



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Emma Reynolds MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4DF

25<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Across our country, we are immensely fortunate to enjoy the crystal-clear and sparkling waters of our chalk streams. Globally rare, only around 200 chalk streams are known to exist worldwide, with England home to approximately 85 per cent of them. They are a unique and irreplaceable part of our national heritage, as precious to England as the Great Barrier Reef is to Australia or the Amazon Rainforest to South America.

Chalk streams are among the most biodiverse and ecologically significant freshwater ecosystems in the world. They support more plant species than any other English river type and provide vital habitat for some of our most threatened wildlife. Their consistent temperature, mineral-rich water and distinctive ecology make them internationally important natural assets.

Yet despite this global significance, the majority of our chalk streams are in a perilous state. Only one in six currently meets “good ecological status”, and not a single English river is in good overall health. Over-abstraction is causing many chalk streams to run dry during summer months, while water quality continues to decline due to sewage discharges and agricultural pollution, with devastating consequences for wildlife.

Restoring and protecting our chalk streams is a matter of global importance. While we recognise the steps the Government has taken to reform the water sector and tackle pollution, more decisive action is needed to safeguard chalk streams for future generations and to properly reflect their status as globally significant ecosystems. As the Government advances its Pride in Place programme, there could be no more fitting place to begin than with the restoration of our chalk streams as unique places in which local communities rightly take pride.

**We therefore urge you to begin the process of nominating the UK’s chalk streams as a serial UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site.** Such designation would formally recognise their international significance, strengthen long-term protections, and help galvanise public engagement and investment in their recovery and restoration. It would also help address the current imbalance in the UK’s World Heritage portfolio, where only four of the 33 sites are designated for their natural importance.

While we recognise that nomination to UNESCO is a long and rigorous process, we stand ready to work constructively across parties and with communities across the country to build on strong local support and help see this ambition through.



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In the meantime, there are clear and practical steps the Government can take now to help save our chalk streams. This should include providing them bespoke protection within the National Planning Policy Framework by listing them alongside ancient woodland as an irreplaceable habitat and ensuring that fines levied on polluting water companies are reinvested into a ring-fenced fund dedicated to chalk stream restoration and enhancement.

As a nation of nature lovers, we have a responsibility to recognise, celebrate and protect our most iconic natural heritage for future generations. As Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government, rightly identified during the passage of the Planning and Infrastructure Act: *“If our chalk streams were buildings, they would be UNESCO heritage sites. Let us protect them as though they were”*. We urge the Government to act in that spirit.

Yours sincerely,

**Pippa Heylings MP**

**Gideon Amos MP**

**Siân Berry MP**

**Olivia Blake MP**

**Alex Brewer MP**

**Jess Brown-Fuller MP**

**Julia Buckley MP**

**Charlotte Cane MP**

**Dr Danny Chambers MP**

**Dr Ellie Chowns MP**

**Victoria Collins MP**

**Daisy Cooper MP**

**Steve Darling MP**

**Bobby Dean MP**

**Carla Denyer MP**

**Lee Dillon MP**

**Sarah Dyke MP**

**Richard Foord MP**

**Zöe Franklin MP**

**Barry Gardiner MP**

**Dr Allison Gardner MP**

**Sarah Gibson MP**

**Chris Hinchliff MP**

**Simon Hoare MP**

**Monica Harding MP**

**Paul Kohler MP**

**Kit Malthouse MP**

**Rachael Maskell MP**

**Kerry McCarthy MP**

**John Milne MP**

**Abtisam Mohamed MP**

**Layla Moran MP**

**Edward Morello MP**

**Wera Hobhouse MP**

**Liz Jarvis MP**

**Terry Jermy MP**

**Helen Morgan MP**

**Tessa Munt MP**

**James Naish MP**

**Manuela Perteghella MP**

**Adrian Ramsay MP**

**Roz Savage MP**

**Vikki Slade MP**

**Ian Sollom MP**

**Blake Stephenson MP**

**Luke Taylor MP**

**Freddie van Mierlo MP**

**Martin Wrigley MP**

**The Rt Revd Graham Usher, Lord Bishop of Norwich**

**Baroness Willis of Summertown**