



ESSEX RIVERS HUB Catchment Partnership Meeting Agenda

Wednesday 15th October 2025
10:00 – 12:30

MS Teams Meeting

Present: Sally Aherne, Melissa Ahmet, Emily Baldock, Justin Barrett, Jo Bayes, Olwen Belgrove, Matt Butcher, Susannah Cass, Helen Dangerfield (chair), Luke Farnish, Ben Fitzsimons, Emma Gray, Gary Hodgetts, Clemmie Moule, David Smart, Nicky Spurr, Darren Tansley, Andrew Warwick, Alice Wickman, Alan Woods

Apologies: Thomas Harris, Kirk Markham, Jo Matthews

1. Recap Past Meeting's Actions & Partner Updates

Helen Dangerfield opened the meeting and read through the actions from the last meeting – all have been followed up with a few added updates from partners, including the imminent deadline on Environment Agency LWEG funding for the following financial year. Whilst there is an immediate deadline, the likely underspend mid-year means projects can still be developed later on and partners should get in touch with Matt Butcher if needed.

- Darren Tansley (EWT) – Mink eradication has seen an 82% reduction in numbers and an overall 92% drop in the number of mink caught (CPUE: 6.4 2024 compared to 0.5-0.6 2025). This suggests a population collapse and that mink should be completely gone by next year, able to declare them functionally extinct.
- Alice Wickman (SWT) – Ongoing river and floodplain restoration projects in Upper Stour, including wetland scrapes, ponds, woody debris, restoring the plain and river to reconnect the river. Additional funding for NbS modelling of flow pathways and pollution, which will identify where interventions are best placed and help identify future projects. Helen Dangerfield added that it would be good to upload these as potential projects to the Anglian River Hub to include work in Suffolk.
- Melissa Ahmet (Affinity Water) – Announced upcoming maternity leave and colleague Alex Sage to attend ERH meetings in her place. Detail provided on the INNS Out Scheme (2025-2030), which supports partnership projects working towards preventing the introduction and spread of INNS, especially where they have detrimental impact on waterbodies or designated sites: <https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/sustainability/inns>. Other grant funds highlighted were 'Rooting for Wildlife' and 'Water in the Landscape', which will reopen next year.
- Sally Aherne (Woodland Trust) – Expressed excitement at first ERH meeting and shared detail on the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme; up to 98% funding offered to landowners to plant trees. Scheme runs over the year, closed Dec-Mar. This year saw a full take-up early on and closed early. It will be running again next year and open to everyone with information released in July and launching in September.
- Gary Hodgetts (Anglian Water) – River Colne water quality is good, but there are low levels especially in Ardleigh Reservoir. Pipeline project is coming online and will move single-source supplied customers onto a more reliable source. Farm Innovation Grant is now closed. Water reuse momentum picking up with lots of potential. Farm cluster fund just about to launch with comms pack launching next week.

- Clemmie Moule (NWG) – Now in her new role as Bluespaces Lead at NWG. Requested any project funding queries be sent over to: clementine.moule@nwl.co.uk

2. ERH Event Check-In

Helen presented an update on the upcoming ERH Annual Event in Cat Wood's absence. The main aim of the event is to recognise citizen science achievement and to demonstrate how individual action fits within the bigger picture while also motivating and encouraging volunteers.

Event will be held on Thursday 13th November from 6:00-10:00 pm at Colchester Rugby Club and tickets to secure place can be booked on Eventbrite: https://www.eventbrite.co.nz/e/essex-rivers-hub-annual-event-celebrating-riverwatch-tickets-1673670737229?aff=ebdsoporgprofile&keep_tld=1

All confirmed approval of the event.

3. Fish Passage Subgroup Update

Darren Tansley provided an update on ERH Subgroup 1 and the ongoing fish passage discussions. An outline of the Essex Fish Migration Roadmap Pipeline and the several stages to bring a project to completion was talked through. Current key statistics are:

- 400+ barriers mapped in Essex with up to 30 km inland (potentially more in upper headwaters)
- 41 barriers at approx. 30 locations scoped with initial options appraisals
- Only about 6-7 mitigated or 'self-mitigated' i.e. Middle Weir, Colne, Castle Park

The previous subgroup meeting involved a presentation by Andy Sadler from Great Yorkshire Rivers who provided a comparison of key statistics:

- 1600 barriers mapped and 500 km of unpassable rivers
- 100 barriers already mitigated, but piecemeal
- Aim to remove all significant barriers by 2043
- Considerable Heritage constraints along historic industrial waterways

This comparatively dwarfs the issues we face in Essex.

The Great Yorkshire Rivers funding and governance could also provide a guidance template for how to proceed.

The current situation on barrier removal is that there are no suitable options for barrier removal to satisfy the Open Rivers Programme; there is no current funding option for mitigation or bypass. There could be potential to perhaps harness the 'redress package', similar to Anglian Water. Overall, it's been determined that the only way to move forward at this scale is to centralise administration funding with the formation of a separate Trust.

Helen Dangerfield commented that the Great Yorkshire Rivers has a good model and that the subgroup work on this will continue.

Gary Hodgetts mentioned the NbS work across Anglia and that a proposition of the scale of ambition will be put forward to relevant contacts to perhaps align with other schemes.

Matt Butcher emphasised the positive progress of this and a keenness to support; the bigger ambition of the project will attract more attention, support and funding.

Darren Tansley commented that projects involving a bypass would be easier to deliver, but Open Rivers Programme requires a removal, which presents the main difficulty.

Clemmie Moule added that the Open Rivers Programme would be amenable to discussion on flexibility, but the Great Yorkshire Rivers model sounds very practical and more suited.

Alan Woods (ESRT Trustee) commented on how great it is to have this level of ambition and that it would be ideal to be incremental in execution to avoid impracticalities or duplication. The importance of statistics that come from a project like this would be valuable to monitor the actual benefits and changes to fish populations.

Helen Dangerfield queried the status of monitoring.

Darren Tansley responded that there is currently little data available until all are united into a larger picture of the river, which presents its own problems in handling the data. EA fish surveys are being relied on for population data at present, but to capture this research and monitoring aspect of the project, a university may need to be involved.

To conclude the update, Helen Dangerfield summarised that there would be broad support for a fish barrier project and that the difficulties lie in the finer details. All feedback provided in this discussion is useful to inform the next steps and highlights the benefit of having a subgroup dedicated to this work.

4. Bluespaces Scheme

Emily Baldock (ESRT) provided a presentation on the Bluespaces Scheme, hosted by NWG, a fund that supports improvements to bluespaces (accessible water environments) for the public to enjoy. The current goal of this scheme is to improve 500 km of bluespaces by 2030.

Currently, 248.1 km of Bluespaces have been improved across Northumbria and Essex & Suffolk by partners, investing £588, 176 into projects – 22 of which have been across Essex and Suffolk.

Changes to the scheme from AMP7 to AMP8 include an increased programme budget of £6.6 m:

- £10,000 is now available per km of accessible water environment improvements
- Partner support fund for project maintenance
- Partner support fund for project feasibility

The Bluespaces team is also being expanded with Clemmie Moule's new role as Bluespaces Lead and a new Bluespaces Advisor role based in Northumbria. Both the Bluespaces Advisor and Clemmie's replacement of Bluespaces Delivery Manager for ESW based projects will be starting on 3rd November.

For any project ideas or questions, please contact: clementine.moule@nwl.co.uk or emily.baldock@essexsuffolkrivertrust.org

5. Transforming the Thames

Olwen Belgrove (ZSL) presented an update for the ongoing work of the Transforming the Thames project.

The estuary will be recovered, reconnected and resilient, forming an outstanding coastal wetland for nature and local communities. Delivery is expected from July 2025 to May 2026. The project will be upscaled for the long term.

As part of the project, there is seagrass restoration in the Blackwater and Stour catchment, native oyster restoration and coastal grazing marsh.

6. Water Net Gain

Susannah Cass (ESRT) introduced herself in her new role as Land and Water Officer and presented current work on Water Net Gain in the Colne catchment.

Water Net Gain is exploring new ways to support farmers and drought-affected water supplies, intending to ease associated river health pressures. The catchment scheme is being co-designed where farmers are paid to store water on their land in ponds to act as 'water batteries'. Participants are currently being recruited within the Colne operational catchment.

Any feedback will be valuable to co-designing future grant schemes, scoping broader opportunities for water quality and availability management beyond ponds.

The pre-stage design for future funding involves restoring disused and offline ponds.

Gary Hodgetts commented that the motivations behind this scheme are stressed across projects on a regional scale, aiming to make a big impact on protecting raw water quality, which may be supported through a land management grant.

Darren Tansley added that this would be useful for the scheme to explore ponds that don't meet current FWAG funding criteria.

Susannah Cass responded that the scheme is designed for ponds to become active rather than only biodiversity purposes.

Alan Woods mentioned the farmer abstract groups in the Colne and those in Suffolk might be a good starting point i.e. the Felixstowe Hydrocycle project makes use of water that would otherwise be pumped out to sea.

Ben Fitzsimons (WRE) highlighted an opportunity with farm surveys and satellites to check pond use. Ground trooping and farm surveys are planned, presenting an opportunity for Water Net Gain work to link up with this and helping to store water beyond flows with scope for Colne.

Emma Gray (North Essex Farm Cluster) questioned whether there could be a crossover and an introduction to the scheme provided for farmers even those split across both catchments.

Susannah Cass responded that this would be useful with Gary Hodgetts commenting that the local perspective is particularly important to consider for a wider project like this.

7. Environmental Destination Planning

Ben Fitzsimons (WRE) introduced himself as Technical Director at Water Resources East to the group, although the main contact is Teresa Meadows: teresa.eadows@wre.org.uk

Work with water resource planning is still being navigated with the intention of improving catchment-level thinking with ERH. Environmental improvement between 2030 and 2055 goal of ~415 ml/d.

Abstraction licence changes i.e. what short term decisions determine long-term strategic outcomes. Catchment abstraction summaries on management catchment level, fully licenced potential reductions and waterbody abstraction reduction risk data available: [Anglian | Environmental Destination - Get involved! | Engage Environment Agency Percentage Reductions | Environmental Destination - Get involved! | Engage Environment Agency](#)

Catchment workshop based on catchment decision making framework from Nov 2025 to Mar 2026, For invite, email: teresa.eadows@wre.org.uk

8. Source to Sea Mapping

Jo Bayes (EA) presented the Source to Sea Mapping EA work

The data collected will support holistic decision making. Emphasis on the importance to expand catchments to salty parts as there is currently a disconnection between the freshwater and saltwater parts of the catchment. Understanding the whole system will provide more benefits and solutions will be identified for a collaborative effort.

Resources including a scoping map, integrated system map and planning diagram were shared. Feedback was encouraged, including suggestions of any relevant missing contacts.

Justin Barrett (EA) mentioned the upcoming EA project, which will fund at waterbody level, Blackwater and Colne catchment. This will run until March 2026 to build on the mapping work

9. Final Comments

Helen Dangerfield thanked all speakers and mentioned the WINEP funding opportunity from ESW to bolster ERH with seed funding to help run meetings, assist in co-ordination and facilitation of subgroups and increase scale of opportunity. Nothing has been agreed yet, but feedback and comments are welcome.

Actions for the next meeting:

	Action	Owner	Completed by next ERH meeting?
1	Explore capacity to create engagement or find solutions to mitigate against the anti-social behaviour of the public (the youth in particular) and have this as an ongoing item on the agenda to check in on	ALL	Ongoing
2	Provide feedback on upcoming ERH event and awards and book tickets (if attending) through Eventbrite: Essex Rivers Hub Annual Event: Celebrating RiverWatch Tickets, Thu 13 Nov 2025 at 18:00 Eventbrite	ALL	
3	Feedback and comments on WINEP (ESW) funding opportunity for ERH	ALL	
4	Share Melissa Ahmet's best contact email with Clemmie Moule for further communication with Affinity Water.	EB	
5	Relevant contacts to be informed of the fish barrier work's scale of ambition to align with other schemes i.e. NbS	GH	
6	Jo Matthews to be updated on Great Yorkshire Rivers model in comparison to Open Rivers Programme for fish barrier projects.	CM	
7	Meeting to be arranged to discuss the links between Water Net Gain and other projects, especially ponds that lie outside of current FWAG funding criteria and protecting raw water quality.	DT, SC & GH	
8	Communicate and compare methods of flow pathway modelling used in Transforming the Thames project and Suffolk Wildlife Trust work.	Alice Wickman & OB	