

# **The Wilbraham River Protection Society minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting**

**Date:** Tuesday 25 November 2025

**Venue:** Great Wilbraham Memorial Hall

## **1. Present**

30 members were present.

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from nine members.

## **3. Minutes of the 26th AGM**

The minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record.

## **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

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## **5. Chairman's Report**

### **Richard Townley**

The Committee met four times during the year. Committee membership remained unchanged, with the exception of the resignation of St John Starkie after the end of the financial year.

### **River Flow and Augmentation**

Early in 2025 there was good river flow, with springs running in the Temple grounds and possibly at Fulbourn. As borehole levels rose above 14 m AOD, the Environment Agency (EA) reduced flow augmentation from 24 hours to 12 hours daily, with the aim of further reduction if natural flow could be maintained.

Despite very low rainfall in March, river flow continued into April. However, by July, when rainfall was the lowest for 132 years, full augmentation resumed. At this time, water reached the New Cut confluence beyond Hawk Mill, but the stretch from there to the A1303 remained dry. This situation persisted into the autumn. Despite cumulative rainfall of only 28 cm up to mid-October, drought was not declared in the Society's area, unlike in surrounding regions, which were designated as experiencing a "prolonged dry period".

Adjustments to augmentation flow rates and pump operation demonstrated how rapidly river flow can be restored if swift action is taken, particularly following pump failure. It was also confirmed that flow loss was not due to cracked riverbeds.

## **Water Quality Monitoring**

In January, the Committee agreed to initiate monitoring of phosphate levels in river water with the assistance of volunteers. It was considered essential that data collection be standardised to allow integration into wider studies.

A pilot water quality survey was conducted in late February, sampling 21 river sites. Encouragingly, no results required reporting to the EA, although some findings suggested possible contamination from sewage, road runoff, and agrochemicals. The Society benefited from the professional support of Dr Steve Boreham during this work.

A second sampling session took place in June, revealing higher levels of coliforms, ammonia, and turbidity, likely due to lower water levels. Low nitrate levels suggested that augmentation water (known to be nitrate-rich) may have been diluted by rainfall or filtered by reeds. Further monitoring, including additional sites, is under consideration. River fly monitoring is also being explored, and training has been undertaken by Stephen Cory.

## **Walks and Engagement**

Three circular seasonal walks, as proposed in the previous year's report, took place in April, June, and October, coinciding with quarterly Committee meetings. The walks covered a 4.1-mile route from Little Wilbraham Windmill along the route of the river and returning via the droves. Twelve people attended the June and October walks. These events provided opportunities to observe reed cutting sites, citizen science sampling points, and potential locations for future monitoring of river levels and reed growth. The Society intends to continue this initiative. Although no annual river walk took place in 2025, one is planned for 2026.

## **River Monitoring Cameras**

Three live cameras have been installed to monitor river flow at gauging stations at the Lanes, Fulbourn/Coles Bridge, and downstream near the wooden footbridge close to the A1303. All cameras are accessible via the Society's website. Improvements to camera quality and relocation of the downstream camera are being considered. EA activity has been noted at the Lanes and at Coles Bridge, where new steps have been installed.

## **Advocacy and Communications**

The Society continues to monitor national and local reports and initiatives affecting chalk streams, the water industry, and local planning. Water supply, sewerage, and regulation remain high-profile issues, particularly given proposed increases in development in this water-scarce area and concerns about sewage treatment capacity.

The Society's website ([thewrps.org](http://thewrps.org)) remains an important source of information. A recent video documenting the river from the Temple Springs to the A1303 illustrates conditions during the summer. Noticeboards are regularly updated with information on Society activities and wildlife sightings.

The Chairman concluded by encouraging further involvement in the Society, both in membership and Committee roles, to support protection of the river and its wildlife.

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## **6. Treasurer's Report**

**Sharon Mulley**

- Opening cash balance: just over £1,400
- Income:
  - £283 from Fugolburna
  - £95 from AGM donations
- Expenditure:
  - Approximately £200 relating to Fugolburna
  - £725 for water testing

This resulted in an overall loss of £617, reducing cash reserves to £792.

The Chairman confirmed the Society's intention to continue water testing. Combined with bank charges of nearly £60 per annum, this means additional income sources will be required. Members were invited to suggest potential funding opportunities. Wadlow Wind Farm and the Kingsway Solar Fund were mentioned, both of which are under consideration.

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## **7. Secretary's Report**

**Rebecca Lomas**

The Society currently has 145 members. During the year, four new members joined and five members were lost.

The Society aims to expand its membership and activities. To support this, Public Liability Insurance will be required. In exploring insurance options, the Society has developed supportive links with several local and national organisations.

Publicity continues through village magazines, the Society website, and noticeboards.

Most Committee officer roles are due for renewal this year. It was agreed by members present that re-elections may take place during the year.

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## **8. Discussion**

- Fundraising ideas included approaching Wadlow Wind Farm and the Kingsway Solar Farm development for potential project funding.

- At the request of a member, David Lomas presented photographs of the river over the past 100 years and provided historical context regarding declining water levels.
  - A question was raised as to why drought was not declared during the driest summer for 138 years. David Lomas explained that Cambridge Water had been reluctant to declare drought for unclear reasons, whereas Anglian Water had been more responsive. Members offered various theories.
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## 9. Film Screening

The film *Testing the Waters* was shown during the break.

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## 10. Guest Speaker

Richard Townley introduced **Dr Laurie Friday**, zoologist and former Programme Manager at the Cambridge Centre for Landscape Regeneration, with over 40 years' experience working in the Fens, particularly at Wicken Fen.

Dr Friday gave a talk entitled *Restoring Wetland Biodiversity in the Fens: What Can Ditches Do for Us?* She outlined the history of fenland drainage and the resulting biodiversity loss. The Great Fen Survey was discussed, highlighting differences in species richness across various ditch types. Ditches with wider, gently sloping or stepped profiles were shown to support greater plant and invertebrate biodiversity. Given the extensive network of ditches in Fenland, small structural changes could have significant positive impacts.

The meeting concluded with a question-and-answer session and formal thanks to Dr Friday.

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