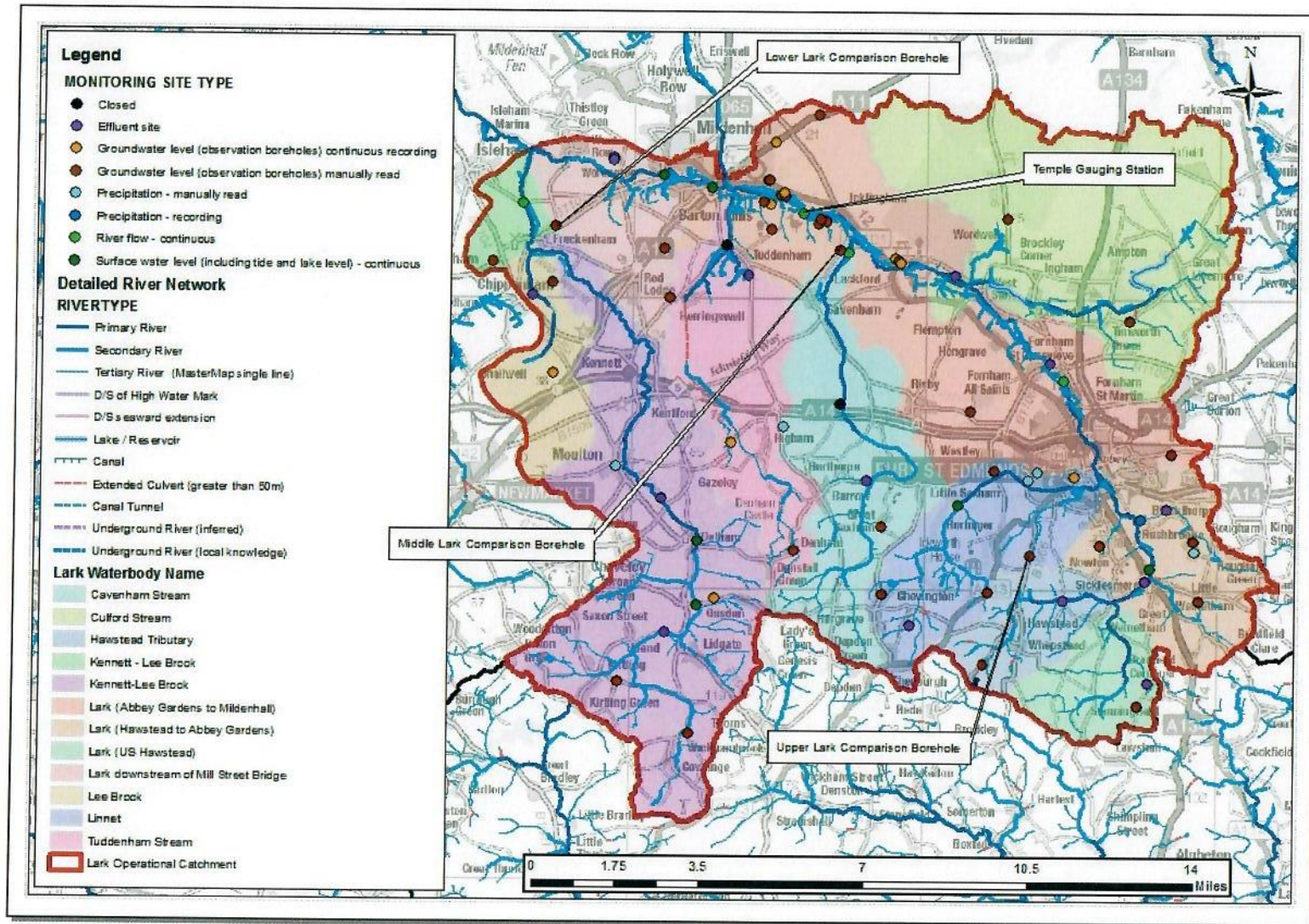


# Map of Comparison Sites



Note from Lindsay Hargreaves – Officer of River Lark Abstractors Ltd  
A brief description of the River Lark Abstractors Ltd

1. Map of the catchment area, see attached, lifted from an EA presentation, which gives a good indication of the boundary. The catchment area includes the Lark and its tributaries. Tributaries include the Kennet and Linnet Rivers, Lee Brook, Cavenham, Tuddenham and Culford Streams. It aligns with the Environment Agency water resource units. For clarity, it does not include the level controlled stretches of the river downstream of Mildenhall or the cut-off channel.
2. The group's role has evolved through time. Initially it existed purely as a liaison group between abstractors and the EA (and its predecessor body, the National Rivers Authority). From that day to this it has met at least annually in March to discuss the state of the aquifer and the river with the EA, identify risks to abstractors and agree terms of voluntary restrictions where appropriate.
3. A core committee was formed in the early stages to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the EA and to call additional meetings as required. The original emphasis was on groundwater abstractions as these were vulnerable to Section 57 (immediate cessation) conditions. The NFU helped in the formation of the group and has supported its activities to this day, firstly through Paul Hammett and now his successor, Kelly Hewson-Fisher. NFU support is in-kind, offering meeting space, secretariat and officer time.
4. As time has passed and the regulatory process has become more complex, eg the introduction of processes such as CAMS (Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies) and the WFD (Water Framework Directive), the agenda discussions have widened to include these elements to develop abstractor awareness and facilitate feedback to the EA on regulatory policy matters. In more recent times as the environmental pressure has increased, the need for the group to become more pro-active has emerged and the decision was taken to formalise the structure. A company limited by guarantee was formed earlier this year to provide a platform whereby the group can raise funds, both externally and from its members to support the necessary research and activity to understand and protect water for agriculture in the catchment, and to allow the group to play a more active role in wider catchment, regional and national water resources policy matters. This more formal group (River Lark Abstractors Ltd) is now emerging and will replace the existing informal group.
5. It was formed in 1991 following an immediate cessation order banning all abstraction of groundwater for spray irrigation. This happened at peak growing season for root vegetables and came without notice causing widespread disruption and crop damage. The group has an informal structure and any abstractor in the catchment is considered a member. The group has regular contact with around 20 abstractors holding over 60 individual spray/trickle irrigation abstraction licences. These cover winter, summer, groundwater and surface water abstractions.
6. The members are typically farming businesses growing a range of arable and vegetable crops. Protected cropping also features. The main irrigated crops are potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips. Farm size varies from very large downwards (>4000ha to <100ha) and business structure is equally varied. Most of the land is owner occupied and managed in family-based operations. The businesses tend to be stable with land ownership changing hands only rarely.
7. There has been informal collaboration between abstractors over many years. This has served to develop food production in the catchment, allow farming businesses to evolve along differing lines, demonstrate the need for water for crop production and protect access to it. In more recent times the group has worked with the River Lark Catchment Partnership, the Rivers Trust and the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) in research work carried out by Cranfield University looking at innovative ways of better utilising the available water resource through more formal ways of water sharing. The group is also involved in Innovate UK grant supported work looking at the development of digital technology to manage abstractions using near-real time data, again with a view to developing systems better able to optimise abstraction opportunities.

8. The collaborative approach has hitherto been largely farmer to farmer but this has rapidly moved to a multi-sector approach, working with all water users in the catchment to better understand how the needs of all water users are managed and to allow the agricultural sector to protect its interests. This multi-sector approach serves to keep the Lark aligned with the national and regional water long term water resources planning processes seeking to develop longer-term strategies for water security on a multi-sector basis.

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