



Summary of West Cumbria Catchment Partnership Meeting

26th November 2020

Attendees:

22 people attended the meeting:

Adam Briggs - NFU	John Gorst – United Utilities
Andrew Harrison – Cumbria County Council	Mel Fletcher – Natural England
Anna Hetterley – Environment Agency	Paul Barnes – Community/Farming representative
Anya Kuliszewski – Love my Beach	Rachael Osborne – Highways England
Caitlin Pearson - West Cumbria Rivers Trust	Rachel Whalley - Cumbria County Council
Chris Downham – United Utilities	Robert Frewen – CLA
Chris Spencer – Solway Coast AONB	Rosie Law – Catchment Sensitive Farming
Clair McFarlan – Solway Firth Partnership	Tim Duckmanton – Lake District National Park Authority
David Bechelli – Copeland Borough Council	Vikki Salas - West Cumbria Rivers Trust
David Kennedy – Environment Agency	
James Bickley – Forestry Commission	
Jan Darrall – Friends of the Lake District	
Jo Ratcliffe – Environment Agency	

Meeting presentations are available on the attached PDF. Any questions and discussions are summarised below.

Project Updates

Combined Sewer overflows – Vikki Salas

The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill is going through Parliament, with its next reading in January. The Bill will place a duty on water companies to ensure that untreated sewage is not discharged into rivers and other inland waters and expand the number of designated inland bathing waters. Combined sewers overflow for thousands of hours each year and water companies need more drivers to enable them to address this issue.

People are encouraged to write to their MP asking them to support the bill. The Rivers Trust have created a template letter that can be used:

www.riverstrust.org/2020/10/26/the-rivers-trust-calls-for-mps-to-vote-to-end-sewage-pollution/

Chris Downham (United Utilities) – United Utilities are supportive of this Bill but there needs to be a lot of engagement with Government and other stakeholders to ensure there is understanding of the reason for the use of combined sewers – to stop people flooding – and the very high level of investment that will be required to change the existing sewer infrastructure.

West Cumbria Rivers Trust Natural Flood Management delivery – Vikki Salas

See presentation slides.

West Cumbria Rivers Trust have delivered a wide range of natural flood management (NFM) measures across four catchment projects (Flimby, Cocker, Bootle and Glenderamackin projects) funded by the Environment Agency's NFM programme and Water Environment Grants. The presentation showcased this work and the lessons learned so far.

Adam Briggs (NFU) – In response to Vikki's point that farmers are increasingly citing uncertainty around the new Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMS) as a reason not to undertake works before the scheme is in place, the Agricultural Transition Paper will be published next week and will provide more detail on ELMS.

Robert Frewen (CLA) – The Agricultural Transition Paper may not provide enough detail for farmers to prepare or make decisions about future work. ELMS is looking to provide capital payments and ongoing annual maintenance/ compensation payments but uncertainty related to Brexit may push this sort of work down farmer's priorities.

Environment Agency Flood Risk Management Schemes – David Kennedy

There have been a lot of impacts and delays to scheme delivery related to Covid-19 as there has been reduced ability to work safely onsite.

The Flimby project has been passed to Cumbria County Council to deliver and will be going ahead. The scheme at Egremont is going well. The initial amount of funding allocated to this scheme should be secure but as the Government will need to reduce spending after the pandemic there is a possibility that the future budget may be reduced. The scheme should contain NFM alongside traditional defences but NFM spend is hard to secure through the funding calculator. It is hoped that a lot more NFM will be delivered as part of larger scales and the Environment Agency are looking at how this can be linked to, and transition into, ELMS.

Highways England A66/Braithwaite flood risk management scheme – Rachael Osbourne

Highways England and the Environment Agency first met in 2017 to discuss working together to combine the Environment Agency's planned linear defences to protect properties in Braithwaite with a scheme to reduce flooding to the A66. This project was halted in January this year as there was no viable option to protect both properties and the A66. The EA's project in Braithwaite has also been paused. An appraisal report is being written to summarise the work done. The project may be restarted if any circumstances change.

Currently the A66 project is not progressing as the main option to reduce flood risk would be to raise the road but Highways England don't want to do this for multiple reasons including the new cycle infrastructure that has just been put in. There is currently no funding in the Highways England

programme for this area but the programme is under review. Amey consultants are reviewing all schemes and a new drainage team are covering the North West.

Vikki Salas asked if the collaborative hydrological model of the Braithwaite area that was produced would be available for partners to use. Rachael to check this with consultants.

Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Rachel Whalley

See presentation slides.

Five areas are currently testing a process for producing Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). One of the reasons for selecting Cumbria as a pilot area is that it has a two-tier planning authority. It also has several protected areas (National Park and AONBs) with their own plans that the LNRS will need to link into. After this pilot, DEFRA will produce a template for other areas to use to create a LNRS. The LNRS should be useful for informing and prioritising delivery on the ground.

The first steps in the plan are to produce a written description of the area in terms of its existing biodiversity and a local habitat map. The next steps will be to look at the gaps, and identify opportunities for recovering or enhancing biodiversity in terms of general outcomes, not specific projects.

How the strategy prioritises actions is key and DEFRA have provided no guidance on this. There will be further stakeholder consultation throughout the process.

Rachael Osborne – Highways England is working towards a target of no net loss of biodiversity by 2025 and a net gain by 2040 and are using a biodiversity metric from Natural England. Highways England funding has to link to a local strategy.

Rachel Whalley – The LNRS will inform planning and targeted delivery of where things should be delivered so it would be good to link with Highways England work.

United Utilities Thirlmere Resilience project – John Gorst

See attached slides for photos.

Around 18 months ago the concept of the Thirlmere Resilience project was introduced to the Catchment Partnership (February 2019 meeting). The project has now been underway for a full year so it is a good time to provide an update. The project team has been very busy, particularly with undertaking survey work across an area of 4200 Ha and is working with partner organisations for both monitoring and delivery.

Working closely with John Muir Trust and Cumbria Wildlife Trust, a forensic approach to surveying the vegetation condition is underway as information is missing from areas that aren't designated as SSSI and detailed condition assessments are needed to create a plan for improvement. This includes comprehensive mapping of the extent and condition of peat soils and specialist plant communities.

The areas damaged by landslides in Storm Desmond are being looked at and plans are being developed to restore the damage and 'slow the flow'. NFM in steep upland catchments is being trialled on Comb Gill alongside assisted natural recovery to reconnect rivers to their floodplains on Wyth Burn and Raise Beck. Baseline data from the rivers has been collected this year ready for the restoration to happen next summer.

The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology have been monitoring water quality and flow dynamics at high resolution to inform a model demonstrating impact of different sized events on water quality. This will also help to demonstrate any benefits of the restoration. There have been very few studies of this sort done on high fells and done at scale.

Early data is showing that turbidity increases with flow but dissolved organic carbon concentration (an indication of damaged peat evident in the water column) is not totally aligned with rainfall. Peat is drying out in the summer and dissolved organic carbon concentration in the water peaks as the peat rewets. Often it is assumed that peat condition is OK because it is covered in vegetation but it can be the wrong kind of vegetation and results in sub-optimal performance of peat in terms of water quality and flooding.

United Utilities have employed a young shepherd, Matthew Fearon, who has been with the team for a year. Matthew is in charge of managing the livestock but is also very interested in the wider work. He keeps a detailed diary of shepherding life including stocking rates, movement and stock condition; the first time quantitative data of this detail has been collected. This will inform future activity and stock management.

After only one summer of changed stocking rates, changes in the vegetation and wider ecosystem are already being seen. There are lots of flowering orchids in the valley bottom, which is rare to see in the Lake District, and Cotton grass in higher areas. The landslide scars after Storm Desmond have remained bare for four years but are now beginning to revegetate. There is anecdotal evidence of more herons, likely due to more small mammals to feed on. Restoring the vegetation has knock on impacts through the food web. Some changes happen quickly but the full benefits will take years to manifest.

So far, the project is showing very positive results. The land has a sustainable carrying capacity; identifying and maintaining this sustainable stocking rate will allow delivery of ecosystem benefits and high quality sheep. Sharing learning from this project will be very important.

Paul Barnes – There is currently a consultation of flood and drought research. We need to respond to encourage more focus on landscape management of this sort.

Paul was referring to the Flood and Drought Research Infrastructure Project (FDRI), which is a scoping project funded by NERC and led by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. The first phase is to identify the priorities for further research on flood and drought infrastructure in the U.K. This will inform a round of NERC funding for research into increasing the U.K.'s resilience to floods and droughts by improving forecasting, planning, incident response and management.

The survey is open until 31st December 2020 and is available at:

www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/floods-and-droughts-research-infrastructure-project-fdri

Pete Leeson – The speed of ecosystem change seen at Thirlmere is rapid. This has been seen elsewhere, such as at the Woodland Trust project site at Tebay where there is greater moss depth, increased number of small mammals more birds. These changes are subtle and not obvious from a distance but they are very worthwhile. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy needs to include this subtlety; concerned that a mapping exercise misses these subtle landscape-scale changes. The LNRS also needs to look at the Lake District National Park 'State of the Park' report and recognise the gaps in the data.

It was agreed by all partners that ongoing monitoring is required to understand these changes and that the Government need to invest more in local data centres to increase availability of condition/baseline data.

LDNPA management plan and Heritage Horizons bid – Tim Duckmanton

An Expression of Interest to the Heritage Lottery Fund Heritage Horizons grant scheme has been successful. The project 'Secured for our Future' is focussed on nature recovery, future-proofing farming and heritage and engaging young people with the work of the National Park. Twelve projects were shortlisted nationally.

The development phase of the project has been extended until 2021 providing an opportunity to blend engagement for the project development into the ongoing engagement on the LDNPA Management Plan. The LDNPA want to co-develop the project with partners and communities and need to understand a range of views.

Detail on the development of the Lake District National Park Management Plan is provided in the attached slides.

Several people expressed an interest in engaging with this process as a Catchment Partnership.

Pete Leeson suggested that in the National Park's vision 'wildlife' needs to be a separate element rather than it being combined with landscape and culture. Only 4 % of SSSI rivers are in good condition; this is not good enough and deserves more focus in the plan. Concerned that some detail on serious issues is being lost.

John Gorst - The best dataset on water quality is the Lakes Tour from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. This is a long term dataset shows climate change and landscape impacts and could be referenced more to cement its importance as its funding is currently at risk.

Discussions

Catchment Pages for the River Basin Management Plan

The River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) is a national plan covering a 6-year period outlining the actions required to protect and improve the water environment.

The 'Catchment Page' is a page within the RBMP for each management catchment that the Catchment Partnership has been tasked with producing. The Catchment Page will outline who the partnership is, our delivery over the last cycle of the RBMP and our planned projects and aspirations for the next cycle. It is a significant opportunity to highlight the work of the Catchment Partnership and the actions needed to improve the water environment.

The RBMP is focussed on improving Water Framework Directive elements; water quality, physical habitat, hydrology and biology (fish, invertebrate and plant communities). It is not focussed on reducing flood risk but projects could include natural flood management projects with multiple benefits and work in the wider catchment that benefits the water environment.

Partners were asked to suggest projects for inclusion in the Catchment Pages based on WFD issues and elements at risk of deterioration. Projects will be split into those where partners are reasonably confident that delivery will go ahead in the next six-year period (2022-2027) and 'aspirational'

projects that we would like to deliver but currently there is something that prevents delivery going ahead. These barriers could be a lack of funding or resource or could be another issue.

Several project ideas were put forward.

Projects with 'confident delivery':

- River Irt Pearl Mussel Project.
- Ehen compensatory measures
- Thirlmere resilience project
- Continued and expanded Catchment Sensitive Farming work
- Continued work at Wild Ennerdale.

Aspirational projects:

- Riparian tree planting
- Facilitated farmer groups for SW coastal becks
- Water friendly farming projects for areas with poor water quality

These will be discussed at a targeted Catchment Pages meeting on 14th December 2020. New project ideas will also be added to the Catchment Partnership project pipeline. Draft versions of the Catchment Pages will be circulated for comment before they are submitted in February 2021.

Funding bids

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

- Cumbria Wildlife Trust have been successful in their bid to the Green Recovery Fund for peat restoration on Armboth Fell, match funded by the Riverlands project.
- West Cumbria Rivers Trust were unsuccessful in a bid for nature recovery in the Irt catchment linked to the ongoing freshwater mussel project, in partnership with the National Trust and Freshwater Biological Association.
- Since the meeting, West Cumbria Rivers Trust have found out they were successful in their bid for £370k to continue nature recovery in the Cocker and Glenderamackin catchments.

Another £40 million of Green recovery funding has been announced by the Government. They will be asking for new submission, not reconsidering ones that were unsuccessful in this round.

Upcoming funding opportunities

The Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovative fund – The Government recently announced £200 million for innovation projects to help communities be more resilient to flooding and coastal change. Twenty-five areas will each receive £6 million between 2021 and 2027. Cumbria County Council are leading on the funding bid for Cumbria. The Cumbrian Rivers Trusts have submitted a joint proposal to deliver nature based solutions as an element of the overall project. This will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

Investment Readiness fund – DEFRA are making £10 million available to support the environmental sector to develop projects that are ‘investment ready’ i.e. can attract repayable investment through the ecosystem services they produce. Further details on the fund and developing investment ready projects can be found via a series of webinars by the Institute of Green Finance www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tqB698USql&ab_channel=GreenFinanceInstitute.

CaST fund - United Utilities have announced a Catchment Systems Thinking fund of £300k for environmental improvements across their operational area. More details will be announced in early 2021.

AOB and DONM

There was no other business raised.

The next meeting will be 2nd February 2021.