - keep an eye on the website for up-to-date news.

Chairman's Report

Jane Gardiner

As we start a new year it is pleasing that the river is looking in a slightly better state following some good rain in December and so far in January, but sadly the aquifer is still well below average for the time of year. The recharge of the aquifer only occurs up to April so without the next couple of months also being quite wet we are in for another very poor summer. For facts and figures see the Bailiffs Report.

Following the AGM we have amended our Constitution to allow for three rather than four Open Meetings a year. These will be in February, June and October, each preceded by a Newsletter. Also at our recent Committee Meeting we re-allocated the rôles which largely remain as before except John Pritchard is taking over from Martin Frearson as Vice-chair and Richard Wallis has taken over as Action Group organiser from Sue Frearson.



Various members of VVS and of the public have been concerned that the footpath to the bridge over the ford behind Redbournbury Mill has become inaccessible due to water flooding back from the pool. I have arranged to meet Julian Thornton, HCC Footpaths Officer, and Adam Buckland, EA, there at the end of the month to discuss what needs to be done.

We will again this year be taking part in SustainableStAlbans week which starts on April 21st. Our Action Group will be working that day and hopefully some members of the public will join in. On Sunday 22nd we hope to have a stall with our display boards in the market place with the rest of the organisations taking part, so please do come along and lend your support.

We have noted that Defra has started a consultation process to

prepare the ground for developing a National Policy Statement on Water Resources (NPS) which will streamline the process of gaining planning consents for large water infrastructure projects - something from which the Ver Valley could only benefit. We are also pleased that the Government has issued a white paper on abstraction planning post Brexit.

St Albans Local Plan 2020-2036

Martin Frearson

All members living in St Albans and District should have received a consultation booklet entitled Have Your Say! in January. Following the rejection of the previous Strategic Local Plan, St Albans is having to start again within a new timeframe to 2036, because of its failure to adequately consult its neighbouring authorities. The good news is that they acknowledge the importance of the Ver and Lea chalk streams, but the really bad news is that in the meantime central government has nearly doubled the district's housing totals to 913 new dwellings per annum to 2036, about 14,000 altogether.

If each of these households contains 2.5 residents and they each consume 175l. of water per day (the current averages) we are talking about an extra six megalitres per day being sucked out of the Ver valley boreholes to supply them. This is the same amount which Bow Bridge supplied, before it was turned off in 2016 to help restore flows in the Ver after a long campaign by your society. We are very concerned and will be responding to the consultation to urge the planners insist that all new homes should be fitted with all current and future water saving and recycling devices to minimise the harm to the river caused by building at these rates. We realise that there is little the district can do to resist the government-imposed target.

We also note that the Green Belt housing sites shown on the map on p20 of the booklet are only enough for 11,000 homes, so there are about 1000 Ha of Green Belt still to allocate. None of this should be in the river flood plain. Please support us by responding to the consultation you may have lots of other points to make of course by 23 February at www.stalbans.gov.uk/localplan2018 or by filling in and posting the booklet back to SACDC, Civic Centre, St Peter's St, St Albans, AL1 3JE.

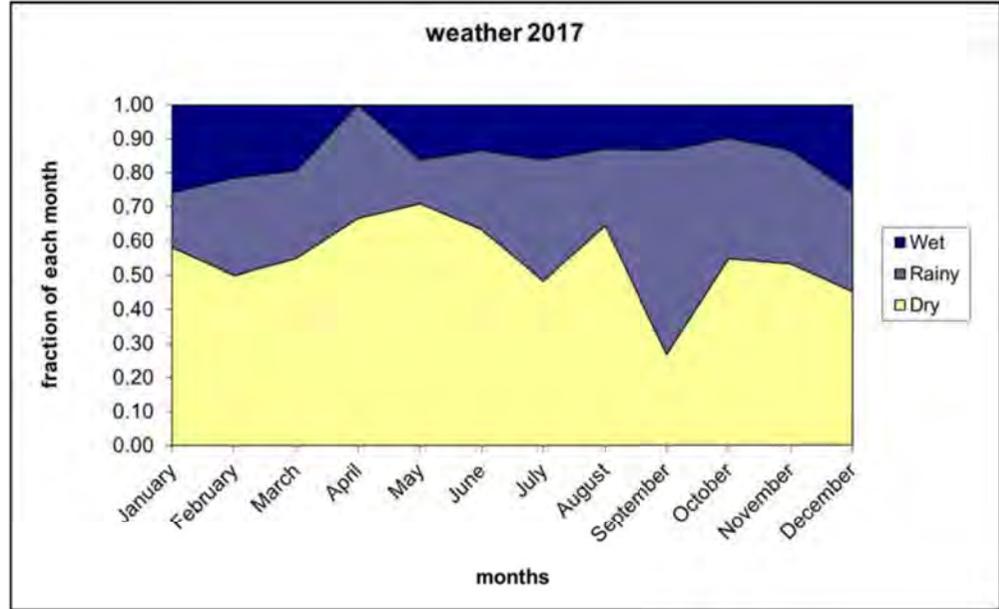
Bailiff's Notes

Jane Gardiner

The welcome rain and snow in December and January has meant that some Bailiffs now have increasing flows to measure but where vegetation growth has blocked the channel the water is simply pooling behind the blockage, forming a marshy area. We need lots more rain in the next couple of months for a proper channel to be established, hopefully from north of Redbourn. As I write the head of the river is south of Redbourn once the Red has joined the Ver. The aquifer would generally increase from December and although it did go up slightly in January it remains nearly six meters below average for this time of year, as you can see from the table below.

I have included the overall rainfall for the year provided by Rothamsted which, at 6.5% below average, goes some way to explaining why the groundwater is so low. The whole year was slightly warmer and had more sun than average and the wettest months last year were July and September, all factors which don't help with recharge.

I enclose a diagram showing my subjective/personal record of the year's weather.



Month 2017/18	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [± average] (figures from Chris Hall at Rothamsted)
October	125.43 [130.93]	31.2 [-50.5]
November	125.10 [130.01]	53.5 [-23.09]
December	124.87 [130.56]	110.8 [+41.25]
Year 2017		691.4 [-41.6 = -6.5%]
January 2018	125.45 [131.36]	

I'm pleased to now have a new volunteer to take over as bailiff for the top part of the valley, north from Flamstead. He is Carl Weston and I will be going out with him in early February to show him the ropes, although sadly there will rarely be much water for him to measure there.

Wildlife continues to thrive in the valley – the fact that the Ver, being a chalk stream, maintains a fairly constant water temperature of about 10c is attractive to water birds. Recently reported have been teal, gadwall, shovellers, lapwing and cormorants as well as the usual mallards, moorhens, coots and too many Canada geese! Herons and egrets are regularly reported as are red kites and buzzards. Other nice bird sightings include several of goldcrests and kingfishers, goldfinches and all the usual tits are being seen as are flocks of yellowhammers and of fieldfares (but few redwings) but less pleasing are large numbers of feral pigeons. Some jackdaws, rooks and ring-necked parakeets are regularly reported as are robins, chaffinches and wrens which I rarely mention but are always nice to see.

There are animals about too with plenty of signs of moles and badgers; the occasional muntjac is seen as well as the ubiquitous squirrels and rabbits. One eagle-eyed bailiff even spotted a shrew in the beak of a heron! Of course very few insects are seen at this time of year but a bumble bee was reported in late December. The river-fly monitors have been getting out and reporting when possible; five different invertebrate species have been recorded recently along with a few bullheads.

In several places trees have come down into the river causing blockages and these have been reported to the relevant authorities. Before the weather got really cold, ivy flowers were still providing a little welcome nectar for some flies and midges. Early hazel catkins are now a welcome sight in some riverside hedges and a few snowdrops provide bright spots on the banks heralding the spring to come.

Chalk Stream Partnership

Rob Rees (EA)

I am really pleased to have this opportunity to write about the Chalk Stream Partnership, an ambitious collaboration between the Environment Agency, Affinity Water and our catchment partners.

Restoring Sustainable Abstraction

For a number of years the Environment Agency have been working with water companies across England to understand the cause of low flows in some rivers and to find and implement solutions. This work is part of our ongoing Restoring Sustainable Abstraction (RSA) programme.

In the Environment Agency Hertfordshire and North London Area, our investigations concluded that abstraction was having a particular impact on a number of chalk streams including the Ver.

As a result, Affinity Water agreed to reduce abstraction at six pumping stations impacting six chalk streams in Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties.

The Chalk Stream Partnership

The Chalk Stream Partnership has been formed to protect and restore our rare chalk streams. At its core is a combination of reductions in abstraction and an ambitious programme of river restoration projects.

In total, Affinity Water will be reducing overall abstraction by 42 million litres per day by 2020 to deliver on its Business Plan commitment to leave more water in the environment.

The first reduction was seen in 2015 at a pumping station on the Mimram, followed by abstraction reductions on the Ver, and more recently reductions in the Beane catchment near Stevenage and the Hughenden Stream in Buckinghamshire. In 2018 further reductions impacting the Gade and Misbourne will take place.

The effects of these reductions may not be seen straight away especially as we have received below long term average rainfall over the last 18 months. This situation has contributed to the current low flows and dry stretches observed along a number of rivers. In order to reverse this trend, we do need an extended period of rainfall to recharge to our groundwater system.

In combination with the completed and planned abstraction reductions, this programme of works will significantly enhance many kilometres of the River Ver, and improve its resilience to future pressures.

I believe that the Chalk Stream Partnership is a fantastic opportunity to improve our precious chalk streams, and a practical expression of the potential and benefits of working together to achieve common goals.

Rob Rees is Catchment Coordinator for the Colne & Upper Lee and works for the Environment Agency. This is the first part of Rob's article. The second part will be in our May Newsletter and will include projects on the Ver. The complete article will be available on our website.

Progress on much of the work underway on the Ver and how you can contribute, together with plans for many other rivers in the Colne Catchment can be found on the Colne Catchment Partnership website at - <http://www.colnecan.org.uk/> You can find out more details project in Verulamium Park at - <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/parks-and-green-space/parks/verulamium-park/riverver/> where you can also make your views on the project known.

Affinity Water Business Plan commitment to leave more water in the environment can be found at - <https://stakeholder.affinitywater.co.uk/news/RiverBeaneApr>

Help and advice on saving water is available from Affinity Water at - <https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/saving-water.aspx>

Membership

John Pritchard

It's been refreshing to see a steady flow of new members throughout the autumn and early winter. Already our latest recruits have brought childhood memories of the Ver at Markyate, a possible sighting of giant hogweed, a handy talent with a pole saw and much more. Welcome to John Lepley, Judith Gordon, Chris Page, Peter White, Lesley Breach, David Paynter and Ivan Hickmott.

Final call! We have written to all members whose subscriptions fell due last September, if you have yet to renew, please do it today.

Riverfly Sampling along the Ver

Sue Frearson

The low flow of the Ver throughout 2017 has resulted in some samples critically close to or below the target levels for some of our fifteen sampling points. Ernie has had no flow at Luton Lane for two years and at Doolittle Mill, Redbournbury Mill and Redbournbury Fisheries Graeme's counts have been lower than would be expected. When a sample is below the target level, as has happened to Catherine's samples in Sopwell Nunnery Green (under the Alban Way) the EA has noted the breaches and investigated further. Clive has recently started to survey the river at the bottom of Holywell Hill, and with dire results. This is not surprising, considering the number of pollution incidents at this spot due to misconnected drains in the city.

Another site giving cause for concern is at Moor Mill, just south of the M25, where recent samples sent in by Tom have shown very few invertebrates.

If there is anybody keen to help with Riverfly monitoring, or cover when a regular is ill, or to suggest other sampling sites, please contact me sue.frearson@which.net /01727 762818. David Johnson HMWT and Allen Beechey Chiltern Chalk Streams Officer run Riverfly training courses and the VVS can supply the sampling kit.

Social Media @VerValleySoc

John Pritchard



Our Facebook and Twitter posts are proving a popular way to hear more about the work of the VVS. We now have over 300 regular followers, most of whom are non-members, who enjoy our mix of river reports, nature notes and Action Group working party photos. One of the most popular posts of the past few months (seen by over 2,200 people) was drumming up support for a clean-up on a sadly dry stretch of the Ver at Redbourn.



Future Open Meetings

John Fisher

Tuesday 27th February 2018 at 7.30 pm -Redbourn Village Hall - Ilias Karapanos of Affinity Water

Tuesday 5th June 2018 at 7.30 pm - Bricket Wood - Dr Brenda Harold Flowers of the Chilterns- t.b.c

Tuesday 23rd October 2018 at 7.30 pm - St Michaels Parish Centre Our AGM - Rob Rees/Nancy Baume of the EA

Very Important:

All meetings are free entrance to members and non members - If you are coming to one of our meetings please check our newsletter or the web page a few days prior to the meeting in case of any late changes. If you require directions to any of the venues please contact a committee member. (See contacts page). Although our meetings are free entry to members and non members we welcome donations towards the cost of refreshments, hall hire etc. Suggested £2 pp

Winter / Spring Programme 2018

Saturday 17th February 2018:

10.00 – 12.00 Frogmore Pits (parking at Moor Mill Lane). For those with waders we will clear the river to the left of the concrete bridge towards Moor Mill. Others will clear fallen trees working upstream from the bridge.

Saturday 17th March 2018:

10:00 – 12:00 (to be confirmed) We will either continue the work at Frogmore (following Storm Eleanor there are eight trees down and in the river) or, back to the Chequers to continue work on the Ver river channel.

Saturday 21st April 2018:

10.00 – 12.00 New Barnes Mill Leat. As part of Sustainable St Albans we will be clearing the Mill Leat adjacent to the road bridge through to the meadow.

Do you remember July 2010? Just to jog your memory that was when Sue Frearson first invited interested members to join her in an Action Group to tackle basic conservation tasks along the River Ver.

Subsequently, the formation of an Action Group was approved in Oct by the AGM and the rest, is as they say, history. Over the 7 years the Action Group has grown under Sue's nurture and we currently have over 20 members who regularly give up their time to Ver conservation work. However, all good things have to come to an end and Sue has decided to step back from running the Action Group although she will continue to run the Riverfly Monitoring.

Thank you Sue! Your efforts over the past seven



Peter at Cottonmill Bridge. [Sue Frearson]

years have made a huge impact on the state of the River and its immediate environment. Well Done.

The work however continues and in December we had some 18 members who, undeterred by the snow and ice, worked on the River Red and the Ver in Redbourn. Fortunately, we all had a chance to warm up in the Chequers over a celebratory drink before going home.

With Christmas over the first outing for the Action group on January 20th was at Cottonmill Bridge and some 10 members ignored the rain and the low temperature and spent two very productive hours working on the river from Holywell Hill through to Cottonmill Bridge where a stretch of the river on the downstream side had become overgrown and a blockage had occurred.

Pam clearing vegetation. [Sue Frearson]



Two Spring Walks

John Fisher

**Saturday April 14th 2018 -10.00 am
Beningfield s Birds - A bird walk led by John Fisher**



*Early Purple Orchid
[John Fisher]*

Redbourn Museum has organised a morning walk in spring to discover the birds of the countryside around our village. Just before his death 20 years ago in 1998, wildlife artist Gordon Beningfield was working on illustrations for a book entitled *Vanishing Songbirds*. The book was later published with text completed by Betty Beningfield and Robin Page. From Redbourn Common we will walk past Do-Little Mill, crossing the main road to arrive at Redbournbury Mill by the River Ver and on to Hammonds End Farm, returning to the start point.

We hope to see some of the birds that were so loved by Gordon in the area close to his former home in Redbourn and we will be collecting donations for the RSPB after the walk.

Booking essential by contacting:

Pauline Ridgwell Tel: 01582 626055 Email: Pauline-r@ntlworld.com

**Saturday 12 May 2018 - 10.00 am
"Springwatch Walk**

Friends of the Nickey Line and the Ver Valley Society are holding a joint walk to see bluebells, early purple orchids and springtime birds. From Redbourn Common we will walk along the Nickey Line to Knott Wood on the Rothamsted Estate.

More information John 01582 792843 or Roger 01582 763560. No need to book for this one.

Both walks will be 4-5 miles in length and could be muddy in places, so appropriate footwear is essential. Make sure to bring some binoculars!!

Both will start at 10 am at Redbourn Museum where parking is available on site or in car parks on the Common.



*Knott Wood bluebells
[John Fisher]*

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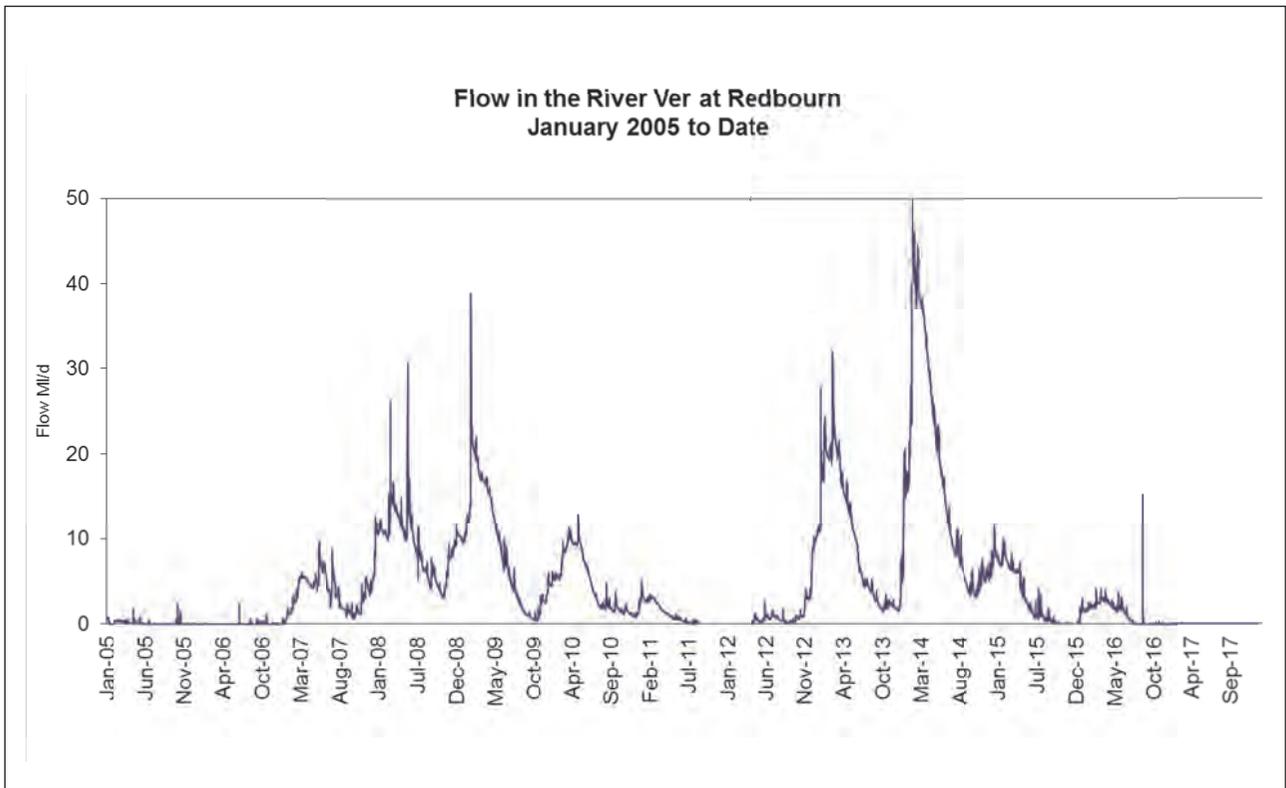
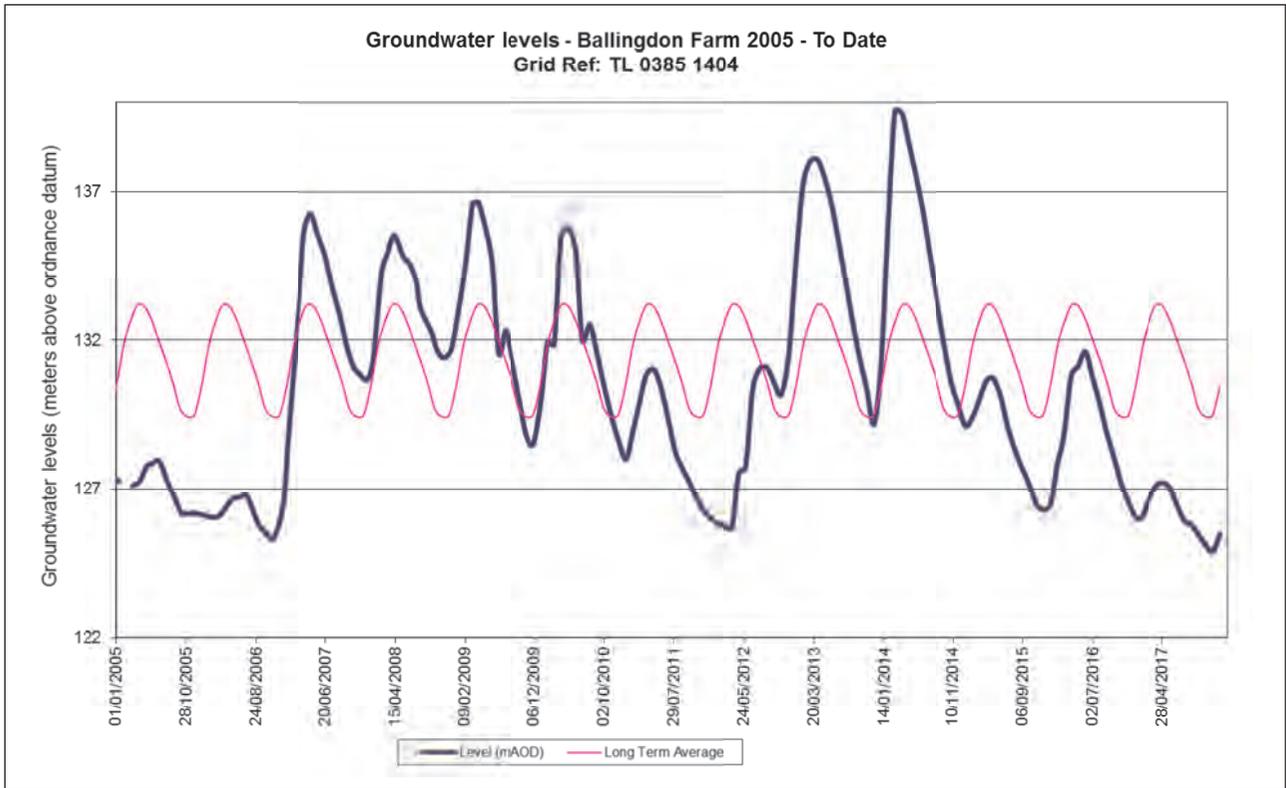
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John Cadisch, John Fisher, Sue Frearson,
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HOTLINES
EA Incident Hotline: 0800 807060
("Report all environmental incidents")
EA Floodline: 0845 988 1188
Cleaner St Albans/Fly tipping reports:
01727 809019 (Veolia)
[email: a.cleanerdistrict@stalbens.gov.uk](mailto:a.cleanerdistrict@stalbens.gov.uk)
Water Leaks (Affinity):
0800 376 5325



We are grateful to Affinity Water for supplying the ground water and flow charts and to Veolia Environmental for printing and distributing our newsletters.