DRiPS
DARENT RIVER
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The voice of the River Darent

www.darent-drips.org.uk

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Britain in Drought

The UK had the driest spring for 132 years and the hottest summer since 1884.

Hosepipe bans are still in place across much of the UK - but were never introduced in London or in the Darent Valley where they would surely have been an acceptable precaution. Unless we have a very wet winter, we may pay the price next year.

River granted Rights

Sevenoaks District Council has adopted a motion, put forward by Councillor Laura Manston, that the impact on the health of River Darent should be considered when making planning decisions.

It recognises the need of the river to have adequate flow and be free from pollution in order to support its ecosystems, essential to the our own survival.

This is a major contribution to growing movement to recognise rivers rights across the UK.

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DRiPS celebrates 40th Birthday

DRiPS was formed in 1985 and we marked our 40th birthday with a summer celebration at The Quadrangle in Shoreham.



We were delighted to be joined by members and local supporters including Tony Clayton, Mayor of Sevenoaks, Councillors Sandra Robinson, Laura Manston and Laurence Ball and John Evans, Chair of Sundridge Council.

We celebrated with live music from The Fabulous Red Diesel Band (who lived up to their name), delicious food, and a spectacular riverine birthday cake. Speakers included former chair Huw Alban Davies, Jamie Riches from Thames Water, and DRiPS president William Alexander. Current chair Stuart Merrylees shared reflections of how each generation accepts the current deteriorated state of the natural world as the new norm - a phenomenon known as **'shifting baseline syndrome'**. It reminds us how easily we can lose sight of what use to be normal, from the state of our rivers and sea-shores to the number of insects that once filled the air.



Darent River Cake



Thanks to everyone who contributed to the afternoon, and particularly to our friends at the Quadrangle.

Remembering events from the past...

Can you imagine Eynsford without a ford?



Eynsford Ford: 12th July 1976

The 12th July 1976 was one of the many days when sections of the Darent dried out, galvanising people into action.

The idyllic Saxon village of "Aegen's Ford" is often visited by families who walk alongside the clear chalk riverbed. For many years during the 1970's and 90's the river dried up towards Dartford due to over abstraction by our water companies. At one stage it was deemed so bad the Darent was considered one of the ten most likely rivers in the UK to disapper completely. The picture below shows fish rescue by the Environment Agency just before the riiver dried out.


Eynsford Ford: 1st July 1976

Following the implementation of the Darent Action Plan (DAP) by Thames Water and the Environment Agency we all hope this could never happen again - but could it?

DRiPS and SE Rivers Trust have been lobbying for reductions in abstraction and Thames Water promise they will eventually cease abstraction from chalk aquifers. Rate of flow remains worrying low due to over abstraction, further increases in population, record breaking hot summers and no reservoir being built anywhere in the South East since the 1970s. While Thames Water and the government have plans for a new reservoir at Abingdon and connecting us to the London Ring Main, this is scheduled for 2050, which is 25 years away - and based on past major projects is likely to be delayed.
Surely there must be a better solution? See next page.


Eynsford Riverside: 11th September 1973

...and looking agead to the future

What will the next 10 years bring?



The challenges for the river continue, brought into particular focus by another hot, dry summer.

This autumn, we reconnected with John Lawson, a retired consultant engineer who wrote a landmark report on the River Darent for Halcrow in 1988. John spent two days revisiting the Darent and Cray with DRiPS committee members and representatives from South East Rivers Trust and Darent Valley Trout Fishers.



The group has asked John to explore computer modelling of the behaviour of the rivers' aquifers using historic digital records. This will complement the work being done by water companies to fulfil their promise to reduce abstraction and allow our chalk streams to recover their health and vitality.

John's two day visit was planned by Trevor Carman, vice-chair, who has lived in Shoreham since 1979, and knows more than anyone about the history of the river. Trevor worked for both the National Rivers Authority and the Environment Agency, where he managed flood defences for North Kent, so his insight and deep knowledge of the Darent and Cray continues to be a great community asset.

Reasons to be cheerful?

Dip into the Darent **is a new podcast series by DRiPS's own Jackie Imas. Listen in to understand the issues the river faces, what's going well and where threats lie.**



The podcast, *Reasons to be Cheerful?*, features an interview with Dr Chris Gardner, fishery scientist and former Head of Science and Partnerships at South East Rivers Trust. He has been involved with the Darent for a decade so has fascinating insight into what he confesses is one of his favourite rivers in the area.

"The reason that I think the Darent has got great restoration potential is because the water quality is probably the best in this river, that is for anywhere in the whole of the southeast…"

"Just to have a river that has no continuous sewage effluent into it is a very, very precious thing. And that gives you a great foundation for restoration… "

"The big thing is the water quantity. The river's been managed to prevent it from drying up again, rather than having a really healthy flow that supports a healthy river and healthy, biodiverse aquatic ecology."



Listen to the full conversation - *Dip into the Darent* - on our website or Facebook page or wherever you get your podcasts.

Rediscovering the dwindling streams in the district

Names like Watercress, Honeypot, Guzzlebrook and Bubblestone sound as if they belong in a fairy tale — but we want to ensure they remain very present in real life.



All are names of tributaries of the River Darent and all once flowed more visibly through Sevenoaks district. It's likely they were once the centre of their own local economies. Watercress anyone?





The Honeypot rises just north of Kemsing - *locals and Open Street Map* calls it the Guzzlebrook. The Watercress Stream rises in Millpond Wood in Greatness, feeds the Mill Pond in Mill Lane (left), gives its name to Watercress Drive and finally appears in a concrete channel at the back of Sainsbury's. It joins the Darent on the wetlands east of the Otford Road (above). The Bubblestone Brook seems to rise in Kemsing, and can be seen just off the Old Otford Rd before disappearing somewhere near the M26 motorway.

While taliking about evocative names, Noah's Ark is surely worth a mention. This is the hamlet that sits on the spring line at the base of the Lower Greensand escarpment. It is where groundwater emerging from the greensand meets the impermeable gault clay — a classic line for chalk-stream headwaters and cool springs for the best watercress. There is a record in the Kentish Times of a watercress farmer at Sutton-at-Hone who reported his springs drying in 1962.



The shadow of Shifting Baseline Syndrome is here again. Surely our fairy-tale rivers deserve a better fate.

Do you have photos or memories of the Darent's tributaries? We'd love to hear from you!

Understanding the Flow of the Darent

What's behind the ebb and flow of the volumes of water in the Darent? Over-abstraction clearly plays a part but does it tell the whole story?



All chalk streams are different and Jamie Riches, senior hydrologist at Thames Water who has been studying the river for 25 years, remains keen to better understand how flow accumulates and leaks away as it encounters different geologies.

To this end, Thames Water has been conducting spot flow measurements along on the whole length of the Darent for an 'accretion' analysis.

An example of unexpected behaviour is the millpond in Sundridge, which sprang back into life two years ago but then dried up earlier this summer. A century ago it provided 10,000 gallons a day and used to drive a paper mill that printed paper for the Bank of England's banknotes.

Darent Valley Path

The new Darent Valley Path extension has been signposted from Westerham to Chipstead.



Find it starting at King George's Field then routing up towards Dryhill Nature Reserve before rejoining the A25 and arriving at Longford Lake near the Bricklayers Arms.



Along the path at Dryhill and Shoreham and beside the ford at Eynsford, new signage has been installed by Kent Downs with information about the Darent Valley connection with the UNESCO Cross Channel Geopark.

Kent Downs and the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership have created an excellent app called *"Darent Valley Trails"*. It includes an audio tour by DRiPS president, William Alexander, entitled *"From Hops to Lavender"*.

Rights of the River Darent

Thank you to Cllr Laura Manston who tabled a motion at Sevenoaks District Council in November, proposing that the rights of the River Darent are considered when making future decisions on planning, land use, and water management.

The motion proposes a 'risk assessment is conducted to consider the impact on the river and its tributaries ensuring they can continue to:

Flow, perform essential functions within the river's ecosystem, be free from pollution, feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers, sustain native biodiversity and be regenerated and restored.'

It was passed overwhelmingly and DRiPS is delighted.

Swimming in the River



The crystal clear waters of the Darent provided many opportunities for swimmers with two popular lidos.

Darent Valley Open-air Bath, commonly known as Brasted Swimming Pool was sited just behind the tennis courts on what is today Brasted Recreation Ground. This image shows how the flow of the river was enjoyed by so many.

Opened in June 1914, there was a diving board and chute at the deep-end, round edges and a solid bottom but near the centre it was pebbles where spring water came straight up out of the greensand.

Another lido was located in Chipstead between Mill Lane and the Miners Arms where much of the site is now covered over by properties and London Road. There were many other locations along the river deep enough to swim however few remain today due to reduced flow and invasive non-native species such as Himalayan balsam.

Many of the publicly accessible locations along the river do not have sufficient depth to swim any distance however there is opportunity to swim with the swimming club located at Longford Lake, Chipstead.

Funding for river management, conservation and restoration has reduced much over the years from government bodies, water companies, private companies and other non-profit organisations. Sadly, our urban river will always need our help.



Volunteering via NWKCP- the North West Kent Countryside Partnership - with Mark Gallant, is a great way to contribute to conserving the river and work parties are arranged throughout the year and always a great day out.

At Park Farm in Brasted, work was carried out this summer to improve the light and help the habitat heal by removing trees and vegetation along the banks that were overshading the river.

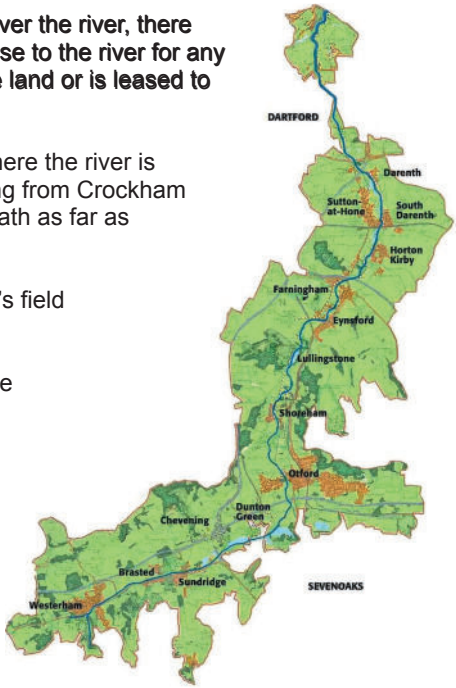
A number of berms were also built from logs, brash and vegetation creating shelf-like structures to slow the water flow to create a diverse habitat for fish, invertebrates and other aquatic life.


Berm or Brasted Aligator?

Where can I walk by the River?

While every village has at least one bridge over the river, there are not many places where you can walk close to the river for any distance as much of it passes though private land or is leased to fishing clubs.

There are however a number of locations where the river is publicly accessible via following paths starting from Crockham Hill along the river or via the Darent Valley Path as far as Dartford Creek.



Westerham: Squerryes Park to King George's field
Brasted: Recreation Ground
Chipstead: Bricklayers to Chipstead Lake
Sevenoaks: Wildlife Reserve and Bradbourne
Otford: Opposite Broughton Manor
Shoreham: War Memorial to Mill Lane
Lullingstone: Country Park to Castle
Eynsford: Viaduct, Riverside & cricket ground
Farningham: Footpath to Horton Kirby
Horton Kirby: Franks Lane to Westminster Field
South Darenth: Station Road to Devon Road
Sutton-at-Hone: Devon Road to Roman Villa & St Johns Jerusalem
Dartford: Hawley Road through Central Park to Acacia Hall
Marshes: Tidal weir at William Mundy Way to creek barrier

Earthshot Finalist captures microplastics

We'd like to congratulate Adam Root from Saffron Walden who built filters that remove microplastics from water pumped out by washing machines and industrial textile units, preventing them from reaching our rivers and oceans.

His company, Matter, narrowly missed winning £1m at the 2025 Earthshot awards, sponsored by Prince William this November https://earthshotprize.org/winners-finalists/matter/


Credit: OurGoodBrands.com

"It's one of the greatest challenges of our generation and people don't really understand or know about it"

In collaboration with Bosch and Siemens, Matter has launched a filter across 30 European markets. Microplastics have been found on every part of Earth, including buried in Antarctic sea ice and inside the guts of animals living in the deepest ocean trenches.

Making Space for Water

The Rivers Trust is calling on the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to 'Make Space for Water' via asking for:

1. A public commitment from the Government to create a network of connected, nature-rich, multifunctional river corridors including river buffers, riparian tree planting and wetland initiatives all delivered at scale, making space for water.

2. Targeted and simplified financial incentives for farmers and landowners to restore and enhance river corridors, including payments for river buffers, wetlands and riparian tree planting.

Please visit **www.makingspaceforwater.com** where there is a link to a petition where once 10,000 signatures is obtained the government will respond.

How can you help look after the river?

- Share awareness to encourage DRiPS membership which helps fund consultants and lobby water companies
- Reduce water consumption at home and consider using a water butt instead of freshwater in your garden
- Lobby councils to limit new housing developments and promote the use of grey water - recycling bath and shower water
- Report any dying fish or pollution to the Environment Agency

The DRiPS committee meets throughout the year with the **Darent and Cray Catchment Improvement Group**. It is chaired by the SE Rivers Trust and NWKCP and is a forum for all organisations with an interest in the Darent and Cray river systems.

Join DRiPS for £10 a year for individuals or £20 for organisations

Email darentdrips1985@gmail.com if you'd like to get in touch

Email mark.gallant@kent.gov.uk if you'd like to join a volunteer work party

www.darent-drips.org.uk

DRiPS AGM will take place in early 2026.

Details shared soon!

Subscriptions due in October

Please check and kindly make payment to:

Darent River Preservation Society

SORT: 60-19-02

Account: 71582894



In October, we warmly welcomed **Dr Isobel Ollard** who joined SERT as Catchment Officer for the Darent and Cray. Isobel was able to join Trevor and the committee when we spent a fascinating day on the Cray with John Lawson and Dr Jack Hogan.



James Nedham joined the DRiPS Committee this summer. Living in Eynsford, he often volunteers with NWKCP and frequently runs along the Darent Valley Path, has a keen interested in local history and the safeguarding of the river.

Stuart Merrylees, Chair
darentdrips1985@gmail.com