



Sent on behalf of Natural England and the Environment Agency

9th May 2022

Dear Stakeholder

We are writing to update you on the recent agreement between Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA) to review and update the Phosphate targets for water quality in the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) on the River Wye and its major designated tributary, the River Lugg, to near natural targets.

The River Wye is both a SSSI and SAC, giving it the highest level of protection in the UK. It is an important ambition for all of us to ensure that the river achieves favourable condition. This means making sure that it can support the life that depends on it, it is healthy and thriving for generations to come and continues to provide the important recreational activities, health and well-being benefits and natural capital for the area.

The targets for the Wye SAC (which includes most of the River Lugg), were previously agreed by NE and EA in 2016 as part of the River Basin Management Plan process and based on details from the [Nutrient Management Plan evidence and options appraisal 2014](#).

Given the level of concerns regarding the health of the river, together with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) recent assessment of the Welsh section of the Wye SAC, and an update to the Common Standard Monitoring Guidance, it was timely to review the phosphate targets to ensure they are appropriate to ensure the long term health of the river.

Targets are set using [Common Standards Monitoring Guidance for Rivers \(jncc.gov.uk\)](#). This guidance states “*nutrient targets for the river should reflect natural/background concentrations and limit enrichment to levels at which adverse effects on characteristic*

biodiversity are unlikely.” For the River Wye this would be the near natural or the High Status Water Framework Directive (WFD) target (the most stringent should be adopted). The guidance states that these targets should be adopted where it is “*feasible to reduce phosphorus concentrations to comply with the relevant target.*”

Following an analysis of current information at a number of joint meetings between EA and NE, it was agreed that using CSM guidance the target for the Wye SAC should be set at near natural or high WFD status (where this is more stringent). Setting these targets ensure we are working towards a level that will ensure the health of the river and help ensure favourable conservation status for the river. The full details of the targets are detailed in Appendix 1 (attached below) with a summary provided below. We have also attached a summary in Appendix 2 providing details of the terminology used in assessing river condition.

- The updated Phosphate target for the Lugg is 30µg/L, except upstream of Leominster, where it is 15 (µg/L).
- The previous target for the Lugg was 50 (µg/L), except upstream of Leominster, where it was 25 (µg/L).
- For the River Wye the updated target is between 21 (µg/L) and 39 (µg/L).
- The previous target was between 30 (µg/L) and 50 (µg/L).

Part of the Wye SAC (the Lugg tributary) was already failing its target, and therefore this more stringent target means there is more to do to achieve this target. However, we do feel that it is feasible to do this and essential to achieve the health of the river.

The remainder of the Wye was not failing its water quality target. With the new more stringent targets, it is still not failing but clearly now is at higher risk of failing this target. Again we feel it is feasible to ensure that the river does not deteriorate further.

Reducing phosphates in the River Wye SAC is a complex and challenging issue, but one which we must address. Both EA and NE together with our stakeholders are committed to reducing phosphate levels. The [Nutrient Management Plan Board](#) oversees the delivery of the [Nutrient Management Action Plan](#) to deliver reductions in phosphate. This is an iterative plan with further actions required to tackle this challenging issue and, along with partners, we recognise we need to evolve how the Board is working to ensure delivery of the plan. EA and NE are committed to this collaboration and recognise it is essential to achieving the new targets where they are failing and ensuring continued compliance where they are being met.

If you have any further questions, please contact west.midlands.enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Emma Johnson – Natural England – Area Manager – West Midlands

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Clare Dinnis – Environment Agency – Area Director – West Midlands

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