



WYE CRISIS and intensive chicken units in Powys
Brecon & Radnor Branch - Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW)

We have all been shocked by photos of a green and sickly Wye. Algal blooms, fatal to the river's wildlife start further up the Welsh headwaters than ever before¹. The iconic Wye, famous for its natural beauty and the fishing in its clear waters, is one of eight Welsh rivers designated as Special Areas of Conservation for their ecological importance.

Our Welsh rivers are dying. Only a decade ago DEFRA data showed Welsh rivers and waterways to be the cleanest in the UK, with a resurgence of river life². Since, there has been a tragic and progressive decline threatening aquatic life and the many Welsh tourism and leisure businesses depending on enjoyment of healthy rivers.

The Welsh government has encouraged and funded uncontrolled expansion of intensive livestock farming without proper safeguards for our rivers. Powys is now home to almost **ten million** intensively raised chickens at any one time with poorly regulated intensive pig farming a growing parallel problem. 125 intensive poultry planning applications were approved by Powys over the past five years. Another 27 are awaiting determination right now with more in the pipeline.

Phosphates reaching the river from the manure in sheds, free-range egg-layer ranges and extra manure spread on fields, all classed as "diffuse pollution", are a significant cause of algal blooms. Modelling suggests that agricultural phosphates in the Lower Wye have doubled in the last six years. Each approval increases the risk. Natural England measures have led to a dramatic reduction in poultry unit approvals in Shropshire and Herefordshire but Natural Resources Wales has not announced any similar protection for the Welsh Wye. Nor has Welsh Government introduced water regulations like those in place across the rest of the UK.

Government inertia helps the Powys planning department to maintain that they can't find material planning reasons to refuse applications. This has created a gravy-train. An astonishing 97 of the applications since July 2015 were made by a single agricultural agent, Roger Parry & Partners, with Ian Pick Associates accounting for another 30.

A permissive culture for agents goes hand in hand with progressive gagging of residents and organisations like CPRW, Wildlife Trusts and the Woodlands Trust. First Powys decided that the Planning Committee could not read letters about applications from the public, then that third party responses to applications will no longer be accessible on their website, then, in January, the constitution was changed to ensure that the most environmentally sensitive projects (with Environmental Impact Assessment status) are decided "under delegated powers" instead of being debated and voted on by elected representatives at a planning committee meeting.

The Welsh Government pronounces that they will reverse the severe decline in biodiversity but their environmental watchdog, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), is severely under-resourced. The Government says it is for Powys to make local planning decisions according to Welsh Planning Policy and the Local Plan, buying in any expertise they do not have. But Powys, also underfunded, says NRW is responsible for environmental protection advice for planning applications. Natural Resources Wales insists their advice only covers a limited range of topics, mainly highly protected sites and species, and Powys is the responsible Planning Authority. During this ping-pong stalemate, the damage to our rivers and wildlife accumulates.

The NFU is right in claiming there are other threats to our rivers such as climate change, housing development and the scandalous large-scale pollution incidents like the one wiping out river life over 6 miles of the Teifi in 2016³. But the uncontrolled growth in intensive livestock farming in our Powys hills is different because it is planned environmental catastrophe. CPRW and other environmental organisations have been warning of the problem in Powys for years⁴. The Welsh Government is not listening.

We need a moratorium on any new intensive livestock development in Powys. In this worst year in history, it is up to the Welsh Government and NRW to take urgent action now.

¹ Wye and Usk Foundation news 8/6/2020 <https://preview.mailerlite.com/b3o3l4/1439713536795219794/o9f9/>

² BBC Wales 8/9/2010 <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/wales-boasts-cleanest-rivers-uk-1896244>

³ Described by Salmon and Trout Conservation as 'just the tip of an iceberg': <https://www.salmon-trout.org/2016/12/22/conservationists-are-stunned-by-devastating-pollution-incident-on-the-teifi/>

⁴ See Brecon & Radnor branch petition to Welsh Government 'P-05-815 Control Rapidly Expanding Intensive Poultry Industry in Wales': <https://business.senedd.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=21792>

For an interactive map of Intensive Poultry Unit applications in Powys, please see

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=19k4NDqAtNeG8MbNbGu-9yd9bQBc&ll=52.495291891220724,-3.766346143718799&z=9>

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