

Notes of the meeting of Wye Catchment Nutrient Management Board held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Wednesday 16 July 2025 at 2.00 pm

Chairperson:

Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst Herefordshire Council

Voting members present in person:

Merry Albright	Herefordshire Construction Industry Representative
Louise Bodnar	Voice of the River
Gordon Green	Wye Salmon Association
Andrew McRobb	Council for Protection of Rural England
Tom Tibbits	The Friends of the Upper Wye

Voting members in attendance remotely:

Liz Bickerton	Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority
Councillor Jackie Charlton	Powys County Council
Christine Hugh-Jones	Council for Protection of Rural Wales
Georgie Hyde	National Farmers Union
Sarenta King	Radnorshire Wildlife Trust
Councillor Andrew McDermid	Forest of Dean District Council

Other participants present in person:

Ben Boswell	Herefordshire Council
Sophie Bourton	Nature Restoration Fund - Nutrients, Natural England
Alison Caffyn	
Daniel Humphreys	Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
Claire Minett	Natural England
Martin Quine	Environment Agency
Kate Speke Adams	Herefordshire Rural Hub
Alastair Wager	Nature Restoration Fund, Natural England

Other participants in attendance remotely:

Ethan Hamer	Powys County Council
Stuart Smith	Wye Salmon Association
Ann Weedy	Natural Resources Wales
Martin Williams	Farm Herefordshire

Support officers:

Ben Baugh	Herefordshire Council
John Coleman	Herefordshire Council

Welcome

The Chairperson welcomed attendees to the meeting and the Voice of the River made opening remarks expressing gratitude for the essential role of water in sustaining life and for the work by individuals to support the restoration of the river.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were noted from voting board members: Nick Day, The Friends of the Lower Wye; Councillor Catrin Maby, Monmouthshire County Council; Councillor Andrew McDermid, Forest of Dean District Council (joined remotely later in the meeting); and Richard Tyler, for Save the Wye. Apologies were also noted from regular participant Emma Guy, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority.

2. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the previous meeting held on 16 April 2025 were received and agreed as an accurate record.

With reference to the question asked at the last meeting about the steps Natural Resources Wales (NRW) had taken to reduce the nutrient load in the Trothy, the following message from Nick Day was read out: 'Thanks for this response, it's good to see NRW have been active in the catchment - could they advise whether any of the enforcement action was informed by data generated by FORW Citizen Scientists, and will they be using such data to target their inspections in the next phase of the project?'. In response, Ann Weedy advised that the query had been passed to the relevant team but noted that a wide range of data was being utilised by NRW to target work better; a further response is available ([link to Supplement 5](#)).

3. QUESTIONS

A document containing the questions received for the meeting and responses received, from the Environment Agency and Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water, was included in Supplement 3; a further iteration, containing responses from Natural Resources Wales, is available ([link to Supplement 5](#)).

In relation to a question about how planning authorities assess the cumulative impact from intensive livestock farming developments across the catchment, Ben Boswell said that responses from the planning authorities would be collated.

[Note: for the efficient transaction of business, the following item was considered after the 'Update from the River Wye Statutory Officers' Group' but the original agenda order is retained below for ease of reference]

4. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE NATURE RESTORATION FUND

Alastair Wager (Nature Restoration Fund, Natural England) explained that the Nature Restoration Fund, a proposal contained in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (the Bill) that was progressing through Parliament, was a strategic way of dealing with environmental obligations through the design and delivery of Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs), led by Natural England. An overview was provided of the key phases. It was anticipated that this approach would streamline the process for development and secure funds to address environmental impacts and drive nature recovery. It was noted that the Labour Party Manifesto 2024 committed to 'implement solutions to unlock the building of homes affected by nutrient neutrality without weakening environmental protections' and that EDPs for nutrients pollution were likely to among the first brought forward. It was reported that Natural England was exploring what EDPs would look like in practice, including engagement with stakeholders and work with partners on local delivery mechanisms to maximise benefits.

In response to questions and comments from board members, Alastair Wager commented that:

- i. Natural England was looking at opportunity modelling for specific issues, informed by evidence from local plans and existing schemes.

- ii. Noting that the government was committed to 1.5 million new homes, EDPs would be capacity focused but there would be granularity in terms of site allocations and environmental factors.
- iii. The Nature Restoration Levy would be payable by developers to meet the relevant obligation in the EDP, likely to be through a planning condition.

A board member said that: the public may not appreciate that the Nature Restoration Levy would be additional to Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions; housing on its own would not pay for the recovery of the catchment given the extent of the action needed; and the lack of certainty around timescales could have implications for investment decisions.

Alaistair Wager said that: this was a government priority and Natural England were working as quickly as possible; it was important to build on the success of existing mitigations; consideration was being given to transitional arrangements; a range of development types were in scope; and, if an EDP did not specify that the Nature Restoration Levy was mandatory, developers would have the option to pay the levy or continue to comply with the current restrictions.

The Chairperson commented on the need for: consistency in the use of terms such as recovery or restoration, e.g. achieving phosphate reduction in isolation may not necessarily make a significant difference to some species; and consideration to be given to natural justice and fairness, as one sector should not be expected to pay for emissions by another sector.

A board member noted that the national demand for certain products and the consequential scale of production could have disproportionate impacts on small geographical areas.

Ben Boswell confirmed that Herefordshire Council was continuing its strategic mitigation approach, alongside ongoing conversations about transitional arrangements.

5. UPDATE FROM THE RIVER WYE STATUTORY OFFICERS' GROUP

The River Wye Statutory Officers' Group (SOG) meeting slide deck was provided in Supplement 1.

In response to a comment by a board member about the late circulation of the update (two working days before the meeting), the Chairperson requested that papers be provided in time for the publication of the main agenda pack. Some board members commented that graphs should be well-labelled, or accompanied by narrative, to help explain whether the results were positive or negative. Another board member suggested that consideration could be given to consistent topics to aid understanding of the position across different agencies and / or geographies.

In response to questions from board members, the following points were made:

- 1. Environment Agency: it was reported that investigations were ongoing to determine the cause of white-clawed crayfish deaths in the River Arrow; it was noted that there was a similar case in the Northeast.
- 2. Natural Resources Wales (NRW): Attention was drawn to the NRW update and the press release included in the agenda, 'Environmental permit change consultations launched', which identified 'Where a poultry farm is subject to both Environmental Permitting Regulations and planning consent, it is the Local Planning Authority's remit to consider the implications of off-site manure management'.

Board members questioned whether local authorities had the capacity and expertise currently to ensure that proper off-site manure management practices were followed. In response to further questions, clarifications were provided about: NRW's legal obligation to determine permits; on-site controls through manure management plans; the Welsh Government's placement of 'holding directions' on planning applications; and NRW's role as a statutory consultee on planning applications.

The Chairperson encouraged participants to respond directly to the NRW consultations.

The Voice of the River expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the current controls and emphasised the need for a system which was fit for purpose.

Councillor Charlton said that clarification would be sought on Powys County Council's position in terms of the assessment of cumulative impact.

6. DIFFUSE WATER POLLUTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP) Part 2, 'List of Actions Needed to Achieve Favourable Condition', was provided in Supplement 3.

Martin Quine explained that work was ongoing on the DWPP for the English Wye, led by the Environment Agency and jointly owned with Natural England. It was noted that the document should be available in advance of the next board meeting.

Attention was drawn to Table A, 'Strategic priorities identified through the DWPP Options Appraisal process', which identified priorities, rationale, and related actions (including matters relating to wider river health, tools in development, and elements requiring further investigation). Reference was made to the 'nutrient gap', the difference between the outputs of the measures and mechanisms modelled and the target.

The board was advised that a study on legacy phosphate was being peer reviewed and was likely to be released at the end of August 2025.

The principal points of the ensuing discussion included:

1. Claire Minnett explained that Catchment Sensitive Farming advice was led by Natural England and reported on a new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier scheme to incentivise land management practices, including options around river and floodplain habitat restoration. An overview was provided of the work of Natural England advisers to engage with farmers, in conjunction with local bodies.
2. A board member expressed concern that voluntary measures would be insufficient for certainty around phosphates and there was a need for additional measures to achieve catchment recovery.
3. The Chairperson said that the DWPP would form the evidence base for the English Wye and work commissioned would provide the evidence base for the Welsh Wye, and these would be brought together to become a Nutrient Management Plan.
4. Martin Quine commented that the DWPP consolidated and updated knowledge, and the suite of actions included regulatory, voluntary, and education measures. It was noted that there were challenges around measuring outputs and that further research was needed.
5. A board member questioned whether the identified measures were radical enough and commented on the need to lobby government for mandatory measures. It was also commented that uncertainties around incentive schemes impacted on the levels of uptake by farmers.

6. The Chairperson commented that it would be problematic if the DWPP was simply a statement of the nutrient gap; adding that landscape recovery schemes should be given due acknowledgement. Martin Quine reported that the national team was aware of the gap, most DWPPs would be signed off by March 2026, and the next steps would need to include consideration of how to enable the delivery of currently unfunded measures. It was also reported that the government had recently announced additional funding for agriculture regulation.
7. A board member drew attention to the priority 'Supply chain engagement and accountability' and questioned how environmental standards and incentives would address water- and air-borne emissions, and the impacts of the transfer of poultry manure out of the catchment; adding that the list of actions did not include any references to reducing livestock production. Martin Quine said that it was understood that advances in technological solutions, including pelletizing and sustainable storage of manure, were being explored by Avara.
8. A board member drew attention to the River Wye Bare Ground Project, referenced in Table B, 'Options Appraisal Actions', and questioned how observations from citizen scientists and others about soil loss into rivers could be utilised. Martin Quine said that relatively few reports of soil loss were received currently, but a new online reporting platform should help to improve the recording and triaging of incidents as they arose. The Chairperson welcomed this work and suggested that it should be joined up with the relevant local authorities. A board member suggested that it would be helpful if the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales could prepare a document about soil loss to aid understanding.
9. The Voice of the River noted that the agencies were working hard but considered that the current legislative framework was not sufficient to ensure sustainable farming practices.

7. UPDATE ON WELSH EVIDENCE

Ben Boswell updated the board on the following: work underway with Ricardo consultants to examine the nutrient management plans and the evidence base for the Welsh catchment, with the intention to share a draft with stakeholders for comment during September 2025; and work to finalise the specification to commission the Wye Catchment Management Plan.

8. UPDATE ON FARMING RULES FOR WATER GUIDANCE

Martin Quine reported that 'The Reduction and Prevention of Agricultural Diffuse Pollution (England) Regulations 2018', also known as the 'Farming Rules for Water' had not been amended but the statutory guidance 'Enforcing the Farming Rules for Water' had been updated in June 2025. The principal changes were outlined.

It was also reported that the summary findings of project TARA (Testing Approaches to Regulation of Agriculture) in the Wye catchment should be available to share in September 2025.

In response to a question, Martin Quine said that the briefing paper in the agenda pack had been provided by the Environment Agency's national team and the reason for reference to nitrate pollution only, rather than nutrient / phosphate pollution, would be checked.

9. UPDATE ON THE HIGH COURT JUDGMENT VS SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

Alison Caffyn provided an overview of the application for a judicial review of a planning permission granted by Shropshire Council for an intensive poultry unit for 200,000 birds in Felton Butler, and the High Court of Justice judgment to quash the decision. It was noted that judgment found in favour of the claimant on two grounds, relating to the failure to carry out a legally adequate assessment of the effect of the spreading of digestate on third party land, and the failure to carry out a lawful in-combination assessment of the development's impacts. It was noted that this case law would be relevant to planning applications anywhere in the country.

Alison Caffyn also commented on efforts by River Action to engage with stakeholders and the government about the need for an agricultural water pollution strategy.

10. UPDATE FOLLOWING MEETINGS WITH MINISTERS

Martin Williams reported on his participation in a regulations group set up by Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) which would involve various stakeholders over three phases; the first phase would run into October 2025.

11. WIDER UPDATES FROM MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

Whole Farm Nutrient Balance Pilot

Kate Speke Adams (Herefordshire Rural Hub) delivered the presentation 'Whole Farm Nutrient Balance Pilot' ([link to Supplement 4](#)).

The principal points included:

- i. agriculture was currently identified as the greatest source of nutrient loss in the Wye catchment;
- ii. datasets in farming were difficult to obtain and often not up to date;
- iii. the pilot was a locally led initiative, supported by the Environment Agency, to undertake whole farm nutrient balance calculations;
- iv. balances had been completed for over 60 holdings since September 2024, covering 14,000 hectares (ha), including a range of farm sizes and enterprise types;
- v. PLANET's FarmGate tool had been used, noting that Defra was working on an updated tool;
- vi. an example was provided to illustrate tracking change and quantifying reductions in nutrient load over time;
- vii. nutrient imports by category, with detailed pie-charts for nitrogen (N) and phosphate (P) imports, and nutrient exports by category were identified;
- viii. RePhoKUs (The Role of Phosphorus in the Resilience and Sustainability of the UK Food System) calculated 6.2kg P/ha excess but the pilot average indicated -14kg P/ha;
- ix. the pilot average indicated +99kg N/ha;
- x. there were some holdings that were now very low and others still in excess, demonstrating that more work needed to be done;

- x. evaluation of the pilot showed that participants found the process informative (95%) and other charts were provided in relation to the most interesting aspects, challenges faced when managing nutrients effectively, barriers preventing improvements to nutrient management, and changes made or pending;
- xii. there was support from the Environment Agency and external sources, including a major retailer, to expand the work in the next year; and
- xiii. it was intended that the dataset would be shared with Lancaster University to inform the RePhoKUs project.

The Chairperson emphasised the importance of high quality data.

In response to questions, Kate Speke Adams:

- commented that expansion into areas such as soil health could be considered but there were limitations with the existing tool; and
- explained how advisers worked with farmers to complete the assessments and to support them to make informed decisions on nutrient and feed use.

Phosphate Mitigation Lead

Ben Boswell drew attention to the Phosphate Mitigation Lead vacancy and invited attendees to promote this key role through their networks.

Big Ranunculus Watch

Tom Tibbits reported on the launch of the Big Ranunculus Watch, a project to map and monitor the presence of ranunculus (water crowfoot), a keystone species in the river ([link to The Big Ranunculus Watch](#)).

Andrew McRobb added that there was a joint initiative exploring the use of drones to survey the catchment, with the potential for full roll out in 2026.

River Arrow Trust

Merry Albright reported that a trust was being set up for the River Arrow, with the intention to celebrate and connect people to the river.

12. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as [Wednesday 22 October 2025 2.00 pm](#).

The meeting ended at 4.35 pm

Chairperson