

Motion to Council 27th November 2025

Proposed by: Cllr Ginny Boxall

Seconded by: Cllr Penny Flux

Recognising and Protecting the Rights of Chalkstreams and our Rivers in East Hampshire

This Council recognises that rivers are vital to the ecological health, cultural heritage, and future sustainability of East Hampshire. Our District is home to some of the most beautiful and precious rivers in the world, including The River Rother, The River Meon and The River Wey, providing habitats for unique and endangered species, supporting livelihoods, recreation, and the wellbeing of our residents. Despite this, rivers across the UK, and here in East Hampshire, face increasing pressures from pollution, over-abstraction, habitat degradation, and climate change.

To address these growing threats and to uphold our responsibilities to future generations, this Council resolves to formally recognise the Rights of Rivers, drawing inspiration from the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers.

These include, but are not limited to:

- The right to flow – unimpeded, seasonal, and natural.
- The right to perform essential functions within the ecosystem.
- The right to be free from pollution and contamination.
- The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers and other freshwater sources.
- The right to native biodiversity and restoration of ecological integrity.
- The right to regeneration and restoration from environmental harm.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Acknowledge the intrinsic rights of rivers within the jurisdiction of East Hampshire District Council.
2. Work with community groups, river trusts and environmental experts to identify and support the legal and practical recognition of these rights.
3. Embed river rights principles into council policies, particularly those concerning planning, development, land use, water quality, water management, and biodiversity.
4. Advocate to national and regional bodies, including the Environment Agency, to adopt river rights frameworks and enhance protections for our chalk streams and freshwater ecosystems.

5. Support local initiatives and citizen monitoring efforts that protect and restore river health, such as citizen science water testing, riparian buffer planting, natural flood management, creating wildlife corridors and sustainable agriculture partnerships.
6. Support public engagement to raise awareness of the importance of chalk streams and rivers to support Hampshire's Natural and Cultural Heritage.
7. Request that the Environment Agency publishes an annual "State of the Rivers" report to track progress in protecting river ecosystems and rights, in collaboration with local environmental organisations.