



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: PO2026/19976

Cllr Bethia Thomas
Vale of White Horse District Council
Abbey House
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

12 August 2026

Dear Bethia,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 July regarding chalk streams and the protections afforded to them in the planning system.

I appreciate how important this matter is and I am grateful to you for taking the time to write. I have asked my officials to address your concerns in the letter appended.

Please be assured that I am conscious of the matters you have raised, and I appreciate the insight your correspondence provides.

I hope the attached response suitably addresses your enquiry. If that is not the case, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Best wishes,

RT HON MATTHEW PENNYCOOK MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning



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Dear Cllr Bethia Thomas,

Thank you for your correspondence to which the Housing Minister has asked me to reply.

The Government recognises the ecological significance of chalk streams and shares the council's commitment to protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Between 16 December 2025 and 10 March 2026, the Government consulted on a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). That consultation included proposals to add explicit recognition of chalk streams as features of high environmental value. The proposed policy is clear that local plans must identify and manage the impacts of development on these sensitive areas, for instance, by creating buffer zones or green corridors, while giving local authorities flexibility to decide which measures are best suited to their local context. The consultation can be found on the GOV.UK website here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>.

The Government has also set out more clearly its expectations for development proposals to assess and mitigate adverse impacts to water quality on these sensitive waterbodies. This aims to secure the consistent application of policy regarding these precious habitats and will be supported by the rollout of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which will be able to map out chalk streams and identify measures to enhance and improve them.

The Government considers that the revised definition of irreplaceable habitats will assist decision-makers in determining whether areas fall within this classification, and will keep the definition under review. It is satisfied that, when applied correctly, the policy continues to provide appropriate protection for areas of importance for biodiversity and geodiversity.

More broadly, the NPPF is clear that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity. If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused. The Framework is also clear that development should, wherever

possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans. Feedback received from the consultation is currently being analysed and a response will be published in due course.

Thank you again for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

ALEX BADRICK
Deputy Principal Private Secretary