



Upper Avon Strategic Partnership Stakeholder Steering Group Meeting

Thursday 24th November 2011, Eathorpe Village Hall

Minutes of the Meeting

In Attendance

Bob Breach, Geoff Harper, Jeremy White, Harry Johnson, John Moverley, Henry Lucas, Steven Bailey, David Hudson, Colin Sully, Katherine Cherry, Jodie Whitehead, Tony Bostock, Bob Slater, Phil Robinson, Carrie Robbins, Rachel Ranger, Tim Haseldon, Anton Irving.

Apologies

Bob Breach, Helen Cork, Jim Richard, Donna Tavernor, Sophie Leszczynska, Cindy Hobkirk, Nigel Francis.

Actions

Melissa Hoskings - to ask the group if they would like to be involved in the workshop and their availability for that week.

Melissa Hoskings – to contact EA Environment Officer to see if she can place the EA walkover survey data onto GIS.

John Moverley – to get in touch with the railways and find out if they are still spraying propyzamide.

Introducing the new Catchment Advisor and introductions round the table

Melissa Hoskings introduced herself as the new Catchment Advisor for the Upper Avon & Leam, followed on by stakeholders introducing themselves around the table.

A background to the project and information on the funding and other matters

Steven Bailey gave a brief introduction to the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative and its presence throughout England.

Jodie Whitehead gave an overview of the issues found in the Leam catchment. These issues included:

- 83% of the catchment at risk from phosphate
- 86% of the catchment at risk from pesticides
- Champion Hills WTW near Leamington Spa had the worst pesticide levels within the whole of the Severn Trent region

Katherine Cherry passed around water quality data and a set of maps for the catchment based on Severn Trent Water's monitoring. The maps illustrated where the pesticide "hotspots" are within the catchment.

The group noted high levels of propyzamide being used during May-July, a time when this pesticide is when this is not used by farmers. It was mentioned that this chemical used to be used frequently on railway lines and by the Highways Agency to kill grass. **Action John Moverley** – to ask his contacts whether this pesticide is still being used on railways.

Outcomes of the first stage of the project and lessons learnt

Jodie Whitehead discussed the outcomes of the first stage of the project. These main outcomes included

- 63 farms were engaged with the project
- 28 farms have received nutrient management plans
- 34 farmers, contractors and spray operatives attended a sprayer event
- 35 farmers achieving their PA4S certificate; 11 achieving their PA1; and 12 achieving their PA2
- Pesticide levels reduced by 50% in the catchment

The main lessons learnt from the project were as follows:

- The project had received lots of exposure in the past making it quite difficult to find new and interesting ways to deliver the information
- The project struggled to engage with agronomists. The Catchment Advisor found that they were quite protective of their clients for commercial reasons and were reluctant to promote the project.
- The actions and delivery milestones had been set for the project before the Catchment Advisor or ADAS were involved. This meant that a proportion of the milestones needed to be changed and others were missed or had to be left altogether.
- The project found there was a need to target late adopters
- There was too much competition for farmer's time and attendance with other organisations when organising meetings.

Discuss milestones and activities for the second phase of the project

Melissa discussed the main activities that have been set for the next 6 months and asked the group if they agreed with these activities, or if they wanted to see any additional activities occurring.

The main activities included:

- A WTW Tour to promote the project
- To find a demonstration farm for a biobed, and run a biobed planning demo
- Deliver a PLANET workshop
- Deliver PA1, PA2 and PA4S training
- Deliver soil and / or manure management plans for 15 farms
- Soil Moisture Deficit (SMD) monitoring and texting service for farmers
- EA farm visits
- 2 Capital Grant Scheme Clinics
- Make contacts in the catchment with regards to buffer strips

Jeremy White mentioned that encouraging buffer strips at the moment may not be a good idea as the LERAP scheme may result in farmers having to introduce a new 20m riparian buffer strip adjacent to watercourses. It may be best to hold on to find out the verdict of this first.

The group mentioned a good way to get farmers to have an annual MOT on their sprayers would be to offer them an incentive, for example through the CSF Capital Grant Scheme.

Provide farmers with a regular update on pesticide levels, including the pesticide maps that Katherine Cherry is producing. The group agreed this would make farmers take more action towards best practise pesticide spraying and pelleting as they would want to risk these chemicals being banned.

Melissa then asked the group to split off into smaller groups of 4 and come up with ideas to tackle pesticide issues within the catchment and how to engage with “difficult” or hard to reach farmers. The main ideas from this session included:

- keep repeating offers to farmers
- Advertise in the press and write articles about farmers who have taken up these offers
- Provide information on better slug pelleters e.g. Phil Robinson’s machine
- Farm walks & BBQ’s
- “Champion Farmers” in the catchment to encourage other farmers and host events and trial measures first
- Educate through children
- Can we grow alternative crops that require less pesticide application?

Steven Bailey provided the group with an introduction to the CSF Capital Grant Scheme, including what it was; how it could help farmers improve their business, and the different eligible grant aid items. Steven mentioned that farmers within the Leam would be able to apply for a grant next March and would have a greater chance of success of receiving the grant or a full grant if they:

a) engaged with the Catchment Advisor

b) selected items from the priority items list

A grant is available up to a maximum of £10,000 and provides a 50% contribution to the total cost.

Melissa provided the group with a list of the 10 priority items that herself and Jodie had selected from the table of eligible items and asked the group if they agreed with the items on the list, or would they like to see some different items on the list.

The group agreed with all the items on the list. The group would like to see pasture pumps or ram pumps added to the list though as these would be a priority in situations where livestock are fenced off from the watercourse and there is no mains water supply on the farm.

Information on the Defra WFD pilot project

David Hudson gave an introduction to the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the WFD Pilot project in the Leam catchment. The overall aim of the project is to work collaboratively with stakeholders within the Leam catchment and to devise a set of methods and actions to improve the environmental status of waterbodies within the catchment.

The Environment Agency (EA) have already completed walkover surveys, produced catchment maps, undertaken SIMCAT modelling to tackle phosphate pollution, and spoken to a number of farmers in the catchment with regards to cattle poached riverbanks. They are intending to use “fat trap” samplers to monitor for banned pesticides in the catchment.

The EA would like to work with the stakeholder group to receive information on what they feel the issues and concerns are for the Leam catchment.

A workshop has been organised for the w/c 12th December 2011 to discuss issues in the Leam catchment. **Action Melissa** - to ask the group if they would like to be involved in the workshop and their availability for that week.

Meeting Close