



Working together to protect and enhance our water environment

What our partnership in the River Evenlode catchment has achieved this year

Smarter Water Catchment Plan
Update Document
March 2025

Working in partnership

Thames Water

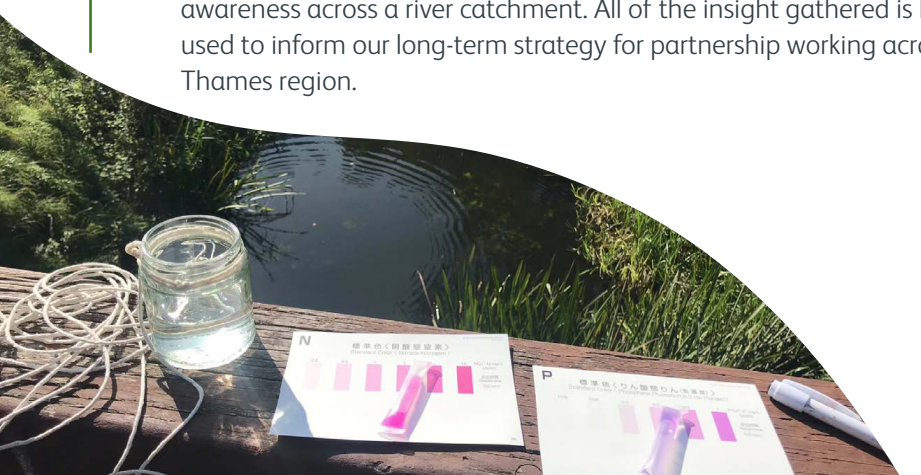
ecp Evenlode Catchment Partnership

Welcome to this update

In March 2021, we collectively set out a 10-year plan to protect and enhance the River Evenlode catchment. Throughout 2024/25, we continue to deliver the actions outlined in this plan and have started to collect data to demonstrate the additional benefits of this programme.

It should be noted that in October 2023, a decision was made on behalf of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP), not to continue working on this programme beyond March 2025 citing disappointment in Thames Water's Draft Business Plan. This decision may be revisited following the publication of the Final Business Plan, but until such a time, this update only includes milestones taking place this Asset Management Plan period (2020 - 2025).

We've been able to measure how working in partnership can leverage additional match funding, support and create new jobs, enhance and create habitat and biodiversity and increase engagement and public awareness across a river catchment. All of the insight gathered is being used to inform our long-term strategy for partnership working across the Thames region.



Working in partnership

We've been working with many different partners across the River Evenlode catchment, bringing together expertise from many specialisms to make sure our future plans are robust and right for the local environment and communities.

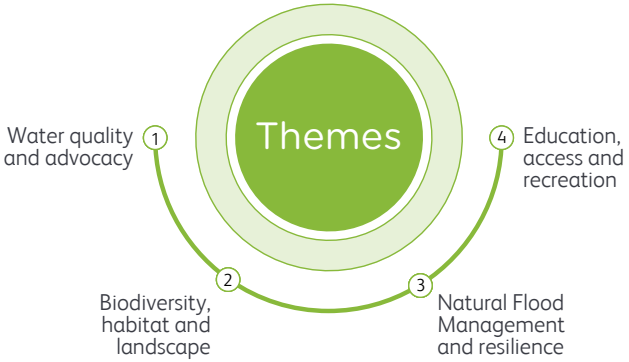
Our partners include water companies, regulators, non-government organisations, academia and local interest groups – all have given either finances or in-kind support to help make this project a success.

Contents

What we're aiming to achieve

Throughout 2024/25, we've focused on delivering the actions set out under each of our key themes. The main focus has been on analysing data to shape our strategies and delivering interventions across the catchment.

River Evenlode strategy



Putting the right governance in place

A steering group with representatives from across the different sectors has guided the development and delivery of this catchment plan. We also have technical working groups for each key theme, bringing in additional stakeholders who are responsible for ensuring the best plan is in place to achieve our objectives. It's also critical that Catchment Partnerships have the resources to partner with us, so we're funding multiple positions to support with facilitation, community engagement and data collection & analysis.

What's our collective vision for the River Evenlode catchment?

Our aim is to achieve a good ecological status across the whole catchment. To achieve this, we must ensure Thames Water has sufficient capacity and infrastructure to process all effluent and remove excess phosphorus. We must also reverse the degradation and fragmentation of our habitats and species, historic landscapes and freshwater bodies. The combined pressures of climate change, the rapid growth of rural settlements and lack of investment, makes reaching this goal harder. More extreme weather events also increase the risk of flooding or untreated sewage spills.

We need to work closely together to tackle these new challenges. We'll engage with local communities, landowners and stakeholders to improve connectivity throughout the catchment and share experiences, solutions, expertise and culture. We'll also expand our monitoring and data collection for water quality and biodiversity using evidence to drive change, deliver restoration projects, enhance ecosystem services and reset attitudes.

Aim for 2025

Our aim is to collate the benefits and lessons learnt from all three Smarter Water Catchments trial projects and disseminate this information in 2025.

On the next page is a case study on some of our collaborative work within the River Evenlode catchment and the benefits it's delivered so far.

Steering group members

Cotswolds National Landscape

Earthwatch

Environment Agency

Local resident representative

Natural England

Thames Water

Wild Oxfordshire

Windrush AEC

A project case study

Cornwell River Restoration and Wetland Creation

Start date: Feb 2021 **End date:** Sept 2024

Project description
The landowner, Alex Ward, approached the ECP to enhance the wetland habitat on three fields in the Cornwell Estate and address the poor water quality in the Chipping Norton Brook. The fields were of low agricultural value typically used for seasonal cattle grazing. The Chipping Norton Brook receives treated and untreated effluent from Chipping Norton sewage treatment works (STW). In times of low flow during the summer, most of the brook's water comes from the STW.

Objectives
To create natural river channels, provide room for the river to move and slow the flow to create wetland habitats.

Restoration and creation work
Three different designs of wetland were constructed in Autumn 2023 by diverting the Chipping Norton Brook.

Upper Wetland: Excavating new channels and backwaters into the field exposed the natural river gravels. The action of the water moving freely in this area has fashioned riffles and deeper water.

Middle Wetland: The topsoil was removed, exposing the river gravels and clay subbase. New channels push the water into the field where it's no longer constrained.

Lower Wetland: This wetland had the least intervention with channels created to push water into the field and re-join the brook lower down. The water can spread widely across the field which has a gentle gradient. The flow has slowed considerably, and vast amounts of sediment have been deposited already.

Fish Spawning Bed: Constructed with gravel, boulders and tree trunks to create slower flowing refuges in steps to allow fish to swim against the fast flow. The gravel bed is the favoured substrate for fish spawning and the faster flowing water keeps the gravel free of sediment.

Outcomes
- 3.4 ha wetland habitat created
- 3.03 ha species-rich grassland created
- 1 km of river reconnected to its floodplain
- 14,500 aquatic plugs planted
- 175 native broadleaved tree whips planted
- 25,000 m^3 flood water stored

Project costs

Thames Water contribution:	£88,000
Public funding contribution:	
• EA WEIF grant	£105,000
• CNL FiPL grant	£146,000
Total Cost:	**£339,000**

Lessons learnt
- Allow plenty of time and contingencies for disruption due to bad weather
- Thames Water don't have records of all their services – there is a parallel pipe between Kingham and Chipping Norton
- Water runs down the gravel filled trench for the foul water pipe in great quantity
- Don't stand still while walking in soft clay!
- Grant payments that only occur at the end of the project can put a small charity in financial jeopardy

Future plans
Ideally, to secure one or more PhD students to study these three different wetlands analysing:
- How the channels and the ecology change with time
- How effective the wetlands are at nutrient reduction

Project highlights
Heron and egret arrived within days of project completion. Within months we had the first recorded sightings of Green Sandpiper and Ringed Plover. Unusual sightings were Ruff, Osprey and Great Egret. The water entering the upper wetland is high in nutrients and very turbid. The water exiting the lower wetland is clear with a lower nutrient load, and this is even before many aquatic and marginal plants have established.


Upper wetland


Middle wetland


Lower wetland

Delivering our shared plan

Highlighted below are the milestones we have achieved in 2024/25.

Water quality and advocacy action plan

Sub-theme: Point source pollution

Year 1 21-22

- Expand existing Citizen Science sampling programme and provide equipment to volunteers to monitor nitrate (N), phosphorus (P) and turbidity. Ensure alignment with wider water quality monitoring project
- Explore and agree storage of data, mapping and access using existing systems
- Explore integrating with other water quality projects; using existing knowledge from partners

Year 2 22-23

- Develop community mapping and monitoring of watercourses
- Integrate data from Citizen Science
- Continue monitoring. Collate and analyse sonde data
- Compare and contrast real-time data sets with headline data currently provided by TW to the EA and OFWAT
- Explore training specialists to monitor across the catchment

Year 3 23-24

- Collate sonde data with existing Riverfly and Citizen Science P and N monitoring
- Recruit and support Riverfly specialists in monitoring across the catchment
- Continue monitoring and data analysis as before
- Review sonde numbers and locations

Year 4 24-25

- Explore training specialists to monitor across the catchment
- Continue monitoring and data analysis, including integration of data from Citizen Science
- Expand monitoring programme
- Plan pilot technology P removal project
- Undertake feasibility assessment on shortlisted sites for pilot technology P removal project
- Deliver pilot technology P removal project

Year 5 25-26

Year 6 26-27

Year 7 27-28

Year 8 28-29

Year 9 29-30

Year 10 30-31

Following the decision taken on behalf of the ECP to part ways from Thames Water and not accept any future funding from April 2025 onwards, the milestones for these years have been removed in this instance. The ECP are due to review their Governance arrangements and propose a new model going forwards. At this stage it would be appropriate to review the contents of the long-term plan for the Evenlode and reintroduce any future milestones if necessary.

Key

Milestones: Milestones we've achieved this year; Milestones we've updated or are new this year

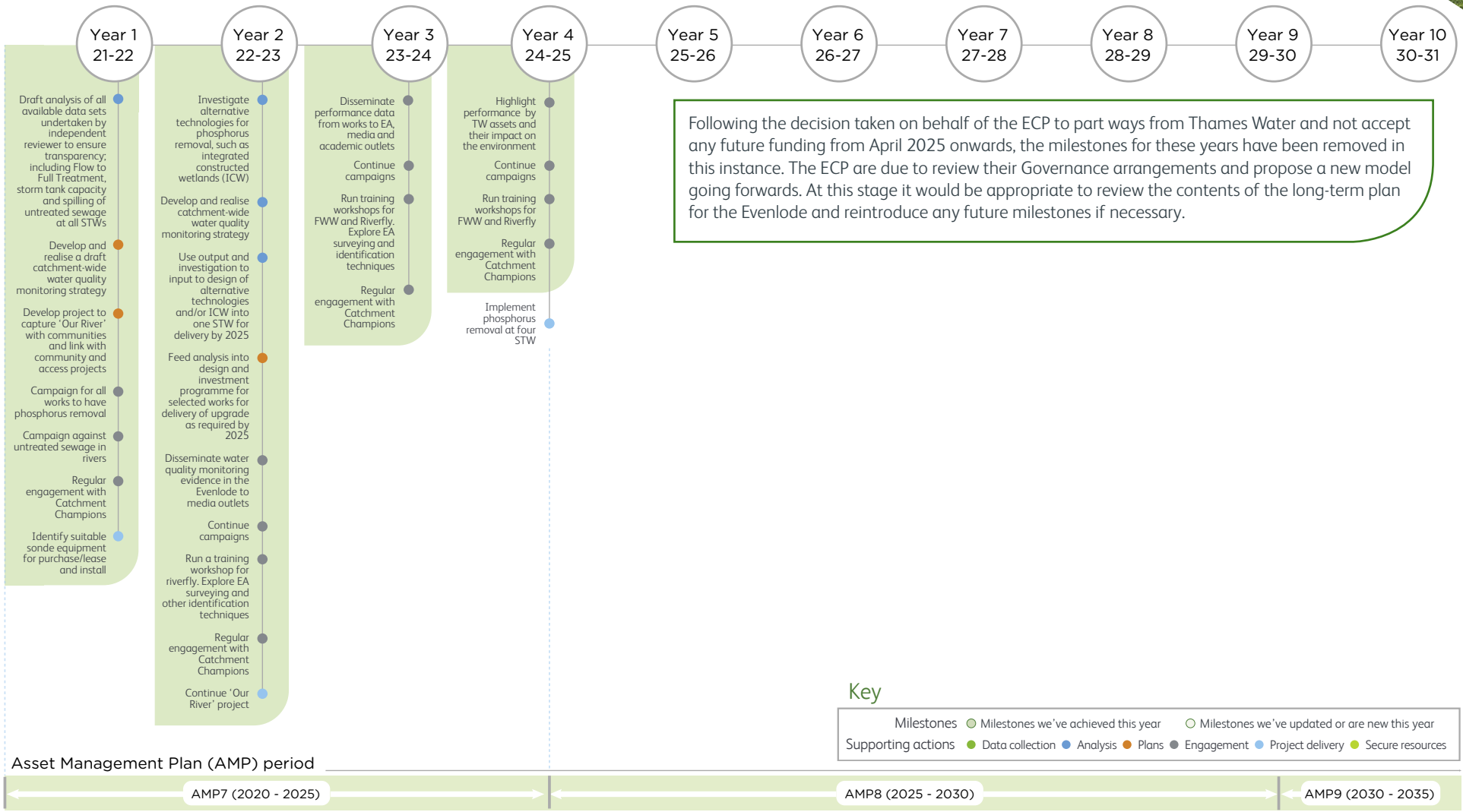
Supporting actions: Data collection; Analysis; Plans; Engagement; Project delivery; Secure resources

Asset Management Plan (AMP) period

AMP7 (2020 - 2025) | AMP8 (2025 - 2030) | AMP9 (2030 - 2035)

Water quality and advocacy action plan

Sub-theme: Point source pollution



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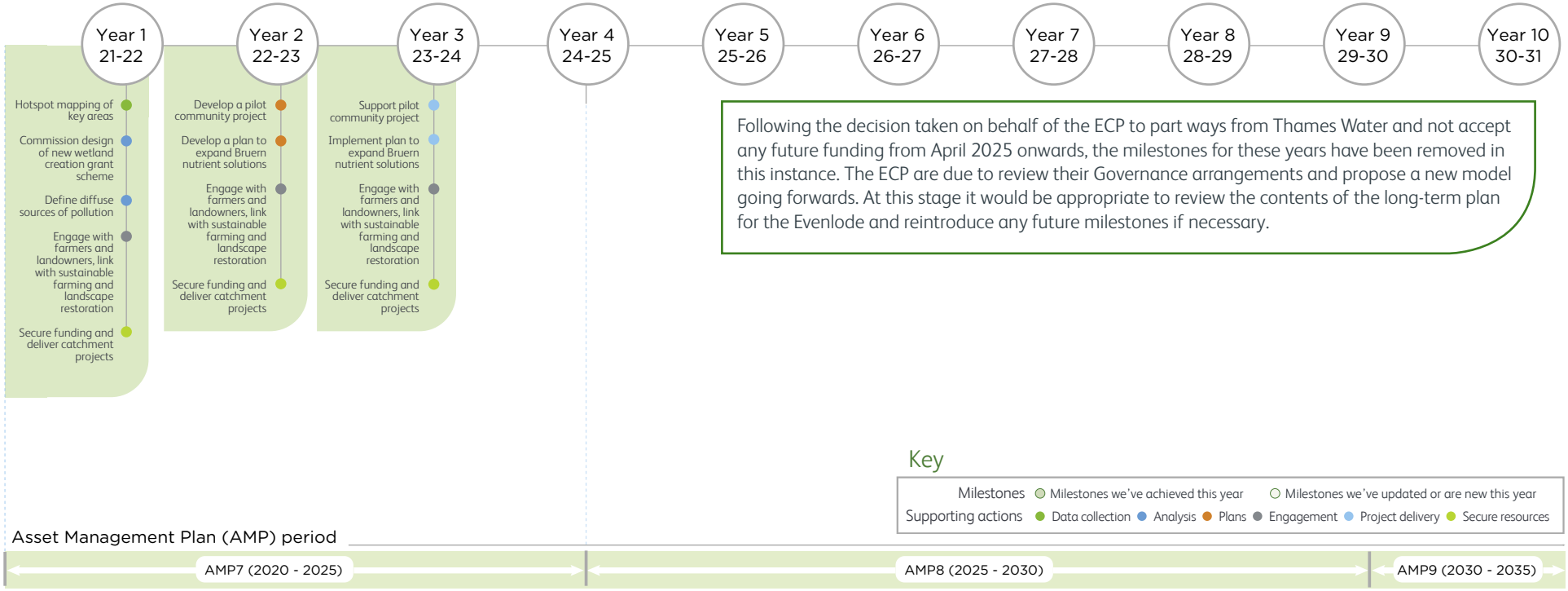
Water quality and advocacy action plan

Sub-theme: Diffuse pollution



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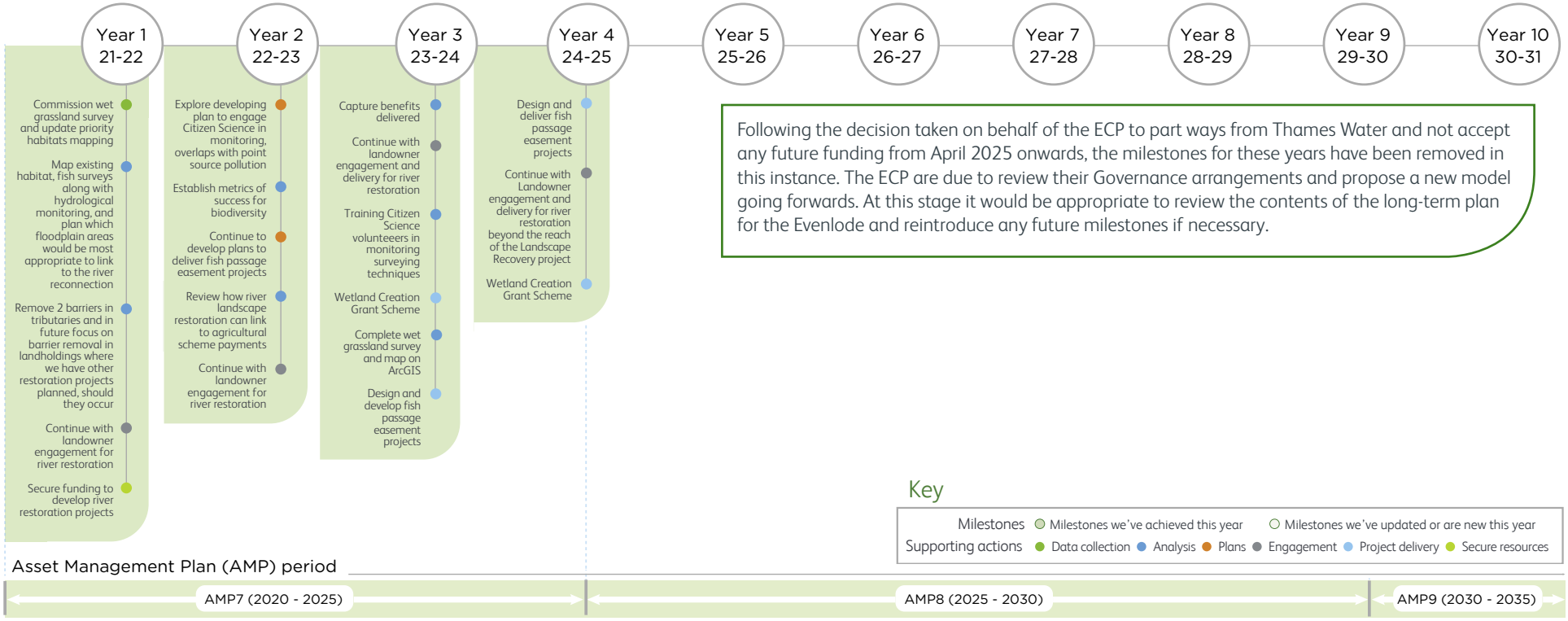
Biodiversity, habitat and landscape action plan

Sub-theme: River and floodplain restoration



Biodiversity, habitat and landscape action plan

Sub-theme: Community

Year 1 21-22
- Plan for river community days
- Enable Milton triangle pond project to be delivered
- Engage with communities on freshwater habitat projects
- Secure funding for river community day

Year 2 22-23
- Establish plans for river community day in conjunction with outreach officer
- Prioritise projects, plan, develop secure funding for delivery
- Organise river community day in conjunction with outreach officer
- Secure funding for river community day

Year 3 23-24
- Support at least one community in improving localised environmental benefits
- Deliver a river community event

Year 4 24-25
- Support at least one community in improving localised environmental benefits

Year 5 25-26

Year 6 26-27

Year 7 27-28

Year 8 28-29

Year 9 29-30

Year 10 30-31

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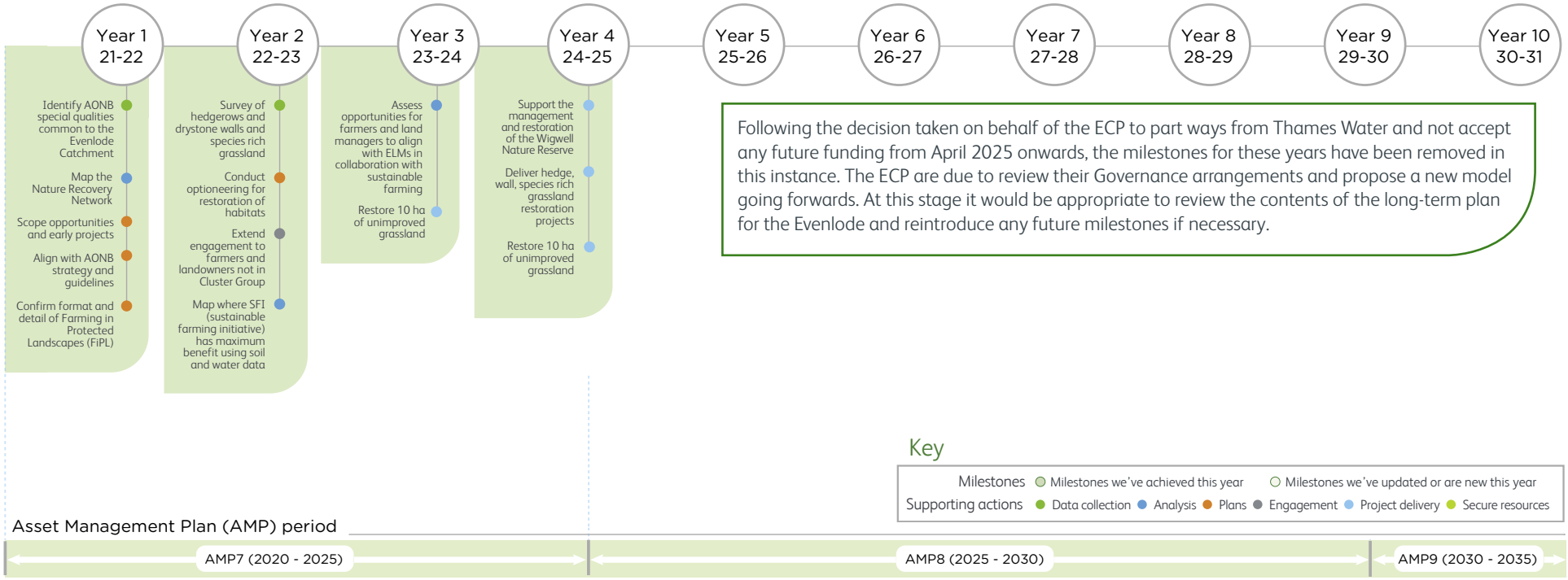
Biodiversity, habitat and landscape action plan

Sub-theme: Landscape restoration



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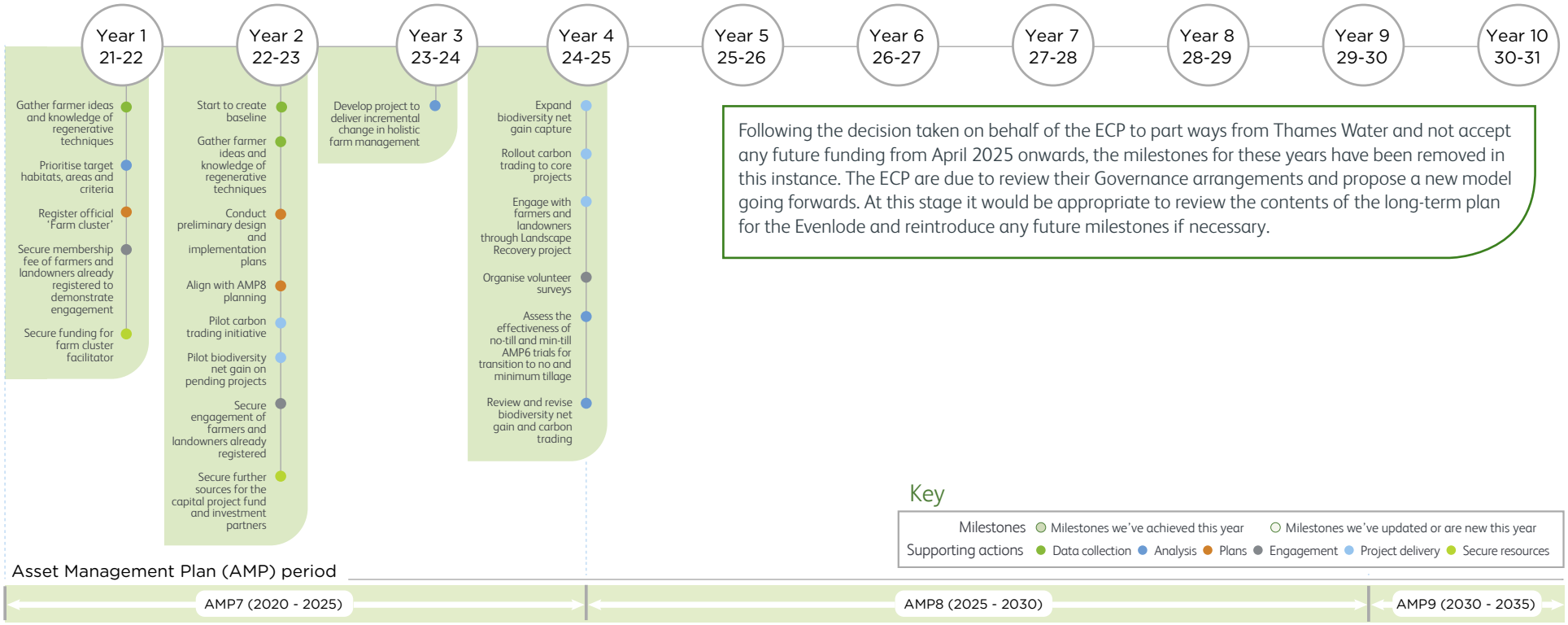
Biodiversity, habitat and landscape action plan

Sub-theme: Sustainable farming



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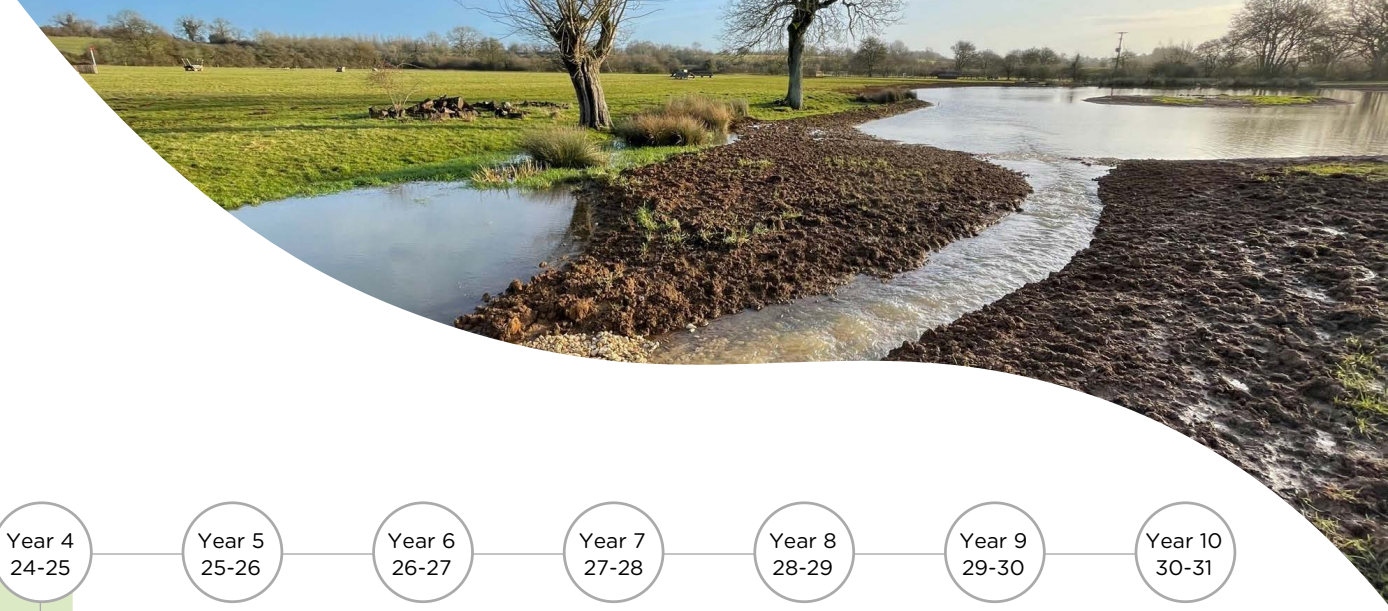
Natural Flood Management and resilience action plan



Year 1 21-22

- Undertake a review of priority flood locations and communities
- Commission detailed feasibility study for Bledington drawing on examples from previous studies
- Create survey to understand public attitude to Natural Flood Management
- Host a NFM knowledge share with landowners, farmers and local community
- Assist with installation of community flood warning at The Heath, Milton under Wychwood

Year 2 22-23

- Progress Bledington scheme as a joint venture opportunity to deliver NFM and climate resilience
- Review regenerative agricultural practices in line with farm cluster initiatives
- Identify farm-scale surface water pilot and tie in with catchment sensitive farming and landscape restoration
- Host a NFM knowledge share with landowners, farmers and local community
- Fund NFM interventions following feasibility study and walkovers
- Monitor NFM schemes pre and post implementation, where appropriate

Year 3 23-24

- Develop NFM intervention plan
- Align with ELMs
- Implement pilot farm scale NFM scheme 1
- Use lessons learnt to assist another community with an early flood warning system
- Design a field scale NFM intervention

Year 4 24-25

- Review NFM farm scale pilot scheme and field scale intervention trials taking account of climate resilience
- Review joint venture opportunities to deliver NFM and climate resilience
- Design pilot farm scale NFM scheme 1
- Plan and secure funding to deliver NFM interventions at field scale in landholding 2

Year 5 25-26

Year 6 26-27

Year 7 27-28

Year 8 28-29

Year 9 29-30

Year 10 30-31

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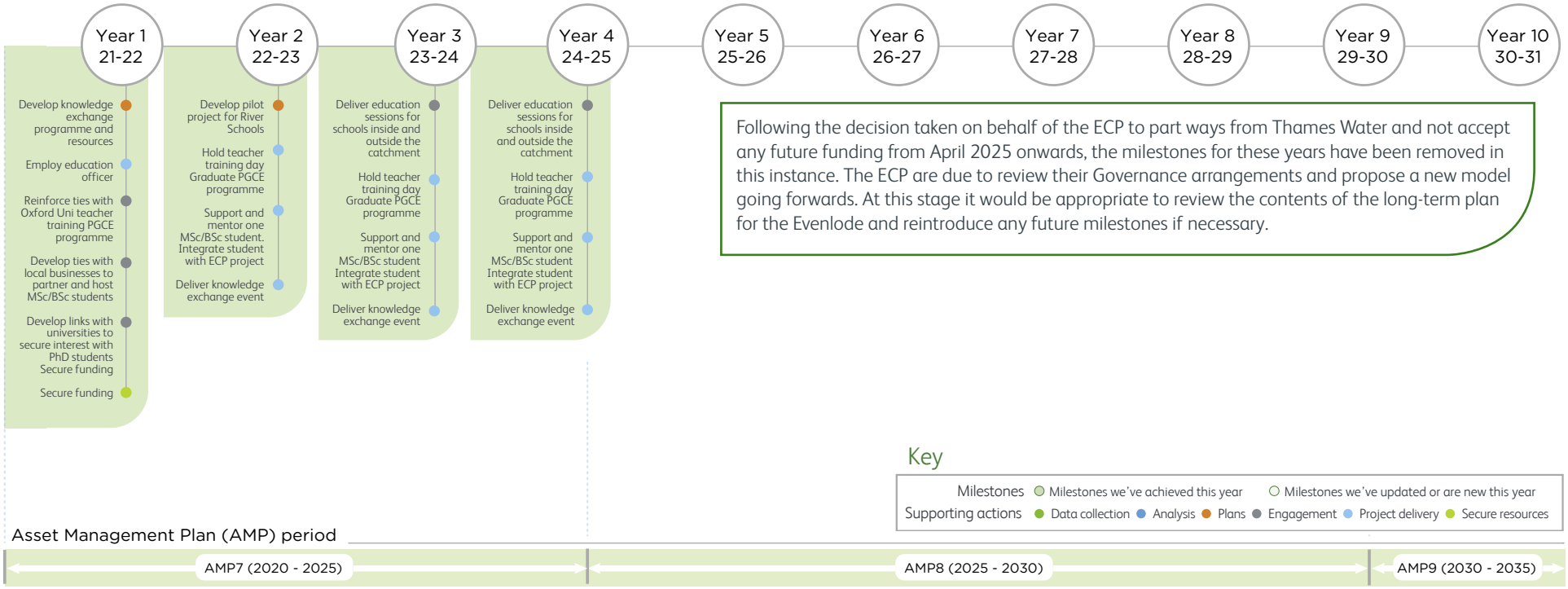
Education, access and recreation action plan

Sub-theme: Education



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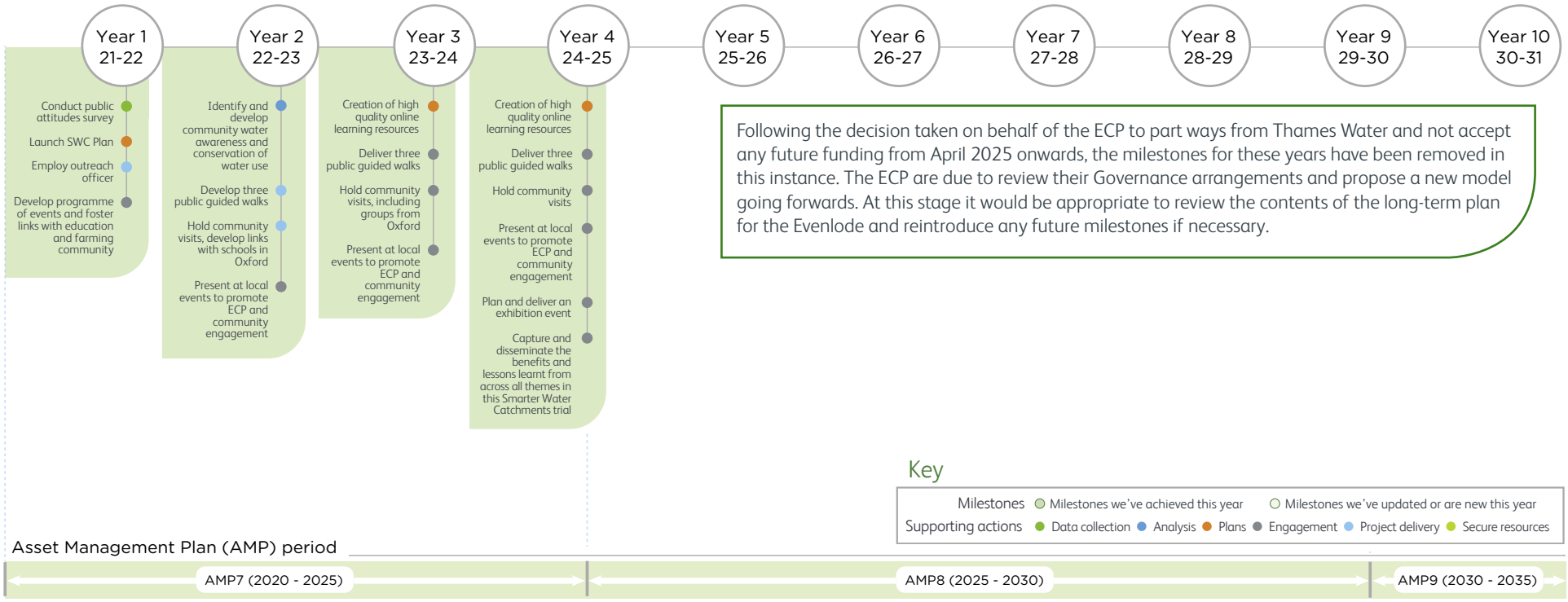
Education, access and recreation action plan

Sub-theme: Community, access and recreation



Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank all the organisations and individuals in the partnership who've contributed their valuable technical inputs, insights and time. Through various forums and engagement platforms, we've been able to jointly develop this plan. We greatly appreciate everyone's commitment and enthusiasm, so we can collectively achieve this vision and deliver the plan.

The information provided in this plan is correct as of 31 March 2025 and has the formal support of all key stakeholders.

Partners

Atkins
Berks Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
Blenheim Palace and Estate
Catchment Champions
Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH)
Cotswolds National Landscape
Cotswolds Rivers Trust
Daylesford
Earthwatch
Environment Agency
Evenlode Catchment Partnership members
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group - South West
Farm-Ed
Forestry Commission
Natural England
North East Cotswolds Farmer Cluster
Oxfordshire County Council
RSK
Sylva Foundation
Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre
University of Oxford
Upper Thames Fisheries Consultative
West Oxfordshire District Council
Wild Oxfordshire
Windrush AEC
Wychwood Forest Trust
Wychwood Project

Photography

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Page 2 photo taken by Earthwatch

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Pages 4, 8, 9 and 15 photos taken by Wild Oxfordshire

Pages 5, 12 and 14 photos taken by David Gasca-Tucker, Atkins

Page 11 photo taken by Jay Neale, Atkins

Your views

We'd really welcome your views on this smarter water catchment plan. Please share your thoughts and ideas on an email to our dedicated team at partnerships@thameswater.co.uk.

Working in partnership

Thames Water

ecp Evenlode Catchment Partnership