

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 April 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
Richard Tyler	Save the Wye

Voting members in attendance remotely:

Nick Day	The Friends of the Lower Wye
Simon Evans	The Wye and Usk Foundation
Christine Hugh-Jones	Council for Protection of Rural Wales
Georgie Hyde	National Farmers Union
Councillor Catrin Maby	Monmouthshire County Council
Councillor Andrew McDermid	Forest of Dean District Council

Other participants present in person:

Ben Boswell	Herefordshire Council
Elizabeth Duberley	Herefordshire Council
Daniel Humphreys	Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
James Marsden	Chairperson of the Wye Catchment Partnership
Claire Minett	Natural England
Martin Quine	Environment Agency

Other participants in attendance remotely:

Garreth Dunstall	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Ethan Hamer	Powys County Council
Craig O'Connor	Monmouthshire County Council
Catherine Osborne	Welsh Government
Ann Weedy	Natural Resources Wales
Dan Westbury	Radnorshire Wildlife Trust
Martin Williams	Farm Herefordshire

Support officers:

Ben Baugh	Herefordshire Council
Alfred Rees-Glinos	Herefordshire Council

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were noted from board members: Jamie Audsley (Herefordshire Wildlife Trust); Liz Bickerton (Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority); Helen Dale (Country Land and Business Association); and Tom Tibbits (The Friends of the Upper Wye).

Apologies were noted from regular attendees: Emma Guy (Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority); and Mark Liddeth (Environment Agency). Apologies were also noted from Peter Morris (Powys County Council) and the Chairperson asked that the best wishes of the board to be recorded.

The Chairperson advised the board that this would be the last meeting attended by Liz Duberley and reflected on the professionalism, hard work, dedication, and collaborative approach taken as Phosphate Mitigation Lead at Herefordshire Council, and the positive outcomes achieved towards improving the river and the state of nature in Herefordshire.

24. WELCOME TO RIVERS REPRESENTATIVE

The governing principles for the seat on the board was provided in Supplement 2. The Chairperson commented on the high calibre of the candidates and thanked them for interest and generosity of spirit. The Chairperson welcomed Dr Louise Bodnar as the 'Voice of the River'.

Dr Bodnar provided an overview of their academic background, work with charities and government organisations, and experience of developing partnerships and relationships with landowners and community organisations. Dr Bodnar said that it was an honour to represent the interests of the river, commented on the significance of the river in various scientific and cultural contexts, and emphasised the need to work together to restore the river.

25. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the previous meeting held on 15 January 2025 were received and agreed as an accurate record.

The Chairperson suggested that the previously deferred item on 'Planning Reform Work Paper - Development and Nature Recovery' could be considered as part of a broader exploration of legislative and policy changes at a future meeting.

26. QUESTIONS

A document containing the questions received for the meeting was included in Supplement 1.

The following responses were provided at the meeting:

- *Questions from Nick Day to Natural Resources Wales*

Ann Weedy said that written responses would be provided.*

- *Question from Nicola Cutcher to the Nutrient Management Board*

The Chairperson expressed a view that, given recent and current reviews, mitigating soil losses needed to fit within the existing regulatory framework and not require a separate law to be brought into statute; it was added that the regulations and guidance should take full account of the importance of soil retention and the need for this to be a pillar of good farming practice.

Other participants commented on: the relevance of spatial and temporal dimensions; natural flood management programme incentives; the case for a Water Protection Zone; and sharing intelligence with the Environment Agency on persistent drain blockages and impacts on highways to inform its programme of farm inspections.

- *Questions from Nicola Cutcher to the Environment Agency*

Martin Quine said that written responses would be provided.*

[*Note: the questions document, updated with the responses received from statutory agencies following the meeting is available via this link [Questions and responses v3](#)]

27. UPDATE FROM DEFRA ON £1MILLION FOR THE RIVER WYE

Garreth Dunstall (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 'Defra') provided an update on the UK and Welsh Government joint research initiative to tackle water quality issues in the River Wye, the principal points included:

- i. The new initiative had been announced in March 2025; [link to the press release 'UK and Welsh Government unite in £1m fund to transform River Wye'](#).
- ii. Work would be undertaken with local stakeholders to gather evidence of pollution pressures and to test solutions to inform wider interventions.
- iii. Current focus was on project planning, including research scope and governance structures, to ensure that different tasks and activities were mapped out over time.
- iv. There was an intention to prioritise actions which focus on farm level interventions and to give effect to a 'living labs' approach.
- v. Research decisions would need to demonstrate value and correspond with wider government priorities, including cleaning up waters, boosting food security, and supporting the circular economy.
- vi. Four themes were identified to start discussions with stakeholders (with examples of potential research questions given), the themes being: the impact of existing activities and other technologies; farmer behaviours; barriers and facilitators; and overall strategy.

The Chairperson welcomed the collaborative approach and, with attention drawn to the planned structure identified in the discussion document circulated in Supplement 2, suggested that a blending of Working Group and Steering Group participants (i.e. officials / statutory officers and local stakeholders) would avoid potential tensions between layers.

Board members asked questions and made comments; the main points included:

1. The research would cover both England and Wales.
2. The need to understand the impact of legacy phosphorus (P) entering the watercourse, including seasonal variations.
3. References in the discussion document to 'ecological carrying capacity of the rivers' and 'societal resistance' were explained.
4. The data / evidence gaps analysis should be mindful of the range of relevant plans, such as the Catchment Management Plan, Nutrient Management Plan, and the Carbon Management Plan.
5. Garreth Dunstall confirmed that the research would be funded over a number of years, so that the issues and interventions could be explored fully, involving prioritisation and planned milestones.
6. Defra would need to co-ordinate with the statutory agencies to ensure that the research was not used as a reason to hold anything up in terms of the Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP) and related actions.

7. Martine Quine explained that the Environment Agency was producing the DWPP which would update the English evidence in terms of water quality and would look at what measures or mechanisms were appropriate in order to reduce nutrients; the Wye Catchment Partnership was looking at wider river health. As the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within England was passing its nutrient target, albeit narrowly in places, there was focus on the River Lugg as a significant tributary. It was commented that, notwithstanding the significant work being undertaken in the catchment, there was likely to be a nutrient gap; it was noted that gaps were not unique in England but there were complex traits in the River Wye catchment. In response to a question, the board was advised that the DWPP and the work being undertaken on the Welsh evidence would result in a combined evidence base.
8. Liz Duberley said that projects should have clear timeframes at the outset and should be outcomes based, with quantification of phosphate reduction where relevant to specific projects; adding that this could help to scale up effective interventions in the longer-term.
9. A view was expressed that previous modelling had not considered elements of global research and there was a need to consider other solutions that were commonplace elsewhere, such as extended buffer zones, with investment made in applied trials.
10. The need to explore emerging technological solutions.
11. A request was made that plans should be written in plain and concise language.
12. James Marsden emphasised on the need for: clarity around funding to deliver the Catchment Management Plan 2025; policy integration, particularly in view of the drivers for the future use and management of land including Carbon Budget, Land Use Framework, and Local Nature Recovery Strategy; and realistic timelines for transformational shift.
13. The potential benefits of restoring and naturalising flows in the catchment.
14. The value of informal networks in sharing best practice in the farming sector.
15. In response to questions, Martin Quine advised that the DWPP would result in some measures where focus was needed currently, potentially with trials at a sub-catchment level which could be replicated elsewhere subsequently, and would identify a 'wish list' of measures which could be undertaken but were unfunded. It was considered that the DWPP would dovetail with the concurrent work on research and development of plans. It was anticipated that the first draft would be prepared by June 2025.

Garreth Dunstall welcomed the discussion and acknowledged: the need for specific and focused plans, with transparent and actionable outcomes; the need to collate and understand the evidence available, particularly to avoid duplication of effort; the inclusion of the Catchment Management Plan within the research (the Chairperson requested a timeline for this); and the importance of horizon scanning and linking in with government bodies, statutory agencies, and local authorities.

Cat Osborne provided assurance that the Welsh Government was having regular meetings with Defra and was making connections within its teams.

The Chairperson thanked the guest participants for their contributions.

28. UPDATE FROM THE RIVER WYE STATUTORY OFFICERS' GROUP

The River Wye Statutory Officers' Group (SOG) meeting slide deck was provided in Supplement 1, with the Natural Resources Wales update provided in Supplement 2.

Board members asked questions and made comments; the main points included:

1. It was clarified that poultry units with less than 40,000 birds did not require environmental permits but were subject to the planning process and pollution prevention regulations. Comments were made around the challenges of understanding the cumulative impact of livestock units operating without permits. Later in the discussion, reference was made to the role of habitats regulation assessments in identifying potential impacts of planning proposals cumulatively and individually on designated features. The Chairperson suggested that local authority representatives obtain further details about the planning approach to cumulative impacts of livestock units in their areas.
2. Reference was made to the Natural Resource Wales update 'Focussing on Phosphorus and compliance against the tighter SAC [Special Area of Conservation] targets there has been an overall improvement in the Wye since 2021'. Ann Weedy advised that the reasons for deterioration in two waterbodies in the upper catchment were being explored. Attention was drawn to the news item [Natural Resources Wales / New water quality data sheds light on health of Wales's waters](#) and Ann Weedy offered to arrange a separate session on the detail.
3. The Chairperson commented on the recent River Improvement Co-Delivery event in Cardiff and welcomed Dwr Cymru Welsh Water's Wye phosphorus removal programme which was expected to achieve a reduction of approximately 13kg/day, adding that the board would welcome data as it became available. It was questioned how mandatory housing target increases were factored into the investment programme going forward. Daniel Humphreys said that he was not involved in Developer Services, but the water company was one of the consultees for local development plans.
4. The Chairperson welcomed: the Environment Agency website resources, link to the hub [Environment Agency / River Wye Water Quality](#); the use of satellite data and drone imagery; and the information on Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) partnership projects, albeit further details were requested about what they had been set up to achieve and how the successful delivery of outcomes would be measured. Martin Quine reported that the WEIF projects were aimed at the Water Directive Framework and acknowledged the need to consider how to ensure that relevant plans and action logs were kept up to date.
5. Liz Duberley reported that: Herefordshire Council had met recently with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the Nature Restoration Fund and an update was awaited; 796 houses had been released using phosphate credits from the Luston and Tarrington wetlands; the authority was working to acquire a third wetland site; and it was considered timely to undertake a review of strategic mitigation given the Nature Restoration Fund and the required growth in housing numbers in Herefordshire. Later in the discussion, it was noted that mechanisms other than wetlands were coming forward elsewhere in the country and that options would be considered in the review.
6. There was a discussion about quantifying nutrient reduction numbers in projects and initiatives, with a view expressed about the challenges around scientific certainty in terms of metrics and other views expressed about the value of identifying estimates wherever possible.

29. UPDATE ON THE DIFFUSE WATER POLLUTION PLAN

The Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP) was discussed during the item 'Update from Defra on £1million for the River Wye', see minute 27.

There was a further discussion about DWPP legal requirements, how to address the gap to meet the favourable condition target for the river, and the need for the research to assist with shared understanding and to direct efforts accordingly. It was noted that the DWPP, combined with the Welsh evidence, would inform the Nutrient Management Plan.

30. UPDATE ON WELSH EVIDENCE FOR NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Ann Weedy reported that the evidence review for the Welsh side of the River Wye had been completed by the consultants and it was being considered, alongside the development of mitigation measures; June 2025 was given as an indicative target.

31. ENGAGEMENT ON NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

It was reported that the statutory agencies and the relevant local authorities were working together to provide an overview of timescales and engagement.

32. WIDER UPDATES FROM MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

An update from CPRE was provided in Supplement 1. The Chairperson welcomed the positive working between the Wye Alliance Citizen Science Group and the Environment Agency, and the CPRE's 'Hedgerow Heroes' campaign; Andrew McRobb urged councils to encourage staff to become volunteers and asked farming groups to promote the call for future sites.

33. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as [Wednesday 16 July 2025, 2.00 pm](#).

The meeting ended at 3.56 pm

Chairperson