Nature

Healthy chalk streams are famous for their exceptionally rich wildlife. Their cool, gin-clear water is rich in minerals. The lush vegetation that grows in and beside the streams makes them excellent for wildlife.

Water Crowfoot, Water Starwort & Fool's Watercress grow in the clean gravel of the riverbed.

The banks have swathes of Reeds, Bulrush, Yellow Flag, Meadowsweet and **Purple Loosestrife** (below), all buzzing with insects in summer time.

The River Wye

The River Wye is an **internationally rare chalk stream**, one of 9 in the Chilterns National Landscape and only 300 globally. It rises in the Chiltern Hills and flows from West Wycombe through the town to Loudwater and Woodburn to join the River Thames at Bourne End.

Today, much of the Wye is a peaceful oasis teeming with wildlife. But for centuries it was a busy, industrial river, powering dozens of watermills that helped local communities develop thriving industries and a rich industrial heritage.

Did you know?

There is a time capsule buried in a secret location at Kingsmead!

A special canister containing writing, images and objects was put into the ground for future generations. It was contributed to by pupils from nearby Loudwater School in 2021.

History

People have lived and worked beside the Wye for millennia, depending on it for a reliable water supply and as a vital source of power for industry.

There were paper mills on both streams in the past, using the water to drive machinery. The mineral-rich water also helped to create high quality papers.

Watermills were built from Saxon times, and **twenty mills were recorded on the river in the Domesday Book of 1086**.

The early mills ground wheat & barley into flour for bread and for animal feed.

As the local economy grew, the machinery in some mills was converted to thicken or 'full' cloth and to make paper.

This heritage is reflected today by the naming of 'The Papermill' Public House & Hotel nearby, for example.

Kingsmead has two chalk streams flowing alongside the grassland, the Wye on north side, and Marsh Brook, which is also known as Back Stream forms the southern edge.

Kingsmead is one of High Wycombe's larger recreation spaces at approx. 30 acres or 12 Hectares. Owned by Buckinghamshire Council, whose parks & open spaces team manage the site including public toilets, play areas, and taking sports pitch bookings.

Like many recreation grounds, Kingsmead has a blend of many uses: sport (home of HWRUFC & South Bucks Netball Assoc), informal recreation - it is well used by picnickers, kids playing, walkers & their dogs, and of course wildlife.

The site forms part of the **strategic flood defences** of the town, un-developed land which holds flood water when required. This is an increasingly frequent need due to climate change altering weather patterns intensifying rainfall throughout the year.

Along with the Rye & Desborough Rec, Kingsmead helps keep water out of people's homes, businesses and reduces flooding on roads too. It is a historical function, a 'mead' is a wet meadow/grassland that is periodically flooded or saturated. The area Kingsmead is located in is, after all, called **Wycombe Marsh**!

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