

The Rt. Hon Steve Reed OBE M.P.
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government
2 Marsham Street
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Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council

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By email only

10 July 2026

Dear Mr Reed,

I am writing on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council in relation to chalk streams and the protections afforded to them in the planning system.

Chalk streams are amongst the rarest freshwater habitats on earth and are primarily found within southern and eastern England, including several notable watercourses within the Vale of White Horse. Their unique characteristics have helped to create extraordinary ecosystems that are home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. Unfortunately, however, sewage discharges, over-abstraction, inappropriate development and climate change are threatening them and, hence, putting these extraordinary places and the species in danger

In the council's considered opinion, the protections afforded to chalk streams under the current planning system are inadequate and, consequently, leave them at substantial risk. Furthermore, although we recognise that there are provisions within the draft National Planning Policy Framework that mention the protection and enhancement of chalk stream habitats, we do not believe that these go far enough.

The Vale is, therefore, requesting that HM Government redefines chalk streams and catchments as 'irreplaceable habitats' within the requirements of the planning system. As justification for this, we would strongly argue that chalk streams meet the definition/requirements to be considered as 'irreplaceable habitats' as they are exceedingly rare, ecological valuable ecosystems that support a wide range of species.

In addition, we would also like to ask that HM Government introduces an evidenced based minimum 'no new development buffer' around chalk streams. This would further help to protect these vital habitats from the risks of inappropriate development, over-abstraction and sewage discharges.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council