

**Clun Catchment Partnership Meeting**  
**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013**  
**Clun Memorial Hall 10am-12.30pm**

**Attendees:**

Mervin Mullard	Farmer, Mainstone
John Croxton	Farmer, Purslow
Joy Greenall	Land, Life & Livelihoods
Rob Harris	DEFRA
Fiona Gomersall	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Emma Buckingham	Severn Rivers Trust
Lucy Roberts	Natural England
Liz Etheridge	Environment Agency
Carol Griffiths	National Farmers Union (Clun representative)
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager
Mike Kelly	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, River Valleys Officer
Ewa Prokop	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Catchment Project Assistant

**1. Apologies & Introductions**

Nick Smith	Forestry Commission
Leo Smith	Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group
Sarah Faulkner	NFU
Neasa Revens	Severn Trent
Ken Downward	Natural England
Jeff Edwards	Natural England
Lynne Farquhar	Natural England
Stuart Gamble	Environment Agency
Adam Shipp	Environment Agency

**2. Notes of last meeting 7<sup>th</sup> June 2013 and matters arising**

It was agreed to recirculate the Terms of Reference for the Partnership for the benefit of new members. Phil pointed out that he had not written to DEFRA regarding interim funding as DEFRA made an announcement soon after the last meeting.

Mike has uploaded recent reports to the AONB website; others are in draft, and pending authorisation these will be uploaded in due course.

Liz reported that Adam is currently working on the 'WAP'; a sheet of costed measures to achieve favourable condition is in draft.

Joy clarified that 66% of all householders, rather than of 160 people, had been prepared to discuss septic tanks.

Rob pointed out a correction; that he had sent a letter to DEFRA rather than the MP.

Phil thanked John for his input into the AONB Partnership tour.

**3. Updates**

**a) Environment Agency**

Liz outlined that the recent pearl mussel survey conducted by Ian Killeen recorded a 50% decline in numbers since 2008 .

Liz is on secondment to collate information about potential recovery ('natural recruitment areas') and translocation sites (a higher risk strategy) and to narrow down those areas which may be suitable. A scoring system has been devised; some sites may be investigated further with regard to velocity, water column chemistry, sediment chemistry and Redox readings. She confirmed that mussels could not be translocated from other regions as they were not adapted to the Clun and

that the present population could not be moved to the Ark as there were likely to be losses. Consultation with farmers will be key in choosing suitable sites.

It is uncertain if chosen areas would need to be designated. She is confident that action taken for the mussel helps other aquatic species; there is no evidence she is aware of that low phosphates are detrimental to salmonids.

**Action: Mervin and/or Carol to circulate information they have come across regarding conflict between requirements of mussels and other fauna. Liz to circulate scoring system.**

## **b) Natural England**

Lucy emphasised that the UK government is open to infraction (serious fines from EU) if the interest feature of the SAC is lost; it would be the first of its kind in England. Natural England is investigating what is likely to be the response to the current prospect of the SAC under 'High Risk Case Work'.

The lack of favourable land management measures has contributed to pearl mussel loss; so far the approach has been voluntary as opposed to an enforced approach in Europe. The Nutrient Management Plan that is currently in draft will ascertain how realistic it is to achieve an appropriate sediment and nutrient balance in the river and what measures need to be put in place regarding development. A NMP Steering Group and Technical Group is likely to be set up. The general concept of EU Directives is to prevent decline and 'improve what we can'; the EU wants to see that activity is being undertaken rather than seeking pristine conditions. More scrutiny will be expected.

Joy proposed that more should be done to conserve and restore wetlands in the upper Clun so that tributaries have enough water to enable translocation.

John pointed out that dredging was no longer undertaken and that this may have had a detrimental impact on the mussels; however, the evidence for this is unclear.

It was reported that that phosphate levels from Bishops Castle sewerage works have declined following installation of 'phosphate stripping'.

NE are sending letters on Environmental Stewardship letters to farmers with ESAs expiring in 2014, but not all will be able to have agreements. CSF will continue into 2014 but the Capital Grants budget will be much reduced; there is no certainty that it will continue into 2015. Advice is being given over a wider area; the final target areas for grant funding are yet to be defined. Carol commented that CSF-contracted advisers had recommended adding more phosphate. Members expressed concern that this agricultural advice was not consistent with conservation aims in the catchment, and questioned whether the remit and briefing of the contracted advisers was appropriate and consistent with other advice given. A number of applications have been received for Environmental Impact Assessment for ploughing of land that has been more than fifteen years under pasture. Many farmers are however failing to apply for EIAs. More publicity may be necessary.

**Action: Lucy to circulate NMP to relevant people.**

## **c) AONB Freshwater Pearl Mussel project (SITA/ NE/ Defra funded)**

Following fencing works 2.8km of buffer strips upstream of Clunton has been established. More sites are lined up this winter for coppicing and fencing works. Approx 50km of buffer strip establishment has been undertaken over the last 10 years.

The Highways Sediment study showed that 60% of the pathways of water are artificial ie. accommodated by the highways. Currently there is discussion as to whether it is possible to interrupt these conduits through the installation of sediment traps and other features.

The AONB Partnership is working with SWT to hold back water on the Turbary; funding is available under the SITA project.

A solar panel pump has been installed at Upper Duffryn; early adopters of the technology are important. There was discussion as to whether gravity-fed systems should be reinvestigated as an option. Natural England are not keen on drinking bays along the SAC and upstream of it. Carol said that there is no statutory obligation for water companies to provide water to stock.

Following a Himalayan Balsam survey this summer, a coordinated approach to management is being devised, to support land managers to meet their legal obligations.

**Action: Mike to circulate advisory note on Himalayan Balsam control. (See here <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/himalayan-balsam> )**

#### **d) Severn Rivers Trust**

Emma reported that a Teme Partnership meeting was held in July, following the publicising of the Management Plan. SRT have applied for funding with the Wildlife Trusts; the aim is to deliver projects collaboratively in the Teme catchment.

Work on the removal of Whitcott Keysett weir is to start in October.

#### **e) Landowner reps**

The issue of RPA interpretation regarding fenced river corridors was raised, noting that there was no satisfactory consistent approach to this.

#### **f) Land, Life & Livelihoods, LEADER project and other activity**

Joy reported that the LEADER project had finished. Over the winter, LLL will work with CSF to promote soil anti-compaction measures and water management options. A visit to Pont Bren is planned.

Rob reported that EA is not in a position to help fund failing septic tanks; consultants will be put in place to provide advice instead.

Water quality sampling for phosphates downstream of housing has been undertaken; the CEH have been unable to trace pollution plumes and suggests that perhaps septic tanks are better than settling ponds. A public meeting will be held on septic tanks.

There is need to look at main runoff pathways to highways and the measures that can be undertaken to reduce runoff; LIDAR surveillance at one metre resolution will be undertaken. This will be backed up by volunteer ground-truthing in different rainfall situations.

#### **g) Shropshire Wildlife Trust**

Fiona reported that surveys of nature reserves have continued. The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group has surveyed 20 sites including one directly on the Clun. Surveys have provided information to NE for Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

SWT is concerned about the amount of ploughing of sensitive sites that is increasingly being proposed. A UCCWG meeting will be held on 21<sup>st</sup> November at Newcastle Village Hall at 7.30pm.

#### **4. Any other business**

There was general acceptance that there is scope for future partnership working through the present group. It was suggested that perhaps more survey information should be directed to the Environment Agency rather than just Natural England.

Comments on the updating of the Severn River Basin Management Plan are being sought – “Water for life and livelihoods: Challenges and choices”: How significant are the challenges for the Severn River basin district and how should these issues be tackled? Comment deadline is 22/12/13

Summary pages are circulated with these minutes.

#### **5. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is to take place on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December at 10am at Clun Memorial Hall.