

Three Rivers Environmental Network Notes

7th July 2026

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Three Rivers District Council Members and staff present: Cllr Chris Mitchell (Vice Chair, acting as Chair), Cllr Aidan Bentley, Francesca Cohen, Jo Hewitson and Rory Shenton.

Apologies received from Cllr Jon Tankard.

2. Notes

No matters arising.

3. Talk from Sarratt Community Garden Director Flora Garvey

Sarratt Community Garden

Sarratt Community Garden was originally started in 2019, born out of lockdown, with the purpose of creating an environmental and social project; growing food that doesn't use pesticides or synthetic fertilisers and encouraging biodiversity, whilst also bringing together the community. A large number of volunteers are widowers or divorcees but are also joined by Duke of Edinburgh students and those with SEN, as well as members of the wider community.

Purpose of the garden is to reconnect people to their food and the seasonality of food (not relying on polytunnels in Spain / Netherlands). Firmly believes that human and environmental health are currently not prioritised within modern food production, and hope community garden can change this.

Despite this, the garden relies heavily on the sale of flowers for their survival with the organically grown fruit and vegetable produce (despite being a competitive price) not selling as well as flowers.

Woodoaks Farm

Woodoaks farm operates a 300 acre site given to the Soil Association in 2020, centred on the goals of nurturing agriculture and nature in an impactful way. With an initial limited budget, the site has benefited from national lottery funding and other grants and donations to build towards these goals.

Once complete, the site will include a community and education hub, to continue to build strong relationships with schools and educating school children and the community. The farm currently has roughly 25 school visits each year.

Alongside this, the farm has a compost club and recently the addition of a community orchard with 30 fruit trees planted in the spring of this year.

4. An Update from Francesca Cohen from the Three Rivers Biodiversity Team

1 Year on from the Restoration of the River Chess

Last year, with funding from Thames Water, Three Rivers District Council undertook a project to restore a 500m stretch of the Rivers Chess just upstream from the Scotsbridge Playing Fields. The works included utilising natural materials, habitat structures and native bank plants such as yellow flag iris were planted to reinforce the bank, which has consistently flooded over years.

The river Chess is a chalk stream a globally recognised biologically important habitat with over 85% found in Southern England. Being so biologically important, this stretch of the river Chess is home to 8 water voles (pre-works), with a count taking place this summer, to confirm that they have returned. Furthermore, notice boards have erected advising visitors of the importance of the river, and promoting responsible dog ownership along the river.

Q) Will grant funding continue and what will happen in several years' time to ensure flooding and bank damage doesn't restart?

A) Work was done by the Environmental Agency ~12 years ago, however the materials and practise used were not as strong as what has been used this time and thus the works carried out last year provide a more robust response. The funding for the project, supplied by Thames Water, has now been spent, however the river will be continued to be monitored to prevent future flooding.

Point of Discussion) Friends of River Chess Proposition:

The River Chess Association do lots of fantastic work, such as monitoring wildlife and pollution levels in the River Chess, however most of this work is focused upstream in and around Chesham. It should be explored that a "Friends of the Rivers Chess" group is set up to operate in a similar vein to the River Chess Association but with a focus on the downstream of the river as it meets the Colne.

5. Discussion

- Three Rivers District is very well served by local and well-established greengrocers and food shops (notably within Croxley Green), however within the discussion group majority of attendees shopped for food at major supermarkets, as will be the case with the majority of residents in the district.
- A point was raised highlighting that although organic produce is highly valuable, greater emphasis should be placed on local produce when having discussions around sustainable food production.
- Allotment participation is greatly variety across towns in the Three Rivers District, equally recent trends throughout allotments with younger individuals taking up allotments and then leaving shortly after due to workload. A further incentive of community gardens, in which less pressure is put on the individual. Furthermore, does engagement with

allotments lead to a greater uptake of those who purchase local produce? The ability to grow your own food, incentivise wanting to subsequently buy local produce.

- Quality taste difference of fresh food (notably fruit & vegetables) is believed to be the incentive to better promote the buying of local more sustainable produce, as opposed to buying from supermarkets. Noted that even competitively priced produce from Sarratt Community Garden struggles, with consumption habits embedded in supermarkets.
- Proposed that food from allotments be given away at free stalls to incentive the quality of fresh produce, however this was pointed out that it would be a very hard sell to allotment growers. The idea of a local farmers markets raised instead, but costs and who bears costs a major barrier.
- Attendee and allotment owner in Abbots Langley noted that he donates excess food to local food banks and has now started a trend with more plot owners doing the same. To be explored in actions from this session as something the council can facilitate / encourage.
- Only 2 currently known local producers of sustainable farming practices within Three Rivers – further incentivisation of farmers cannot be achieved at local level and requires national policy, but work can be done to change purchasing habits and culture locally.

6. Round Table of Upcoming Events/Schemes/Initiatives Not Mentioned Elsewhere

No matters arising.

7. Any Other Business

None.

8. Next Meeting

Date, location, and topic to be confirmed.

9. Tour of Sustainable Three Rivers Garden

A guided tour was generously carried out of the Sustainable Three Rivers Community Garden by a Sustainable Three Rivers representative. The tour was well received by all who attended and highlighted the importance of community garden spaces as tools for sustainable growing to engage with the community and those who lack access to private outdoor spaces.

Actions

Summary

As a semi-rural district, Three Rivers has a large agricultural presence and green space with organisation such as Woodoaks Farm and Sarratt Community Garden and individuals striving to create sustainable farming and engage with the community about sustainable farming practices. Despite this, engagement remains

low, and even though well served by local produce-oriented shops, supermarkets still dominate food shopping habits.

Actions for the Council

- Council officers to investigate potential for schemes / practices in which excess food grown on allotments is donated to local food banks, as is currently carried out informally by individual member of Abbots Langley allotments.
- Explore options for River Chess Association group, focusing on the downstream river that falls within the Three Rivers catchment.