

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Thriving Communities Scrutiny

Date of meeting: 19th of March 2025

Title: Update on Phosphates workstreams

Purpose of the report: To update scrutiny on the phosphate risk register and general update on ongoing work.

Reason Scrutiny have requested the information:
To review the risk register

Cabinet Portfolio and Cabinet Member:
Economy and Regeneration Cllr Clive Davies

Background

In January 2021 NRW released advice to planning authorities on permitting development in riverine catchments of Special Areas of Conservation across Wales. This guidance effectively placed an embargo on most development within the river Teifi SAC catchment which encompasses over 50% of Ceredigion and 3 of the 6 main towns. Ceredigion County Council added this constraint to its corporate risk register shortly after and was forced to hold in abeyance a number of planning applications and put the Local Development Plan preparation on formal pause.

Current Situation

Members were updated in October 2024 with the following information:

Phosphates and Nutrient Management Board

The position around phosphates restrictions on the Afon Teifi SAC remains unchanged, development cannot come forward if it would contribute additional waste water to the SAC. Such a restriction impacts approx. 50% of Ceredigion and 3 of the 6 main towns. NRW have amended the guidance to release certain types of development servicing local needs. A review of Waste Water Treatment Plants (WWTP) permits undertaken by DCWW and NRW has released some additional capacity within WWTP catchment. However this is a short term 'fix' with strategic mitigation and upgrades of WWTPs required to make a sustainable step change. To that end the Nutrient Management Board (NMB) are about to adopt and publish their Nutrient Management Plan on the 2nd of October. It is expected this will be the first in Wales for adoption on a wholly Welsh river. The plan identifies actions and mitigations that will support water quality improvement in regard to phosphates, with actions assigned to specific bodies.

The Ceredigion Policy team alongside the NMB have also delivered a number of aligned projects including the Phosphate Reduction and Mitigation (PRaM) project. This Heritage Lottery Funded project delivered a number of work packages including,

on farm nutrient run-off improvements, 5 Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes, public engagement, 9km of riparian fencing and designed 3 strategic mitigation options (wetlands and wet woodlands) up to planning stage.

The policy team alongside the NMB have also undertaken a Teifi Water Quality monitoring project supported by the Shared Prosperity Fund to install fully remote water quality sensors along the main length of the Teifi and some tributaries. This is the first river of its kind in Wales to be fully monitored and in particular using this new and emerging technology, the results are currently being developed into a live dashboard which also includes weather, water level, temperature analysis. This is complemented by a diverse citizen science programme who are using water quality testers provided by the council to assess other areas of the river, whose results are also being included on the dashboard.

The policy team are also leading on a project looking at Net Benefit of County Landholdings funded by Cynnal y Cardi. This assessment is considering the current baseline of county farm landholdings from an economic, social and environmental perspective and assessing what interventions could be made to improve upon this baseline to meet our requirements under a number of local and national policies such as Net Zero, SFS and phosphate reduction. As well as maximising the use of the sites for the greater public good.

At a national level the Afon Teifi has been designated the only 'Demonstrator Catchment' in the UK which is a multi disciplinary approach to full catchment restoration of which we are a strategic partner. The project is led by Sir David Henshaw of NRW.

In short whilst restrictions still apply, opportunity to develop is widening and all the workstreams identified above make the Teifi the most advanced river in terms of nutrient management in Wales. We are leading the way, contributing to the First Ministers river action plan and supporting dissemination of our work across all 9 riverine SACs in Wales.

However some issues persist for us to continue this exemplary work, at present Welsh Government have not committed funding to the NMB for next year, this is a strong concern for us given Local Authority budgets. Furthermore the strategic mitigations we have designed and spent months of work on, are frustrated by a national policy approach from NRW who will only allow a waste permit to DCWW for Integrated Constructed Wetlands. Natural England support such measures and in England wetlands are enabling development as we speak. We continue to lobby hard on both issues.

February Update

Whilst little has changed in the intervening 3 months since the previous update. I can confirm the following:

The Nutrient Management Plan evidence base was adopted on the 2/10/24 and the detailed water body action plans are expected to be adopted in early April.

The Water Quality Monitoring project dashboard and citizen science dashboard are now live available here: [Teifi Nutrient Monitoring Dashboard - Ceredigion County Council](#)

The County farms net benefit assessment has been completed and shared with the Farms Task and Finish group with specific recommendations for nutrient management included. An update meeting is scheduled for May for further discussion and the creation of a County Farm strategy.

The Planning Service are working with partners internally and externally to consider a strategic Net Benefit for Biodiversity project that includes nutrient mitigation, this would be to offset environmental policy requirements on the proposed WWTP upgrades county wide.

The Planning Service are hopeful to be successful in an SPF bid for additional funding to install the water quality monitors in the marine environment county wide. This would allow us to track nitrates in the Cardigan Bay SAC and develop mitigation strategies.

The Planning Service are currently preparing their 25/26 business plans where a number of actions on this workstream will be incorporated.

Phosphates on the Risk Register

Nutrient Management has been on the Corporate Risk Register for some time and whilst the work of the service in monitoring, delivering improvements, leading by example has been comprehensive and has allowed some capacity for development across the Teifi catchment alongside partner work by DCWW and NRW. This development opportunity is still constrained and remains a critical challenge to economic growth.

The potential release of Marine SAC guidance is a real risk to the economic growth of the county outside the Teifi catchment. Thus, it is important to continue to include the Nutrient risk on the register and maintain momentum and critical action on the project objectives. With that in mind the risk register will be reviewed regularly and actions updated as the projects move forward.

The Current identified mitigating actions are:

1. Consider local solutions such as private treatment plants and working with DCWW to remedy the impact of WWTPs contributing 68% of the phosphates in the Afon Teifi.
2. Continue to lobby for a 'Team Wales' approach including a national mitigation list and database
3. Ensure all applications, plans and projects are screened in accordance with NRW guidance and a test of likely significant effect is undertaken followed by an Appropriate Assessment where required before issuing a decision.
4. Raise Awareness locally and nationally on this issue, identify ways to refine the guidance
5. Seek local solutions – learning from best practice elsewhere- utilizing council owned assets where possible
6. Work at a sub-national and national level through the working groups to identify solutions and mitigations and work collaboratively across catchments.

All of these actions have been progressed and remain ongoing as the updates above outline.

Appendix 1 is the current wording of the Nutrient Risk on the Corporate Risk Register.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No as this is an update on current work streams not implementing new policy.

Recommendation(s):

None

Reasons for decision:

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Date of Report: 18/02/2025

Acronyms:

DCWW Dwr Cymru Welsh Water

NRW Natural Resources Wales

LDP Local Development Plan

SAC Special Area of Conservation

SPF Shared Prosperity Fund