



**North Wales Wildlife Trust:
Beaver Project Stakeholder
Engagement
September / October 2022**

31 March 2023

About this document

As the Wellbeing Planner, I provide customer focused services that help groups of people, whatever their circumstance, to work together more effectively.

Success in a team, a community or business is based on shared understanding to inspire collective action. Whether it's tackling climate change or to focus the efforts of a corporate team, success comes from people working towards a shared goal.

This paper provides a record of the stakeholder engagement workshops with for the North Wales Wildlife Trust on their Beaver Project. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

For information on the Wellbeing Planner, please visit www.wellbeingplanner.co.uk

Yn gywir

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Dafydd Thomas', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Dafydd Thomas
Wellbeing Planner
Director

t 07894 917 533

e dafydd@wellbeingplanner.co.uk

w www.wellbeingplanner.co.uk

Table of Contents

Background	4
Methodology	6
Observations	7
Discussion	11
Recommendations	15
Appendix One – Workshop Agenda	17
Appendix Two – Notes from the Four Workshops	20
Appendix Three - Summary of Stakeholder perspectives on the different options for Beaver Project	30

Background

The Workshops

The North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) has been investigating the feasibility of reintroducing wild beavers to Wales since 2005 – called the Welsh Beaver Project. In January and February 2022, the North Wales Wildlife Trust organised four online workshops as an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on their proposals. That exercise generated 15 questions about the Trust's proposal that stakeholders wanted answering. Feedback from the workshop also recommended that the Trust explore different ways of engaging and informing stakeholders about their proposal - and to continue the dialogue about any potential intervention.

In September and October 2022, the Trust organised a follow-on series of three face-to-face workshops and one online event¹ to report back to stakeholders about the work they'd done since Spring 2022. The events were an opportunity to answer the questions gathered earlier in the year, inform participants about any changes to the proposed intervention and continue the process of listening to stakeholders as they continue to inform the development of the Beaver Project.

NWWT were also using the events as an opportunity to understand the wider context in which any beaver reintroduction project, or similar, would have to operate. By taking this approach, NWWT were very hopeful that participants could co-create the project's design and eventual implementation.

Finally, NWWT hoped that the information gathered during this round of workshops would be used to:

- inform Natural Resources Wales as a key stakeholder and
- inform the management plan of the project going forward.

Policy Context

A goal of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015 (Wales) is to create a resilient Wales, measured by 'biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic, and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.'² The Act also requires that public bodies in Wales follow ways of working that include collaboration, involvement and thinking long term. The Ways of Working and the Resilient Wales WFGA Goal are at the heart of NWWT's approach to the Welsh Beaver Project – and another reason why this latest round of workshops were held.

¹ Held on Wednesday 28th September 10:00 to 15:00 – face to face meeting Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve; Wednesday 12th October 10:00 to 15:00 – face to face meeting Centre for Alternative Technology; Tuesday 18th October 18:00 to 21:00 – face to face meeting Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve and Thursday 20th October 19:00 to 21:00 – online event.

² Application to Natural Resources Wales to release the Eurasian Beaver for a reintroduction to the Dyfi Catchment North Wales Wildlife Trust December 2019.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016³ aims to help Wales meet the challenge of creating a secure, resilient, and productive ecosystem in Wales through the joined-up management of natural resources in ways that deliver for the environment, people, the economy, and the communities of Wales. The aim of the Act is to build up the resilience of natural systems for the long term.

According to the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales 2020⁴ assessment of ecosystem resilience, the 'wellbeing of humans ... is threatened by an ecological and environmental breakdown.' It also states that 'building up the resilience of ecosystems' is key. The report defines a resilient ecosystem as, an 'environment that can respond to pressures by resisting, recovering or adapting to change; and is able to continue to provide natural resources and benefits to people.'

Under the heading of Opportunities for Action, the report urges Wales to 'to place nature at the centre of decision making,' through 'effective ecosystem management ... by maintaining and enhancing habitats and species to aid the recovery of biodiversity and restore functionality to ecosystems.'

The multiple threats to the natural environment and the need to enhance habitats and restore the functionality of ecosystems is what's motivating NWWT to reintroduce Beaver into the Dyfi Catchment.

It is NWWT's belief that how they achieve the 'restoration of the ecosystem' is by working with the local community to co-create their proposals for the Welsh Beaver Project. It is the conviction of NWWT that they need to work with local communities to achieve their aims and inspire them to co-create any proposals. This aligns with what SoNaRR 2020 describes as 'building wider engagement' to create a 'commitment to transformative change ... by working together on the importance of nature-based solutions, promotion and adoption of good practice and more integrated policy interventions.'

³ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/environment-wales-act-2016-overview.pdf>

⁴ <https://naturalresources.wales/evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-report-sonarr-for-wales-2020/sonarr2020-our-assessment/ecosystems-are-resilient-to-expected-and-unforeseen-change/?lang=en>

Methodology

Stakeholder Recruitment

During the summer of 2022 NWWT build up a detailed list of stakeholders to invite to the Autumn workshops. As a result of this stakeholder mapping, they were able to contact 139 stakeholders directly, inviting them take part in the workshops. In addition, bilingual flyers were posted in the local library, shops, the bakery, the museum and on public notice boards in Machynlleth to ensure that the events were open to anyone who was interested.

Bilingual adverts were also posted on the NWWT, Radnorshire Wildlife Trust and Wildlife Trusts Wales websites – again to help raise awareness of what was being planned.

In addition, bilingual adverts were posted in the press and on social media through NWWT, Welsh Beaver Project, Wildlife Trusts Wales social media channels and local social media pages.

Workshop structure and delivery

The workshops were based on the Three Horizon⁵ methodology. NWWT were interested in gathering stakeholder contributions to help develop their proposal, whilst simultaneously taking the opportunity to understand the wider context into which the project would have to sit. With that in mind, two of the workshops specifically sought participant views about the wider context of living and working in rural Mid Wales and what that might mean for the Welsh Beaver Project. The remaining two workshops reported back on what had been said, so that participants could 'sense check' what had been said and agree or disagree as they saw fit.

In the first two workshops, participants were taken through every stage of the Three Horizon future scanning process. In the last two workshops, participants were presented with outputs from the first two workshops to save time on the agenda. Once again, participants in these two workshops had time to comment and feedback on the information that had been gathered in the earlier workshops.

For details of the workshop agendas, please see Appendix One.

For all the notes gathered in the four workshops, please see Appendix Two.

⁵ <https://resources.h3uni.org/facilitation-guide/three-horizon-mapping-guide/>

Observations

At the start of each workshop, participants were given the opportunity to share their expectations for the event. Most of the comments by participants said they were attending the workshops in order to get a better understanding of the proposal and learn about the potential impacts of the Beaver Project. Many also said that they were keen to have a discussion, take the opportunity to hear different perspectives and identify some common ground.

As part of the process, participants were then encouraged to give their perspective about the issue facing rural Wales in general – unconnected to the NWWT proposal. The purpose of this part of the discussion was to give some context to the discussions in this series of workshops.

The participant's concerns included:

- A feeling that many communities in rural Wales were at tipping point because of the number of different issues and pressures they're currently facing. They listed the issues as increased visitor pressure, the increased cost of living, impacts on local fisheries, uncertainty about local jobs and the lack of affordable housing in rural Wales.
- A number had concerns about the wider environment being threatened or being in decline in general.
- Many of the participants felt that they couldn't influence the decisions being made in the local area. They felt decisions that had a local impact were being made further afield.
- Participants also felt it was difficult to access services in rural areas of Wales such as the Dyfi Valley.

A smaller number of participants spoke about their concerns of an 'uncertain future,' including a lack of opportunities (particularly for young people) in the area and a feeling that the local area was still recovering from the impacts of the COVID 19 Pandemic.

In each of the four workshops, participants were asked to share what they felt were the key issues that needed to be incorporated into the design and delivery of an intervention like the Beaver Project. There was consensus amongst the participants about the need to ensure good governance with projects of this kind – echoing some of the concerns raised during the discussion about their current life experiences in rural Wales.

Leading on from that point, participants wanted to ensure that any future interventions were inclusive and involved stakeholders. Participants wanted any organisation proposing an intervention had ways for local people to get involved right from the start and was actively listening to what they had to say.

Another key point raised by the workshop participants centred on the communication efforts of interventions like the Beaver Project. Participants wanted the communication activities to be effective and informative for the target audience

– without giving a great deal of detail as to what ‘effective and informative’ meant in practical terms.

An additional key point raised by the workshop participants was having a clearer idea about the benefits of having beaver active within the local landscape – particularly over the long term. Participants wanted to know what the project’s impact and benefits on the rivers, the landscape, local farms, and stakeholders (including farmers, anglers, and the local community – residents and businesses) would be.

The farmers wanted the specific details about the Beaver Project proposals – including any support available to manage any animals that might appear or reside on their land. They were keen that any individuals minimised their impact if they were living on their land. They were also interested in understanding the links between the Beaver Project and Welsh Government’s proposed plan for farming payments, currently called the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

<u>28/9</u>	<u>12/10</u>	<u>18/10</u>	<u>20/10</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure Appropriate Long-Term Funding Impact Assessment - many different variables mentioned (EIA, Economic, societal, community, biodiversity, flood risk. Communications to Stakeholders Long term monitoring Communications within project participants Farm Payments that factor in climate change Governance – a body to take long term management responsibility and accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External Communications recommendations Pre Project Recommendations Stakeholder Specific recommendations Use of Resources External Communications Recommendations Continue to gather information about the positive and negative impacts of the project. Management of the project to be based on the evidence gathered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There’s Opposition There’s Support Wanting more detail about the project General suggestions for the project Concerns about disease Asking for more information Concerns about governance generally. Review river ownership - how can so few own so much to the degree that they exclude people and all other wildlife. Put in fencing Plant along the river No more releases but learn from what’s already there Make as much detail of the project as overtly public as possible Feedback about the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from what’s already there There’s Opposition Ways to engage with the project Suggestions of the project Concerns about governance with the project Further engagement with specific audiences In support Try other locations Making the project as public as possible Gather and use data Align with Farm Payments

Table 1 Next Steps Feedback from all four workshops.

As described in the methodology, by the end of each workshop the participants were given the opportunity to reflect on everything they had heard during each event - including the NWWT presentation, the answers given to participant questions and the conversations that had subsequently taken place. Keeping all this information in mind, they were then asked to answer the following question: “From all that you heard from today, what is the next step with regards to the NWWT Beaver Project?” Appendix Two has their detailed responses, with a summary of that feedback presented in Table 1.

As expected, there were individuals at the events who were passionately opposed to anything that might be remotely connected to introducing beavers into the Dyfi River

catchment. Similarly, there were individuals at the events who were hugely supportive of beaver introduction into the catchment. There were also several views in between, which promoted several suggestions to inform the next steps for the Beaver Project.

Many of the comments included as 'what next' suggestions referred to a managed mechanism to communicate about the project with the target audience including some of the following:

- Understanding the different audiences who would be interested in this project – for example landowners, conservation organisations, farmers, anglers, specialists, and residents.
- Identifying the most effective and efficient means to inform and engage with the target audiences (emails, website, social media, presentations, partnership working etc).
- Use the different mechanisms and understand what works best with each audience.
- Identifying what the different audiences know about the project and where they might need more information. In other words, what to tell them and in how much detail.
- Develop a plan that would bring together how a project might communicate the information to the right audience. As part of this process, and recognising that resources aren't limitless, decisions would have to be made about the most cost-effective ways to communicate with the different audiences and share that thinking with stakeholders.
- Look to build trust in the process so that information can effectively flow to and from the target audience to the managing organisation in a project of this kind.
- Have a point of contact for all this communication activity, who is managing the process and can be easily contacted if more information is required.

Another topic explored in the 'what next' conversation was about responsibility for the Beaver Project in terms of decision-making in relation to overall strategy, resource management, programme management and dealing with stakeholder concerns or insights. All this commentary should be brought together under the heading of 'project governance.' The workshop participants wanted the Beaver Project to have a governance structure that was inclusive, transparent, and accountable.

The reliability of data, how its presented and who to trust was a constant area of debate during the workshops. Many of the participants had information about different studies and interventions that they used to emphasise a particular point or challenge another participant's particular point of view during the workshops. The Environment Agency describes this activity as 'information framing'⁶, 'the ways in which information is presented tends to reflect the interests or assumptions of those producing it. Information is received and interpreted differently by individuals

⁶ Working together to adapt to a changing climate: flood and coast. Slides Environment Agency January 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-research-reports/working-together-to-adapt-to-a-changing-climate-flood-and-coast#learning>

and stakeholder groups, in ways that are shaped by prior knowledge, ways of thinking, values and emotions.” The report goes on to say, “framing affects not just perceptions of relevant knowledge, but also how agencies, stakeholders and communities see and relate to each other.” This was certainly the case during the workshops.

Despite these challenges, a couple of the participants volunteered to say that they’d done their own research about beavers and had developed a more positive view of the beaver as a result. Their prior knowledge and emotions hadn’t influenced their interpretation of the data and their point of view had changed.

Unsurprisingly the workshop participants felt that gathering information about the positive and negative impacts of beaver was an important step in relation to the ongoing development of the Beaver Project. They felt that any intervention in the future should be guided by the evidence. They gave the following examples of areas where data collection might be useful and help paint a holistic picture of the project – changes to the river, the habitat, the socio-economic conditions, climate as well as data about the animals themselves were all mentioned. Participants felt this would help strengthen the relationship between the project delivery organisation or organisations and local stakeholders. This in turn would help build trust amongst the stakeholders.

A few of the participants also made the point that there are several beavers already within the catchment and the next step for the Beaver Project should be to learn from what’s already there. The lessons learned from that approach would help inform stakeholders and guide the next steps – whether that’s introducing more animals or removing what’s already in the catchment.

Another area discussed by the workshop participants under the heading of ‘what next’ was to gather information for the stakeholders about the influence the intervention might have on future farm payments, such as Welsh Government’s Sustainable Farming Scheme. Would supporting the project penalise a landowner’s future involvement in the Sustainable Farming Scheme for example?

Other concerns raised as issues that need to be investigated as next steps included:

- Wanting to better understand the role of Beavers as vectors for disease – particularly in relation to cattle living near the river.
- What information existed that assessed the various impacts of beaver on a catchment like the Dyfi?
- Funding cycles can often be short term. Participants felt that this project needed to be able to function over a much long-term timescale.
- Some of the participants wanted to know in more detail about the benefits of tree planting along the riverbank.
- Some of the participants also wanted to know who would pay for damages to fences caused by the reintroduced beaver?

Discussion

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 continue to share their views about what's being proposed. The opportunity to meet face to face due to the lack of COVID19 restrictions also proved very beneficial – if at times a bit heated.

It was extremely useful to get stakeholder views about rural Wales at the start of the process. The challenge of accessing services in rural Wales; the uncertainty about the future agriculture in Wales; and the frustration that decisions are made to local communities rather than with them were just a few of the issues that surfaced during that part of the conversation.

It's beyond the resources of NWWT to tackle all the issues raised. But it's certainly possible for NWWT to share these stories with the partners they work with and ensure that an accurate picture of the challenges that face rural Wales is more widely known. Strategic partners such as the Gwynedd Council, Ceredigion Council, Powys County Council, the Growing Mid Wales Partnership⁷, Welsh Government or Natural Resources Wales should be made aware of the challenges communities are experiencing. Not only that, local frustrations about governance; farmer's uncertainties about the Sustainable Farming Scheme; the weakness of local fishing stocks; the vulnerability of the Welsh language and the lack of information about a local community's dividend in a rural tourism economy all add a layer of complexity to an intervention of this kind. As was said during the workshops, some of these are issues are way beyond NWWT's area of influence but have all contributed to some of the stakeholder expressing their frustration that a project of this kind is being considered in the area.

It's worth noting that the Mid Wales Growth Deal has a Road Map⁸ references the same challenges raised during recent workshops: uncertainty about local employment, pockets of local poverty, and lack of individual opportunity. It also mentions a need to strengthen the agricultural sector; provide opportunities for skills development and employment – whilst protecting the natural assets in the area. As an example, in relation to its ambition to strengthen the Mid Wales Tourism Offer, it recognises the area's strength of local natural and institutional assets – saying it could excel in tourism focused on sustainability, the circular economy and supporting health and wellbeing actions. It goes on to suggest that the focus must be on quality and value, not high volumes of visitors. As beavers are crepuscular animals⁹, most active at dusk and dawn. It's arguable that beaver watching would require an overnight stay – an activity that is more attractive to the high quality, high value, low volume visitors of primary interest in the Road Map.

⁷ Responsible for the development and delivery of A Vision for Growing Mid Wales: Strategic Economic Plan & Growth Deal Roadmap, Growing Mid Wales, May 2020 www.growingmid.wales

⁸ <http://growingmidwales.co.uk/strategicroadmap>

⁹ Crepuscular behaviour https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crepuscular_animal

Anglers concerns about the fishing stocks is another example of where the engagement events about the Welsh Beaver Project were being used as an opportunity to voice wider concerns about the management and governance of the local environment. Those representing the angling community were very concerned about the decline and vulnerability of local fish stocks and wanted to avoid further catastrophic decline. What wasn't clear from their contributions was the steps they'd taken and the opportunities they'd had to pass these concerns onto an agency better placed to act upon their feedback.

Project governance was raised in several of the events. This is something that NWWT can directly control by ensuring the ongoing development and potential delivery of any future intervention is informed through the sharing of diverse views, but also ensuring shared responsibility for delivery.

As has been mentioned in observations section, there were several comments about the role of communications in this project. Although some of the participants want to see NWWT capture the opinion of every individual that might experience change resulting from this project, that might prove prohibitively expensive and time consuming. NWWT have undertaken three rounds of consultation since 2019, held or attended many rounds of meetings and have a bilingual website with a breadth of beaver related information¹⁰ for access by the public. Resources will obviously drive what is possible in terms of communications, but it remains a fundamental part of the overall intervention.

The role of data and evidence and how its shared would also help with discussions and decision making about the future of this project. It was clear from the workshops that participants had various sources of information to hand that they would often reference during discussion. What wasn't clear was where the information had come from and the impact it might have on public discussion or any future decision-making processes.

During one of the workshops NWWT heard very clearly and powerfully from a farmer that the project's proponents were 'hearing but not listening.' It was also clear that some of the participants were made to feel uncomfortable by a vocal and often aggressive minority involved in these workshops – particularly the representatives from the angling and fishing groups. Indeed, some of the participants said that although they'd come to the workshops to listen and learn, the atmosphere had been so intimidating that they hadn't felt comfortable in voicing their support of the project. Others posted feedback during the workshops sharing their concerns that decision makers might be fooled into thinking these aggressive minority views were representative of local concerns.

Another concern articulated during these events has been the challenge NWWT faces in accessing resources for this project. Participants felt that the funding available was for short term interventions, whilst they recognised the long timescale

¹⁰ <https://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/welshbeaverproject>

needed to successfully deliver a project of this kind – whatever its anticipated outcome.

As outlined at the start of this section, it is clear there are a breadth of interests and views about what should happen next with the Welsh Beaver Project. Table 1 is an attempt to guide NWWT decision making in relation to the project based on stakeholder feedback, plotting an approach that is both responsible and responsive to stakeholder views.

+ Stakeholder – Concerns and Perspectives.				
	1. No Material Change = No Beaver Introduction: No Beaver Management	2. Beaver Introduced: No Beaver Management	3. No Beaver Introduction: Beaver Actively Managed	4. Beaver Introduced: Beaver Actively Managed
Farming Community	Many individuals in the farming community voiced their opposition to introducing beaver to the Dyfi Catchment. Many have concerns about the precarious position of agriculture and don't want to add additional uncertainties that they feel could negatively impact their livelihoods.	Many individuals in the farming community would feel aggrieved if more beavers were introduced into the catchment with no attempt to manage their movement or activities in the area. They would be concerned about potential and actual impacts with no one to answer questions or provide direct material support.	With no new animals being introduced, the farming community could feel as though their concerns have been listened to and acted upon in good faith. Using appropriate management techniques to deal with the current population, landowners / farmers and the responsible organisation could develop an effective and trusted management programme that could deal with concerns as they arose.	Individuals in the farming community would feel aggrieved if more beavers were introduced into the catchment. The backlash could be tempered with the support of an effective and trusted management programme. Although farmers / landowners might feel that NWMF and other organisations hadn't listened to their concerns in the first place.
Angler Representatives	Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.	Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.	Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.	Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.
NRW Obligations and Strategic Aspirations	No management of the current beaver population leaves them at best, being seen as a nuisance by local landowners. At worst, the animals are at risk of unlawful removal or extermination.	No management of the current beaver population leaves them at best, being seen as a nuisance by local landowners. At worst, the animals are at risk of unlawful removal or extermination. NRW and others would want to see that someone or somebody was responsible for the introduction process – which isn't what happens at present.	Having an individual or an organisation responsible for managing beaver behaviour and impacts would reduce the possibility of conflict occurring between stakeholders and the animal. NRW would appreciate the role that the beaver population would play in enhancing the local habitat and restoring functionality to the ecosystem.	Having an individual or an organisation responsible for managing beaver behaviour and impacts would reduce the possibility of conflict occurring. But NRW would have to agree to provide a license for any new beaver introduced into the area. NRW would appreciate the role that the beaver population would play in enhancing the local habitat and restoring functionality to the ecosystem.
eNGO Groups and wider 'Green' community	Many individuals and groups are concerned by the decline in local biodiversity and feel something needs to be done to improve habitat quality and species diversity.	Although concerned about local biodiversity, most eNGOs and individual supporters for the re-introduction of the beaver would appreciate that unmanaged introductions would be an opportunity missed in terms of recording their local impact locally and creating an exciting narrative about the beaver that would support its long-term conservation.	Most eNGOs and individual supporters for the re-introduction of the beaver would appreciate the opportunity to better understand local beaver activity and impact as an outcome of this 'pilot' project. They'd also appreciate the opportunity to create an exciting narrative about the beaver to share with stakeholders.	Most eNGOs and individual supporters for the re-introduction of the beaver would appreciate the opportunity to better understand local beaver activity and impact as an outcome of this 'pilot' project. They'd also appreciate the opportunity to create an exciting narrative about the beaver to share with stakeholders.
Local Community	The local community no doubt has a breadth of perspectives regarding the beaver. Some against the beaver, some in support of them. With no change in the current situation, these individuals have minimal opportunity to engage in the project.	Other than more beavers being introduced in an uncontrolled and unmanaged fashion, the local community would have minimal opportunity to engage in the project.	The local community have a significant opportunity to engage in the project and understand more about the activities and impacts of the beaver and its role in enhancing the local habitat and restoring the functionality of the local ecosystem.	The local community have a significant opportunity to engage in the project and understand more about the activities and impacts of the beaver and its role in enhancing the local habitat and restoring the functionality of the local ecosystem.

Table 1: Summarised Stakeholder perspectives on the different options for next steps.

Recommendations

- a) Beaver Project Intervention: Much of the feedback from the farmers and anglers at the workshop directed at the NWWT's Beaver Project staff was as a result of individuals being frustrated at the situation they had found themselves facing, and fearful of things possibly getting worse. This included the uncertain future of agriculture resulting from imminent changes to government funding, and concerns about the vulnerability of local fish stocks. The response from certain representatives from both communities was to do nothing.

Taken literally that means no material change to the current situation. Or no introduction of beavers and no management of those animals that currently inhabit the catchment. As explored in Table 1, such an approach might at the very least, lead to unmanaged conflict between the animals and local farmers or fishermen; or at the very worst, unlawful killing of the animals.

Based on participant feedback alone, the next step for the Beaver Project would be not to introduce beaver to the catchment but continue to actively manage the animals that are already there. Unfortunately, that isn't possible as it would threaten the genetic diversity of the beavers that already live within the catchment. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature require populations of animals to remain genetically diverse and healthy.

With that in mind, it is recommended that a limited release of beavers would be necessary as a midpoint between Options 3 and 4. NWWT would need to apply for a license and funding in support of that approach.

- b) Project Governance: That a robust governance framework is established running alongside the next steps of the Welsh Beaver Project that provides the opportunity for local views and insights to be included into the ongoing development and delivery of this project.
- c) Project Communications: That a communications strategy continues to remain an important tool in engaging and informing stakeholders about the project.
- d) Project Data: That a robust monitoring and evaluation framework is coproduced with stakeholders, through the governance structure, that can be used to measure impact and inform stakeholders about the project and the lessons learned.
- e) That NWWT facilitates stakeholders to engage with:
1. The Mid Wales Growth Deal to get a detailed view of what a green visitor economy looks like in the Dyfi Catchment – and the opportunities that exist for agriculture and the Welsh Beaver Project in the future.
 2. Welsh Government about how the Welsh Beaver Project aligns with Sustainable Farming Scheme payments.
 3. Work with anglers to help them raise their concerns with the appropriate agencies about the state of fish stocks within their Catchment.

- f) Applying for a License: To deliver the recommended option, NWWT will need to demonstrate how they have engaged with stakeholders to develop their proposal. With that in mind NWWT can supply a data free version of the Stakeholder Map created in preparation for these stakeholder events, as well as the outputs from these workshops as evidence to inform the licensing process and demonstrate how stakeholder views have helped shape the final proposal.

31 March 2023
Dafydd Thomas
Wellbeing Planner

Appendix One Workshop Agendas

Daytime Background

Purpose:

- This workshop is a surgery about the future of the project.
- We want to share how we've reflected and responded to the previous round of consultation.
- We want them to know we can help them manage the beavers that are already there.
- We also want to capture some of the feedback about farming in rural Wales.

Timing: 10.00 – 15.00

Daytime Agenda

Introductions and Welcome

Expectations

Presentation by Alicia about the project (30 minutes)

Key findings from the previous round of conversations to pull together.

Small group discussion:

11.00 Teas and Coffees (10 minutes)

Audience Feedback

Seeds of Change

This activity is intended to generate lots of ideas. It is about stretching the limits of current thinking and considering different levels of impact.

Plenary

Seeds of Hope

Are there examples, projects, interventions or practice that embody what the participants were interested in; what their shared values might be or what they'd like to do in the future.

Our current situation

When we think about our current situation, what indicators or signals can we see around us that things need to change?

Plenary

12.45 Lunch (45 minutes)

Presentation

Feedback the day's discussion about:

- Indicators that things need to change
- A list of our shared interests, values and future.
- Some of the key points made from the morning's presentation and follow on discussion

Plenary

Creating Consensus about next steps

Ask them each to individually answer the following question

"From all that you heard from today, what is our next step with regards to the NWWT Beaver Project?"

Wash Up

Thank you and goodbye

Evening Meetings Agenda – Face to Face and Online

Background

Purpose:

- This workshop is a surgery about the future of the project.
- We want to share how we've reflected and responded to the previous round of consultation.
- We want them to know we can help them manage the beavers that are already there.
- Feedback what's already been said.

Draft Agenda for Face to Face

Introductions and Welcome

Expectations

Presentation by Alicia about the project (30 minutes)

Small group discussion:

Audience Feedback

Creating Consensus about next steps

Ask them each to individually answer the following question.

"From all that you heard from today, what is our next step with regards to the NWWT Beaver Project?"

Thank you and goodbye

Appendix Two Workshop Notes

Meeting Notes 28 September 2023

From all that you heard from today, what are the next steps for the Beaver Project?

Unsorted

- Relegate the beaver to mainstream status where they're no longer 'a thing'. They're a natural part of the environment, same as any other. Reduce their status as a divisive topic. All of the approaches described within this section, will all help to make this a less divisive issue.

Secure Appropriate Long-Term Funding

- Establish long-term funding and management approaches to provide reassurance to landowners. Relinquishing some control of land is a big step, and lessening the risk with clear provision of support, and 'having their back' would allay many of the concerns.
- Funding - long term funding for the project that gives landowners security of payments for riparian zones and beaver management - and demonstrates Welsh Government commitment to the project.
- Securing long-term commitment and funds from NRW/WG to work with the volunteer network to manage any negative side-effects of releasing beavers.

Impact Assessment - many different variables mentioned

- Carry out an equivalent of an EIA for this project for the area / Wales.
- Have a clearer understanding of the cost of impact and benefits to the economy, environment and society / community.
- On a related issue, a clearer understanding of the costs and benefits related to ecosystem services of NOT having beavers, i.e., continuing with the status quo, in a changing climate with declining biodiversity.
- Model the flood risk across the catchment under different scenarios (such as NRW do), so that people can see on maps the impact of those different scenarios - e.g., what might a one-foot rise in water level do to different locations.

Communications to Stakeholders

- Communicate a clear project plan with a timeline because it will provide a clear framework that people can understand and know what is coming next and the overall aims objectives.
- Will NWWT / Beaver Project will continue to manage the beavers that already live within the catchment even if the reintroduction element doesn't continue?
- Continue with these engagement events because they are very important to build relationships with various stakeholders and makes people feel involved.
- Education - (more) direct talking to landowners with consideration of the language used - presentations in Cymraeg.
- Be more accessible - local base for questions/concerns/discussions/presentation of facts and current timeline/progress of project.

- Maintain connections, and relationships to keep everyone informed and the information available so that public knowledge of the project is clear and accurate.
- Provide information and facts for local communities to facilitate informed opinions. This could be bolstered by a Beaver Hotline for beaver-related queries, concerns, and hopes, managed by well-informed and impartial experts. A website would also help.

Long term monitoring

- Long term monitoring of the beavers and their effects and a concrete exit strategy e.g., a negotiation that the beavers can be relocated to another project, so this is a pre-negotiated option for if and when its needed.
- Developing a long-term independent monitoring framework to measure the impacts of releasing beavers in the catchment (before, during and after). This will then inform adaptive management and potential roll-out (or not) in other catchments.

Communications within project participants

- Coordination - clear point of contact with a network of staff/volunteers that is easy to contact and can share information.

Farm Payments that factor in climate change

- Comprehensive farm payment reviews that factor in climate change/flooding/space for wildlife/riparian zones/ and supports landowners to have space for beavers on and passing through their land.

Governance

- A public body to take long term management responsibility and overall accountability for the impacts and effects that occur, Funding / management / strategy / planning with longevity to provide the essential accountability needed.

Meeting Notes 12 October 2023

From all that you heard from today, what are the next steps for the Beaver Project?

Unsorted

- Promoting that this session went ahead so that other stakeholders consider getting involved.
- 5 years of conflict, 5 years of getting used to beavers, and then forgetting all about them.
- Beavers are great but the Dyfi is not the right place for more and it is not right to impose your views on landowners who will have to deal with the consequences. It is not the right place due to existing infrastructure including flood banks and railway embankment, existing natural flood mitigation schemes, investment in tree planting and lack of landowner commitment due to no clarity in funding repair of any long-term effects. You do not have the agreement of the freeholder of the river - the New Dovey Fishery Association - or the many landowners who own land adjoining and access to the river. Existing sluice and drainage channels that cope with drainage and tidal issues could be adversely affected.

ST External Communications recommendations

- School engagement so that children can bring home the intended message to parents, which can be quite powerful.
- Provide examples of longer case studies where beavers have been reintroduced and communicate what issues arose (positive and negative) and how these were received by the various stakeholders.
- Increase info sharing for Machynlleth (beaver ecology, case studies) with pop ups - shops/market, leaflets.
- Consultations in local pubs with the promise of free food!
- Sharing any feedback from consultation sessions with the public- to ensure that transparency is achieved and so that stakeholders feel that their opinions are being taken into consideration, which may encourage higher attendance/ engagement.

ST Pre Project Recommendations

- Find out how many Beavers we have in the catchment already.
- Call it quits and pull out of the project now.
- Understand the number of landowners that may be affected - quantify the numbers involved within a consultation around the land use within the catchment.
- Develop long term strategies for mitigation regardless of whether beavers are reintroduced.

ST Stakeholder Specific recommendations

- Engage high level political sponsorship to champion beaver reintroduction.

LT Use of Resources

- Clear long-term funded management plan to ensure financial support for the impacted parties and to achieve future vision of the project decades into the future.
- NRW to provide the same level of support as they have in Scotland, which is provide a Beaver Ecologist to advise and then mitigation for impacts of the Beavers.
- Maybe the Welsh Beaver Project need to engage with a Change Management advisor, because this is a major Change for the local landowners and aspects of Change Management would perhaps help.

LT External Communications Recommendations

- Continued visible engagement with community and landowners.
- Identify and convince key target groups, for example farmers.
- Ongoing long-term plan to communicate with the community councils in terms of management of the project.
- Direct engagement with communities with large concerns and reservations
- I think that there needs to be highlighted that there are landowners who do support this project, but perhaps the negative comments are from more outspoken because they have an issue.
- Rethink the existing project, acknowledge that landowners and farmers are keen to participate in environmental and nature restoration and are open to looking at a project or projects that look at increasing declining biodiversity and reinstating species that have been lost in the recent past.
- Farmers - largely negative. Provide a practical medium term support package. With a telephone line, mobile support service, peer advice etc.
- If there's disagreement about any of the recommendations - happy that you disagree, but please explain why the project disagrees with what's proposed.
- School children get involved in education program – with fun hands-on activities. To include friends, family, and community.

LT Continue to gather information about the positive and negative impacts of the project.

- Longer term measurement of the expected benefits of beaver reintroduction to provide evidence of their effectiveness (e.g., water quality, biodiversity, flood mitigation, tourism).

LT Management of the project to be based on the evidence gathered.

- Make sure the project and the goals evolve to match the changes to the river and surrounding area, climate, and socio-economic position.
- Use the evidence gathered from other planned / current environmental and nature restoration projects to build a strong relationship between the host association and the landowners over a period of time - secure success on these projects, build trust and collaborate on more ambitious projects from this platform of earned trust.

Meeting Notes 18 October 2023

Next Steps

Wanting more detail about the project

- If trees are damaged on the river, who will deal with that? Who does the landowner go to?
- Potential issues to mature trees that could be felled very quickly and without knowledge have the potential to endanger life by falling on road/railway etc. Will the project take responsibility for these damages?
- The potential impacts to the Dyfi railway, e.g., fallen trees, carcasses on the track etc.
- Lodges and dams could potentially block river gates and create localized flooding in valley bottom.
- Beavers could present an added cost and liability for landowners and farmers.
- Who pays for repairing the burrows that break down the roads and other infrastructure?
- Information to understand if the wooden bridges on the river might be damaged by beavers.
- Let's imagine a scenario where beavers are released and become officially protected. Therefore, NRW would potentially implement an exclusion area where shooting, fishing, river/land maintenance is not allowed. What happens then? Will beavers be used as a weapon to manipulate aforementioned practices?

Opposition

- When the application goes in to NRW will the petition that has been signed by 35 farmers to the effect that they do not want beaver on their land be submitted.
- Forget the project. Hit it on the head. It's not welcome in the Dyfi Valley. We have a railway, a river with an embankment to protect the village. The chair of the Beavers society in Britain says shouldn't release into areas with river defences.
- Lots of people in the room, 90% not in favour.
- Has a comprehensive scientific study been carried out to determine the demise of salmon and other fish species in our rivers?
- As a farmer I appreciate wildlife and depend on it. I want to look after the wildlife that is here already instead of introducing a new species.
- What about the effects of temperature rises and industrial fishing?
- 90% of us had an opinion it shouldn't go ahead. Therefore, don't go ahead.
- We have enough trouble stabilising the banks as it is.
- In a room full of 38 people there was no vocal support to this idea when called upon.
- What about the red squirrel?! It's almost died out!
- Very important that the petition that was already put together by the anglers is recognised as part of the process.

In support

- We need to recognise the fact that climate change needs to be.... addressed urgently. The presence of beavers has been proved to increase biodiversity

which is important if there is to be a future for life on earth. This seems to have been totally overlooked.

- Climate change is THE MOST IMPORTANT issue we are currently facing and anything we can do to help mitigate against carbon emissions and the effects of climate change (like flash floods) should be welcomed.

General suggestions for the project

- Has the Dyfi Fisheries been approached as they own the riverbed for 20 miles on both banks? Next step to approach and ask Dyfi Fisheries. Richard Evans - Plas, Machynlleth, SY20 8ER 01654 702721
- Whoever is running the scheme needs to be ready to remove dams and prepared for weils disease and other hazards.
- What about looking at the possibilities of introducing another species that is less contentious or is less likely of causing damage?
- Make sure that beavers do not become legally protected so that there is an exit plan

Concerns about disease

- IBR, Vield Disease, Lepto - lots of other diseases that affect herds that can be transmitted from one herd to the other. Act as a vector of diseases from one closed herd to another. More research on this aspect of disease impact would be useful.
- Concerns about Wiels disease and lepidospirosis transferring from beavers (sorry about spellings)

Asking for more information

- There is a need for an independent study on the possible impacts of the project in this area. The ecological and economic effects are important. But so too are the impacts on the language and Welsh culture.

Concerns about governance generally

- Review river ownership - how can so few own so much to the degree that they exclude people and all other wildlife.

Putting in fencing

- Information on what happens to the damage from flooding to fencing etc. and who pays for it.
- If there is fencing, then it needs to work with existing livestock.

Planting along the river

- Maybe putting woodland along the river as a planting project to protect riverbank.
- Protection for plantation of young trees along the riverbanks.

No more releases but learn from what's already there

- Hold fire and monitor the current beaver population for say 5 years.

- There's no opposition from me about the beavers that are here already, but we don't want to see more of them. Why not learn about the beaver that are here already?
- The project has two parts .. one is to manage the beaver the other is to release more beaver. Lets start with the management.
- Why can't we just have the beavers that are here already, let them do their thing but don't add any more.
- I think we should experiment with the ones we've already got. Don't need any more.
- It would be great to know more about the beavers that are already there, let the beavers that are there be at peace and don't introduce any more. Do not interfere with nature.
- There's a beaver management project and a beaver release project within this whole program. Think about doing the beaver management of what's already there first, learn from that, explain to people what's being learned from that, before doing any more releases.
- Anglers have big concerns about fish numbers on the river. What's impacting them? Whatever it is the population is very low and fragile.
- Someone should apply for a license to trap and health check on existing Beavers.
- There are concerns about adding more beavers to a population we know nothing about already.

Make as much detail of the project as overtly public as possible

- Where is the full risk assessment from the Trust about a beaver release? Request for risk assessment to be made public and distributed.
- Compensation available to landowner for any damages occurred by beaver behaviour. Can this compensation availability be advertised?
- Some of the participants feel that there's no point in getting involved in this. People need to trust the process.
- The consultation needs to capture the voices less heard and those who stand to have the biggest impact or the biggest problem from their introduction. Their views need to be paramount.
- It would be useful to have a list of common questions and answers available with links to scientific papers etc so the evidence can be viewed by anyone. This saves valuable time by not having the same questions asked again and again and again.
- Please could this record be sent out to everyone who was here.
- Introduce citizen science into the project - get people who know the river and know the area to be involved in the project.

Feedback about the event

- I personally found the atmosphere of the in-person meeting very intimidating and did not feel comfortable to share my views.
- At times, public meetings can feel like they are a bit of a lobby for interest groups and other views (neutral or pro beaver) are not represented.

Meeting Notes 20 October 2023

Next Steps

Learn from what's already there

- Next steps for me would be to start active monitoring of the current beaver population to begin a baseline for any future work.
- What happens if we DON'T do anything?
- If farmers and local communities don't agree with it and they and next generations will have to bear the consequences with risks to their livelihoods, flood defences and infrastructure, why not use the Dyfi as a control catchment and deter the beavers who visit at present, and keep it clear of reintroductions?
- If farmers and local communities don't agree with it and they and next generations will have to bear the consequences with risks to their livelihoods, flood defences and infrastructure, why not use the Dyfi as a control catchment and deter the beavers who visit at present, and keep it clear of reintroductions?
- Detailed monitoring of what the current beaver population is on the Dyfi and where the territories are distributed.

Opposition

- Forget the whole project - I don't think the farmers in Wales don't agree with the project.

Ways to engage with the project

- Cultural events to help people process not just information but also emotional responses to the research.
- Share as much information as possible with everyone that may be affected by the project to ensure they are aware of all positives and negatives of the project e.g., landowners, local businesses, public. Engage and ask for their views.

Suggestions of the project

- Are baseline measurements/investigations of the environment being conducted before beavers are introduced, e.g., nutrient levels, peak flows, so that this can then be used as a comparison to when beavers are introduced and could be used to inform other projects in the future. It may also support the project if pollution is very high for example.
- Short term - protection of beavers under Welsh Law - in line with England and Scotland - to prevent people taking measures into their own hands.

Concerns about governance with the project

- Get NRW and Welsh government to agree and publish a statement on the legal status of beavers in Wales.
- Address the concerns of the stakeholders: landowners, farmers, AND residents of the valley (who may be more positive regarding beaver population and have a right/say in what happens).
- Long Term - address our archaic land ownership system that enable anglers to own riverbeds. Rivers needs management on a catchment level not on an exclusive boy's club basis.

Further engagement with specific audiences

- Reassure landowners that their land is going to have managers help, and make sure their bottom line isn't affected.
- Interested to know why, in detail, the farming community in the dyfi are against the project?
- Engagement with farmers and landowners.
- The project should go round every farmer in the locality and have a chat with them about the project. Or have a letter sent. Do it again.

In support

- Release the beasts, seconded. They belong here. We need big picture change, this is just a small part of it. We've said nothing about the huge benefit of wider flood mitigation (ease of peak flow in flood and better flow in drought) on the Dyfi - we might not have even needed the new road bridge if we had a full population of beavers in the catchment!
- Reduce the beavers from something divisive to something that just IS, that exists alongside the rest of nature, helping it to thrive.
- Long term: Embrace the regeneration of our habitats. We don't know what we've lost!
- Get cracking on releasing the animals into their natural, rightful habitat. They were here for thousands of years living in harmony with salmon, lichen, etc; Give support and reassurance to any farmers affected and continue the conversations. The sky didn't cave in with the spread of red kites or pine martins, nor will it fall in with the release of a few beavers. Recruit a volunteer team with representation from all sectors of the community. Put farmers in touch with their European counterparts to help reassure.

Try other locations

- Long term: Approach other areas. Cors Caron needs scrub management; I know a toothy rodent which could oblige.

Making the project as public as possible

- Addressing "shifting baselines" among the community and general public.
- Long term - information hub to make emerging research on Beaver impacts (against baselines) readily accessible to all.
- Fearful of what might happen in the long term. For the project to develop a detailed future cast or future scenario of what the Dyfi might look like with a beaver released. Needs to include all the changes that are impacting the landscape / ecosystem / saving farming a decade or two decades from now.

Gather and use data

- Long term monitoring to inform future projects of the benefits and risks of the project! Collect as much data as possible.
- Modelling of hydrological/biodiversity impacts of beavers long-term (if possible), data and knowledge sharing.

Align with Farm Payments

- Long term - overhaul of the farm payment system so that farmers/land owners are paid to manage riparian strips for recovery of river systems - this alone would mitigate over 95% of the conflict with beavers.
- This is an amazing idea, possibly reducing most objections.
- Long term: feedback to Welsh rural farm payments to encourage riparian buffer strips and payments for any losses to beaver.

Appendix Three – Summary of Stakeholder perspectives on the different options of the Beaver Project’s next steps.

Stakeholder – Concerns and Perspectives.	1. No Material Change = No Beaver Introduction: No Beaver Management	2. Beaver Introduced: No Beaver Management	3. No Beaver Introduction: Beaver Actively Managed	4. Beaver Introduced: Beaver Actively Managed
Farming Community	<p>Many individuals in the farming community voiced their opposition to introducing beaver to the Dyfi Catchment.</p> <p>Many have concerns about the precarious position of agriculture and don't want to add additional uncertainties that they feel could negatively impact their livelihoods.</p>	<p>Many individuals in the farming community would feel aggrieved if more beavers were introduced into the catchment with no attempt to manage their movement or activities in the area.</p> <p>They would be concerned about potential and actual impacts with no one to answer questions or provide direct material support.</p>	<p>With no new animals being introduced, the farming community could feel as though their concerns have been listened to and acted upon in good faith.</p> <p>Using appropriate management techniques to deal with the current population, landowners / farmers and the responsible organisation could develop an effective and trusted management programme that could deal with concerns as they arose.</p>	<p>Individuals in the farming community would feel aggrieved if more beavers were introduced into the catchment.</p> <p>The backlash could be tempered with the support of an effective and trusted management programme.</p> <p>Although farmers / landowners might feel that NWWT and other organisations hadn't listened to their concerns in the first place.</p>
Angler Representatives	<p>Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.</p>	<p>Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.</p>	<p>Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.</p>	<p>Most of the anglers who attended the workshop are in opposition to the scheme. Their primary concern is what they describe as the precarious position of local fish stocks, which they wish to protect / see protected.</p>
NRW Obligations and Strategic Aspirations	<p>No management of the current beaver population leaves them at best, being seen as a nuisance by local landowners. At worst, the animals are at risk of unlawful removal or extermination.</p>	<p>No management of the current beaver population leaves them at best, being seen as a nuisance by local landowners. At worst, the animals are at risk of unlawful removal or extermination.</p> <p>NRW and others would want to see that someone or somebody was responsible for the introduction process – which isn't what happens at present.</p>	<p>Having an individual or an organisation responsible for managing beaver behaviour and impacts would reduce the possibility of conflict occurring between stakeholders and the animal.</p> <p>NRW would appreciate the role that the beaver population would play in enhancing the local habitat and restoring functionality to the ecosystem.</p>	<p>Having an individual or an organisation responsible for managing beaver behaviour and impacts would reduce the possibility of conflict occurring. But NRW would have to agree to provide a license for any new beaver introduced into the area.</p> <p>NRW would appreciate the role that the beaver population would play in enhancing the local habitat and restoring functionality to the ecosystem.</p>
eNGO Groups and wider 'Green' community	<p>Many individuals and groups are concerned by the decline in local biodiversity and feel something needs to be done to improve habitat quality and species diversity.</p>	<p>Although concerned about local biodiversity, most eNGOs and individual supporters for the re-introduction of the beaver would appreciate that unmanaged introductions would be an opportunity missed in terms of recording their local impact locally and creating an exciting narrative about the beaver that would support its long-term conservation.</p>	<p>Most eNGOs and individual supporters for the re-introduction of the beaver would appreciate the opportunity to better understand local beaver activity and impact as an outcome of this 'pilot' project. They'd also appreciate the opportunity to create an exciting narrative about the beaver to share with stakeholders.</p>	<p>Most eNGOs and individual supporters for the re-introduction of the beaver would appreciate the opportunity to better understand local beaver activity and impact as an outcome of this 'pilot' project. They'd also appreciate the opportunity to create an exciting narrative about the beaver to share with stakeholders.</p>
Local Community	<p>The local community no doubt has a breadth of perspectives regarding the beaver. Some against the beaver, some in support of them. With no change in the current situation, these individuals have minimal opportunity to engage in the project.</p>	<p>Other than more beavers being introduced in an uncontrolled and unmanaged fashion, the local community would have minimal opportunity to engage in the project.</p>	<p>The local community have a significant opportunity to engage in the project and understand more about the activities and impacts of the beaver and its role in enhancing the local habitat and restoring the functionality of the local ecosystem.</p>	<p>The local community have a significant opportunity to engage in the project and understand more about the activities and impacts of the beaver and its role in enhancing the local habitat and restoring the functionality of the local ecosystem.</p>

Table 1: Summarised Stakeholder perspectives on the different options for next steps.