



# A Manifesto for the Wye

---

This is a briefing document prepared by Save The Wye, a network of concerned citizens living along the Wye.

# Restore Our River

---

**Herefordshire Council has a key role to play in reversing the river's decline. We have created this Manifesto for the Wye to help make the health of our river a top priority in the local elections. Ask your candidate to pledge support for the following programme of action because, if elected, all councillors must act urgently to save the Wye.**

All agencies and experts agree that we are at a “crucial moment in the life or death of the Wye.”<sup>1</sup> This briefing document sets out what we feel is going wrong and what needs to be done to restore the river to its former glory. Its aim is to help prospective councillors, if elected, make what we feel are the right decisions to ensure our beautiful river can be enjoyed by future generations of Herefordshire citizens and for it to contribute as much as possible to the local economy. We have more detailed information backing up these proposals, on our website [savethewye.org](https://savethewye.org).

# A Manifesto for the Wye

As a prospective councillor, please pledge your support for the following programme of action for Herefordshire Council:

## PREVENT MORE DAMAGE

- 01 No approval of new or expansion of existing intensive poultry units (IPUs)
- 02 No approval for centralised Anaerobic Digesters
- 03 Develop a full cost-benefit analysis of the county's intensive poultry industry
- 04 Hold egg and poultry processors to account for damage done to the local economy

## CREATE CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

- 05 Embed river-friendly farming in the Local Plan and Economic Development work
- 06 Make river-friendly food a priority in all areas of council policy including procurement
- 07 Drive rural regeneration initiatives that enable farmers to diversify away from intensive poultry

## DRIVE THE PROCESS

- 08 Support the renewal of the Nutrient Management Board, ensuring it has proper powers and resources
- 09 Fight for significant extra funding for the Wye catchment from the Welsh and English Governments
- 10 Lobby the Welsh and English Governments for a River Wye Water Protection Zone

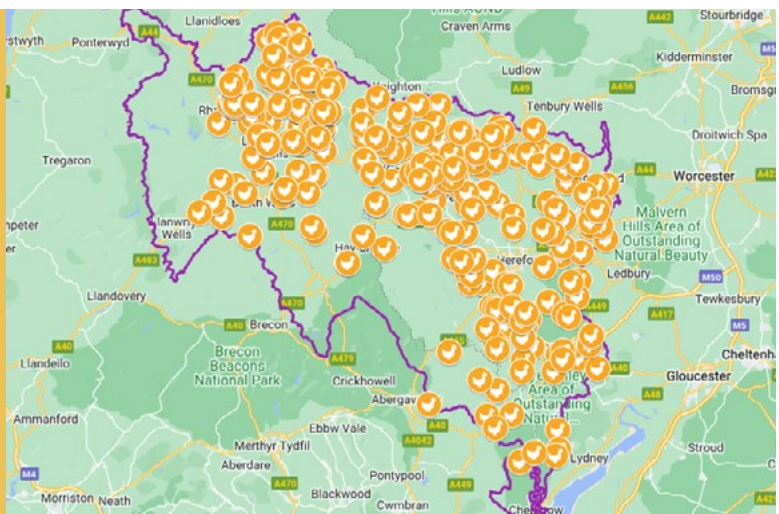
# About the Wye

The Wye and Lugg are amongst the UK's most highly protected wildlife habitats.<sup>2</sup> Their poor state indicates a major failure in this protection. They also support a thriving tourist industry and make a major contribution toward the well-being of our local communities. For this to continue, urgent change is essential.

## The State of the Wye

High levels of phosphates are washed into the Wye, mostly through run-off from farms. These levels disrupt the balanced life in the river, reducing essential biodiversity like salmon, otters and water crowfoot.

There are around  
**20** million  
chickens  
in the Wye catchment<sup>3</sup>



Wye River Catchment area IPU Map by cprw.org.uk 2023

## Links to Intensive Poultry Production

---

Thousands of tonnes of phosphate enter the Wye catchment every year in feed for the millions of chickens in factory sheds.<sup>4</sup> Their manure is then spread on farmland as fertiliser, but unfortunately much of this just washes into the rivers. Government committees, independent research and even Avara, Herefordshire's biggest chicken processor, have all recognised the link between industrial poultry units and the declining state of the River Wye.<sup>5</sup>

## The Oklahoma Case

---


In a long-running case in Oklahoma, Avara's parent company Cargill have recently been found guilty of knowingly polluting the river Illinois.<sup>6</sup> The judgement made clear that in the 1980s Cargill knew full well that spreading chicken litter in the catchment would destroy the river. So it is clear that Cargill have known for many years what the impact of their chicken business would be on the Wye.

## The Regulators aren't Regulating

---

A number of public bodies across England and Wales, working to international frameworks and guidelines, are responsible for monitoring and maintaining water quality. Cuts in funding from Government have led to a drop in monitoring and therefore data<sup>7</sup> – and on some occasions the agencies have actually been instructed by ministers not to enforce rules.<sup>8</sup> We need regulators to regulate properly.



An underwater photograph of a river. The top half shows the water surface with light reflecting through ripples. Below, the water is clear, revealing a rocky riverbed with many small fish swimming. Some green algae or plants are visible near the bottom.

Over  
**70%**  
of **Pollution**  
in the **River Wye** is from  
**Agriculture**

EA modelling 2023<sup>9</sup>

# Farming as a Solution

---

We need to work with farmers to find good solutions to the problems the Wye faces. It does however need a change in approach – the current system is largely broken. Indeed there are a range of river-friendly farming methods that could be adopted, which reduce the need for new phosphate to be spread on fields. These methods build soil structure and embed more carbon so that farmland absorbs more water and the remaining phosphates are captured by the soil. There are multiple benefits to these farming methods, and phosphate reduction in rivers is just one. They also work in harmony with our tourist industry, and produce food for our county.

Methods include planting scavenger crops, farm diversification, changed grazing methods,<sup>10</sup> planting trees (agroforestry),<sup>11</sup> different grazing crops and creating bigger buffer strips along the river.<sup>12</sup> A growing number of farmers are successfully working in river friendly ways.

## Planning Policies

---

Housing generates phosphates through the waste water discharged. Housing generates far less phosphorus than agriculture. But housing development has had to cease in the Lugg catchment to prevent further damage to the river.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the damage caused by IPUs continues unabated, thereby directly destroying jobs in the building sector. This is having a major impact on the county's economy and it is vital that we find ways of reducing all pollution in order to allow housing to go ahead on a sustainable basis. If chicken manure continues to be spread at its current rates then this will never happen. Spreading of any manure from intensive units within the Wye catchment has to cease immediately if we are to save the river.

We need planning policies that will immediately prevent any new intensive poultry units being built or the capacity of existing ones increased. Then we need the right regulation to reduce the number of birds in our area. Twenty million chickens are just too many.

## The Local Plan

---

It is important that the new Local Plan generates policies that minimize the generation of new phosphate load. The Council must produce clear, stringent Agricultural Planning Policies that require zero phosphate emissions from new agricultural development.

The county also needs a rural regeneration programme that encourages river-friendly farming and diversification away from factory farming. The Council should use its influence within the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership as well as with the UK and Welsh Governments to promote alternative business models for the rural economy and to support the actions needed to implement them.

Large, centralised Anaerobic Digestors that rely on the long-distance transport of manure and other feedstock are not the solution. They only concentrate the phosphate into the digestate which still needs to be disposed of, normally back onto fields that do not need the extra phosphate. They involve large numbers of lorry movements causing major disturbance to local communities.

## Water Protection Zone

---

We have known about the issues facing the Wye for at least 10 years. Over that period, the agencies have been using light touch regulation, advice and encouragement to try and manage the problem. Yet the rivers are in an even worse state now than before. It is therefore essential that we move onto a new model for managing the river with more powers, stricter regulations and more funding to resolve the issues.

There is a legal mechanism that achieves this called the 'Water Protection Zone' and there is no doubt that this is what we need to tackle the appalling state of the Wye.<sup>14</sup> So far the Government has rejected calls for this to be implemented but the Council needs to lobby hard to persuade Westminster of its crucial importance.



## Appendix and Further Reading:

---

1. [Landmark decision on mega poultry farm could mean 'life or death' of River Wye](#) (The Guardian, Jan 10 2023)
2. River Wye [wikipedia.org/wiki/River\\_Wye](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Wye)
3. Nicola Cutcher, Freelance journalist and Co-Producer of live TV investigative documentary 'Rivecide', "[Counting Chickens](#)" (15 July 2021)
4. Lancaster University led [RePHOKUs study](#) (May 2022), [Factory farming is turning this beautiful British river into an open sewer](#) (The Guardian 10 Jun 2022), Friends of the Upper Wye [Citizen Science project data](#) (Jan 2023)
5. EAC "[Water quality in rivers](#)" report (January 2022), Lancaster University led RePHOKUs study (May 2022), NRW [core management plan for the River Wye](#) (Sept 2022), John Reed (Agricultural Director of Avara Foods Ltd), Abergavenny Food Festival (Sept 2022)
6. [Chicken farm giant linked to River Wye decline was sued over water blight in US](#) (The Guardian 25 Sept 2022), court document: [illinoisriver.org/images/uploads/20230119/frizzell-decision-poultry-28632.pdf](https://illinoisriver.org/images/uploads/20230119/frizzell-decision-poultry-28632.pdf)
7. [Factory farming is turning this beautiful British river into an open sewer](#) (The Guardian, 10 Jun 2022)
8. [Government retracts 'unlawful' pollution guidance for England's farms](#) (The Guardian, 20 Jun 2022)
9. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Environment Agency (EA) Phosphorus1 Source Apportionment data for the Wye Catchment (March 2023)
10. A Mob Grazing to increase Soil Health and reduce run-off: [smilingtreefarm.com/resources/mob-grazing](https://smilingtreefarm.com/resources/mob-grazing)
11. Agroforestry as a farming solution: [Farming with trees would help UK hit net zero](#)
12. Water Meadows and Buffer Strips: [regenben.com/the-farm/the-river-wye](https://regenben.com/the-farm/the-river-wye)
13. Hfds Cllr David Hitchiner, leader of the council, [letter to Philip Dunne MP and Chair of the Environment Audit Select Committee \(EAC\)](#) announcing the moratorium on housing development and requesting assistance with solutions (5 Oct 2021)
14. Hfds Cllr David Hitchiner, leader of the council, [letter to George Eustace MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#) requesting a 'glide path' route to a Water Protection Zone (1 June 2021)

## Thank You!

---

Thank you for your interest. We hope we can rely on you to pledge your support for our Manifesto for the Wye and help implement it, once you are elected. Good luck in your campaign.

For enquiries about this document  
email: [richard@savethewye.org](mailto:richard@savethewye.org)

