

Please email davidbrooks@btinternet.com with any items for him to consider for the next newsletter or to request that your address be taken off (or added to) the emailing list. Do forward this newsletter to anyone who may be interested.

We welcome signs that our local water companies are facing up to some serious challenges. The Cambridge Independent reported on 25 November that Cambridge Water are 'considering all options to remove pressures on chalk streams', including demand



management, bulk imports of water from neighbouring companies, and new reservoirs. To the south, Affinity Water is already reducing abstraction from the Chalk and has told us that their commitment to end unsustainable abstraction 'applies to all chalk rivers not just those in the Chilterns.' Meanwhile, Anglian Water already has work in hand to transfer surplus water from Humberside to Essex via Ely.

No matter how many new houses Cambridge planners permit, and however extravagant their occupiers, Cambridge Water is required by law to supply all the water they want. We want them to reduce current levels and meet new demand not from the Chalk aquifer but by importing water from elsewhere. Once we get new reservoirs to capture winter flows they can start to reduce borehole abstraction, so that Chalk streams run all year, every year, whatever the weather.

Encouraging customers to consume less should help too, in theory, but what of our own behaviour? Raising the price of water to reduce consumption is politically difficult but the Government has recently told OFWAT and the water companies to find solutions to our water supply challenges that 'provide the best value to customers, society and the environment, rather than simply the lowest financial impact'. That is a significant and encouraging shift in policy.

At a recent Zoom (https://youtu.be/YV3_Ca8CE5Y) meeting called by local activists, Feargal Sharkey did much to stimulate and inform a large audience. We are having a wetter-than-average winter after five drier ones but more rain cannot be relied upon to solve a crisis created by decades of unsustainable practice. The big challenge now is to help the water industry find solutions that deliver not only secure supplies but also a healthier and cleaner water environment.

Alan Woods

Meanwhile, Signal Crayfish abound. The American,



invasive Signal Crayfish was introduced into the UK in the 1970s, to farm for human food (photo of the crustacean

above). Up to 6 inches long, having escaped from enclosures, it has displaced the small, native White-clawed Crayfish, being much more aggressive, as well as being a voracious predator, consuming almost anything it finds including plants, invertebrates, snails, small fish, fish eggs and, even, its own young. It carries a fungus disease which is fatal to the natives but not itself.

It has reached plague proportions in many parts of the UK, including the Cam Valley, along the Bourn Brook and the River Shep for example. Small surviving outliers of the White-clawed natives in South Cambs are particularly vulnerable to the destructive advance of the invaders. Though thwarted by Covid the River Mel Restoration Group is planning to use traps to assess their density and distribution (but see www.crayfishuk.org/wp for complications arising from the use of conventional traps).

The invaders destabilise river banks by digging burrows up to 3 feet long. The banks collapse, the channel widens, material accumulates on the channel bed, and covers the sand and gravel used by spawning fish. The female incubates more than 250 eggs under her tail, each year.