**News Release **

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**East Kent river thrives again after partnership restoration project**

***Little Stour returns to how nature intended with recent surveys showing boost for local wildlife and flood management***

A Kentish river is now reaping the environmental benefits of a partnership makeover project that has restored over 300 metres of rare chalk stream habitat at Seaton, near Canterbury.

In 2016, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership delivered work that transformed part of the much-loved Little Stour between Wickhambreaux Village and Seaton Mill.

This partnership project, with assistance from the three landowners, was originally completed in 2016but a recent drone survey of the river showed how the scheme is benefitting the Little Stour following the improvement works.

For the £28k project, the overly-widened river was narrowed with berms, bars and spits and pools were dug. The riverbanks were fenced and trees were planted along the river and in the adjacent fields.

Using a mechanical excavator, a series of pools were dug into the river bed to create a narrower, deeper, winding channel which will hold water during summer when the water level is lower. Deeper water in the pools is expected to be cooler in the warmer temperatures expected with climate change over the coming decades.

Fish passage has now become much easier and a more varied habitat has developed for all aquatic and riverside wildlife to thrive.

Since the project was completed, fish recorded in the restored stretch include eels, bullheads and brook lamprey - all of which are rare and priority species. There have also been reports of otter just upstream of the site.

The project has also provided flood protection benefits as well as the river banks being raised with clay to further reduce flood risk to residents in Seaton.

Tom Reid, Environment Agency Area Technical Specialist, said: “We are delighted to work together with our partners at the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership on such an important project.

“Chalk streams are precious habitats, havens for wildlife and highly valued by local communities and visitors alike. Their future depends on collective action and this project is therefore a much needed and welcome step towards addressing the many pressures these rare watercourses face.

“It is very rewarding to see the environmental benefits of the Little Stour project after only a short time which include a much better environment for fish and wildlife to thrive as well as reducing flood risk.”

Martin Thomas of the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, said: “I’m struck by how this stretch of river has been transformed by our project.

“When I first visited in 2016 to speak to the owners to gain their approval, it was barren – straight, shallow, with little or no vegetation. It’s now teeming with wildlife. We’re very grateful to the owners of the river and adjoining land for their enthusiastic support.”

As the adjacent fields remain as pasture, a crossing and cattle drink were created at one short section of river, with gates preventing cows from accessing the rest of the watercourse. This stops cattle grazing on the river vegetation, allowing wild plants to grow in the water and on the banks, providing better habitat for wildlife.

Chalk streams are a rare and valuable habitat, often referred to as the equivalent of England’s rain forests or Great Barrier Reef. 85% of all chalk streams are found in England, mainly in the south and east of the country, as well as dozens of smaller chalk springs and watercourses.

However, they face unique challenges in the 21st century because of complex problems exacerbated by climate change and population growth. They flow through some of the most urbanised, industrialised, and intensively-farmed parts of the country. Over-abstraction, pollution, and habitat degradation are serious concerns for environmental groups and other stakeholders.

To find out more about the project, please visit <https://kentishstour.org.uk/seaton-river-restoration/>

**Ends**

**Media enquiries: 0800 141 2743**

**E-mail: Communications\_SE@environment-agency.gov.uk**

**Notes to editors:**

* A recent chalk stream strategy, published by Catchment Based Approach’s (CaBA) Chalk Stream Restoration Group (CSRG), sets the future direction needed to protect and enhance England’s chalk streams.
* The strategy at <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/chalk-stream-strategy/> is for everyone who has responsibility for, or uses, chalk streams. It sets out actions and recommendations for government, regulators and the water industry on water resources, water quality and habitat restoration and management.
* The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) is an inclusive, civil society-led initiative that works in partnership with Government, Local Authorities, Water Companies, businesses and more, to maximise the natural value of our environment.
* Chalk streams face numerous pressures:
	+ low flows due to unsustainable abstraction
	+ poor water quality due to point source discharges and diffuse pollution
	+ poor habitats due to man-made impacts such as straightening channels and barriers to fish migration.
	+ Historically, industry practice, dredging and structures which cause habitat loss, have all contributed to their degradation.