

Appendix 1

Motion for Rivers and Ocean Draft Action Plan – September 2022

What is the Motion for the Rivers and Ocean?

Monmouthshire is a coastal community, but its estuary location means that it is often not viewed as such. Coastal local authorities around the UK are working hard to bring about a brighter future for the communities we serve. We work to boost local economies, improve community health and wellbeing, and to protect and enhance local biodiversity. We know that the health, wellbeing and prosperity of coastal communities is dependent on a clean, healthy and productive marine environment – yet too often we consider these issues separately, rather than thinking about it in a joined-up way.



The Motion for the Ocean was created to enable local authorities to tackle these potentially competing ambitions in a more holistic way. Developed by leading coastal and marine experts, Cllr Dr Pamela Buchan (former Plymouth City Councillor), Emily Cunningham (formerly Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group (LGA Coastal SIG)) and Nicola Bridge (Ocean Conservation Trust), at its core the motion aims to help councils and the communities we serve to “think ocean” and ensure the development of the blue economy is regenerative, delivering the recovery of our ocean and reducing socio-economic

inequality in our coastal communities. The motion aims to help councils embed this new way of thinking at the highest levels of local decision-making, so it is not the responsibility of one team, but of the whole council.

The LGA Coastal SIG who helped develop and promote the motion contacted Monmouthshire County Council to see whether we were interested in adopting the motion as the first local authority in Wales to do so. As well as having an estuary coastline, Monmouthshire also has the rivers Wye and Usk running through it, both of which are facing significant challenges in terms of water quality, with much publicity about pollution from sewage and agricultural run off hitting the local and national media. In light of this, in March 2022 elected members voted for not just a Motion for the Ocean, but Rivers and Ocean, recognising the importance of taking a catchment to coast approach to protecting water quality.

“This Council is proud to be a coastal county and the starting point of the Wales Coastal Path. We recognise the importance of the marine ecosystem and our role as a stakeholder and guardian of it. A report should be brought forward to Council within 6 months of this motion containing appropriate recommendations to ensure we play our part in ensuring realising clean, healthy and productive rivers and oceans alongside our existing commitment to tackle the climate emergency.” March 2022

Why is it needed now?

We recognise that our ocean, waterways, nature and climate are in a state of emergency and that the communities we serve are on the frontline. An ocean in crisis, and likewise rivers in crisis are not only bad news for our climate, but also for our fishing industry, aquaculture industry, tourism industry and for the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our coastal and river communities. Delivering the pledges set out in the Motion for the Rivers and Ocean could yield new jobs and opportunities, more resilient coastal and riverside economies, and happier, healthier people; as well as a cleaner, healthier and more productive natural environment. Healthy oceans and rivers are essential allies in our fight against climate change and blue carbon could play an integral role in helping us meet our net zero targets.

The health of our ocean is inextricably linked with our climate and with human health, wellbeing and prosperity. A healthy ocean is fundamental in regulating the global climate system and is an essential ally in our fight against climate change. The ocean absorbs more than 90% of the excess heat in the climate system as well as absorbing around 20% of annual carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions generated by human activity.



However, decades of irresponsible marine exploitation and pollution have led to significant levels of degradation, and this together with the detrimental impacts of our changing climate on marine ecosystems has led to national and global recognition that the world ocean is in crisis. An unhealthy ocean does not absorb or store carbon as effectively as a healthy one, further worsening the impacts of the climate crisis.

Around the UK fish stocks continue to collapse from permitted and illegal overfishing and poor water quality is impacting seafood and safe bathing. The coastline and ocean are blighted with litter, much of it plastic. Marine microplastics have been found in all marine environments and in the bodies of many species, including humans and the species of fish we regularly eat.

Our residents are on the frontline of climate change. The impact of the climate crisis on the ocean is profound, from rising water temperatures and changes in ocean chemistry, to sea level rise and increased storminess. This is increasing the risk to infrastructure and properties and increasing the risk of flooding and storm damage both along the coast and in our riverside communities.

Urgent action is needed to halt these devastating changes and recover the health of our ocean to enable it to deliver the full range of benefits, including climate regulation, carbon storage in coastal and marine habitats, coastal protection, a thriving local economy, clean safe recreation and happy, healthy coastal communities. We must play our part in recovering the health of the ocean.

Similarly, across the UK the health of our rivers is under threat, which is threatening wildlife and habitats, as well as potentially human health. Healthy rivers and good catchment management are essential for mitigating climate change and building resilience for a changing climate.



Rivers and water form some of the most attractive features of the Monmouthshire landscape, and are at the heart of our heritage and economy. They are popular routes for walking and cycling and have high ecological value as well as being the foci of historical settlements. From the rich maritime and ship building heritage of Chepstow to the thousands of visitors who come on holiday to enjoy the Wye Valley and follow in the footsteps of the historic Wye Tour, many come to experience the sight, sound and feel of our rivers and coast.

However, Monmouthshire's waterways are under threat from pressure from development, increases in recreational use, changes in agricultural practice and climate change. The Rivers Wye and Usk are both designated as Special Areas of Conservation for their water quality, but over recent years the water quality has deteriorated significantly. This is due to a complex range of issues, including sewage releases into the rivers and phosphates and nitrates entering the rivers due to agricultural activity. Phosphates and nitrates entering the river cause a process called eutrophication to occur, where toxic algal blooms feed on the excess nutrients and multiply and reduce light and oxygen levels, killing fish and other species. This effect has been exacerbated this year with extremely dry weather and high temperatures, which mean that the water levels in our rivers are very low. Because of the high levels of phosphates, both the Usk and Wye fail to comply with water quality standards, which means planning restrictions have been introduced in order to meet Habitat Regulations. The planning restrictions are impacting on the development of new homes.

The severity of the water quality problem is significant and has attracted much local and national publicity. A number of local campaign groups have formed and have organised marches and protests to raise the profile of the issue and try and make stakeholders take action. Work needs to happen both sides of the English and Welsh border, and the large river catchment means that collaboration with neighbouring authorities in both England and Wales is essential to protect waterways along the length of their catchments.

Rivers and oceans can play a vital role in our economic recovery and we must strive to develop a sustainable and equitable blue economy that delivers both river and ocean recovery and local prosperity. We must ensure that river and ocean recovery is embedded in our relevant strategic decision-making, policymaking and budget-setting; as well as being considered in future strategies and plans, including those seeking to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents.

First-hand experience of our rivers and ocean are essential if people are to be motivated to play their part in protecting it, whether that is through disposing of their litter responsibly, recycling what they can or volunteering in conservation or monitoring and data collection projects with local organisations. Helping individuals develop their ocean literacy (understanding of the relationship between people and the ocean) is an important part of this motion, as is individual and collective river and marine citizenship (promoting and demanding blue recovery through local, national and international policy changes).



Monmouthshire Context

Monmouthshire County Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and our Climate Emergency Action Plan recognises the importance of managing green spaces to reduce energy use, absorb carbon and be resilient.

The importance of protecting our rivers and coasts has risen in profile over the last year. When the Climate Emergency Action Plan was updated in 2021, the emphasis on nature recovery was strengthened, in recognition of the nature emergency, and an action on addressing water quality was added.

The Motion for the Rivers and Ocean agreed by the Council in March 2022 was followed by further debate in Council in June 2022, which led to the following more detailed motion which relates specifically to rivers:

In addition, the Wye Valley Villages Plan which was adopted by MCC in July 2022 includes measures to tackle river water quality, and will include measures by partner organisations and landowners.

“This Council:

- *Notes the decision of full council in March to become the first in Wales to declare a water quality emergency and commission a strategy to improve our waterways.*
- *Has grave concerns about the declining state of the Wye and Usk rivers in Monmouthshire and the multiple sources of phosphate and other pollutants including those originating upstream outside of Monmouthshire, which are threatening biodiversity and wildlife as well as fish numbers.*
- *Commits the Leader and Cabinet Member to work with opposition groups and relevant authorities including Powys County Council and Herefordshire County Council to ensure action is being taken to improve the health of our rivers before it’s too late.”*

Preparation of this action plan has highlighted how complex the partnership landscape is that is working to protect our rivers and ocean. There are numerous partnerships, both in place and emerging, which are all aiming to tackle different aspects of how our rivers and coasts are managed and looked after.

Monmouthshire plays an important role in many of these partnerships. Likewise, there is much work going on within the council to address the nature emergency and protect water quality. However, there needs to

be more of a co-ordinated focus on how we have an impact on our rivers and coasts. This action plan aims to pull together the work that is going on across many different council services in a co-ordinated way and to address areas where the council could be doing more to protect our rivers and coast.



Local authorities cannot solve the ocean and river crises alone, but we can – and must – play our part.

| Action | Officer | Timescales |
|---|---|-------------|
| Estuary and coastal management | | |
| Continue participation in ASERA partnership to discharge statutory duties to protect European Marine site in line with EU Habitats Directive | Environment & Culture Manger (Matthew Lewis) | On going |
| Become members of the Severn Estuary Partnership in order to connect with, learn from and work in partnership with other estuary stakeholders | Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | Autumn 2022 |
| Through membership of SEP, engage with the Welsh Government Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group (WMAAG) on the development of a Blue Recovery Plan for Wales to support sustainable development actions to both help coastal communities to recover, and to achieve our vision of Welsh seas that are clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse. | Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | Ongoing |
| Work with partners over the next 12 months to secure longer term funding for the Living Levels partnership. The Living Levels aims to re-connect people and communities to the Gwent levels landscape and provide a sustainable future for this historic and unique area. | Environment & Culture Manger (Matthew Lewis) Cllr Catrin Maby Cllr Frances Taylor | 2022/2023 |
| Participate in the Diverse Marine Values research project with Cardiff University and other research partners to help understand how diverse values can influence marine policy and decision making. | Hazel Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | 2022/24 |
| Continue as an active member of the Severn Estuary Coastal Group (SECG) to be responsible for the implementation of the Shoreline Management Plan, to promote community and stakeholder engagement on the Shoreline Management Plan Actions, to encourage research into established problems and concern about current and future trends affecting the coastline and to ensure the dissemination of any information obtained. | Flood Risk Manager (Ross Price) | Ongoing |
| Work with NRW to identify improvements to the Caldicot sea wall to reinstate its function as a defence against future tidal flooding. | Head of Placemaking, Regen, Highways & Flooding (Mark Hand) | 2022/24 |
| Through membership of SEP, work with the Blue Marine Foundation and cross-border partners to scope the potential for a National Marine Park for the Severn Estuary | Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) and colleagues | 2023/24 |
| Through membership of SEP work to explore options for the development of the Severn Vision work into a deliverable framework for action; one which maximises nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation benefits for the whole Severn Estuary and outer reaches area | Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) and colleagues | 2022/23 |

| Action | Officer | Timescales |
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| Input to the development of the SEP Resilient Communities application to NRW to expand the Discover the Severn and Litter Free Coast and Seas projects across Monmouthshire and neighbouring LAs | Hazel Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | 2022/23 |
| Through membership of ASERA and SEP engage with coastal disturbance through behaviour change. | Environment & Culture Manger (Matthew Lewis) | 2023/24 |
| River catchment management | | |
| Continue to participate and play a more active role in the Wye Nutrient Management Board in order to ensure the Lower Wye phosphate issues are addressed | Head of Planning (Craig O'Connor) Cllr Catrin Maby | On going |
| Continue involvement in the Wye Nutrient Management Board Technical Advice Group to identify and analyse options for delivering improvements for water quality | Biodiversity & Ecology Lead (Kate Stinchcombe) | On going |
| Play a key role in the development of the Usk Catchment Partnership in order to tackle nutrient management on the River Usk | Head of Planning (Craig O'Connor) Biodiversity & Ecology Lead (Kate Stinchcombe) Cllr Catrin Maby | Work commence d summer 2022 |
| Continue involvement with the Wye Catchment Partnership in order to protect water quality, water quantity and biodiversity | Environment & Culture Manger (Matthew Lewis) Wye valley AONB | On going |
| Support catchment wide action, nature-based solutions and natural flood management and seek to develop partnerships and funding to deliver these. | Flood Risk Manager (Ross Price) | 2022/23 |
| Clarify the arrangements for Internal Drainage Districts with Natural Resources Wales | Head of Placemaking, Regen, Highways & Flooding (Mark Hand) | Completed July 2022 |
| Work with Welsh Water to provide a phosphate stripping facility at Llanfoist to improve water quality and facilitate new development in the Usk catchment. | Head of Placemaking, Regen, Highways & Flooding (Mark Hand) | 2023 |
| Continue to work with NRW, Welsh Water, neighbouring Councils and other partners to identify phosphate solutions including nature-based solutions for both the river Usk and Wye catchments. | Head of Placemaking, Regen, Highways & Flooding (Mark Hand) | 2022/24 |

| Action | Officer | Timescales |
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| Review and amend the spatial strategy for sustainable growth in Monmouthshire within the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) to ensure that development does not have an adverse impact on the conversation status of the Rivers Wye and Usk. The amended spatial strategy has been developed following discussion with NRW and Welsh Water on future strategic solutions for phosphate mitigation within river catchment areas. | Head of Placemaking, Regen, Highways & Flooding (Mark Hand) | Autumn 2022 |
| Use our powers as a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) approving body to ensure new developments manage on site surface water in a sustainable way | Flood Risk Manager (Ross Price) | Ongoing |
| Use our powers as Land Drainage Authority to ensure works undertaken within ordinary watercourses do not have a negative impact on water quality or on the local environment. | Flood Risk Manager (Ross Price) | Ongoing |
| Appoint a Nutrient Management Officer to sit within the Planning team | Head of Placemaking, Regen, Highways & Flooding (Mark Hand) | 2022/23 |
| Maintain regular officer liaison meetings with NRW and broaden their scope to cover river water quality issues, and suggest that Cabinet Member liaison meetings are introduced. | Head of Planning (Craig O'Connor) Cllr Catrin Maby | Autumn 2022 to broaden scope |
| Maintain good relationship and regular meetings with Welsh Water, with regular updates and information on sewage incidents and forward plans for improvements. | Head of Planning (Craig O'Connor) | Ongoing |
| Lobby Welsh Government to ensure Natural Resources Wales have the resources they need to protect our river and marine environment | Elected members | 2022/23 |
| Build and strengthen relationships with Natural Resources Wales at all levels. | Various MCC officers | On going |
| Take part in a new cross-border working group of agencies, local authorities, MPs and other key parties to develop the first five-year integrated plan to cut pollution in the River Wye. | Cllr Catrin Maby | 2022/27 |
| Nature recovery | | |
| Continue involvement to lead the Gwent Green Grid and Resilient Greater Gwent partnership and explore ways to sustain the partnership beyond the end of current funding in 2023 in order to maintain a regional approach to green infrastructure and nature recovery, including river and ocean recovery | Green Infrastructure Manager (Colette Bosley) Environment & Culture Manger (Matthew Lewis) | 2022/23 |
| Continue to lead Monmouthshire and Newport Local Nature Partnership to share best practice and resources to maximise benefits for people and wildlife | Biodiversity & Ecology Lead (Kate Stinchcombe) | On going |

| Action | Officer | Timescales |
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| Develop the Monmouthshire and Newport Nature Recovery Action Plan with the Local Nature Partnership to include river and marine environments | Biodiversity & Ecology Lead (Kate Stinchcombe) | 2023 |
| Litter reduction | | |
| Deliver litter campaigns with a focus on the impact of litter entering rivers and sea | Green Infrastructure & Litter Education Officer (Sue Parkinson) | Ongoing |
| Work with community groups and Keep Wales Tidy to provide support for local litter picks and implement litter picking hubs. | Green Infrastructure & Litter Education Officer (Sue Parkinson) | Ongoing |
| Continue support of plastic free towns in Monmouthshire | Head of Neighbourhood Services (Carl Touhig) | Ongoing |
| Work with schools to raise awareness of the impact litter has on Rivers and Oceans | Green Infrastructure & Litter Education Officer (Sue Parkinson) | 2022/23 |
| Work with Keep Abergavenny Tidy on a litter campaign targeting business in Abergavenny | Green Infrastructure & Litter Education Officer (Sue Parkinson) | 2022/23 |
| Engage with Welsh Government throughout the development of the Single Use Plastic Bill. | Head of Neighbourhood Services (Carl Touhig) | 2022/23 |
| Education and awareness | | |
| Play a role in the development of an Ocean Literacy action plan in Wales | Decarbonisation Graduate (Niamh Falconer) | Autumn/ Winter 2022 |
| Use the One Planet Centre as a focus for education about marine and river pollution | Bec | Ongoing |
| Deliver dog fouling campaign which will reduce water pollution | Green Infrastructure & Litter Education Officer (Sue Parkinson) | Summer 2022 |

| Action | Officer | Timescales |
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| Facilitate ongoing discussion between MCC and community groups on river and coastal issues through Community Climate Champions network | Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | On going |
| Strengthen the guidance notes for integrated impact assessment to ensure that the Resilient Wales goal is understood to include rivers, coasts and ecosystem resilience, to ensure rivers and oceans are considered as part of council decision making | Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | Autumn 2022 |
| Develop information and resources on rivers and oceans to put on MCC website. | Decarbonisation Graduate (Niamh Falconer) and Sustainability Policy Officer (Hazel Clatworthy) | Autumn/ Winter 2022 |
| Promote the Visit Wales addo (promise to care for Wales' communities and environment) | Destination Manager (Nicola Edwards) | Ongoing |
| Target socially and environmentally responsible visitor segments in our destination marketing | Destination Manager (Nicola Edwards) | Ongoing |
| Encourage local action, community awareness initiatives, demonstration projects and encourage participation in volunteer monitoring and data collection | Environment & Culture Manger (Matthew Lewis) and Head of Neighbourhood Services (Carl Touhig) | Ongoing |
| Use the Space for Local Production Programme pilot of 4 farms to understand how the farms look now and how they could look in the future if certain measures were taken, and use this learning to understand how land management can better protect waterways. | Sustainable Food Projects Manager (Deserie Mansfield) | 2022/23 |

Glossary

A “Blue Economy” is one which uses ocean resources sustainably or even regeneratively whilst improving community wellbeing and social equity. It is not simply marine or maritime economic activity or “blue growth”.

“Ocean literacy” is where a person understands the ocean's influence on them and their influence on the ocean. For example, an understanding that the ocean stores carbon and an understanding that what they put down the drain can impact on ocean health. It can also include learning how to be an active marine citizen.

“Marine citizenship” is exercising the right to participate in the transformation of the human-ocean relationship for sustainability. This means taking individual and collective responsibility to consider one’s

own and society's impacts on the ocean; and exercising rights as a marine citizen, e.g. writing to a local Councillor to ask them to take action for ocean recovery; or promoting or making local, national or international policy changes.