

Briefing paper: The North Wales Wildlife Trust - Welsh Government Funded Projects Update

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper, written by Wildlife Trusts Wales, is to highlight the ongoing issues surrounding the Sustainable Management Scheme and ENRaW funding schemes. It presents the North Wales Wildlife Trust's experiences of applying for funding under these two streams and highlights severe issues with the processes of each.

We ask for Welsh Government officials to engage with the voluntary sector Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs planning group, and the wider sector, to discuss how these processes can be improved.

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT SCHEME PROJECTS

1. Our River Wellbeing (SMS ID: 81421)

This project has been relatively unaffected so far by the Covid-19 Welsh Government grant freeze. We received our grant claim up until end March 2020. We have recently submitted the claim for April and May and await payment. However, we are about to submit a project reprofile which will, if accepted, extend the project for a year (partly in response to the Covid-19 situation). If it takes months for it to be approved, it will delay our ability to make grant claims and so could affect cash-flow.

2. Wrexham Industrial Estate 'Biodiversity Means Business' (SMS ID: 81434)

Over the last month we have been working with Welsh Government staff to process our grant reprofile submitted in January 2020 (the one submitted in January 2019 was never processed). We have not yet received payments for any work beyond July 2019. We are hoping the reprofile will be approved very soon and we will be able to backdate our claim to **August 2019** and thereafter submit a claim every other month. These delays cause considerable stress and cashflow problems, when coupled with re-profiling and continuous clarification requests the process has become very frustrating. Welsh Government staff are as helpful as they can be but the process that has to be followed is disjointed, unwieldy and slow.

3. Woodlands for Water (SMS ID: 82249)

Over the last month we have been working with Welsh Government staff to provide them with information to enable the processing of our grant application submitted in **October 2019**. There are still some questions being asked but we hope that by July WG will have all the information it requires to process the grant application and enable us to make our first claim. However, despite this work that is clearly being done by Welsh Government staff, they have still not been given the authority to confirm if the grant will be ultimately approved, this is hindering our ability to forward plan. NWWT's Director was given a verbal promise that costs up until end March 2020 will be honoured, however a request for this in writing was refused. During this time there has been concern of securing budget due as we understand the pressing need to prioritise Covid-19 related funding. The consequence of not confirming funding has meant that significant elements of the project are currently on

hold (e.g. recruitment of staff). As above, Welsh Government staff do the best they can within the process.

Also, a note on the **Rural Payments Wales** system: organisations such as PONT have found that there is no way to communicate with people through the RPW account system. The best that can be done is to raise an issue, and it then takes several weeks for someone to get in touch. PONT have found that payments have been delayed and not paid in full with no communication, meaning they have been unable to find out what issues there have been with their claim while at the same time threatening the very existence of the project.

ENRaW

1. Dyfi Catchment Natural Restoration Project (Welsh Beaver Project)

The three-year grant award was cut to a one-year grant award in October 2019, due to mistakes made by Welsh Government in fulfilling EU funding requirements. Cutting a three-year project during the first year to just a one-year programme causes extreme logistic problems. Whilst re-organising the project, staff also had to re-apply for funding in November 2019 - this takes up staff time and gives uncertainty to project staff employment, especially as the application was unsuccessful. Therefore, a third application was made in March 2019. A decision was expected in May but due to Covid-19 we have heard nothing. This now leaves the project in limbo with preliminary work undertaken but no ability to fulfil the intentions of the project. Payment for the first year wasn't received until April 2020, leaving the charity to cash flow the project.

What has been helpful is Welsh Government staff letting us amend the project to be extended until the end of August to undertake a Beaver release to the Cors Dyfi enclosure. However, this part of the project is currently delayed as Welsh Government vets haven't yet approved the Veterinary Risk Assessment and Natural Resources Wales need to approve the fencing design.

Wildlife Trusts Wales on behalf of the Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs voluntary sector planning group

July 2020