I set up Community Connection Projects CIC in May 2014 to undertake land & river improvement work in Watford. In October 2015 I began an 18 month contract with Groundwork South as rivers officer and catchment host for the Colne Catchment Action Network; this work gave me a much greater understanding of the issues facing our rivers and the stakeholders involved, I also went on a Thames21 training course to become a badged clear-up group, I found this really useful providing amongst other things knowledge of the risk assessments and method statements essential for my river work. I’ve been supported by Watford Borough Council since I set up, & work with volunteers, community payback, corporate groups, regular work experience student placements and paid staff; I’ve also received funding through Tesco’s Bags of Help, and other grants.
I record the river work I do on a public Facebook group page: called ‘Watford in the Water’ which is also the name of the project set up aimed at establishing regular Watford river clearance events and finding, supporting and co-ordinating stakeholders to help improve, monitor, understand and enjoy our rivers amenity and wildlife. I engage in activities like litter clearance, invasive species control, habitat improvements, pollution & riverfly monitoring, misconnections work & reporting and other river and waterway issues.
In April 2018 Watford Borough Council agreed to fund CCP to focus on River Colne improvement work on a regular basis, including funding an apprentice to work with Me. Since April 2018 I’ve organised 85 clear up events, with paid staff, volunteers, community payback & other groups & businesses.

During these clear ups estimated collections from the Colne and its banks by CCP are of 470 Green Veolia bags & 20 jumbo bags of litter, (containing over 5000 plastic bottles, 3,200 cans and 1,400 glass bottles and over 13,000 small plastic items (bags, bottle tops & bits). 137 tyres, 82 large metal items (drums, tanks and canisters) 70 trolleys, 6 motorbikes and over 2500 cigarette butts (in two collections from the front of Tesco Extra).

CCP installed a “boom” in the Oxhey Park stretch of the river in 2014. This is a structure which acts as a barrier across the width of the river, trapping litter which can then be disposed of rather than flowing downstream. It is cleared on average every 3 weeks.
CCP has also been involved in habitat improvements work along the River Colne, holding 22 events in Watford since April 2018 with various parties including the Environment Agency, Wild Trout Trust, The Colne Valleys Fisheries Consultative, Community Payback & Volunteers. We’ve also planted native plant species such as Pendulus Sedge, Floating Sweet-grass and Purple Loosestrife along the river bank at various locations, some of which we grow from seed at local allotments.
CCP carries out control and treatment of invasive species including Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Signal Crayfish. Plants identified are mapped to enable effective control and management. Permission is gained from the Environment Agency and the landowner before control commences. We’ve also submitted seeds and leaves to CABI in working towards a biocontrol, and just received a £2500 grant from Affinity water to progress this work.
We regularly survey the local river & pollution incidents are reported to the relevant bodies including the Environment Agency, Thames Water and Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative. We also undertake Riverfly monitoring.
Pictures: Fish stocking in late November. Community payback fitting grill to protect river bank by Tesco from litter. Me collecting litter in channel with 75 litre trugs. 10’ Jon boat useful in providing a support platform for river activities. Brushwood bundles tied with 6mm sisal using tautline hitch knot. Payback clearing river banks in late winter the dormant vegetation making it much easier to spot & clear.
I’ve also re-stocked the Colne with fish with our EA fisheries officer, & worked extensively with the local community, community payback and others. CCP has built up relationships with many stakeholders along the River Colne in Watford through a regular presence and proactive engagement. This includes raising awareness of river work, highlighting responsibilities and reporting issues. Often small reaches can have multiple relevant contacts, landowners, managing agents and other relevant groups and then an array of specific local issues.

Stakeholders include: Riparian landowners/Residents/Businesses/Schools/Housing associations/Police/ Local authorities

I strongly believe in the value of local action & the importance of empowering people & communities moving away from the them & us attitudes between statutory bodies & the community, encouraging collaborative working to support transparent decision making. I think these are positive factors which in part result from the catchment based approach. It’s also so encouraging that best practice & experience can now be easily shared through the internet & social media.

I’ve found that often local knowledge & action are the keys to action & understanding, often informing larger issues of general & strategic relevance.

Litter is a more important and complex issue than generally perceived, studies have shown there is a direct link between litter and crime levels, & litter affects people’s feelings of wellbeing and safety, ruining people’s enjoyment of the countryside and often making open spaces feel abandoned like waste grounds. When it appears no one cares, crime and disorder can escalate. Litter is evidence & with plastic production continually increasing we desperately need to find new solutions to protect our precious and receding natural environment. involving young children & schools in work has I believe numerous benefits, raising the status & awareness of this type of work, & posing the question what sort of legacy are we leaving them.