

Notes of the meeting of Wye Catchment Nutrient Management Board held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Monday 6 July 2026 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
Councillor Andrew McDermid	Forest of Dean District Council
Andrew McRobb	Council for Protection of Rural England
Adam Taylor	Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority

Voting members in attendance remotely:

Councillor Jackie Charlton	Powys County Council
Helen Dale	Country Land and Business Association
Nick Day	The Friends of the Lower Wye
Saul Herbert	Herefordshire Wildlife Trust
Christine Hugh-Jones	Council for Protection of Rural Wales
Sarenta King	Radnorshire Wildlife Trust
Councillor Catrin Maby	Monmouthshire County Council

Other participants present in person:

Ben Baugh	Herefordshire Council
Gemma Dando	Herefordshire Council
Daniel Humphreys	Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
Claire Minett	Natural England

Other participants in attendance remotely:

Daisy Burris	Natural England
Oda Dijksterhuis	Environment Agency
Jason Doe	Environment Agency
Andrew Grant	Forest of Dean District Council
Sally Green	Wye Catchment Partnership: Natural England
Catherine Hinds	National Farmers' Union
Emma Johnson	Natural England
Steve Klenk	Wye Catchment Partnership: Farm Herefordshire
Craig O'Connor	Monmouthshire County Council
Alwyn Roberts	Wye Catchment Partnership: Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
Paul Vernon	Wye Salmon Association
Stephen Ware	Wye Catchment Partnership
Ann Weedy	Natural Resources Wales
Judith Whateley	Herefordshire Council
Rosanna Willmott	Herefordshire Council
Bradley Willson	Herefordshire Council
Gertruda Zieniute	Natural England

Introduction

Louise Bodnar invited attendees to reflect on the importance of water and acknowledged the River Wye and other water sources.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were noted from board members: Simon Evans (The Wye and Usk Foundation); Gordon Green (Wye Salmon Association); Georgie Hyde (National Farmers' Union); and Pat Stirling (Friends of the Upper Wye).

Apologies were also noted from Alastair Chapman (Forest of Dean District Council) and Martin Quine (Environment Agency).

The Chairperson welcomed Adam Taylor as the new voting member for Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, succeeding Liz Bickerton.

2. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the previous meeting held on 29 April 2026 were agreed.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Attention was drawn to a question received from Alison Caffyn, published in advance of the meeting, [Questions from members of the public, as at 2 July 2026](#).

Given the range of matters raised, Gemma Dando advised that a written response would be provided directly to the questioner and would be published.

4. RIVER LUGG SSSI CONDITION ASSESSMENT

Claire Minett introduced the River Lugg SSSI Condition Assessment (2026), with Daisy Burris and Gertruda Zieniute presenting the findings; the presentation had been delivered at an event for landowners the previous week. The assessment concerned the River Lugg Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and was the first full condition assessment since 2010. The overall condition was assessed as Unfavourable - Declining.

The assessment considered four components: hydrology, water quality, physical habitat and biological assemblages. A detailed visual walkthrough was provided of the four SSSI units.

Unit 4: Presteigne to Aymestrey

- i. In the upper assessment unit, many sections were described as pristine and relatively unmodified, with good habitat diversity and natural channels, and floodplain connectivity; with tree cover and large woody debris, and erosion and deposition, forming significant components. The plant community was diverse but some areas had higher than expected algae cover, and there were pressures from arable agriculture.
- ii. Flows, large woody debris, siltation, and habitat were considered to be favourable. Water quality, in-channel structures (such as weirs), and invasive species were unfavourable.

Unit 3: Aymestrey to Eyton

- iii. This section also had good habitat diversity, floodplain connectivity, and tree cover, but became more affected by siltation. The plant community had high ecological status in the upper part but poor ecological status downstream. There were significant pressures in terms of in-channel structures, collapsing field drains, and poaching from livestock.

- iv. Flows, large woody debris, and habitat were considered to be favourable. Water quality, in-channel structures, invasive species, bank vegetation, and siltation were unfavourable.

Unit 2: Eyton to Hope-under-Dinmore

- v. This section had significant variability, with some areas predominantly unmodified and natural, and others significantly modified. An overview was provided of historic river channel and land modifications which impacted negatively on flows, siltation and habitat. The floodplain was largely disconnected from the river, with embankments preventing the natural movement of floodwater. The plant community had poor ecological status.
- vi. Flows and large woody debris were considered to be favourable. Water quality, in-channel structures, invasive species, plant community, habitat modification, bank vegetation, and siltation were unfavourable.

Unit 1: Hope-under-Dinmore to Wye confluence

- vii. In the lower assessment unit, there was again significant variability in terms of physical habitat, with some significant historic modifications, including reaches that had been straightened and embanked, resulting in disconnection. There were areas with limited biodiversity and heavy poaching activity. The plant community had moderate ecological status.
- viii. Flows and large woody debris were considered to be favourable; there was only one weir with a fish pass. Water quality, invasive species, plant community, habitat modification, and siltation were unfavourable.

It was reported that phosphorus remained a sustained catchment-wide pressure; reference was made to the source apportionment modelling in the [Diffuse Water Pollution Plan \(DWPP\)](#) which identified that 81% originated from rural diffuse sources, with 14% from point sources (sewage treatment). It was also reported that historic plant records and the 2025 surveys indicated a marked increase in filamentous algae cover, with the caveat that historic datasets were not always directly comparable.

In concluding the presentation, the following points were highlighted: the present condition reflected both historic and contemporary management practices across the catchment, rather than solely within riparian corridors; tree cover and large woody debris provided valuable habitat; nutrients and silt remained significant challenges; focus was needed on floodplain connectivity as well as land use; and the impacts of climate change were increasing.

The Chairperson noted that the condition assessment covered a wide spectrum of issues, many of which fell within the remit of Wye Catchment Partnership, and would help inform the Catchment Plan.

Attention was drawn to the final paragraphs of page 48 of the report (agenda page 72): *'Catchment wide measures to address diffuse water pollution are urgently required to significantly decrease catchment sources of phosphate pollution. The conversion of arable cropping in the floodplain to low intensity semi-natural habitat should be a priority.'*; *'Measures to mitigate the conveyance of sediment bound phosphate should also be urgently investigated.'*; and *'The actions in [the DWPP] should be urgently implemented to address diffuse pollution pressures across the catchment'*.

Attention was also drawn to page 135 of the report (agenda page 159): *'The River Lugg SSSI cannot be restored through in-channel works and voluntary measures alone; it*

requires catchment-wide pressure reduction (nutrients, fine sediment, physical modification) in a co-ordinated way'; 'Achieving the necessary reduction in loads will require significant change in how land is managed, going beyond incremental improvements and business-as-usual approaches'; and 'A system shift in governance and land use is required to restore the site to a thriving ecologically resilient system'.

The Chairperson commented on the need for the board to consider how it could help. The inclusion of the 'Evidence Gaps' section was welcomed, including around sediment source identification, as this would inform focus, understanding and actions. Claire Minett advised that Natural England were working with the Environment Agency to explore the potential of 'sediment fingerprinting'.

Attention was further drawn to: page 78 of the report (agenda page 102) in relation to Unit 4, *'At a whole unit scale, land use is assessed as unfavourable to support favourable condition of the site'*; and page 84 (108) in relation to Unit 2, *'Current land use is not conducive to supporting a naturally functioning river system'* and *'Significant land use change along the riparian corridor is required to reach favourable condition'*. The Chairperson suggested that narrative around significant upticks or downticks in the data, or the identification of evidence gaps, would be helpful.

The principal points arising from the discussion included:

1. In response to a question from Christine Hugh-Jones, Daisy Burris outlined the challenges of comparing historic and contemporary macrophyte surveys given the natural year-to-year variations, and said that ranunculus aquatilis cover in the 1980s was apparently very low, but this was not considered surprising as the river type differed from reaches of the River Wye where greater cover might be expected.
2. Andrew McRobb questioned responsibility and accountability for implementing the recommendations. Claire Minett explained that Natural England and the Environment Agency could progress measures within their respective remits, but no single agency or body could restore the river. The Chairperson emphasised that this was a condition assessment which would inform the Catchment Management Plan and the Nutrient Management Plan.
3. Councillor Charlton questioned cross-border coordination with Wales and noted the importance of engagement with riparian landowners. Ann Weedy explained the different designations on each side of the border and that most tributaries on the Welsh side were assessed as being at high or good status under the Water Framework Directive. It was nevertheless acknowledged that the cross-border context could be explained more clearly going forward.
4. In response to a question from Paul Vernon, it was understood that there were 19 in-channel structures. It was reported that the Environment Agency was actively prioritising the lowering or removal of structures and improving fish passage.
5. Councillor Maby questioned the scale and feasibility of land-management change. Claire Minett estimated that around 150 owner-occupiers were associated with the riparian corridor, while catchment-wide nutrient pressures involved substantially more landholdings. An overview was provided of Catchment Sensitive Farming advice and longer-term landscape recovery mechanisms. It was noted that the changes required ranged from measures such as buffer strips to more significant land-use changes.
6. Louise Bodnar questioned the historic evidence for changes in siltation and other factors which may affect aquatic plants. Daisy Burris explained that methods for assessing siltation had changed over time, there were no current set siltation

targets for rivers, and historic surveys represented snapshots rather than a continuous record. Claire Minett added that historic data on livestock did not form part of the assessment. Louise Bodnar commented on the potential of experimental approaches, including wider buffers, to minimise sediment entering the river. Claire Minett noted that the Wye Catchment Living Labs Programme intended to undertake a range of trial-based studies.

7. Merry Albright noted the limited attendance at the recent event for landowners, with around eight present, and emphasised the importance of broadening engagement given the need for voluntary and collaborative solutions. It was suggested that the landowner summary note, [Update on the Condition of the River Lugg SSSI](#), could be enhanced by conveying the urgency and key messages of the condition assessment, and setting out current source-apportionment estimates. It was noted that parts of the Arrow, Lugg, and other upstream water courses fell outside of the Wyescapes landscape recovery project. Claire Minett acknowledged that the contact database had required updating and welcomed offers of support from local networks, noted the feedback on the summary note, and recognised that a single landscape recovery project was not enough to address the pressures across the wider catchment.
8. In response to a question from the Chairperson, Catherine Hinds considered that the farming community would respond positively to clear, direct and non-judgemental language in communications.
9. Adam Taylor highlighted the range of social, regulatory and financial considerations facing farmers and the need for longer-term changes to land use and business models, reflecting the circumstances of individual landholdings.
10. Louise Bodnar called for the Government to introduce stronger statutory protections for rivers and floodplains.

5. REVIEW OF A NITROGEN (N) TARGET FOR THE RIVER WYE AND LUGG SSSIS

The written update from Natural England, Reviewing a Nitrogen Target for the River Wye and Lugg SSSIs update for NMB June 2026, published in Supplement 1 was received. It was noted that Natural England would undertake an evidence review, with input from the Environment Agency, to consider the potential role of nitrogen in the current condition of the Wye and Lugg and whether nitrogen levels were limiting achievement of favourable condition.

6. DWR CYMRU WELSH WATER UPDATE

Daniel Humphreys updated the board on Ofwat's investigation into the management and performance of wastewater treatment works and sewerage networks in England and Wales, and provided an overview of the assets, measures and data considered in relation to Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water.

It was reported that the investigation identified a number of compliance shortcomings, with remedial work underway or already completed. The company had put forward a £44.7m redress package which had been accepted by Ofwat in June 2026. This included: £40.6m to accelerate improvements to storm overflows, none of which were in the Wye or Lugg catchment; £2m for river restoration activity; £1m for a misconnection task force; and £1m for a community and nature fund. The relevant programmes were being developed for delivery by 2030.

In response to questions from Councillor McDermid about the treatment of emerging contaminants, Daniel Humphreys explained that many treatment works were not designed to remove substances such as persistent chemicals and that sector-wide

research was continuing. It was noted that preventing pollutants entering the system at source was preferable to relying on treatment downstream. Councillor Charlton commented on the importance of producer responsibility for preventing and mitigating environmental impacts. The Chairperson noted that issues directly related to nutrients and sediment could be considered by the board, with wider emerging contaminant issues more appropriately considered through the Wye Catchment Partnership.

7. WYE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN AND NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN - UPDATE

The written update, agenda pages 169–172, was taken as read.

8. STATUTORY OFFICERS' GROUP REVIEW

The review item was deferred until the next meeting.

9. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION FROM THE STATUTORY AGENCIES

The Environment Agency updates, published in Supplement 1, were acknowledged. In view of Martin Quine's absence and the technical nature of the River Wye Data Analysis Report (2025) and the high-level findings from Project TARA, it was suggested that a separate briefing could be arranged.

[Note: A briefing for board members was held on Friday 14 August 2026. Discussions included the need for effective interventions, verifiable agricultural nutrient reductions, clearer accountability for manure transported into and out of the county, and coordinated action to help lift development restrictions.]

10. WIDER UPDATES FROM MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

The Chairperson reported that The Charter for the River Wye had been launched and was attracting interest from other catchments and groups wishing to pursue similar approaches.

There was a brief discussion about how the Charter could be embedded in the work of local authorities and partner organisations, including raising awareness among councillors, officers and other stakeholders.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted, as follows:

[Wednesday 7 October 2026, 2.00 pm \(link to meeting page\)](#)

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm

Chairperson