

Our Technical Guidance: National Planning Policy Framework

Our waterways need urgent protection. There are only around 250 chalk streams in the world, with 80% of these endangered rivers located in Southern England. These rivers are England's equivalent to the Great Barrier Reef or Amazon Rainforest. However, current planning regulations fail to provide adequate, bespoke protections of our chalk streams, with only 11 out of the 220 British chalk streams having any legal protections as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Status at an SSSI is not appropriate for chalk stream protection, as these streams are heavily influenced by activities across their catchments. A bespoke protection is required to reflect these unique habitats. Urgent, ambitious action is essential to ensure their long-term health and valuable ecological services are protected, as previously highlighted by the CaBA Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy.

In light of the ongoing degradation of our precious chalk streams, we urge the Government to utilise the opportunity of its planning reforms to designate chalk streams and their catchments with a bespoke protection, integrated within the National Planning Policy Framework. This protection should tackle direct harm and wastewater pollution. Our recommendations for specific policy amendments to deliver much needed chalk stream protection can be found below:

- Under 20b) add a sub clause i) 'or, in the case where headroom in water supply and/or sewage treatment provision does not exist in chalk stream catchments or is not provisioned for through development, provide for such development to be water and/or nutrient neutral'
- Under 20d) include specific reference to the 'conservation, protection and enhancement of irreplaceable chalk streams, associated riparian habitats and blue infrastructure'
- Under 180i) add specific reference to recognise the intrinsic value and wider natural capital benefits of rivers, including chalk streams and their associated riparian habitats.
- Under 186c) 'vital chalk streams and associated riparian habitats' should be listed alongside ancient woodland as an irreplaceable habitat and listed in the glossary as such. References to 'unless their existing wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy' should be removed. Footnote 69 outlining 'for example infrastructure projects where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of the habitat' should also be removed.
- Under 187), introduce a new point d) to grant 'chalk streams and associated riparian habitats' the same protection as habitat sites.
- Under 191), add sub-clause 191d) to include 'protect globally rare chalk streams from the impacts of pollution and habitat loss through adherence to a 50-100 metre 'no development' buffer zone along the riparian corridor'.