



**Cotswolds
National
Landscape**



**Smarter Water Catchment Pilot:
Everyone's Evenlode Impact Report**

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Section 1: Executive Summary

The Everyone's Evenlode project was delivered by Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) as part of the Thames Water Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) pilot on the River Evenlode from November 2021 to July 2025. The project received £460,000 of funding during its lifetime, which was part of a wider investment of £3 million by Thames Water into the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP).

The Everyone's Evenlode project focused on Education, Access, and Recreation, aiming to reconnect people with the river, enhance wellbeing, inspire environmental conservation, and equip children and young people with knowledge and skills regarding their local waterways. It represents a significant achievement in connecting local communities and schools with their river environment.

Over its 3.5-year duration, Everyone's Evenlode reached thousands of children, young people, and adults across Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire through hands-on river studies, outdoor learning programmes, guided walks, community events, and citizen science initiatives. The programme successfully established a strong public identity for the Evenlode Catchment Partnership, demonstrated positive

impact on knowledge, engagement, and environmental behaviours, and created a legacy of outdoor learning resources, trained volunteers, and empowered local communities.

Summary of Achievements

- Over 3,800 children and young people engaged in outdoor learning, with sustained curriculum impact.
- More than 7,000 participants (children, adults, and volunteers) engaged in community and citizen science activities.
- Strong emotional and behavioural outcomes demonstrated through wellbeing activities, pledges, postcards and volunteering.
- A resilient network of volunteers, schools, and community groups continues to support catchment stewardship.

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Ros Marsden

A-Level geography students touring the Evenlode catchment.

- Establishment of digital and knowledge-sharing resources ensures the project's benefits extend beyond the four-year pilot.

Section 2: Context and Background

The River Evenlode, a headwater of the Thames, flows for over 45 miles from the limestone hills of the Cotswolds near Moreton-in-Marsh to its confluence with the Thames at Cassington. Its catchment spans nearly 30,000 hectares, encompassing a largely rural landscape of arable farmland, villages, and small towns.

The catchment's heavy clay soils contribute to winter flooding, while historic and contemporary agricultural practices, including the widespread use of chemical fertilisers, have led to high levels of nitrate and phosphate in waterways. Nineteen sewage treatment works service a population of approximately 50,000, adding significantly to poor water quality in the river Evenlode. Much of the river flows through privately owned land, limiting continuous public access; however, several accessible stretches of the main river and its tributaries, which include the River Dorn and River Glyme, offer opportunities for recreation, education, and community connection.

The Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP) was established in 2014 as part of a nationwide effort by the Environment Agency to improve river health and achieve 'Good Ecological Status.' The partnership

brings together NGOs, Thames Water, parish councils, farmers, landowners, businesses, community groups, and individuals to co-create solutions to complex, interconnected pressures on river systems. In 2020, Thames Water launched three Smarter Water Catchment pilots, including the Evenlode, providing significant funding to support a Catchment Based Approach (CaBA). This approach prioritises collaboration, long-term planning, and engagement with multiple stakeholders, addressing pollution, flooding, biodiversity and habitat loss, and community disconnection in an integrated way.

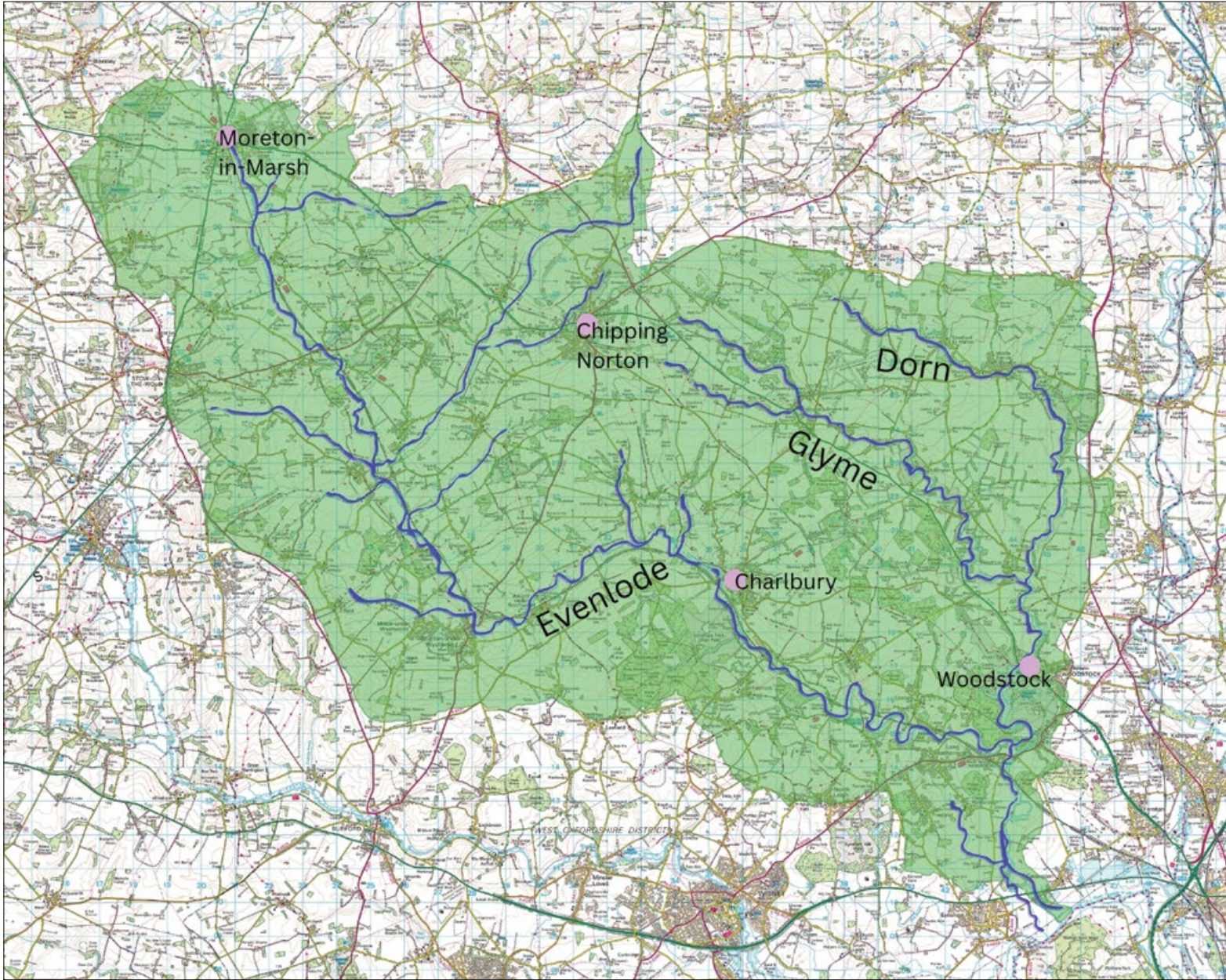
The Everyone's Evenlode theme, led by the Cotswolds National Landscape, was designed to complement the ECP's wider goals by focusing on community engagement and education. Its objectives were to improve access to

the river environment, enhance physical and mental wellbeing, educate young people and communities, and inspire active participation in environmental conservation. Activities included school and university programmes, guided walks, large community events, citizen science initiatives, and the development of digital resources to support continued engagement. Through these initiatives, the project aimed not only to foster appreciation and understanding of the river, but also to provide practical opportunities for participants to contribute to its protection and restoration.

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The River Evenlode, a headwater of the Thames, flows for over

45
miles



Evenlode Catchment

Key

-  WFD rivers
-  Urban areas
-  Evenlode Catchment



Section 3: The Everyone's Evenlode Vision

The Everyone's Evenlode programme was conceived as a community-centred complement to the technical and ecological work of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership. While efforts to improve water quality, manage flooding, and restore habitats are important, these outcomes are enhanced when local communities understand, value, and actively engage with their rivers. Everyone's Evenlode sought to bridge this gap, creating a clear public identity for catchment engagement and offering opportunities for people of all ages to experience the river, deepen their environmental knowledge, and participate in conservation efforts.



Graham Hill



Jennifer Lanham

Admiring the River Lea, London.

Programme Objectives

The overarching vision of Everyone's Evenlode was to reconnect people with the River Evenlode, its tributaries, and the surrounding landscape, while promoting wellbeing, education, and conservation. Specifically, the programme aimed to:

- 1. Raise awareness of catchment pressures** such as pollution, habitat loss, biodiversity decline and flooding, demonstrating how community action, alongside ECP interventions, can positively affect water quality and help protect both ecosystems and local communities.
- 2. Educate the next generation** through school visits and field trips, enabling children and young people to develop practical skills, scientific and geographical understanding, and a personal connection to the environment.
- 3. Inspire environmental conservation** by encouraging people to take positive action – including participation in citizen science activities, conservation projects, and behavior changes that contribute to river health.
- 4. Reconnect communities with their local river** by improving access, leading guided riverside walks, and providing river-based educational and recreational opportunities.
- 5. Enhance physical and mental wellbeing** by inviting people to spend time in natural environments, taking part in gentle exercise, mindful practices and creative outdoor experiences.



Rowan Wynne-Jone

Children learning about food production.

Strategic Approach

To achieve these objectives, the Everyone's Evenlode team adopted a broad and flexible outreach model that incorporated formal education, community engagement, and volunteer opportunities. This combined structured learning with informal experiences designed to engage a diverse range of audiences. The approach recognised that participation is most successful

when people are offered meaningful and memorable experiences that bring together learning, hands-on involvement, a sense of personal agency, and genuine connection. Employing four team members with complementary skill sets strengthened and consolidated this diverse strategy.

Vision Realised

From the outset, Everyone's Evenlode aimed not only to deliver activities, but to build long-term connections between people and place. By integrating education, recreation, volunteering, and knowledge-sharing into a single, coherent programme, it established a model for holistic catchment engagement – one that recognises the river as both essential natural resource to protect, as well as an important social resource to cherish. This vision guided all the activities, and shaped the design, delivery, and evaluation of the project.

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Rowan Wynne-Jone

Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award conservation volunteer.

Section 4: Education and Learning

Education was at the heart of the Everyone's Evenlode programme. Recognising that children and young people are both custodians and beneficiaries of the natural environment, the project placed a strong emphasis on providing hands-on, curriculum-linked learning experiences. The Education programme and associated activities enabled thousands of learners to explore, understand, and engage with their local rivers, while also nurturing curiosity, practical skills, and a sense of environmental responsibility. For many students, these sessions represented their first direct experience of a river environment, creating profound physical and emotional connections to local ecosystems.



Rowan Wynne-Jones

Sketching by the River Evenlode.

Scope and Reach

Over the five-year duration of the project, Everyone's Evenlode worked with 41 schools and engaged 3,855 children and young people, ranging from primary school pupils to university students. Many schools returned for multiple sessions, reflecting the quality, relevance, and impact of the offer. The Education programme was inclusive and pragmatic. Recognising that many children living within the catchment attend schools beyond its boundary, the programme engaged both local and neighbouring schools, thus extending its reach and maximising impact.

Participation data demonstrates the scale of delivery:

Year	Schools involved	School sessions	Children	Young People (16-25)	Total participants	Volunteer hours
2021-22*	10	9	299	11	310	29
2022-23	17	35	934	81	1,015	66
2023-24	20	39	849	110	959	155
2024-25	20	39	925	45	970	248
2025-26*	14	23	601	0	601	148
Total	41**	145	3,608	247	3,855	645

* 2021-22 and 2025-26 were partial years (~4 months each).

**Many schools engaged multiple times.

Over the five-year duration of the project, Everyone's Evenlode worked with 41 schools and engaged

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children



Ros Marsden

Children checking phosphate and nitrate levels.

Programme Design and Delivery

The Education programme offered a wide range of activities, tailored to the age of the pupils and the targets of the curriculum. For primary school pupils, sessions often combined creative, exploratory, and sensory experiences such as pond dipping, stream wading, leaf rubbing, willow weaving, and compass navigation. Secondary school pupils undertook more structured fieldwork, including GCSE geography investigations, complete with wading, water testing, and habitat exploration. A-level students were engaged with broader catchment tours, taking in a number of Natural Flood

Management (NFM) schemes, a range of riparian habitats and a selection of conservation schemes within the Evenlode catchment. Higher education students, including PGCE trainees, received specialised training in outdoor learning and fieldwork delivery, equipping them with the skills and confidence to incorporate similar approaches in their future teaching.

The programme's inclusive design ensured that all learners could participate fully. Several primary schools with limited transport options benefited from the "From the School Gate" initiative, where the team scouted accessible local waterbodies to deliver field-based learning close to the school, reducing costs and travel time while still meeting national curriculum requirements.

The Education team, with the help of some enthusiastic CNL voluntary wardens, provided support to teachers who may have lacked the time, resources, or confidence to deliver bespoke outdoor learning, helping to create curriculum-linked experiences which were high-quality, affordable and logistically viable.



Tea Smart

Exploring a stretch of the river in waders.

Secondary school pupils undertook more structured fieldwork, including GCSE geography investigations, complete with wading, water testing, and habitat exploration.

Quality and Feedback

High-quality delivery was central to the programme's success. The Everyone's Evenlode team employed experienced educators and engaged the expertise of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, whose support enriched the learning experience significantly. Sessions were carefully monitored and refined based on feedback from teachers and participants, ensuring that activities were engaging, educational, and logistically smooth.



Rowan Wynne-Jone

Earthwatch training young citizen scientists.

Teacher feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with an average rating of 9.5 out of 10 for the overall session. Highlights cited by teachers included: pond and river dipping, identifying invertebrates, water testing, exploring habitats, and practical fieldwork such as measuring riverbanks and sampling riverbeds. Many teachers noted that their pupils had never experienced a river first-hand before, and described these opportunities as transformative. Representative comments included:

"The children loved the pond dipping and finding creatures in the water."

"Getting students into the river to measure the banks and bed was the highlight – real-world geography!"

"The quality of teaching, the variety of tasks, and the local setting made it brilliant."

Feedback collected via 80 teacher surveys demonstrated exceptional satisfaction and learning outcomes. Teachers rated sessions on a scale of 1-10, with results above:

Area	Average score/10
Amount and quality of learning	9.5
Development of skills (observation, practical work, recording)	9.3
Participant enjoyment and enthusiasm	9.5
Usefulness in supporting class learning	9.6
Overall session quality	9.5

Key Highlights from Feedback:

- Hands-on activities such as river and pond dipping, invertebrate identification, and water quality testing were repeatedly cited as the most memorable elements.
- Exploration of local habitats, including hedgerows, ponds, and rivers, allowed students to observe wildlife such as crayfish, deer and red kites, fostering a direct connection to the natural world.
- The combination of geography, science, creativity, and play ensured engagement across age ranges, with students often trying new skills for the first time.
- Teachers praised the expertise, enthusiasm, and adaptability of staff, as well as the structured yet flexible delivery of sessions.

Where suggestions for improvement were offered, they primarily related to logistics and resources rather than delivery or content, such as providing additional testing kits and extending time for walking and reflection. Many schools reported that “nothing” needed improvement, describing the sessions as among the best field trips they had ever attended.

Citizen Science and Legacy

A key legacy of the education programme was the introduction of citizen science in schools, connecting them with Earthwatch’s FreshWater Watch programme. This initiative encouraged pupils to monitor water quality on a regular basis. By embedding citizen science into school routines, the programme created enduring opportunities for students to contribute to data collection, environmental monitoring, and to build an enduring connection to their local waterways.

Many schools reported that “nothing” needed improvement, describing the sessions as among the best field trips they had ever attended.



Jennifer Lanham

DofE volunteers repairing willow fascines.

Duke of Edinburgh Awards and Volunteer Engagement

Everyone’s Evenlode also offered young people the chance to engage with practical conservation activities through the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Thirty-one participants completing bronze, silver, and gold awards, engaged in a wide range of conservation activities, including hedge-

laying, tree grafting, pond clearing, leaky dam construction, and willow weaving. Beyond achieving awards, participants gained confidence, communication skills, and a meaningful sense of connection to their environment. Some young people continued volunteering beyond the required timeframe, reinforcing the programme’s long-term impact.



Ros Marsden

GCSE geography fieldtrip - surveying the river at Combe Mill.

Emotional Wellbeing

An additional outcome was the programme's positive impact on participants' emotional wellbeing. Activities such as "Wellbeing by the River" sessions used mindful and creative outdoor activities to support Year 5 and 6 pupils. Mood ratings collected using a coloured emoji scale before and after sessions consistently showed marked improvements, demonstrating the mental health benefits of spending time in nature and engaging in purposeful outdoor activities.

Mood ratings collected using a coloured emoji scale before and after sessions consistently showed marked improvements...

PGCE Training Days

Five training days were delivered for 48 PGCE students from the University of Oxford and Buckinghamshire SCITT. The sessions focused on fieldwork skills, safety, and curriculum links, with an average of 9.2/10 satisfaction reported across the training days, with practical demonstrations reported as a key highlight.

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Rowan Wynne-Jones

Outdoor learning at Sarsden Brook.

Section 5: Community Engagement and Access

Community Outreach was a central pillar of the Everyone's Evenlode programme. Recognising that river health is shaped not only by ecological interventions but also by public awareness, understanding, and behaviour, the programme aimed to connect people of all ages and backgrounds with the River Evenlode. Through guided walks, bespoke community visits, large river events, fairs, and knowledge-sharing initiatives, the project created opportunities for individuals and communities to engage with river ecology, biodiversity, and water quality issues. Special attention was given to enhancing inclusion, with bespoke initiatives for refugee families, disabled participants and other underserved communities.

Volunteering was another key component. The programme partnered with CNL's Voluntary Wardens to provide a quality educational and outreach programme utilising their knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm. The team also worked with young volunteers completing their Duke of Edinburgh Award awards, as they assisted with a range of conservation activities. Working in close partnership with Earthwatch, the outreach programme also helped recruit scores of citizen scientists to help monitor their local stretches of river for pollution levels.

Guided Walks

Guided walks provided interactive experiences that allowed participants to explore river corridors, observe biodiversity, and understand the challenges and restoration efforts underway in their catchment. Early walks were open to the general public, typically attracting 10-20 participants per session, and incorporated water quality testing, habitat and biodiversity observation, and discussion of flood management and conservation techniques.



Guided walk within the Evenlode Catchment.

As the programme developed, walks were tailored to under-represented groups to improve inclusivity. For example, refugee families from Oxford and a Muslim women's walking group from the Friendship Café in Gloucester were welcomed to the catchment. These bespoke experiences were highly valued by participants and promoted trust, engagement, and repeated involvement. Such targeted engagement ensured that the outreach programme not only reached broad audiences but also created opportunities for deeper, more meaningful connections with specific communities.



Rowan Wynne-Jones

Girl Guides pond dipping.

Community Visits and Co-Created Activities

Community visits allowed the team to take activities into local towns, villages, and interest groups, creating accessible points of contact for people who might not otherwise visit river locations. Sessions were co-designed with groups such as the

Women’s Institute, Scouts and Guides and local shops, libraries, and heritage sites. Formats were flexible, ranging from indoor presentations in village halls to outdoor activities like pond dipping, bat walks, and litter picking sessions by the river. By bringing experiences into communities and co-creating events with individuals and organisations, the programme increased accessibility, interest and engagement across the catchment.

Large Community Events

To provide high-impact engagement, the programme delivered one large river-focused community event each year. These events combined family-friendly activities, citizen science opportunities, and public presentations to reach wide audiences, raise awareness, and showcase the work of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership. Highlights included:

- **Eco-Youth Conference (November 2022)** – A youth-led programme featuring presentations on river pollution, practical workshops such as bat-box and bird-feeder construction, live bat demonstrations, and a celebration of children’s nature-writing achievements. Families participated throughout the day, and the event

successfully showcased the voice and action of young people in environmental engagement and conservation.

- **Earth Day at Wigwell Nature Reserve (April 2023)** – A combination of ticketed and open-air activities including beaver dam building, stream dipping, arts and crafts, and partner presentations. Local scouts provided refreshments, and pupils from Charlbury Primary School performed river-themed songs. Attendance was estimated at 250-300 people, supported by 17 volunteers.



CNL

ECP community outreach in Oxford.

Participation Data

Year	Guided Walks	Community Visits	Events, Fairs, Festivals & Shows	Knowledge Exchange	Total Events	Children	Adults	Volunteer Hours
2021-22	0	3	0	1	4	12	88	23
2022-23	7	2	11	5	26	618	860	206
2023-24	5	17	13	10	46	873	1,664	352
2024-25	5	14	8	29	57	896	1,635	181
2025-26	0	5	4	6	15	54	381	58
Total	17	41	36	51	148	2,453	4,628	820

- Celebration Exhibition at FarmED (March 2025)** – Celebrating the accomplishments of the ECP, this exhibition highlighted achievements of the Smarter Water Catchment pilot, with presentations from partners including Wild Oxfordshire, Earthwatch, CNL, and Thames Water. Pupils from local schools and Duke of Edinburgh participants shared practical projects, ensuring that young people’s contributions were recognised and celebrated alongside those of the partnership as a whole.

A number of high-quality printable online resources were also developed and shared with the public...

The data demonstrates significant reach across age groups and communities, highlighting both breadth and depth of engagement. Early events focused on visibility and mass participation, while later activities became more targeted, addressing specific community needs and supporting sustained involvement.

Knowledge Exchange and Online Resources

An important component of community engagement was knowledge exchange. Early in the programme, the focus was on training volunteers and citizen scientists to build local capacity. Later, the team expanded initiatives to share expertise widely, including the creation of the Outdoor Learning Network, which

connected individuals, businesses and schools, and the Voices of the River webinar series. While live attendance for webinars was modest, recordings reached hundreds online, ensuring a digital legacy and extending the programme’s reach beyond physical events.

A number of high-quality printable online resources were also developed and shared with the public, raising awareness of local water issues and offering clear, practical ways for individuals to make a positive difference to the aquatic environment.



Rowan Wynne-Jones

Young families learning about riparian invertebrates.



CNL

water quality, conservation, and advocacy, demonstrating how engagement can translate into concrete behaviours and awareness-raising. Similarly, public events, guided walks, and citizen science activities encouraged participants to monitor water quality, reduce pollution, and advocate for river restoration, effectively multiplying the impact of the programme beyond direct participation.

Connection through the Arts

The team recognised the importance of engaging people through a variety of approaches – from scientific and fact-driven methods to the softer, more emotive medium of the arts – emphasising the value of connecting with individuals both creatively and intellectually.

Early in the project, the team collaborated with Kath Lucas, a local community artist, to design and create a River Goddess puppet. This puppet became a striking visual and tactile symbol of the River, appearing at numerous public events to help convey the project’s message.

Over the course of the project, two creative competitions were organised: a water-themed creative writing competition for children in the summer of 2022, and a river-themed photography competition open to all in the autumn of 2025. Both competitions attracted high-quality entries and proved to be an effective way of celebrating creativity while encouraging a connection to nature through the arts.



River Goddess at a river blessing ceremony.

At the Eco-Youth Conference, participants wrote

54

environmental pledges

Inspiring Action and Environmental Conservation

Community engagement activities were designed not only to educate but also to inspire action. At the Eco-Youth Conference, participants wrote 54 environmental pledges reflecting personal responsibility and a commitment to river protection. Many pledges focused on



Ros Marsden

Pond dipping at Science Oxford Centre.

Weaving bird feeders from willow harvested from the riverside and purchased from a local grower proved to be a highly popular activity. It offered local schoolchildren, members of the public and volunteers an opportunity to engage creatively with natural materials, while also promoting a sense of agency in supporting local bird populations. The team facilitated the creation of hundreds of bird feeders over the duration of the project.

Community Engagement Outcomes

Community engagement activities reached 4,628 adults and 2,453 children through 148 events, including guided walks, community visits, fairs, festivals, and knowledge exchange sessions. Large-scale river events, such as the Eco-Youth Conference and Earth Day at Wigwell Nature Reserve, offered immersive, interactive experiences and strengthened connections between participants and the catchment.

Environmental Awareness and Conservation:

- Public events and citizen science opportunities inspired behavioural change, increasing awareness of catchment issues such as pollution, habitat loss, and biodiversity decline.
- Numerous knowledge-sharing events and workshops were organised and facilitated by Everyone's Evenlode on topics including tracks and signs; curlews and lapwings; butterflies; slow worms; hedgelaying; willow weaving; dam building, and more.

Citizen Science Participation:

- The programme successfully introduced Earthwatch Freshwater Watch monitoring to schools, creating a cohort of student citizen scientists engaged in monthly water quality testing.
- Numbers of active citizen scientists in the Evenlode catchment increased exponentially over the project period.

Volunteer Contribution and Skills Development:

- Cotswold Voluntary Wardens contributed nearly 1,500 hours of volunteer work, assisting with education and community outreach projects.
- Duke of Edinburgh Volunteers engaged in hedge laying, tree grafting, pond clearing, bird box building, leaky dam construction, and willow weaving, developing practical skills, teamwork, confidence, and leadership, while also acting as mentors for peers and younger participants.
- Many volunteers continued their engagement beyond the project, embedding conservation and environmental responsibility within the community.

Impact on River Health Awareness

A significant outcome of the programme was the deepened understanding of catchment pressures among participants. The project highlighted multiple threats, including sewage discharges, agricultural runoff, habitat degradation, and climate impacts, demonstrating that river health is a shared responsibility.

Hundreds of postcards advocating for improved river health were written by members of the public, collected, and then delivered to the Minister for Water and Flooding by Everyone's Evenlode alongside a group of passionate children. Messages expressed grief, urgency, and moral responsibility for river restoration. Representative quotes include:

"The rivers are the lifeline of this country. Finally, they were coming back to life, now focus on profit has ruined them."

"Childhood swimming in our local rivers is now historic. 2,000x the safe amount of forever chemicals is HORRIFIC."

"My daughter wants and deserves a living planet."

These insights illustrate the programme's success in translating awareness into empathy and motivation for action, strengthening the cultural and emotional connection between communities and their river environment.



Message in a Bottle - postcards from community members calling for action on rivers.

Section 6: Barriers, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

While Everyone's Evenlode achieved outstanding outcomes, the project faced a number of challenges that required careful planning, adaptation, and creative problem-solving. Understanding these barriers provides insight into the resilience and flexibility of the programme, and offers valuable lessons for future catchment-based initiatives.

Transport and Access

One of the most significant barriers for schools was the cost and logistics of travel. Coach hire for school visits ranged from approximately £400-£700 per day, presenting a challenge for schools with limited budgets, particularly those with

higher proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. Where schools were able to use mini-buses, this mitigated costs but limited the number of pupils able to attend each session.

To address this, the programme introduced the "From the School Gate" initiative. The team scouted local waterbodies accessible on foot from the school, enabling local environmental education within walking distance of the school gate. This approach not only reduced transport costs but also allowed sessions to be closely tied to the national curriculum and the local environment, demonstrating that impactful, hands-on learning need not depend on distant travel.



Helen Komor

Children arriving in the Cotswolds by bus.



James Webb

River surveying.

Staffing and Capacity

Staffing constraints were a recurring challenge. Between January 2022 and mid-project, delivery was supported by the equivalent of 1.0 FTE Education Officer time and 0.6 FTE Outreach Officer time, distributed between three staff members. This level of staffing limited the number of sessions that could be delivered and the breadth of community engagement. Additional staff hours were subsequently secured, bringing the total staffing to the equivalent of 2.5 FTE days per week, shared between three staff members, enabling the programme to expand its offer and reach.

Volunteers, particularly the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, contributed nearly 1,500 hours of support, providing essential expertise and capacity for school field trips, guided walks, and event delivery. Without this voluntary contribution, the programme's scale and quality would have been significantly constrained.

A further staffing consideration was school supervision. For river-based sessions, sufficient adult-to-child ratios were critical to ensure safety when pupils entered the water. On many occasions, volunteer wardens enabled full participation by supporting supervision and practical delivery.

Weather and Environmental Conditions
Weather was an unavoidable challenge in outdoor learning. The programme adopted the guiding principle that “there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing,” instructing pupils to bring wellies and waterproofs, or sunhats and sunscreen



Ros Marsden

Catchment tour of Natural Flood Management (NFM) schemes.

as required. Rainproof materials, such as pencils instead of pens, ensured activities could continue in wet conditions.

Flooding occasionally made sections of the river unsafe for wading. In these cases, alternative setups such as mock rivers using benches and tarpaulins allowed sessions to continue safely. Occasionally, high winds and thunderstorms meant access to wooded areas had to be avoided, with risk assessments ensuring participant safety while maintaining learning outcomes.

Pollution

River pollution proved to be one of the greatest challenges. Sewage discharges into the Evenlode increased substantially during the project, with 3,000 hours in 2022, rising to 17,000 hours by 2024. This necessitated relocation of some geography field trips to alternative rivers with lower pollution levels. Other sources of pollution included forever chemicals, road run-off, and agricultural run-off. Strict handwashing protocols were implemented whenever participants came into contact with water, mitigating health risks while maintaining the immersive river experience.



Sam Frith

Polluted tributary.

These challenges highlighted the wider systemic pressures on river health, reinforcing the need for public engagement, advocacy, and collaborative action to address upstream pollution sources.

For river-based sessions, sufficient adult-to-child ratios were critical to ensure safety when pupils entered the water.

Facilities and Logistics

Toilets and other basic facilities required careful planning. Sessions were limited to approximately two hours where onsite amenities were unavailable, or routed near accessible public toilets. Managing these



Nicole Daw

Off-road trampers making the catchment more accessible.

logistical considerations ensured comfort, safety, and inclusivity, particularly for younger participants.

The rural nature of the catchment meant that access to riverbanks was often challenging for wheelchair users. On occasion, off-road “trampers” were borrowed through staff connections, allowing pupils with physical disabilities to take part alongside their classmates. Later, using capital funding, the project purchased a Mountain Trike – an all-terrain wheelchair – ensuring that future field trips to rivers and nature sites are fully accessible to everyone.

Engagement and Inclusivity

Reaching schools and under-represented community groups was initially a challenge, with pressures on school timetables and limited awareness of outdoor learning opportunities. Building a reputation for high-quality, curriculum-linked delivery gradually overcame this barrier, leading to repeat engagement from many schools. Targeted outreach enabled access for harder-to-reach groups, including under-served communities and local refugee families. Partnerships with organisations such as



Jennifer Lanharn

Bird Watching at Blenheim Palace.

Refugee Resource, Black2Nature, and the Friendship Café facilitated inclusion and ensured activities were culturally appropriate, welcoming, and meaningful.

On occasion, off-road “trampers” were borrowed through staff connections, allowing pupils with physical disabilities to take part alongside their classmates.

Lessons Learned

Several key lessons emerged from overcoming these barriers:

- 1. Flexibility and adaptability are essential** – localised learning, alternative river sites, and weather contingency plans ensured continuity of high-quality experiences.
- 2. Partnerships multiply impact** – volunteers, schools, and community groups enabled a scale and depth of delivery impossible for staff alone.
- 3. Inclusivity requires proactive engagement** – establishing trust and culturally appropriate approaches was essential to reaching under-represented groups.
- 4. Early planning and risk assessment** – transport logistics, site access, and safety considerations needed to be embedded in every activity to ensure smooth delivery.
- 5. Practical, hands-on experiences drive engagement** – immersive activities, sensory experiences, and creative approaches consistently yielded the highest levels of participation, learning, and enjoyment.



Rowan Wynne-Jone

Nature crafts for all the family.

Through careful attention to these challenges and responsive adaptations, Everyone's Evenlode not only mitigated barriers but also strengthened the programme's resilience, inclusivity, and overall impact.

Immersive activities, sensory experiences, and creative approaches consistently yielded the highest levels of participation, learning, and enjoyment.

Section 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The Everyone's Evenlode programme has been a resounding success, demonstrating how targeted education, community engagement, and practical conservation can transform both people and places within a river catchment. Over 3.5 years, the programme delivered meaningful, hands-on learning experiences to more than 3,800 children and young people, engaged over 7,000 participants across schools, communities, and volunteers, and established enduring structures for ongoing environmental conservation.

The programme achieved its core objectives:

1. Raise awareness of catchment pressures:

Knowledge shared through attendance at events, presentations, educational sessions, and accessible online resources helped build a comprehensive and shared understanding of the catchment and the multiple pressures affecting the river system.

2. Educate the next generation: High-quality fieldwork, curriculum-linked activities, and citizen science projects fostered environmental literacy, curiosity, and practical skills in children and young people.

3. Inspire environmental conservation:

Environmental pledges, postcards, volunteer opportunities, and citizen science initiatives embedded a sense of responsibility and encouraged lasting behavioural change.

4. Reconnect communities with their local river:

Through guided walks, river-based learning, and community events, participants developed meaningful connections to the river and its ecosystems.

5. Enhance physical and emotional wellbeing:

Wellbeing-focused sessions, walks and outdoor learning activities improved participants' mood, confidence, and sense of agency.



Riparian conservation with young people.

Across these dimensions, feedback from teachers, participants, and volunteers consistently highlighted the programme's quality, inclusivity, and transformative impact. The combination of immersive outdoor learning, structured volunteering, and accessible community engagement created multiple layers of impact, reaching individuals, schools, families and communities while simultaneously contributing to river and catchment health awareness.

The programme's adaptability was a key strength. Challenges such as transport, staffing, weather, and pollution were met with creative solutions, including the "From the School Gate" initiative, use of mock rivers, volunteer support, and careful site selection. These strategies

not only maintained delivery but also demonstrated a scalable model for other catchments facing similar barriers.

Legacy and Long-Term Impact

The Everyone's Evenlode programme established lasting infrastructure for ongoing engagement:

- Schools have embedded river-based learning and citizen science into their curriculum, creating enduring educational impact.
- Volunteers and young people trained during the project continue to engage in conservation and citizen science.
- Digital resources, including recorded webinars and printable resources provide accessible tools for teachers, volunteers, and community groups.
- Geography PGCE trainees who attended our River School Training days have gone on to teach in local schools, giving them confidence to lead river-based fieldtrips in their new professional capacity.

Everyone's Evenlode demonstrates that high-quality education and community engagement are essential to successful catchment management. By inspiring curiosity, participation, and conservation, the programme created both immediate



Rowan Wymme-Jones

Summer holiday activities by the river.

and long-lasting benefits for people and nature alike, offering a replicable model for holistic, community-centred environmental programmes.

Recommendations

Drawing on lessons learned, the following recommendations are proposed to achieve the greatest impact:

1. Hands-on Educational Programmes

- Deliver waterside sessions with local schools.
- Develop citizen science projects with schools.
- Provide flexible, ready-to-use teacher resources.



CNL

Monitoring the river with school groups.



Ros Marsden

Tracks & Signs knowledge shared day.

2. Deepen Community Engagement and Inclusivity

- Create targeted activities for under-represented groups.
- Co-design events with community organisations.
- Develop catchment walks.

3. Strengthen Volunteer Capacity

- Support volunteers to sustain delivery and broaden reach.
- Offer training and development.
- Co-create social events to recognise volunteers' contribution.

4. Manage Environmental and Logistical Challenges

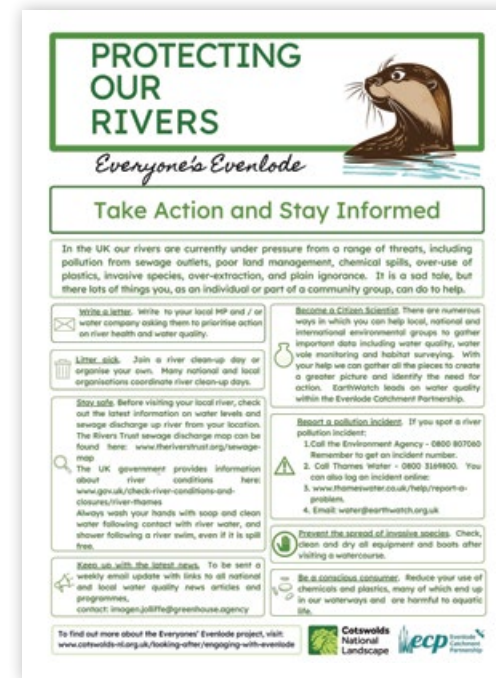
- Use adaptable delivery models to suit shifting river conditions, weather, pollution and access.
- Reduce transport barriers, including exploring subsidised travel for schools.

5. Broaden Knowledge Exchange and Legacy

- Create digital resources to reach wider audiences.
- Share learning, case studies and best practice for future programmes.
- Seek funding and explore diverse resourcing models.

Final Assessment

Everyone's Evenlode demonstrates that a well-resourced, community-centred, and curriculum-aligned approach to catchment management can achieve multiple outcomes simultaneously: environmental awareness, behavioural change, wellbeing, education, and community connection. By facilitating meaningful engagement with blue and green spaces, empowering young people and communities, and embedding volunteer networks, the programme has created a strong foundation for long-term river conservation and care.



From a funder perspective, the programme illustrates how strategic investment in education, access, and recreation can deliver measurable outcomes, generate community ownership, and inspire sustainable environmental action. The model is replicable and scalable, offering inspiration for other catchments seeking to combine ecological improvement with community engagement.

In conclusion, Everyone's Evenlode exceeded expectations in delivering high-quality, impactful, and inclusive engagement. With continued support, the momentum generated over the past four years could be sustained, enabling the Evenlode catchment to remain a living classroom, a source of wellbeing, and a vibrant focus for environmental conservation for generations to come.



Ros Marsden

School fieldtrip.

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Rowan Wynne-Jones

River Evenlode in flood.

Partner Organisations

It would have been impossible for the Everyone's Evenlode team to achieve so much in such a short period without the support of a wide network of organisations, businesses and individuals. This support took many forms, including the provision of funding, time, venues, expertise, connections and passion. For this, the Everyone's Evenlode team – James Webb, Jennifer Lanham, Rosalind Marsden, Rowan Wynne-Jones and Ruth Rudwick – would like to extend their sincere thanks. While they would like to acknowledge every person who contributed to the project, the sheer number makes this impractical.



CNL

Everyone's Evenlode team members (L-R), Jennifer Lanham, Rosalind Marsden, Rowan Wynne-Jones.

Section 8: Case Studies

To illustrate the impact and reach of Everyone's Evenlode, this section presents a selection of case studies and highlights, showing how the programme transformed learning, engagement, and community connection across the catchment. These examples demonstrate not only the breadth of delivery but also the depth of personal and environmental outcomes.

Case Study 1: **School Visits – First-Time River Experiences**

Multiple children and young people visiting Combe Mill in West Oxfordshire had never entered a river before the programme. During bespoke river fieldwork sessions, students waded into the Evenlode to measure channel width and depth, collect invertebrate samples, and test water quality.



Impact:

- Students expressed excitement at discovering wildlife first-hand, noting the “tiny creatures hiding under stones” and “the feel of the river under my feet.”
- Teachers reported heightened engagement with geography and science curricula, linking practical river measurements to classroom learning about hydrology, erosion, and habitat.
- The experience fostered curiosity and confidence outdoors, with several students noting they would explore local streams with their families for the first time.

This case demonstrates the power of hands-on, sensory learning in creating memorable, curriculum-linked experiences.



Case Study 2: **Duke of Edinburgh Awards – Volunteer Conservation**

The Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) programme offered young volunteers the opportunity to engage in practical conservation tasks across the catchment. Participants completed activities such as hedge laying, bird box building, willow weaving, and leaky dam construction.

Impact:

- 31 young people participated, with 21 achieving Bronze, 5 Silver, and 5 Gold awards.
- Volunteers developed practical skills, teamwork, and leadership, while contributing tangible environmental improvements to the catchment.
- Several participants continued engagement as citizen scientists or community volunteers, amplifying long-term impact.

This case highlights how structured volunteering can link personal development with meaningful environmental outcomes.

Case Study 3:

Voices of the River – Reaching Wider Audiences Beyond the Catchment

Everyone's Evenlode partnered with CNL and Earthwatch to deliver *Voices of the River*, a webinar series designed to broaden public understanding of river systems and the pressures they face. The series comprised hour-long online sessions, each focusing on a specific river-related theme and led by expert speakers.

Impact:

- 17 episodes of the *Voices of the River* webinar series were produced and remain freely available online, collectively attracting over 1,500 views, as of January 2026.
- The webinars increased public awareness and understanding of complex and often under-represented river issues, with topics ranging from angling and road run-off to PFAS pollution and nature-based solutions.
- The online format enabled engagement well beyond the Evenlode catchment, extending the programme's reach and creating a lasting educational resource.



This case demonstrates how accessible, digital learning can extend the programme's legacy, enabling continued public engagement and knowledge-sharing with minimal ongoing resource demand.



Case Study 4:

Refugee Families and Underserved Groups – Inclusive Engagement

Guided walks and bespoke sessions for refugee families and underserved communities ensured that Everyone's Evenlode was accessible to all. For example, a walking group from the Friendship Café in Gloucester, composed of Muslim women, participated in river exploration and water awareness activities.

Impact:

- Requests for repeat sessions indicated high satisfaction and engagement.
- These activities fostered trust, inclusivity, and long-term relationships between the programme and under-represented groups.

This case demonstrates the programme's commitment to inclusion and the power of culturally sensitive engagement.



Earthwatch

**Case Study 5:
Citizen Science Schools –
Inspiring the Next Generation**

Through partnership with Earthwatch Freshwater Watch, pupils from multiple schools conducted monthly water quality testing, measuring Nitrate and Phosphate concentrations and turbidity.

Impact:

- Created a cohort of young citizen scientists with ongoing involvement in monitoring the catchment.
- Increased awareness of river pollution, eutrophication, and the impact of human activity on ecosystems.

This case highlights the programme’s long-term contribution to environmental conservation and scientific literacy.

**Case Study 6:
Residential Camps –
Creating Meaningful
Connections with Nature**

Residential camping trips were delivered for children from urban areas including Bristol and London, giving young people the chance to spend time outdoors in beautiful natural settings. Many of the participants had never experienced camping or rural environments before. The trips helped build confidence, independence and a deeper connection with nature.

Impact

- Children had memorable, hands-on experiences with wildlife, farm animals and food growing, developing a better understanding of where food comes from.
- Schools and groups have planned return visits for the following year, helping build long-term relationships and ongoing opportunities.
- The experience opened up awareness of careers in rural land management and nature conservation for young people who are currently under-represented in these sectors.

This case study demonstrates the powerful impact of giving children from urban communities meaningful access to the natural environment in the Cotswolds. It shows how time outdoors can inspire curiosity, confidence and positive connections to nature.





**Cotswolds
National
Landscape**



Author

This report was written by Rowan Wynne-Jones, who works for Cotswolds National Landscape on outdoor learning and rivers-based community engagement as part of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership.

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The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), managed and looked after by the Cotswolds National Landscape Board (The legal name is the Cotswolds Conservation Board)