

BRAMPTON ABBOTTS & FOY GROUP PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on Tuesday 22nd March 2022 at 7.00 pm at Upton Bishop Millennium Hall

Addendum to Minutes of 22nd March 2022.

CPRE Herefordshire presentation – Phosphates in the River Wye.

Andrew McRobb provided a detailed summary of the issues currently impacting on the phosphate levels in the River Wye, and actions that are being, or could be, taken to reduce the levels. Throughout the Wye catchment, the river has suffered the catastrophic effects of pollution. Despite the situation being understood, the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) have taken little action in the last 7 years.

Where does the pollution come from:

25%	Sewage treatment plants discharging into the river (point pollution)
66-70%	Agriculture (diffuse pollution)
5%	Households or other sources

Andrew had brought a map of the area with him, showing the scale of Intensive Poultry and animal units within the Wye Catchment. Those present were surprised by the prevalence.

The main pollutants are phosphate and nitrate. There are many reasons why pollution from agriculture in Herefordshire is relatively high and / or has increased:

- Soil type – very fine, and high in phosphates
- Topography – lots of hills, allowing the water to run off into the river
- Legacy phosphates – In a study by Leeds & Lancaster University it is estimated that each year, far more fertilizer is applied to fields, than is actually required by the crops, resulting in around 3000 tonnes of excess phosphate.
- Lots of pasture and orchards have been removed, and replaced with potatoes and maize, which results in increased run-off.
- Mass chicken farming. Around 20m chickens in Herefordshire.
- When planning permissions have been granted for further chicken farms, the cumulative effect on pollution has not been appreciated, or accounted for.
- Chicken manure is 5 x heavier in phosphates than cattle manure.
- Compaction – larger machinery = more compacted ground.
- Crops can be sprayed up to 12 times per year.
- Storms increase run off

Other factors:

- Pollution generated within Powys which then flows downstream is adding to the extremely high levels in Herefordshire, especially in the River Lugg Catchment.
- Until recently, there were only 2 EA field officers. This has now been increased to 6, but this still only provides the manpower to inspect each farm once every 40 years.
- Across England water and sewage companies have not been sanctioned to stop discharging into rivers, and therefore, have not invested the necessary funds to achieve improvement. However Welsh Water are investing £60m this year to improve water quality in our catchment.

What's happening now:

- Citizen Science volunteers are carrying out 500-600 site tests per week.
- There are now approximately 800 volunteers actively working on and providing Citizen Science to help fight pollution in the Wye Catchment

- Recently, the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee produced a Water Quality in Rivers Report which has recommended the Government takes a series of actions immediately to reduce pollution including highlighting that agriculture is a source of water pollution.
- The Nutrient Management Board and Herefordshire Council have both passed motions for the regulatory agencies to start the process of obtaining a Water Protection Zone for the entire Wye Catchment.
- A Wetlands Scheme using reedbed technology is being set up by Herefordshire Council to extract nutrients from waste water in Luston.
- EA, NE, their Welsh equivalents, Herefordshire Council (HC) and Powys County Council (PCC) are being encouraged to work together and take a joined up catchment approach.
- A River Action Plan is before DEFRA, stating that the spreading of manure must be addressed in the whole catchment area (including Powys)

Other interesting information:

- We only have 2-3 years to avoid a eutrophication tipping point on the River Wye.
- Once Citizen Science data has a full 12 months of testing result, they will publish their findings
- Welsh Water is the only non-profit water company in England (Note that the situation is different in different parts of the UK)
- Welsh Water has announced £60m investment to look at sewage issues, and HC has budgeted £2m
- The NFU has a new Chair for Herefordshire and he is very proactive.
- 40 farmers are currently actively involved in reducing their impact on river pollution
- Research is being undertaken to look at neutralizing chicken manure – these are private initiatives (and include technologies pioneered in fish farm manure)
- Chicken manure can be transported to other counties (where it is actually needed)

Comments from the councillors / public

- It seems that resolving the sewage treatment issue is a potential “quick win” to take out 25% of the pollution, yet there isn’t sufficient pressure being put on the water companies.
- We need to make sure that we don’t simply move the problem to somewhere else.
- According to a recent newspaper article, the EA had recently found that they couldn’t access their own monitoring data, within their computer system. Is the EA fit for purpose?
- Water companies consistently blame customers for flushing inappropriate items, resulting in blockages.

What can we do:

- Spread the word, raise awareness
- Only flush toilet paper – no wipes etc.
- Help to bring pressure to bare in water companies, councils etc. so that they take action
- Contribute towards a spirit of cooperation between all residents, businesses and farmers.
- Not simply look to blame others but have a desire to be part of community based solutions including pressurising agencies and Government