

WELLBEING Planner

North Wales Wildlife Trust: Beaver Project Stakeholder Engagement

January / February 2022

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About the Wellbeing Planner

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- Evaluation and Research.

I deliver this service by working with groups of people and help ignite the creative power of their collective experience, passions, insights and wisdom. For information visit www.wellbeingplanner.co.uk

Yn gywir

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dafydd Thomas'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

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Table of Contents

Background	4
Methodology	5
Observations	6
Conclusions and Recommendations	9
Appendix One – Workshop Agenda	11
Appendix Two – xLeap Notes from the four workshops	12
Appendix Three – xLeap notes: issues about the reintroduction plan	33

Background

The Welsh Beaver Project has been investigating the feasibility of reintroducing wild beavers to Wales since 2005. As part of this work, the North Wales Wildlife Trust have been examining a proposal for a managed reintroduction of beaver on the River Dyfi. To aid in that process, the Trust organised four consultation events with stakeholders in January and February 2022.

The events were designed to share NWWT's proposal, gather feedback and identify issues that might need to be addressed going forward. By working in this way, NWWT hoped to co-create of solutions with stakeholders.

A detailed stakeholder analysis enabled North Wales Wildlife Trust to directly invite a number of individuals to the events. These participants in turn were encouraged to think of friends and colleagues who might want to attend to contact the Trust directly. In addition, the Trust also used social media and their website to encourage as many individuals and representatives as possible to participate in the ongoing discussion.

The four workshops themselves were held on:

- Thursday 20th January 2022 between 10.00 to 12.00
- Wednesday 26th January 2022 between 19.00 to 21.00
- Tuesday 8th February 2022 between 10.00 to 12.00
- Monday 14th February 2022 between 19.00 to 21.00

Methodology

Because of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic and associated Welsh Government restrictions, it wasn't possible to have face to face events with stakeholders. As a result, the workshops were held online using a simultaneous Welsh language interpreter, Xleap¹ collaboration software and Zoom video conferencing software.

Each workshop was two hours long. For a detailed agenda see Appendix One.

The first half of each workshop started with a presentation by North Wales Wildlife Trust about the organisation's interest in the beaver and the opportunities presented by its reintroduction to the area. The presentation gave details about the ecology of the beaver and its impact on the landscape. This included both positive and negative impacts – with suggestions on how those negative impacts would be managed and mitigated. Research and findings from other reintroduction projects were also shared with the workshop participants.

Participants then had an opportunity to ask questions for clarification before giving their feedback about what had been proposed.

The second half of each workshop then provided participants to identify:

- Common areas of concern.
- Issues where the stakeholders needed more information.
- Suggested next steps following on from these workshops.
- Who to involve in the future and how.

No attempt was made to get consensus from the workshop participants about the project at this time. The aim of the exercise was to simply let the participants feedback their perspective on what had been proposed.

¹ Xleap is a browser based digital collaboration platform which Dafydd Thomas uses as online flipchart paper to capture and organise the information shared by workshop participants.

Observations

The following points summarise those made by the stakeholders in all four events. For more details see Appendix One.

Comments that stood out from the initial presentation were:

- The details of the reintroduction plan – but the workshop participants wanted more information.
- The steps have been taken or that need to be taken to engage local stakeholders about the project.
- Understanding some aspects of beaver behaviour.
- Understanding how to manage beaver behaviour.
- A realisation by some of the contribution beavers make to conservation and biodiversity.
- Sharing their concerns about the potential impacts of beavers on other species within the catchment.

Without doubt, the workshop participants wanted more details about the proposed reintroduction plan. Their questions have been summarised as follows:

A) Questions about the project's background and context:

Participants wanted to know more about the beavers already on the river and how their presence was being considered as part of the proposed reintroduction project. They wanted to know if there were lessons being captured from what's already happened that will be taken into account in the proposal going forward.

Some of the participants wanted additional information as to why the Dyfi has been picked for the project.

Participants also had concerns about the diseases carried by beavers, or the potential for beavers to carry disease. Specifically, they wanted to know the risks beavers pose in terms of disease and how those disease related risks (if any) can be managed?

Finally, several other beaver programmes were mentioned during the presentation. The participants wanted more details about where those programmes have occurred and what can be learned from them.

B) Specific details about the reintroduction:

- Where specifically will the beavers be reintroduced?
- What contingency plans were in place protect local infrastructure (such as roads, railways and bridges) from beaver behaviour? Participants had concerns about the potential impacts on low lying fields and damage to riverbanks.
- Participants also wanted to know about potential impacts on other species and vulnerable habitats, such as peatland, and how might that be managed?

- The workshop participants wanted to know who was liable for any costs incurred by local farmers and landowners, arising from damage caused by beavers released as part of the project
- The workshop participants were also interested in NWWT's views about beaver numbers on the Dyfi. They wanted to know how many they expected to have on the Dyfi. How many is too much? What can we expect to happen when there are too many? Will the beavers be moved around the river if necessary?
- Workshop participants wanted more details about the project's overall budget.
- Participants heard briefly about the Volunteer Programme but wanted more details.
- The workshop participants also wanted to know which organisations are involved in the project and their role?
- They also wanted to know how will locals be able to continue to engage with the project in the future? What steps are in place in terms of governance for the project?

C) Details about the scope of the project:

- Some of the participants wanted to know what success looks like for the project? How will those benefits be measured and communicated?
- And finally, what is the exit strategy? What are the conditions or thresholds of the exit strategy and how will it be implemented?

For the details questions asked by participants during the workshop on reintroduction plan, see Appendix Two.

Following on from the detailed reflections on the initial presentation, the participants were then asked to suggest what they thought needed to happen as next steps. They're responses have been summarised as the following:

Build up stakeholder involvement – with comments including:

- The steps necessary to build trust between stakeholders. Suggestions included helping farmers speak to farmers about the issues or visit other farms with beavers present. Participants were aware that not everyone had been able to attend the online workshops and wanted to include them somehow. If face to face meetings weren't able to take place, the suggestion was that the project reaches out by post or other means possible.
- Work with NFU and FUW to engage their members. Reach out to CLA and Scottish National Farmers Union to capture their insights and experience.
- There were hopes that face to face meeting will be able to take place sometime soon – including site visits – as a way to involve and engage with stakeholders.
- Lots of uncertainty within the farming community at present in relation to changes to subsidy, which is a challenging situation for all concerned.
- Involve the public in the discussion, maybe attend the marketplace in Machynlleth.

Explain the benefits of the project and costs – with comments including:

- Participants wanted more information and clarity about the proposed benefits of the project.
- Case Studies were asked for.
- Participants in the workshops wanted a copy of the slides used.

Provide clarity about the impacts of the project – with comments including:

- How to balance those who bare the inconvenience with the wider benefits to the public and local environment?

Collate up to date information about beavers – with comments including:

- As well as collating the information, is there a farmer who already has beavers on their land who would be willing to share their learning and experience?
- Present the information in a simple cost and benefit format. Or alternately pros and cons.

Project Governance – with comments including:

- Provide information and suggestions about the decision-making process linked to this project.
- Provide information on how stakeholders might continue to engage with the NWWT and others about the project.

Have all the details of the project available to share – with comments including:

- Answer the detailed questions asked in the workshop about the project (see recommendations in the next section).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The four online workshops organised by North Wales Wildlife Trust provided an excellent opportunity for those who are for and against the proposed beaver reintroduction programme to air their views. The workshops were well attended, lively and informative events – with a frank yet polite exchange of views.

As was mentioned earlier, no attempt was made to find any consensus on what was discussed, merely to give people a chance for stakeholders to have their say. However, the participants across all four workshops independently came up with a consistent list of questions about the project on the Dyfi that they wanted answering. This isn't entirely surprising, as there was only so much information that could sensibly be put in a presentation within the specific time limit of the workshops.

The list of questions stakeholders would like answering are:

1. What lessons being captured from the unmanaged reintroduction of beaver into the Dyfi? How is that informing this proposal?
2. Why has the Dyfi has been picked for the project?
3. What risks to beavers pose in terms of disease? If there are risks, how are they being managed?
4. What has been learned from similar programmes and how has that learning been incorporated into this proposal?
5. Where specifically will the beavers be reintroduced?
6. What contingency plans were in place protect local infrastructure from beaver behaviour?
7. How will the impacts of beaver on other species and habitats be managed?
8. Who is liable for any costs associated with the project?
9. How many beavers does NWWT expect to have on the Dyfi? What can we expect to happen when there are too many?
10. What is the project's overall budget?
11. What are the details about the Volunteer Programme?
12. Which organisations are involved in the project and what is their role?
13. How will locals be able to continue to engage with the project in the future?
14. What does success look like for the project? How will those benefits be measured and communicated?
15. What is the exit strategy? What are the conditions or thresholds for the exit strategy and how will it be implemented?

Again, workshop participants independently, but consistently, came up with a series of suggested steps for the project to take forward following on from the workshop. They were:

- a. Collate up to date information about beavers.
- b. Explain the benefits of the project and costs.
- c. Provide clarity about the impacts of the project.
- d. Have all the details of the project available to share.
- e. Provide more details on the project's governance.

f. Build up stakeholder involvement.

Next Steps a - e are raised in the list of questions stakeholders would like answered.

Based on all this information, the recommended actions to take forward following on from this stakeholder engagement is:

- R1. For NWWT to provide as many answers as possible to questions 1 to 15 and ensure that its easily available to stakeholders – on a website or as a hard copy document. If it's not possible to answer those questions, then to give a reason why, for example, some of the answers maybe currently unknown and that's why the project is taking place.
- R2. For NWWT to explore different ways to share the information with stakeholders using the mechanisms suggested by the workshop participants. Again, if it's not possible to do everything, then to explain why. The intention is to continue the dialogue about the project with stakeholders in a way which is trustworthy, respectful, and two-way.

Appendix One – Workshop Agenda

Welcome (Dafydd) (20 minutes)

Opening up the conversation by asking the participants to introduce themselves by answering:

- What are you bringing to this meeting?
- What are you leaving being?

Get people online to Xleap.

Presentation by Alicia (20 minutes)

- Brief intro into NWWT and their interest in the Beaver
- Ecology of the Beaver
- History of the project.
- Recognising the positive and negative impacts of the projects.

Ask if there are any questions for clarity?

Breakout Group 1 (20 minutes)

- What words or pictures stood out for you from Alicia's presentation? Anything missed?
- What seems most critical?
- Listening to one another, what insights are starting to emerge about this project?

Coffee Break (10 minutes)

Plenary (10 minutes)

Themes the feedback from the breakout rooms:

- Common areas of concern?
- On what do the stakeholders need more information?
- What needs to happen to help the project
- Who else needs to be involved?

Here I'll have to organise the breakout rooms depending on the number of issues and the number of participants

Breakout Group 2 (20 minutes)

- What are the next steps?
- Who to involve?

Plenary (15 minutes)

- Feedback
- Next steps
- Who is involved?

Anything else? Wash Up? End (5 minutes)

Appendix Two Xleap Notes from the NWWT Beaver Workshops January / February 2022

20 January 2022

Feedback on the presentation

**What words or pictures stood out for you from Alicia's presentation?
Anything missed?**

Issues of Managing the Beavers in the Landscape

- Big concern that they do lots of damage
- As a farmer worried about beavers on food production and farming.
- Are they a protected species and we can't manage them if they become a problem,
- The negative impacts.
- How localised they seemed to be in the examples.
- The thought that had gone into solving the problems.

Interest in the contribution to conservation and biodiversity

- They are missing from the landscape
- History of beavers in Europe stood out - very powerful
- Great thing to bring them back.

Questions about their behaviour etc

- Do they move upstream?
- Missing - what is the impact on other species
- Fascinating natural history. Lots of detail on the problems they can cause.

More about the reintroduction plan

- Question on actual release site has that been decided.
- What's the plan?
- How many pairs?
- Importance of suitable habitat and presumably that is why the Dyfi catchment has been selected as a possible area?
- Is there compensation built into the project for farmers?

Engagement with Stakeholders

- Can we see evidence on the public debate.
- Interested in understanding if anything can be done to help farmers with their concerns.

What seems critical to you?

Need to look at the landscape approach. losing habitat in lower Dyfi, Landscape approach.

Work with stakeholders

- Need to understand the different stakeholders involved and why.
- Landowners and farmers are fully informed and involved at all stages of the reintroductions
- We need to achieve close engagement with farming community. They can understand and support. They are crucial.

Some more development needed on the proposal

- The need for suitable habitat or willing landowners to restore riparian habitat
- Their landscape scale means that it needs a landscape scale support
- Need more details on what's actually being planned.

How to manage the beaver

- Need for information for stakeholders on beaver behaviour, diet, impact other species etc ...
- Need information on what's needed to manage them in the landscape.
- weighing up positives and negatives in a bit more clarity
- The importance of the farming community - need to have questions answered.
- Its about landscape conservation.

Listening to one another, what insights are starting to emerge about this project?

Why here?

- Why the Dyfi catchment and is this linked to the previous rewilding project (Summit to Sea)? An answer was given to this question that it was separate to summit to sea
- There is a sense from some that the Dyfi area has been targeted by some organisations as some kind of 'test bed' for initiative (e.g. large scale afforestation) and there are issues around trust.
- Progress appears to be being made in building trust between communities and farmers and the summit to sea project and possible advantages for farmers and land managers

Stakeholders - who are they and how to involve

- Discussion around feedback from local people and concerns from the farming community including the enclosure at Cors Dyfi but also a great deal of local support in the area
- Why aren't Welsh Government or NRW involved in these meetings?
- Important to get the right stakeholders involved ...

Information

- Important to get practical examples from those on the ground and to ensure there is complete involvement
- Interesting to see the examples from other areas such as Europe and within the UK where solutions have been trialled and we should be able to use these techniques which may give reassurance to landowners
- It's really important to have these kinds of conversations on what to do next ...

Delivery

- Importance of the volunteer group network suitably resourced and informed to make sure that any issues that arise are solved before they become major problems. It's more of a landowner / volunteer project rather than a beaver project

Talked about the why .. but needs more information.

Need to answer the so what ...

26 January 2022

Feedback on the presentation

What words or pictures stood out for you from Alicia's presentation? Anything missed?

It was interesting to hear Chris Jones of the Beaver Trust two months ago say in an interview on BBC Breakfast that there are places you would not introduce beavers...that is rivers where there are flood defences/embankments!

The tourism point is nonsense. Farmers will not want tourist Beaver spotting on their land

Engagement with stakeholders

- Farmers have signed petition to say no - National trust giving opposite opinion. Wishes of farmers should be honoured.
- Need to ask all the farmers to get involved.

Issues of Managing the beaver in the landscape

- In a similar vein to Heather's question there are concerns about the potential damage to farmland, damaging trees, undermining riverbanks, impeding farmland drainage systems and causing low-lying fields to flood as well as the risk of disease spread to farm livestock as has already been mentioned
- What is the primary purpose - is it slowing water flow - example from Pontpren - river side planting
- Migrate up to the tributaries - they will dam the tributaries that will be bad for the salmon that are already on the downturn - what is the point in putting a pipe in to a dam.
- Damage trees - damage is visible. Clay banks of the Dyfi or being burrowed into making flood damage worse. Once they have burrowed it is too late.
- Could the reintroduction of beavers cause a shift from the conservation focus of other species?
- Lots of scientific evidence on the benefits
- Impacts on migratory fish. The salmon and trout on the Dyfi are already facing enormous pressures.
- Issues over tree felling, including tree felling from the existing beavers on the Dyfi. Trees being felled close to the road.
- Concern about increased flood risk to silage fields
- If beavers are so good to countryside, why are they being shot in Scotland?
- Is there evidence of people fishing at night near beavers?
- Anglers on the sea trout river - night fishing with waders - could they be attacked by beavers?
- Temporary dams will give way and cause flash flooding
- Missing from presentation - why do they want to reintroduce - what are the benefits?

- Is there an ideological view of beavers and their impacts, are the issues raised more about the loss of control if beavers manage the habitat? The unknown?
- I noted that Alicia was involved in the Scottish project can she comment on the cull licences that have had to be issued

Contribution to conservation and biodiversity

- There has been research carried out in Poland with Beaver connectivity of Bats. Where there was beaver there was much more wildlife, insects and Bats.
- There are environmental benefits of beavers, they should be here.
- You have to remember that there were at one time there were up to 60-80 million beavers all around Europe and were made extinct in most countries to 4 countries. We really have to rethink the biodiversity in Europe and learn from most of the countries in Europe. Humans murdered beavers for fur and selfish reasons. If we look at this properly it can be done reasonably

Details of the reintroduction plan

- What is the impact of introducing beavers at the lower Dyfi valley? evidence for benefits relates to upland areas rather than lower reaches of the river. Flooding is an issue on the lower Dyfi river and slowing the flow of water will increase flooding?
- Can you identify specific environmental benefits for the dyfi valley? and has there been a cost benefit analysis been undertaken? When the funds end in 2023 and there are management interventions required who will fund them?
- With the significant list of potential issues and the cost of dealing with same. What is the point?
- Really important to put the dam and the beavers in the right place. Be aware of the tide etc.
- Concern that research mentioned in Alicia's presentation was not relevant to the Dyfi
- Is this a shift away from supporting conservation of existing species -against additional resources of re introductions?
- Interested to hear how you plan to protect our Dyfi infrastructure - the flood banks and rail track from tunnelling beavers? Will Wildlife Trusts' insurers cover any repairs?
- Worried by who is liable for compensation claims - for example if the beavers fell a tree across a road or railway.
- Farmers could get the banks repaired - Will NRW let them do it? Not currently allowed to make bank repairs. Not allowed to put stones in.
- Have learnt a lot from the presentation. Clarification around the beavers that are already there and why more are needed?
- I saw a programme recently set in the USA, where they had an officer who caught the beavers and moved them back in to certain other areas.
- Why the reintroduction to the Dyfi specifically?
- How much money has there been from the Welsh Government to pay for the project so far? and the total project cost going to be?
- Exit strategy - once they are here, they will be here. There will not be an exit strategy.

- Main concern - if it does go ahead and doesn't work can you see the Welsh government approving a cull?
- What's the exit strategy?
- A large number of concerns were raised by those against the pilot reintroduction. These included disease risk; threats to food production; financial impacts upon farmers and landowners affected; compensation measures need to be in place; details on the exit strategy; legal liabilities; physical risks to infrastructure
- What does success and failure of a project look like?
- Beavers are already here - before adding any more surely you need to gain a better understanding of the impacts these are having and their suitability to the area before adding any more
- Local reports of a beaver having already been found dead in the area - do we know the cause of death? This does nothing to allay the fears of those who have concerns about the disease risks associated with beavers.
- Positive impacts may be hard to measure in early years compared to obvious effects like a felled tree but studies show those positive impacts are widespread in terms of biodiversity increases and that's something all species rely on, including us long term.
- Just to answer a question, if beaver dams were to cause localised flooding of fields they can very easily be modified or removed to address the issue. Also, they would tend to concentrate on areas where there is abundant food nearby, which isn't usually within grazed pasture. On the lower Dyfi, they'd generally prefer those areas that do not require damming such as the main river, so would prefer not to occupy field ditches - although it may occasionally occur and would be dealt with by the local Beaver Management Group.

What about other species?

- Concern about ecological impacts on the species and habitats of the ecosystem of the river at the moment
- Concern that beavers are already impacting negatively upon the salmon and sea trout fishery
- There are benefits to biodiversity and this has knock on benefits.
- Should some of the money be put towards salmon and trout.
- Salmon and trout do not receive as much attention as they are not 'cute and fluffy'.
- Any Positive or Negative effects on fish species may be hard to measure against the other threats fish face such as Nitrate Runoff and Chemical pollution, the beavers may end up taking the blame for other factors.

What seems critical to you?

How to manage the beaver in the project

- Nothing has been said tonight about what your exit strategy will be if and when things go wrong
- Stakeholders have a lot of questions about the practical management of the beaver ... how to limit damage to trees and banks.
- Questions about the beavers that are already there. What to do with them? How to manage them?
- There are questions about the details of the project - costs, location, exit strategy, how to exit, liability, compensation, financial support for the farmers with beavers on their land.
- Management issues into the future seem to be important.
- Beavers are already here - before adding any more surely you need to gain a better understanding of the impacts these are having and their suitability to the area before adding any more
- Questions about risk - disease, damage to infrastructure, increased flooding, silage crop ...

Working with stakeholders and project governance

- Consultation with local farmers and listening
- Stakeholders have questions about the governance of this process. Why the Dyfi? Some farmers are against the project. The National Trust for example, are supportive of the project. How are decisions going to be made?
- If a farmer says they do not want the m on the land how can someone say they have to have them
- Some stakeholders are excited by the contribution they'll make to the local environment and biodiversity.

More development needed of the proposal

- Want to have the evidence to hand. And how it sits in the area.
- Local reports of a dead beaver having already been found in the area - do we know the cause of death? This does nothing to allay the fears of those who have concerns about the disease risks associated with beavers
- Regarding disease- there are thousands of rats on the Dyfi, surely more likely to be a source of disease than a small number of beavers. That seems an unfounded concern
- Such as tourism ... balanced against the concerns that some farmers will have of people being on their land.
- A full impact assessment must be carried out before any further beaver introductions - the impact on a farmer's ability to produce food needs to be included as part of a full impact assessment and this should be carried out before any license is issued.
- Is there a natural predator for the beaver? If there is no natural predator and their numbers increase how will their numbers be managed for the benefit of the beavers themselves?
- Balance between introducing and the cost of putting right what they do

- Questions also about the point of the exercise. Let's talk about the cost, but help us understand the benefits.
- There are questions about how this project will impact on local infrastructure, riverbanks, night fishing and fish stocks / fish migrations.
- Also questions of if NRW and others will allow farmers to repair any damage that occurs.

Listening to one another, what insights are starting to emerge about this project?

Stakeholders - who they are and how to involve?

- 32 farmers - need to be engaged.

Why - needs more information

- Be clearer about the benefits.
- Lots of questions that need to be answered. How can we discuss and debate things?
- We seem to be a long way along the decision making ...

8 February 2022

Feedback on the presentation

**What words or pictures stood out for you from Alicia's presentation?
Anything missed?**

Details about the reintroduction plan

- Some farmers losing land to erosion so NWWT planting willows as roots will prevent future erosion. Identifying areas to plant trees and help stabilise bank. Want to continue bankside restoration, stabilise banks by revegetating them. Also provides habitat for beavers, meaning burrows would have less impact as trees hold banks together. Takes time. Meanwhile, pending farm payments, will remain vigilant. Trap and move beavers if necessary.
- It is really necessary to be 100% clear on what is done when beaver number get too high... how will the control be done? let's get it out there upfront.
- Slight worry about damage to trees. Bigger worry about burrowing damage to bank. Silage fields of concern - damage could cause erosion. Could be disastrous.
- Because beavers already present on Dyfi, need to be managed.
- Details on the proposal and consideration of concerns on a local basis will help alleviate concerns
- Good to hear that most negative issues have been considered and mitigation measures proposed. Training up of volunteers to help with mitigation is an excellent proposal and would be key to the projects' success.
- Less likely on Dyfi, more likely on tributaries? - depends on steepness and speed of water flow. Up to 2% slope.
- Length of Dyfi affected? How far up? Down to estuary?
- Who is supporting volunteers? Who is managing the volunteers? Volunteers can do a great job, but they need support from an organisation. Where is long-term funding for this project coming from?
- It was expressed that the unauthorised releases of beaver in the past have already brought about an "awful lot of damage". Who takes responsibility for damage caused by beaver activity? What would happen if beaver activity impacted upon road and rail infrastructure resulting in accidents?
- Who pays for the costs of dealing with small flooding events, moving beavers on or removing dams etc.? You need a long-term plan with long-term sustainable funding.
- There was some reassurance given by the mitigation proposals mentioned in Alicia's presentation
- Farmers need to know the long-term funding issues and responsibilities of a lead organisation. Is that going to be NRW?
- Great talk and good to hear more detail about the project and the animals.
- Q. There are beavers already on the Dyfi. Has the project taken them into consideration? What will happen to them and how will they impact the new beavers coming in.
- Q. You say up to 10 pairs of beavers. Where will the beavers be coming from? Will they be captive bred? What is their provenance.

- What do the Wildlife Trusts do if beaver numbers rise exponentially in the future
- Q. what happens when the beaver pairs start to breed, and more beavers are produced? What manages their population. Would we need to capture beavers and remove in future, or would there be natural predators to manage the population?
- Good talk about the general Beaver reintroduction but it would be good to hear more about the specifics relating to the Dyfi? Where, how, who etc. You need to be specific to the Dyfi.
- Liability about the project.
- It's not a species that can be left to its own. There needs to be long-term management.
- So what about the beavers that have already been introduced? What's happening to them?

Engagement with stakeholders

- The issue was stated of the "35 Dyfi farmers" who have signed a petition strongly objecting to the reintroduction proposals. It was stated that NFU Cymru are also very much against

About beaver behaviour

- Clarification on ideal bankside habitat? Willows, grasses, brambles, will get Himalayan Balsam. Bushy vegetation. Secluded is better but will live in sparse heathland! Birch and Aspen respond well to being coppiced. Coevolution.
- Only part of Dyfi will be suitable. Water levels. Food supplies. Size of territory depends on quality of habitat. Average 3km riverbank or lakeside. 90% within 10m of water's edge.
- What constitutes good habitat? Almost any vegetation - bark in winter. Food availability. Slow flowing water 1m deep. Will build dams to increase depth. Don't bother to build dams if water deep enough. Burrows in banks unlikely on Dyfi because of rocky banks and spatey river.
- Could they move between summer and winter residences? Yes but, low number of beavers on Dyfi means they may not have stabilised territories. As families increase they may move around.

Contribution to conservation and biodiversity

- Just to say, beavers help restore river ecology, and that will benefit fish, perhaps more than any species.
- Trees coppice. the roots are fine. coppiced trees don't topple over and rip out the riverbank.
- Coppice is a great wildlife resource for many species.

Concerns or impacts on other species

- Concerns about sea trout and salmon fish levels ... the river is currently at risk for both.
- In particular amongst the tributaries. And the downstream migration of fish.
- Beavers will tend to improve the habitat for minnows but will not benefit salmonids.

What seems critical to you?

Working with Stakeholders

- More meetings with landowners - site meetings
- Need detailed understanding why farmers have concerns? Also, how fishery concerns (especially salmonids) can be understood/addressed.
- Sharing with stakeholders the effectiveness of mitigation measures and experiences/case studies from elsewhere, where problems have been resolved.
- Communication is critical to landowners - knowing the benefits and addressing the concerns - control measures, exit strategy -

More development needed on the proposal

- Want to have a clear idea of the advantages and the disadvantages of the reintroduction ..
- More site-specific details required
- Once released what protection would beavers have from persecution.
- Tributary streams require shallow water
- The presentation slides showed few fish in the ponds.

How to manage the beavers / project going forward

- Damage to forestry? Conifer? Can be fenced out.
- Potential road and culvert flooding, tree felling across roads,
- Does this not need secure long-term funding for the ongoing management, otherwise it will be difficult to sustain once funding finishes

Listening to one another, what insights are starting to emerge about this project?

More information

- Find out if any issues/examples of conflict with road network/drainage etc from Tayside (eg A9) in Scotland.
- Quantified not rhetoric!
- Link to study to quantify...
- Could more be done to raise awareness of co-evolution of species eg salmon and beaver over longer timescales than just medieval?
- It strikes me that some concerns / worries / anxieties expressed by participants are emotional responses which are not necessarily proportionate to the scale of the problem. For example, is there evidence of a beaver having been hit by a train? I imagine the beaver suffered more than the train - is there any risk assessment of the likelihood of derailment?

Stakeholders - who are they and how to involve

- Reflecting as a facilitator, I get the impression from the whole group discussion that for some participants, there is a strong association between beaver reintroduction and rewilding. I wonder whether people's views are coloured by experiences with other rewilding projects. And whether you're talking with those groups about their lessons learned? Might this help to find ways of addressing those concerns? For example, I know some groups prefer to describe their work

as 'habitat restoration' rather than rewilding. Perhaps the difference is whether or not there's commitment to longer term funding to manage potential impacts to people's livelihoods. Perhaps there's also a deeper dimension to these fears - that this is a kind of eco-anxiety - this may be just me speculating but if engagement is to be effective, we may need to visit these levels of emotional response which underpin our rational thought, as well as working towards an 'objective' assessment of the pros and cons.

- Landowner/farmer engagement is critical. Need to explain clearly the mitigation options and process for resolving issues.

Issues about delivery

- Need proper systems, well managed. WG / NRW gone from supportive to just licensing. Beavers on the Wye. Coming to Wales anyway. WG now supportive and funding again. Tentatively agreed to fund beaver groups. Will probably not be very costly? Volunteers and some materials.
- Funding until next year - what if funding not continued? Who would be responsible or liable?
- NRW don't have policy on beavers. Using trial to get info on beavers. Unofficial promises. Benefits outweigh costs 100:1!
- Own view as landowner / representing NFU - open mind, not against reintroduction as long as it's not invasive and doesn't cause damage. Could cause mild damage. How can that live in harmony with biodiversity and existing farming systems and infrastructure?
- Communication and Funds - farmers feeling under pressure, not making money, uncertain about future, straw camel's back, feel under stress, need people to come alongside. Worried re mitigation. Fencing expensive. Alay fears. Not us and them.
- General feeling is supportive, but genuine concerns about how an introduction would affect precarious fish populations - what are the observations from other re-introduction sites?
- Concerns re beaver impact to the Dyfi which is currently in desperate need of help regarding fishing stock.
- Why here?

14 February 2022

Feedback on the presentation

What words or pictures stood out for you from Alicia's presentation? Anything missed?

About beaver behaviour

- Information lacking around the problems that these pests can cause.
- Beavers as a keystone species that are missing from our landscape and the benefits that have been seen
- disappointed - all that was talked about was the positives
- Pictures that were shown only showed minimal damage.
- Contribution to conservation and biodiversity
- Generally, in favour due to the benefits to the environment
- Generally opened minded about the project. Some big issues mind but lets hear more.

Engagement with stakeholders

- What was not said - stake holders have not been consulted. Specifically, landowners
- Needed to be speaking to landowners two years ago.
- Consultation around the Dyfi hasn't happened on a wider scale.
- No Consultations - there were 10 consultations held in 2020. The pandemic has put a hold on face to face.

Details about the reintroduction plan

- What happens after 5 years.
- Good evidence from Scotland and Devon that can be applied to the project on the Dyfi.
- Confusion over the enclosure and the wild release
- Small matter, does the time of release make a difference
- Concerned that even more beavers will be let out on the Dyfi than there are now.
- Who is paying for all of this in the long term? who is liable if a beaver floods and area or who is paying for the electric fencing etc.
- There are concerns about the beaver being a protected species and once present on the river we couldn't actually move them if they were a problem.
- When the population grows and grows you can't monitor them as well as you can with a small population. How are you going to keep tabs on population growth? Have you got access permission to river and land to survey for them or are you assuming?
- the exit strategy may be impossible if there are lots of beavers by the time the project comes to an end. The strategy needs to be in line with the actual number of beavers on the catchment by then.
- What is going to happen after 5 years. The farmers and the community are in this for the long term and care passionately about the area and how we leave it for future generations. Who will look after the area after the five-years? What is the exit strategy?

- We need to be very cautious with the project and not jump in.
- Issues about managing beavers in the landscape
- 1600s population of Britain was 2,000,000, now 63,000,000
- Flooding at Derwenlas, if the main road floods again will be a problem for emergency services due to beavers
- There are issues with the project from various sectors including farming and fishery and the issue of the Highway is a big concern because it is very important to the area. Any blockage of the road will have huge issues locally and financially.
- Why has there had to be a cull in Scotland
- Anomalies in cutting trees and not cutting trees

Issues about other species

- Concentrate more on Res Squirrels and Otters, that have less impacts. Concentrating on the wrong areas. Vanity project

What seems critical to you?

Working with stakeholders

- Need to know where the consultation has been from
- Lack of consultation with local farmers / landowners
- Concerns of farmers (the people affected) need to be put to NRW and Welsh government

More information about the project

- What happens at the end of the 5 years?
- Concern about the exit strategy being put in place by the project
- Right place, right time - learn from the pine marten project (10 years in the making)

Listening to one another, what insights are starting to emerge about this project?

More information needed about delivery

- The economic balance of this approach?
- What happens in the longer term?
- With the mitigation measures who will meet the costs? Will it be the farmer?
- the exit strategy?
- Impact of disease?
- Concern about what happens when numbers of beaver get much higher and the long-term impacts and if there is an effect who is liable in the medium to long term?
- How do we address the issue of legal protection for beavers as and when and if they become established?

Stakeholders - who are they and how to involve them?

- How to consult going forward?

Next Steps - 20 January 2022

Build stakeholder involvement (6)

- Build trust and stakeholder involvement, away from the usual suspects who don't join online meetings
- Comments
- How do we determine who the key stakeholders are/those that can actually make or break decisions? ()
- Need to have evening meetings and face to face meetings in order to get farmers involved. (Jan 20, 2022, 12:07 GMT)
- Site visits are really good to help people understand. (Jan 20, 2022, 12:07 GMT)
- Any ideas on how we can build up trust and stakeholder involvement?
- Visits to areas in Scotland so that farmers and landowners can meet their farming counterparts in areas where beavers have already been released.
- An event to engage community members where a meeting may not seem as appealing
- Farmers speaking to farmers is a good way of gaining understanding e.g. using farmers involved in the Devon project or Scottish project to communicate their experiences. (Jan 20, 2022, 12:08 GMT)
- It seems like a really difficult time to introduce what could be perceived as very new and different approaches to land management at the moment given that the political and economic foundations of agricultural sector are so uncertain. Things will become more certain once we know more about the shape of the "Sustainable Farm Plan" subsidy...until then, I might be hard for farmers to give perceived "risky" moves any support. (Jan 21, 2022, 16:45 GMT)

Explain the benefits of the project (5)

- Get across the wider ecosystem benefits that bringing beavers back will result in - ecological, flood prevention, tourism etc.
- How do we demonstrate the benefits of beavers and perhaps we need to do more on this? Import of managing water in catchments as well as all the biodiversity benefits but they do create issues. There is a cost, but it is very small and it's important that the benefits accrue to everyone. Farmers shouldn't feel that they bear the cost whereas the tourism sector would benefit
- A road trip would be fabulous and very helpful - previous experience has shown that actually seeing a project/process in action is extremely useful
- Provide case studies from other areas where farmers have seen benefits to give reassurance
- Beaver are likely to be released in most suitable areas and funding will be sought for this?

Explain what to do about the impacts of the project (1)

- How to balance out those who bear the cost or inconvenience with the wider benefits which affect the wider public.

Collate up to date information about beavers (2)

- A question was asked about the beaver's natural habitats - are they usually in the uplands or further downstream?

- The Dyfi is a spate river so the beaver could have a beneficial effect further up the catchment quite quickly. But it is a long-term process and 10 pairs of beaver in the Dyfi may take 30 years for a beneficial effect ()
- Do local people know that beavers are already present?

Next Steps - 26 January 2022

Unsorted (3)

- It seems that participants tonight want more information about the costs and benefits of this approach. How can we gather that information and share that information?
- Because of the previous rewilding isn't there a danger that this is caught up in this.
- Comments
- So there needs to be clarity between this project and other things that have gone on before.
- It is all a bit of a muddle

Build stakeholder involvement (11)

- How do we engage people in this process. There are 32 farmers along the river who according to Mark are against the project. Do they have other questions that they want answered? Are there ways we can do that? How can we facilitate those discussions?
- Those 32 farmers will be the ones left to cope with all the repercussions when the project ends after 5 years. Who will be funding them to do this?
- Stakeholders tonight have a lot of questions that they want answered. How can we do that?
- Can the stakeholders have more information about the decision making associated with this project?
- General Public. There are a lot of supporters of Beaver reintroductions that are often ignored.
- Consultation - going out and giving people the benefits. Being honest.
- Seeking out the people who will be directly affected individually.
- Face to face engagement with those who will be directly affected.
- More consultation with the general public.
- Questionnaire and consultation letters to general public in the area. Might be a good and quick way to get to people
- Concerns that farmers have not been invited to these workshops. You need to do better to get farmers to the table.
- The existing beavers near Machynlleth seem to have gathered negative press, what can be done to address this?

Explain the benefits of the project and costs (2)

- Be open about the costs of the projects - what is the payment
- please share the powerpoint presentation

What to do about the impacts of the project (4)

- Tourism industry needs to be consulted. But on the flip side there isn't much access to the river, so it may encourage trespass.
- Wider range of vets to be consulted. Are there diseases etc that need monitoring over the long-term.
- If we go down the route of looking at all mammal diseases, then we need to look at dog fouling in the landscape.
- Where does the liability lie if serious issues/damage becomes apparent in the longer term e.g. impact on farmland, highways, railways etc? Will it be the Welsh Beaver Project/Wildlife Trust who are liable? Or the Beaver Management network of volunteers? Adrian Lloyd-Jones stated in the breakout room that once the beavers are released, they would be wild animals therefore any liability would sit with Welsh Government!

Governance (3)

- Who is the ultimate decider - NRW or WG or individuals?
- Landowners feel they have no control over what is happening
- There needs to be a feel of ownership for local landowners

Collate up to date information about beavers (1)

- Find a landowner willing to have beavers released on their land and assess the impacts. A demonstration site?

Next Steps - 8 February 2022

Unsorted (8)

- The issues raised in the previous discussion where:
- ... around the interaction / impact between species (Salmonids and downstream migration of species as two examples);
- ... the pros and cons of the project? Participant questions about cleaner water, impacts on infrastructure, increased biodiversity ...
- ... some detailed questions about managing the project going forward
- how to engage with all the stakeholders in this project
- But the next step is how to take all of these issues forward? What are the next steps you'd like to see to address these issues ...?
- Please see a link to our summary report here. It answers a lot of information about beavers. (It's a little out of date with regards to the sites that were being considered but the rest is fine).<https://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/Welsh%20Beaver%20Report%20Summary%202012%20%28ENG%29.pdf>
- Wanting this to be in the right place and the right time.
- Comments
- It's also important to consider the Dyfi Biosphere, especially taking into account the relationship between Man and the Biosphere...

Build stakeholder involvement (3)

- Lots of people have been involved in this has been good. But going to the marketplace in Machynlleth was one suggestion on how to engage with people.
- Also use social media and work with NFU and FUW to engage with their members.
- A suggestion that the project talks to individual farmers along the river and listens to their concerns and interests.
- Farmer's/ landowners along the Dyfi need to be reached out to - by post, in person, by whatever means available. Farmers don't tend to be online during the day... and it's lambing coming up!! (Spoken as a former farmer)

What to do about the impacts of the project (1)

- General support with caveats - more information required on the technical side between the beaver and fishing communities. Get the questions answered and have opportunities to swap information.

Collate up to date information about the beavers (3)

- Wanting a simplified document - these are the pros and cons.
- The beavers are already on Cors Dyfi ... there's something we can learn from already.
- Could the project find out if the recent A9 road scheme north of Perth considered that there might be impacts or specific mitigation needed for the Tayside beaver population? I would be interested in any response.

Get the details about the project straight (3)

- The presence of beaver on the Dyfi ... means there's an opportunity to meet on site and understand the pros and cons. Maybe some data is being gathered that could help explain what's going on.
- Whether or not funding might be available to keep going volunteer groups and maintenance or other ...
- If the funding comes to an end ... and damage occurs ... who is liable ...?

Next Steps - 14 February 2022

Unsorted (2)

- Some of the feedback from the previous exercise included ...
- Follow up on the Bangor University contact.

Build stakeholder involvement (9)

- How and who to consult going forward?
- Speaking to Bangor University and impact on landscape.
- How might the reintroduction of beavers' impact SSSIs?
- Plan for future consultation outlined
- Comments
- So, is this to ask for a plan? Or was the plan outlined in your discussion?
- NFU farm walk outlined too
- Consultation on tributaries
- Farms on a wide catchment level could be affected - need to broaden out the scope of the consultations
- Evening consultations
- In local area
- People do care about nature - if consulted - at the beginning - have ideas about what could be reintroduced. Need to work with not but things on to. There is a want to conserve.
- Consultations with farmers from Scotland - some positive some negative. CLA and Scottish National Farmers Union

Explain benefits of the project (2)

- Interest in how the beaver might benefit the hydrology of the area. Is there something we can learn from people at the moment?
- Really need to explain why going after the beaver. Is it all about kudos ... or is it that we need to recognise the ecological benefit they bring as 'habitat engineers' creating other habitats for other species and increasing the biodiversity on the way?

What to do about the impacts of the project (2)

- Impact of disease?
- One farmer runs an organic farm and is concerned about the impact of disease - or more specifically the impact of beavers as a vector for disease that might impact on his organic herd. He wants reassurance about this.
- Recognise the different economic impacts- farming is 12 months a year, tourism a few weeks, for example.

Collate up to date information about the beavers (2)

- Some very specific issues about what might happen to the landscape as a consequence of reintroducing the beaver. How might the project impact upon local peat bogs for example.
- Need to monitor the beaver that are already there. Worried if we add more ... what happens if we end up with hundreds ... Why not just monitor the beavers that are already in the river.

Get the details about the project straight (5)

- The exit strategy?
- The economic balance of this approach?
- The impact on the farming balance - when they grow the feed for the winter near the river during the summer. This has a financial impact on running the business which is a concern.
- What happens in the longer term?
- Have a plan for handover to a responsible body at the end of the five years.
- Have monitoring in place such as Bangor University for the SSSIs.

Appendix Three – Questions about the details of the Reintroduction Plan

(In no particular order)

Where is the site? (7)

- Question on actual release site has that been decided.
- What is the impact of introducing beavers at the lower Dyfi valley? evidence for benefits relates to upland areas rather than lower reaches of the river. Flooding is an issue on the lower Dyfi river and slowing the flow of water will increase flooding?
- Really important to put the damn and the beavers in the right place. Be aware of the tide etc.
- Details on the proposal and consideration of concerns on a local basis will help alleviate concerns
- Less likely on Dyfi, more likely on tributaries? - depends on steepness and speed of water flow. Up to 2% slope.
- Length of Dyfi affected? How far up? Down to estuary?
- Good talk about the general Beaver reintroduction but it would be good to hear more about the specifics relating to the Dyfi? Where, how, who etc. You need to be specific to the Dyfi.

What about the beaver's already on the river? How are lessons being captured from that and introduced into the project. (5)

- Have learnt a lot from the presentation. Clarification around the beavers that are already there and why more are needed?
- Beavers are already here - before adding any more surely you need to gain a better understanding of the impacts these are having and their suitability to the area before adding any more
- Because beavers already present on Dyfi, need to be managed.
- So, what about the beavers that have already been introduced? What's happening to them?
- Concerned that even more beavers will be let out on the Dyfi than there are now.

Contingency plans to protect / ameliorate local infrastructure, low lying fields, impacts on other species and damage to riverbanks (10)

- Is this a shift away from supporting conservation of existing species - against additional resources of re introductions?
- Interested to hear how you plan to protect our Dyfi infrastructure - the flood banks and rail track from tunnelling beavers? Will Wildlife Trusts' insurers cover any repairs?
- Farmers could get the banks repaired - Will NRW let them, do it? Not currently allowed to make bank repairs. Not allowed to put stones in.
- Just to answer a question, if beaver dams were to cause localised flooding of fields they can very easily be modified or removed to address the issue. Also, they would tend to concentrate on areas where there is abundant food nearby, which isn't usually within grazed pasture. On the lower Dyfi, they'd generally prefer those areas that do not require damming such as the main river, so would

prefer not to occupy field ditches - although it may occasionally occur and would be dealt with by the local Beaver Management Group.

- Some farmers losing land to erosion so NWWT planting willows as roots will prevent future erosion. Identifying areas to plant trees and help stabilise bank. Want to continue bankside restoration, stabilise banks by revegetating them. Also provides habitat for beavers, meaning burrows would have less impact as trees hold banks together. Takes time. Meanwhile, pending farm payments, will remain vigilant. Trap and move beavers if necessary.
- Slight worry about damage to trees. Bigger worry about burrowing damage to bank. Silage fields of concern - damage could cause erosion. Could be disastrous.
- It was expressed that the unauthorised releases of beaver in the past have already brought about an "awful lot of damage". Who takes responsibility for damage caused by beaver activity? What would happen if beaver activity impacted upon road and rail infrastructure resulting in accidents?
- There are issues with the project from various sectors including farming and fishery and the issue of the Highway is a big concern because it is very important to the area. Any blockage of the road will have huge issues locally and financially.
- Anomalies in cutting trees and not cutting trees
- What about the physical risks to infrastructure?
- What are the threats to food production?

Who is liable for any costs incurred by local farmers etc caused by beavers released as part of the project (10)

- Is there compensation built into the project for farmers?
- With the significant list of potential issues and the cost of dealing with same. What is the point?
- Worried by who is liable for compensation claims - for example if the beavers fell a tree across a road or railway.
- Who pays for the costs of dealing with small flooding events, moving beavers on or removing dams etc.? You need a long-term plan with long-term sustainable funding.
- Liability about the project.
- Who is paying for all of this in the long term? who is liable if a beaver floods and area or who is paying for the electric fencing etc.
- Flooding at Derwenlas, if the main road floods again will be a problem for emergency services due to beavers
- What are the financial impacts upon farmers and landowners affected?
- What compensation measures are in place?
- What are do the legal liabilities lie?

Will the beavers be moved around the river if necessary? Under what conditions. (1)

- I saw a programme recently set in the USA, where they had an officer who caught the beavers and moved them back in to certain other areas.

Project Budget (1)

- How much money has there been from the Welsh Government to pay for the project so far? and the total project cost going to be?

What is the exit strategy? Under what conditions / thresholds will the exit strategy be implemented? (8)

- Exit strategy - once they are here, they will be here. There will not be an exit strategy.
- Main concern - if it does go ahead and doesn't work can you see the Welsh government approving a cull?
- What's the exit strategy?
- It's not a species that can be left to its own. There needs to be long-term management.
- What happens after 5 years.
- There are concerns about the beaver being a protected species and once present on the river we couldn't actually move them if they were a problem.
- What is going to happen after 5 years. The farmers and the community are in this for the long term and care passionately about the area and how we leave it for future generations. Who will look after the area after the five-years? What is the exit strategy?
- What are the details on the exit strategy?

More details required about why the Dyfi was picked for the project. (3)

- Importance of suitable habitat and presumably that is why the Dyfi catchment has been selected as a possible area?
- Can you identify specific environmental benefits for the Dyfi valley? and has there been a cost benefit analysis been undertaken? When the funds end in 2023 and there are management interventions required who will fund them?
- Why the reintroduction to the Dyfi specifically?

What does success look like for the project? How will the benefits be measured and communicated? (3)

- What does success and failure of a project look like?
- Positive impacts may be hard to measure in early years compared to obvious effects like a felled tree, but studies show those positive impacts are widespread in terms of biodiversity increases and that's something all species rely on, including us long term.
- We need to be very cautious with the project and not jump in.

How will the project manage beaver numbers? What is considered to be too many?

What can we expect to happen when there are too many? (6)

- How many pairs?
- It is really necessary to be 100% clear on what is done when beaver numbers get too high... how will the control be done? Let's get it out there upfront.
- What do the Wildlife Trusts do if beaver numbers rise exponentially in the future
- When the population grows and grows you can't monitor them as well as you can with a small population. How are you going to keep tabs on population growth?

Have you got access permission to river and land to survey for them or are you assuming?

- the exit strategy may be impossible if there are lots of beavers by the time the project comes to an end. The strategy needs to be in line with the actual number of beavers on the catchment by then.
- Why has there had to be a cull in Scotland

Volunteer Programme: details on what they will do and how they will be supported / trained. (2)

- Good to hear that most negative issues have been considered and mitigation measures proposed. Training up of volunteers to help with mitigation is an excellent proposal and would be key to the projects' success.
- Who is supporting volunteers? Who is managing the volunteers? Volunteers can do a great job, but they need support from an organisation. Where is long-term funding for this project coming from?

Which organisations will do what within the project? (1)

- Farmers need to know the long-term funding issues and responsibilities of a lead organisation. Is that going to be NRW?

What about other programmes. Where are they? And what have we learned? (6)

- Concern that research mentioned in Alicia's presentation was not relevant to the Dyfi
- Good evidence from Scotland and Devon that can be applied to the project on the Dyfi.
- Confusion over the enclosure and the wild release
- Small matter, does the time of release make a difference
- Issues about managing beavers in the landscape
- 1600s population of Britain was 2,000,000, now 63,000,000

How will locals be able to continue to engage with the project over time? (0)

What about disease? What are the risks and how have they been managed? (3)

- Local reports of a beaver having already been found dead in the area - do we know the cause of death? This does nothing to allay the fears of those who have concerns about the disease risks associated with beavers.
- Q. You say up to 10 pairs of beavers. Where will the beavers be coming from? Will they be captive bred? What is their provenance.
- Disease risk

Unsorted (4)

- What's the plan?
- There was some reassurance given by the mitigation proposals mentioned in Alicia's presentation
- Great talk and good to hear more detail about the project and the animals.