



Chalke  
Valley  
Farmer  
Cluster



Green Investment  
Opportunities

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## CHALKE VALLEY FARMER CLUSTER

The Chalke Valley Farmer Cluster was formed in 2016 with more than 20 farmers covering over 9000ha within and adjoining the Chalke Valley between Berwick St John and Coombe Bissett, south-west of Salisbury, Wiltshire. The Cluster was set up following the desire of a number of farmers to work collaboratively to enhance the local landscape for wildlife. In the past, as elsewhere, much of the conservation activities carried out in the Chalke Valley has focused on individual farms with very little consideration of what neighbouring farmers are doing. By working together and looking beyond farm boundaries we hope that our collective achievements will be greater than the sum of our parts. The Cluster gives us a platform to share knowledge, experience and ideas. We have access to our own, locally specific environmental advice, and greater economies of scale, with easier access to environmental funding and buying power. The basis for the group is that our objectives and activities have been developed by the farmers themselves, a bottom-up approach which we believe is a more effective, sustainable way to deliver greater benefits for the Chalke Valley landscape.

*Working across farm boundaries to enhance the health and diversity of the Chalke Valley landscape for both wildlife and people.*



# WHAT WE DO

## FARMING

The Chalke Valley is a wildlife-rich working landscape. Farming is the primary land use in the Chalke Valley and is dominated by mixed farming with both livestock and arable crops being grown.

The grassland on the steep chalk scarps and in the valley bottom, alongside the River Ebble, are grazed by sheep (producing lamb and wool) and cattle (producing beef and milk).

Elsewhere on the flatter, free-draining land, arable crops are grown including wheat (for milling), barley (for malting) and oilseed rape (for vegetable oil) as well as fodder crops to feed the livestock.

The diverse and mixed farming landscape supports a rich biodiversity including a number of nationally declining plant and animal species. We are promoting farming practices which are both economically viable and environmentally sound to protect our soils, water and to address climate change.

## IMPROVING FARMLAND FOR POLLINATORS

Wild insects pollinate our food for free and can improve both crop yields and quality.

84% of EU crops (valued at £12.6 billion) and some 80% of wildflowers rely on insect pollination by species including bees, hoverflies and butterflies.

For maximum pollination a diverse community of insects is required.

Pollinating insects also provide valuable food for farmland birds, such as Corn Bunting and Yellowhammer.

We are providing flower-rich habitats throughout the Valley for pollinators and developing wildlife corridors so that they can move more easily around our landscape.



## ENHANCE AND LINK FLOWER-RICH CHALK GRASSLAND

Chalk grassland is one of our most diverse habitats; it can contain up to 40 species of flowering plants in one square metre – it has been called the European equivalent of the tropical rainforest!

It supports a range of wildlife from butterflies and wildflowers, to insects, mammals and birds.

The diversity of the grassland relies on livestock farming. Grazing by sheep and cattle maintains the balance between grass, flowers, and scrub.

It is one of our most important habitats in the Chalke Valley extending to in excess of 500 hectares or 650 football pitches!

We are working to help enlarge and link these fragmented areas of chalk grassland to enable wildlife to move more freely throughout the landscape.

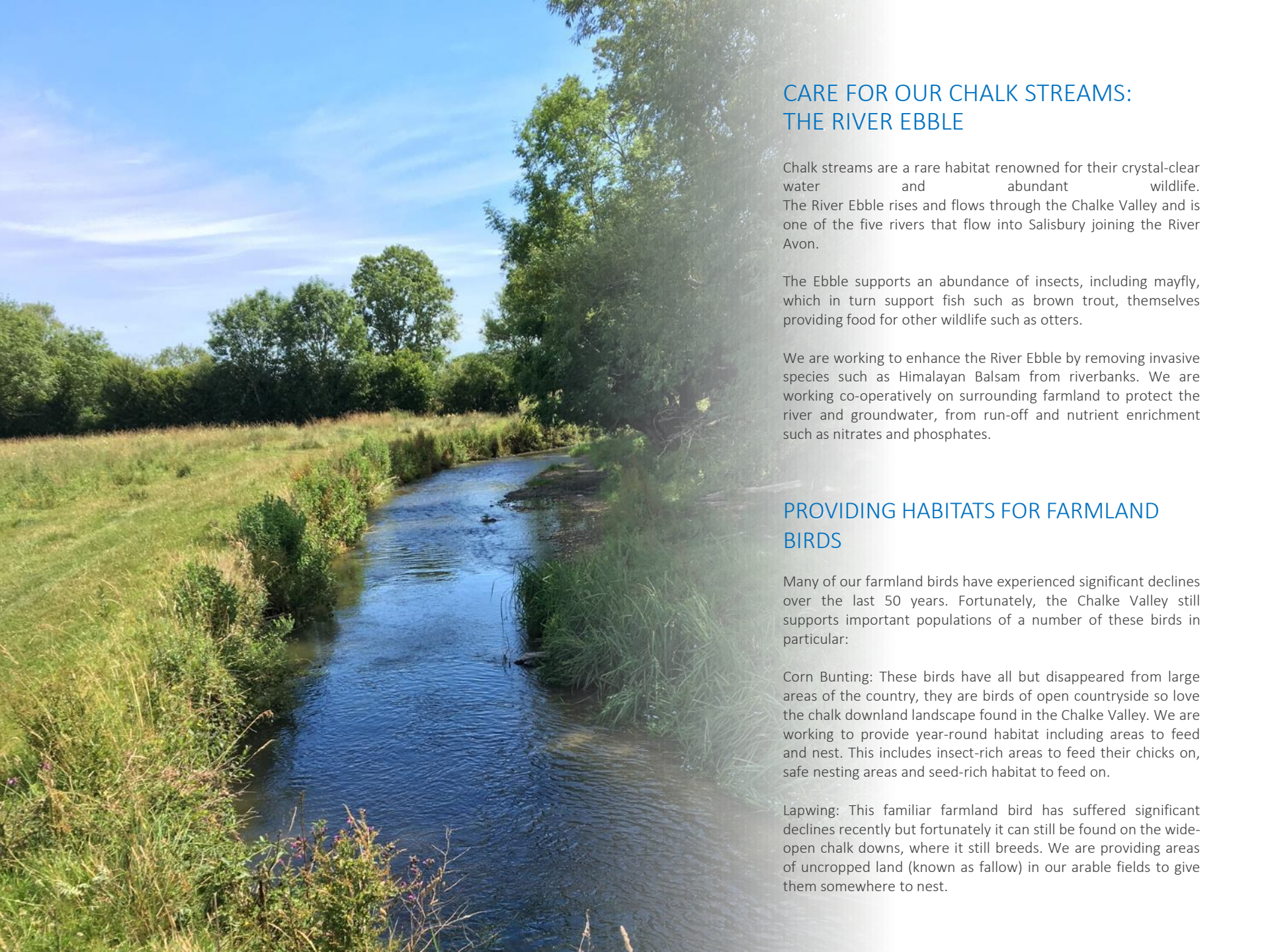
## PROTECT THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

The Chalke Valley has numerous archaeological features, which illustrate the length of time human activity has influenced the local landscape.

This includes Burial mounds from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages and Iron Age settlements

There are also more recent additions such as water meadow and old farm buildings.

We are working to ensure the long-term survival of historic features by undertaking activities such as scrub removal, sensitive grazing on archaeological earthworks and protecting the built features associated with water meadows.



## CARE FOR OUR CHALK STREAMS: THE RIVER EBBLE

Chalk streams are a rare habitat renowned for their crystal-clear water and abundant wildlife. The River Ebbles rises and flows through the Chalke Valley and is one of the five rivers that flow into Salisbury joining the River Avon.

The Ebbles supports an abundance of insects, including mayfly, which in turn support fish such as brown trout, themselves providing food for other wildlife such as otters.

We are working to enhance the River Ebbles by removing invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam from riverbanks. We are working co-operatively on surrounding farmland to protect the river and groundwater, from run-off and nutrient enrichment such as nitrates and phosphates.

## PROVIDING HABITATS FOR FARMLAND BIRDS

Many of our farmland birds have experienced significant declines over the last 50 years. Fortunately, the Chalke Valley still supports important populations of a number of these birds in particular:

**Corn Bunting:** These birds have all but disappeared from large areas of the country, they are birds of open countryside so love the chalk downland landscape found in the Chalke Valley. We are working to provide year-round habitat including areas to feed and nest. This includes insect-rich areas to feed their chicks on, safe nesting areas and seed-rich habitat to feed on.

**Lapwing:** This familiar farmland bird has suffered significant declines recently but fortunately it can still be found on the wide-open chalk downs, where it still breeds. We are providing areas of uncropped land (known as fallow) in our arable fields to give them somewhere to nest.



## ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

We are keen to work in partnership with private businesses to enhance our local environment. With significant change within the agricultural industry over the next few years we are keen to look at new ways of investing in the countryside for the benefit of the environment, public enjoyment and businesses.

We would like to link management and investment in the landscape to the long-term needs of business and society. Business interests can range from resilient crop production, flood risk, carrying capacity of water catchments, management of carbon or biodiversity, to health and quality of life for their workforce.

We are working to identify our Natural Capital Assets and are currently undertaking carbon assessments of our farming businesses. These activities will help us develop a baseline of our natural assets and opportunities for carbon sequestration. The diversity within the Chalke Valley including chalk streams, species-rich grassland, woodland in a mixed farming landscape offers an equally wide range of opportunities.



# WHAT WE CAN OFFER

## Biodiversity net-gain

We have experience of biodiversity net-gain including a good understanding of the calculations both from the supply and demand side and associated delivery of enhancement and creation projects. We can provide opportunities for the provision of off-site mitigation including for a range of protected species and priority habitats.

## Carbon sequestration

We are working towards improving our soils, including building organic matter, and associated carbon levels. Members of the Cluster are currently in the process of undertaking carbon assessments of their farms in conjunction with the Farm Carbon Toolkit to provide a baseline for our businesses and environmental improvements.

## Priority species and habitat management

We manage a very diverse landscape including grasslands, rivers and associated wetlands and woodlands. As priority habitats these support a range of priority species including rare insects, plants, birds and mammals. We have extensive experience of maintaining and restoring and where possible, re-creating some of these habitats. This includes where management needs to be tailored for specific species.





# WHAT WE CAN OFFER

## Water quality and catchment management

Our Cluster is based around the River Ebbles catchment which forms part of the Hampshire Avon Catchment, a SSSI and SAC of International Importance. We are working to enhance the River and its associated habitats. We are also working towards improving water quality in the River and ground water aquifers by improving the efficiencies of our farming businesses and addressing erosion and nutrient losses particularly nitrate, phosphate and sediment loss. We can offer housing developers opportunities to address their requirements for nutrient neutrality within the Hampshire Avon Catchment.

## Sustainable Farming and high-quality produce

We are keen to improve our soils and encourage regenerative agriculture techniques including reduced cultivations and cover cropping. We recognise that there are multiple benefits to more sustainable farming systems including healthy soils and agricultural ecosystems, more sustainable, robust farming businesses and high quality, healthy nutrient dense food.

If you would like a confidential discussion about any of these opportunities, please contact  
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