



## Clun Catchment

### Position Statement

December 2021

#### Background

The Clun Catchment, a tributary of the River Teme in South Shropshire, is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It is designated due to the presence of freshwater pearl mussel. The River Clun SAC is the southernmost of only three SAC sites designated for freshwater pearl mussel in England.

The Conservation Objectives<sup>1</sup> set by Natural England place targets on concentrations of phosphorous, nitrogen and sediment to protect the freshwater pearl mussel and ensure that the river is in good health. Water quality in the River Clun SAC is currently worse than the Conservation Objective targets (in that measured concentrations of pollutants are higher), and the freshwater pearl mussel is in serious decline. Mitigation and restoration actions are therefore required to bring pollution level down to below target levels.

#### What does this mean?

Reductions in phosphates, nitrogen and suspended solids and sediment are all needed in the River Clun SAC catchment to restore the site. Siltation and nutrient enrichment have serious and ongoing impacts on juvenile and adult mussels. The freshwater pearl mussel utilises fish for part of its lifecycle. Increased inputs of dissolved nutrients lead to algal growth which can create reduction in dissolved oxygen in the water. Excess sediment and algae create poor riverbed substrate and smothering of mussel, invertebrate and fish habitat.

The Nutrient Management Plan identified need for a total Phosphate reduction of around 75%, from diffuse sources, to meet the Favourable Conservation Target. Given the significant investment that has already taken place in relation to WWTW, this is likely to largely need to come from changes in agricultural practice.

Modelling undertaken by the Environment Agency indicates that 88% of catchment nitrogen loads are from diffuse sources. Reductions in the order of 65% are needed from diffuse sources to meet the nitrogen Favourable Conservation Target (around 600kg/day).

Sediment issues arise because farmed soils on steep slopes and on the floodplain in the Clun catchment are naturally susceptible to erosion, and roads and fields with associated drainage are also key sediment and nutrient pathways to the River Clun. Diffuse sources account for the majority of sediment loads in the river. Reductions in mean annual suspended soil of around 65% may be required to meet the sediment Favourable Conservation Target.

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<sup>1</sup> Citation and Conservation Objective documents are found here : [European Site Conservation Objectives for River Clun SAC - UK0030250 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/objectives/river-clun-sac-uk0030250)



## **The overall vision**

Whilst the Favourable Conservation Targets recognise the unique environmental value of the River Clun SAC, we also recognise the value of the area as an important rural community. This means taking account of the requirement for new development to maintain and meet future community needs. Alongside the nature conservation requirement, there is therefore a need for us to balance this with the needs of people and enabling this rural local community to thrive.

Our combined vision for the River Clun SAC is therefore for the whole catchment area to be restored to a functional unit where a nature recovery plan enables ecological and human needs to successfully interact, thereby balancing the needs of people, economy and the environment.

## **How are we working together to achieve this?**

Significant work has already been undertaken by the individual organisations within the catchment. For example, Severn Trent Water has already invested in Wastewater Treatment Work upgrades to enable phosphate stripping and reductions in phosphate contributions from point sources in the river. Trees have been planted along the banks of the river to provide shading for freshwater pearl mussel. Farm advice and Countryside Stewardship Agreements are being delivered along the river and within its catchment. River habitat improvements, community events and citizen science sampling have taken place.

However, the environmental challenges remain and more needs to be done as a collective to deliver the transformation required to both restore and unlock the value of this area to support both environmental and community needs.

Shropshire Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England and Severn Trent Water have therefore come together to provide a multi-agency response and coordinated leadership. The organisations have established a Strategic Clun Liaison Group which meets monthly and comprises senior leaders from each of the individual organisations.

The Strategic Clun Liaison Group recognises the need for a long-term plan to identify and prioritise the suite of mitigation and restoration measures. This will need to identify and provide a work programme for the mixture of short, medium and long-term management measures required throughout the catchment.

Whilst aimed at providing the right joint leadership, the Group recognises the vital need for everyone to play their part in helping to address the catchment needs.

In developing the long-term plan, the Strategic Clun Liaison Group will need to work alongside community members, Town and Parish Councils, landowners and others across the catchment area to both identify nature recovery opportunities and the best ways to implement them.