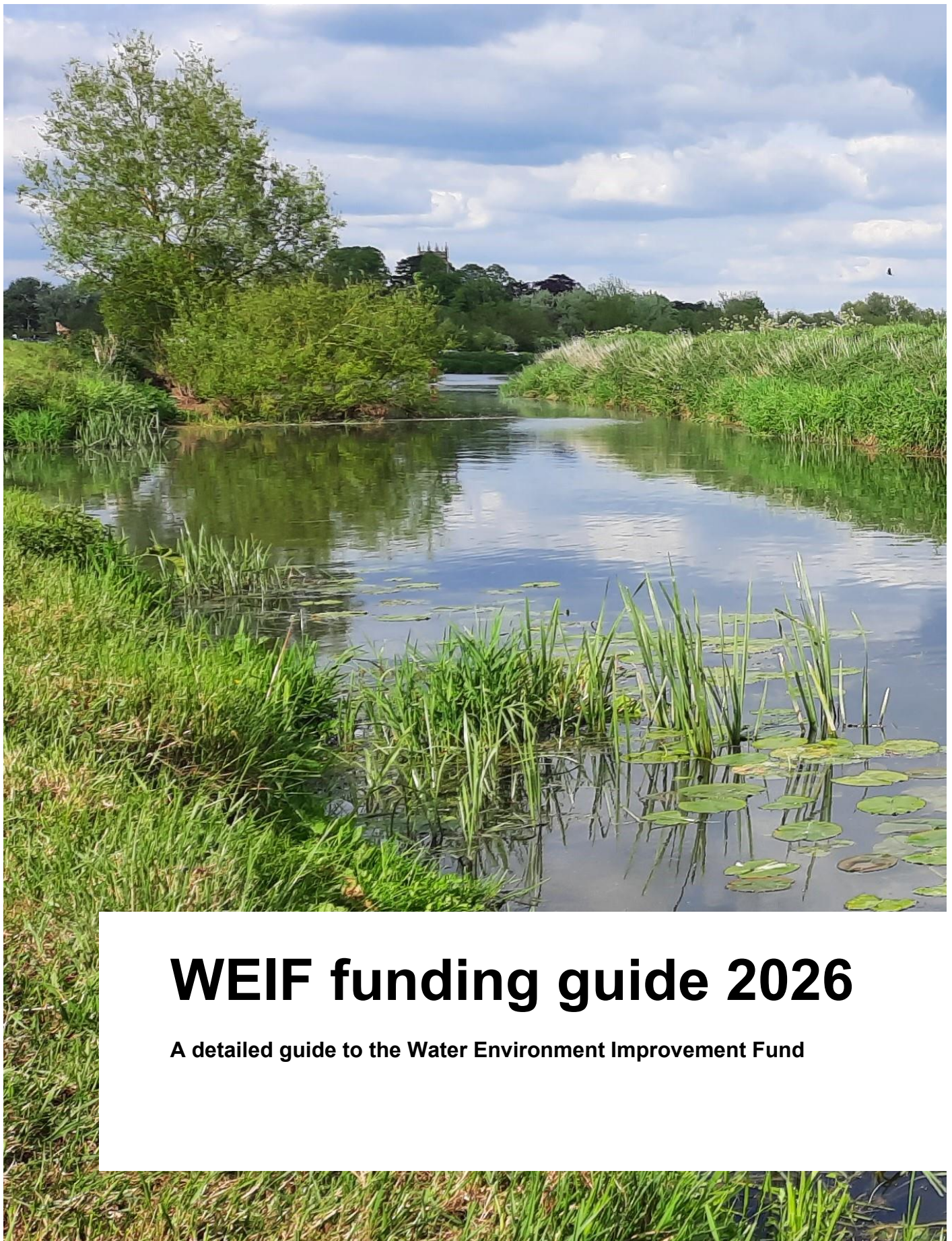




WEIF funding guide 2026

A detailed guide to the Water Environment Improvement Fund

River Tees at Piercebridge. *Credit: J Lavick*

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Part 1: WEIF funding guide 2026

This is a guide to the eligibility and prioritisation criteria to apply for the *Water Environment Improvement Fund* (WEIF) and should be used to put forward projects for future funding through the Medium-Term Plan (MTP).

What is the Water Environment Improvement Fund?

The purpose of the Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) is to support the delivery of the statutory water body objectives set out in the River Basin Management Plans through the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) and the delivery of the governments *Environment Improvement Plan 2025* – to restore nature, improve the water environment and mitigate and adapt to climate change. The objectives and success measures are described in [Appendix 1](#).

As a public fund WEIF is designed to address issues in the water environment where there is no responsible direct owner or where direct public intervention, co-ordination and investment is needed to attract other investors and voluntary groups to work together for the public good.

Investment should be coordinated with the planned investment and actions of others and not duplicate other planned investment. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) will identify potential measures and locations to deliver locally agreed environmental priorities and should be considered for investment.

The Environment Agency is responsible for ensuring that the use of public money is compliant with Managing Public Money and maintains an audit trail to demonstrate this.

WEIF funding information at a glance:

Location	England
Funding organisation	The Environment Agency
Who can apply?	Charitable, non-profit, public sector and private sector organisations.
Are there restrictions on what can be funded?	Projects must meet the Eligibility criteria and the funding rules set out below.
How much can you get?	Every area ¹ of the country is allocated a portion of the fund. Project allocations are limited by the funding available. Most projects receive less than £100,000, but we consider larger scale bids.

¹ Based on the 14 [Environment Agency areas](#)

How do I apply for WEIF?

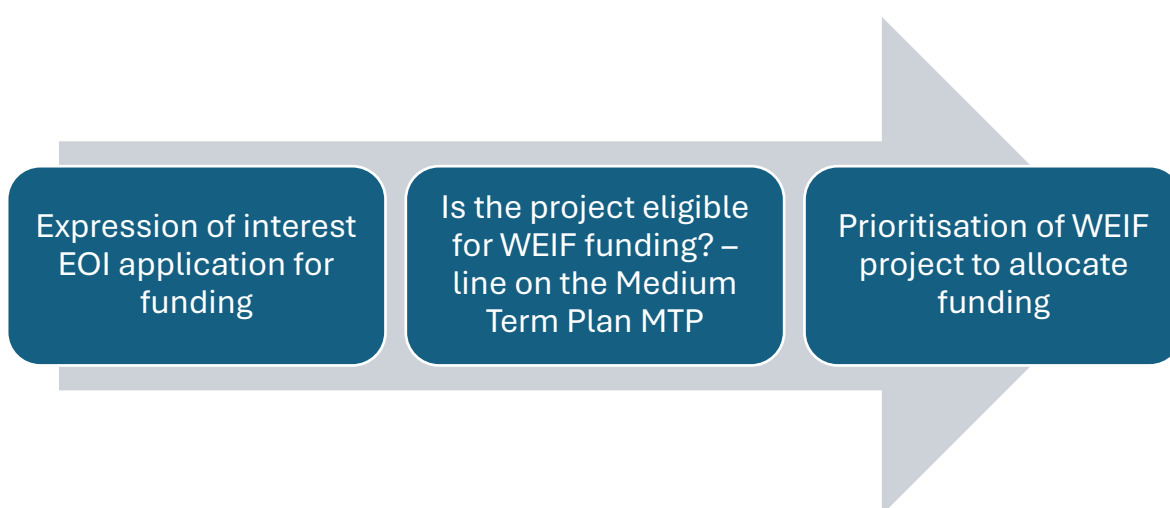
Projects seeking funding should submit proposals to the Environment Agency through your local *Catchment Co-ordinator*.

Applications can be submitted at any time. Project proposals are reviewed and if eligible, are added to the Medium-Term Plan (MTP). The MTP provides a list of potential projects, with their investment needs and outcomes, and acts as a valuable source of information to bid for government funding by showcasing our shared ambition for the environment

The MTP is reviewed (“refreshed”) annually during the summer and early autumn, and eligible projects prioritised for the allocation of funding for delivery in the following financial year.

Projects will receive confirmation of funding once WEIF has been confirmed by Defra.

The basic application steps for WEIF funding are summarised below:



How to identify projects for the MTP

Each Catchment Partnership has a [Catchment Management Plan](#) which describes the ambition to improve the environment in a local area. Details of water body status and issues that need addressing can be found on the [Catchment Data Explorer](#).

The identification of potential projects seeking WEIF investment through the MTP should be carried out collaboratively with catchment partners and other key stakeholders, based on the Catchment based Approach (CaBA).

Projects seeking WEIF funding must meet the [eligibility criteria](#) and the [WEIF funding rules](#).

WEIF eligibility criteria

To be eligible for WEIF funding, projects must meet *all* of the following four criteria. This is a pass / fail test for funding.

Table 1: WEIF eligibility criteria

1. It can be confirmed that the project has the support of the Catchment or Coastal* Partnership. Project proposal should be aligned with Catchment Partnership priorities agreed in Catchment Plans. *If in place
2. The project is designed to deliver an action where there is no responsible direct owner or where direct public intervention, co-ordination and investment is needed to attract other investors and voluntary groups to work together for the public good.
3. The project must deliver one or more of these relevant outcomes: • Address a Reason for Not Achieving Good status (RNAG) or Reason for deterioration (RFD) or heavily modified waterbody Mitigation Measure, as evidenced in the Catchment Planning System (CPS); <i>and / or</i> • Improve or restore WFD Protected Area status; <i>and / or</i> • Create, enhance or restore water dependent habitats (appendix 2), water dependent species that are threatened or of principle importance (appendix 3) or water related priorities in the locally relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategies (appendix 4)
4. The project proposal (expression of interest) must provide estimated delivery costs and an indication of match funding. Match funding can be partner in kind, partner funding, external and / or private funding

How WEIF projects are prioritised for funding

Prioritisation is a competitive process, ensuring that only the best projects which meet the objectives of the programme (Appendix 1) receive funding. It is best practice to involve Catchment Partnership with the prioritisation of project proposals in their catchment.

The allocation of WEIF funding is the responsibility of the Environment Agency who must ensure that the final programme is optimised and balanced with the right mixture of projects to maximise outcomes, provide value for money, assures delivery and meets the objectives and outcomes set by Defra.

Projects are prioritised based on four broad criteria set out in Table 2:

Table 2: Prioritisation criteria

Prioritisation criteria	Weighting	Information/ data used to assess prioritisation
Environmental outcomes	40%	Does the project <i>maximise</i> the environmental outcomes? Considerations include the scale, quantity of outcomes, impact of a project and additional / multiple benefits: • Contributes to achieving water body objectives and Km of water body enhanced and protected. (Km enhanced / protected, RNAGs and RFD and heavily modified waterbody mitigation measures addressed) • Delivers benefits for priority habitats and species (Ha of priority habitat created and restored) ○ Creation or restoration of priority wetland habitats (see Appendix 2) ○ Further the conservation and enhancement of water dependent species that are threatened or of principle importance Appendix 3. ○ Supports the delivery of <i>water related</i> priorities and measures set out in the relevant LNRS. Appendix 4 • Delivers multiple additional benefits e.g. carbon sequestration (trees planted), reduced flood risk; social benefits • Scale: Single waterbody or whole catchment • Stage of project: is this the final year needed to deliver the outcomes?
Value for money	20%	Does the project demonstrate <i>good value for money</i>? Considerations include: • % ratio of WEIF funding to external funding (in year and total project). • Longevity of the intervention (permanent solutions are preferential) • Amount of maintenance required long term. • Benchmark costs against known best practice
Confidence in delivery	20%	What is the <i>likelihood of success</i>. Considerations may include: • Confidence in partner's ability to deliver based on past experience and qualifications • Known capacity of partner organisation, based on size of the organisation and / or number of existing projects • Highly complex projects and innovative approaches are higher risk • Scalability of scope in year • Good project risk mitigation plan in place and credible scheduling of work • Are requirements for the projects in place to proceed, for instance landowner support, permits and flood modelling?
Local strategic priorities	20%	The objective is to ensure <i>local priorities</i> are considered. Consider whether the project will help deliver: • Local environmental strategies such as River Basin Management Plans, Flood Risk Management Plans, catchment plans, species action plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategies. • Local EA Area priorities e.g. Stakeholder Beneficiary Mapping Tool



Part 2: WEIF funding rules and considerations

2.1 Delivery Mechanism

The majority of WEIF projects are delivered by local external partners. All WEIF projects will be delivered through one of three routes:

- I. **Grants:** Approximately 80% of WEIF projects on the programme will be allocated funding using grants under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, called **Local Water Environment Grants (LWEGs)**. The management and administration of LWEGs is in accordance with Government Grant functional standards and is undertaken by the FCRM Portfolio Management Office and Defra finance Grant Administration Team. Many of the organisations that we work with will be eligible, for example River Trusts and Wildlife Trusts, and other environmental non-governmental organisations. Public sector organisations (including Risk Management Authorities and Local Authorities including any sub-groups or committees within a Local Authority) are also eligible for LWEG's.

It should be noted that LWEG's are not a contract for services, and the Environment Agency must take care not to treat the Grant Recipient as a contractor. The grants process is designed so that organisations (Grantees) receive money from the Environment Agency (Grantor) to do the Grantee's own project – this process must not be used where the organisation is carrying out any work for or providing services to the Environment Agency. During delivery, the Environment Agency can provide advice as they would to any organisation and may check that the grant is being spent in line with the grant conditions; however, the Environment Agency must not take on any roles relating to the delivery of the project, decision making, the design of the project or the delivery of the project; nor should the Environment Agency take any responsibility for risks associated with the project beyond that set out in the Grant Agreement's terms. Business cases should reflect that there is a clear arm's length relationship between the grantee and Environment Agency in relation to the Grantee's responsibility for and delivery of the project.

Successful applicants will be offered a grant on the basis of either a legal Agreement (under £100k) or a Deed (over £100k).

Once an LWEG has been awarded, any proposed change to a project which alters its outcomes, objectives or scope, including approved cost must be communicated to the EA and written approval from the EA must be received prior to the change being implemented.

We would encourage partners to make use of the ability to claim interim payments throughout the year, and plan project milestones accordingly this will help to keep track of project costs and allow time for variations if needed. Upfront payments are also available on request.

- II. **Collaborative Agreements:** Some WEIF projects are not eligible for grants because they are truly collaborative in their delivery between the Environment Agency and our partners. In these cases, the EA will sit on the project board and be fully involved in project delivery decision making. We will use Collaborative Agreements in these cases. The EA is not necessarily the lead Partner in the project delivery. Good contract management policies and ways of working will be followed, and Defra Group Commercial (DgC) will be engaged and lead on the procurement where directed. The current arrangement is that DgC will lead on Collaborative Agreements >£50k.
- III. **EA Contract frameworks:** For some complex engineering projects it is appropriate for the EA to be the lead, and these projects are delivered using PPD project managers and framework contracts. Good contract management policies and ways of working will be followed, and Defra Group Commercial will be engaged and lead on the procurement where directed. The current arrangement is that DgC will lead on framework contract >£10k.

2.2 Health and Safety

It is important to consider how health and safety will be appropriately managed when developing projects. The project delivery lead must understand this responsibility and must have the capability to appropriately manage health and safety throughout the life of the project. For Local Water Environment Grant projects all health and safety responsibilities fall to the grant holder, including those under Construction, Design and Management regulations (CDM). It is recommended that Collaborative Agreements include a clause passing all Health and Safety responsibilities, including those under CDM, to the lead partner. Partners must not assign any CDM role to the Environment Agency, without the Environment Agency's prior express written consent.

2.3 Climate change

Please consider the following factors when planning and delivering projects:

- The carbon cost of projects
- Project objectives e.g. enhancing the ability of the natural environment to withstand climatic changes
- Longevity of our interventions e.g. designing our interventions to withstand warmer summer temperatures, more intense rainfall etc.

From 2023/24 onwards carbon assessment must be carried out for all new projects and project managers can use the ERIC tool to capture carbon costs in business cases. At the end of the year project managers will also need to undertake a carbon assessment using ERIC for any projects that have finished.

The ERIC carbon planning tool consists of two components – the Carbon Modelling Tool (CMT)

which is a 'top down' whole life carbon assessment of the project options and the Carbon Calculator (CC) which is a detailed 'bottom-up' assessment of the carbon emitted during delivery of the project.

Project planning must also take account of the potential effects of climate change (e.g. from rising temperatures, more frequent weather extremes, flooding or less naturally available water) on project delivery and expected benefits. Adaptation may be required either now or in the future to ensure projects are able to perform as intended.

2.4 VAT

All VAT whether incurred in the UK or in other countries must be excluded from budgets and payment claims if the VAT is recoverable by the applicant. If the applicant cannot recover its VAT it can include the VAT element as a line item into the budget. LWEG ask for VAT to be stated separately from the other costs and included in the initial grant application.

2.5 Maintenance

It is important that future maintenance (resource costs) is discussed and agreed with partners and landowners at project concept and development stages to ensure that the delivered works continue to function as intended after completion. The Environment Agency does not have a WEIF resource budget that will pay for maintenance and cannot take on this responsibility. However, the partner can include future maintenance costs as part of their match funding contribution.

LWEG terms and conditions state that EA has no responsibility for maintenance at all – during, before or after the LWEG Agreement. The grant holder will need to consider maintenance obligations with the landowner.

2.6 Monitoring

WEIF funding is not to be used to fund stand-alone monitoring projects.

WEIF will fund pre and post project targeted monitoring to demonstrate that the project has delivered the required outcomes and benefits, justify further improvement work and enable us to learn which type of interventions are most effective.

2.7 External staff costs and posts

WEIF project money must not be used to fund / part fund posts in external organisations. Staff costs for project delivery are eligible.

Funding for external posts is a resource activity (not capital expenditure). WEIF funding must not be used to fund a post in an external organisation or partner because there is no guarantee that resource funding will be available in future years to pay for it. Funding such a post could

also give the receiving organisation a potential competitive advantage.

Note: Project management is a separate activity from partner / contractor project delivery time which can be claimed as part of a project.

Overheads for LWEG's are funded at a flat rate of 20% of direct staff costs. This is expected to cover day to day running expenses, which an applicant must necessarily incur to discharge its functions. These include accommodation and related costs, insurance charges, legal and other professional costs.

2.8 WEIF capital projects

Most of our WEIF funding is capital, in government budgeting terms called CDEL (Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit), to fund project delivery costs. The WEIF capital programme, with our partnership by default model of delivery, primarily creates natural assets that are owned and maintained by a third party. Project spent directly attributable to creating these third party assets is classed as CWEIY (Capital Works Expenses in Year) and can be spent against the CDEL budget.

Note: Project design costs are classed as capital directly attributable costs.

2.9 WEIF resource projects & project development costs

We may have some WEIF resource funding, in government budgeting terms called RDEL (Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit), to fund projects.

Following the change in guidance about capital spend classification, it is important to note that the following project types should stand alone, and be classed as WEIF resource:

- Feasibility and option appraisal projects
- Engagement projects should be classed as resource projects.
- Routine Non-Native Invasive Species (INNS) work

Any Questions?

If you need any clarification about the process, please contact your local Environment Agency contact / Catchment Coordinator

Appendix 1: WEIF programme objectives and success measures

WEIF primary objectives	Measures
To contribute to the delivery of statutory water body objectives, as set out in the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP), focusing on measures without an owner	• km enhanced, and km improved • Actions address Reasons for Deterioration (RFD) or Reasons for Not Achieving Good Status (RNAGS)
To protect, improve and restore the status of priority water dependant habitats and species	• Ha Habitat created or restored • Habitat types created or improved: wetlands, reedbeds, peatland, saltmarsh • Priority species addressed
To increase natural carbon storage and enable the water environment and water dependent wildlife to adapt and become more resilient to climate change impacts	• Total tonnes CO² sequestered • Ha / Number of trees planted
Maximise cost beneficial investment and secure wider economic, social and commercial benefits through improvements to natural capital	• Partnership and external funding secured • Wider & multiple benefits (e.g. Natural Flood Management)
To increase stakeholder engagement to ensure local needs and priorities for water natural capital are met	• Number of partners or community groups involved • Number of volunteer days
Projects should be developed through collaborative engagement using the Catchment Based Approach, looking for co-benefits and adopt a partnership first local delivery model	• Number of projects led by partners • Evidence that Catchment Partnerships have been consulted on prioritisation of WEIF project

Appendix 2: Habitats of principal importance

There are 56 habitats of principal importance (previously called UK BAP priority habitats). They are the most important habitats for wildlife and are a focus for conservation action in England.

There are many opportunities to restore or create a wide range of these priority habitats through our Environment Programme. However, the focus should be on those habitats that are identified as being "water dependent" (listed below).

Creation of many of these priority habitats also presents opportunities to deliver multiple benefits including nature based recreation and carbon sequestration.

FBG teams should be involved in the development of projects to restore or create habitats of principal importance. They can provide technical advice on the most appropriate habitat to be created in a particular location, determine when a proposal is creation or restoration, and will ensure that the measures are sustainable

UK BAP Broad Habitat	Water dependent UK BAP Priority Habitat
Rivers and streams	Rivers (including chalk rivers)
Standing open waters and canals	Oligotrophic and Dystrophic Lakes
	Ponds
	Mesotrophic Lakes
	Eutrophic Standing Waters
	Aquifer Fed Naturally Fluctuating Water Bodies
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland	Wet Woodland
Neutral Grassland	Lowland Meadows
Improved Grassland	Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh
Fen, Marsh and Swamp	Upland Flushes, Fens and Swamps
	Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures
	Lowland Fens
	Reedbeds
Bogs	Lowland Raised Bog
	Blanket Bog
Supralittoral Sediment	Coastal Vegetated Shingle
	Machair
	Coastal Sand Dunes
Marine Habitats	Many, see https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap-priority-habitats/ for full list Includes: Coastal Saltmarsh, seagrass beds

Appendix 3: Species that are threatened or of principal importance

Projects should support the conservation, enhancement or recovery of water dependent species of Principal Importance or that are threatened, or local priorities such as those that have been identified in Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Species of principal importance

Species of Principal Importance for conserving or enhancing biodiversity are listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by the Environment Act 2021. The Environment Agency plays a lead role in the conservation and enhancement of many of the water and wetland species listed in Section 41. [Habitats and species of principal importance in England - GOV.UK](#)

Threatened water environment species needing recovery action

We have identified around 250 threatened species in the water environment that have actions that we can contribute to due to our organisational remit and role. Many of these are 'Species of Principal Importance' but also include others that are on IUCN Red list of Threatened Species. Of these 250 species, those listed below are of particular focus for the EA to take a key role in supporting the delivery of recovery action for – our flagship species. Taking action for these species will support the Government's Environment Act Species Targets. When working with partners, please direct them to [Natural England's Threatened Species Recovery Actions \(TSRA\)](#) project which identifies the top 3 actions needed for threatened species.

Flagship species			
		Artic charr	Freshwater pearl mussel
			Hairy click beetle
	Black Poplar	Atlantic Salmon	Narrow-mouthed whorl snail
Eurasian beaver	Dwarf eel grass and Eel grass	Common whitefish	Native oyster
European otter	Greater water parsnip	European eel	River shingle rove beetle
Water vole	Opposite-leaved pond weed	Trout (Sea and brown)	Southern damselfly
	Triangular club-rush	Vendace	Tansy beetle
			White-clawed crayfish

Of these flagship species, the Environment Agency's Environment & Biodiversity (E&B) team have previously collated a national list of water bodies which are a priority for the recovery of Salmon and can be used to target the recovery of these species. For information on other flagship species, contact the Local Environment Agency Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology (FBG) teams and see our [Species Recovery SharePoint](#) site.

Environment Agency FBG teams should be involved in the development of projects that involve the conservation, enhancement or recovery of water and wetland species. They will be aware of local priorities including those in Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and ecological requirements for species of principal importance and threatened species and will be able to ensure that projects are appropriate.

Appendix 4: Local Nature Recovery Strategies

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Delivery Partnerships set up by each LNRS responsible authority have a role to coordinate action, funding, and investment in nature recovery in their strategy area.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a nationwide system of targeted, locally led spatial strategies that map where habitat should be created or improved to most effectively meet national and local targets and commitments including good ecological status and good environmental status for our seas. See the [Local Nature Recovery Strategies \(LNRS\)](#) for more information.

The Environment Improvement Plan recognises that LNRSs will contribute widely to delivery, particularly the restored nature goal, but they will also be important to meet water commitments. LNRS will drive action across the country and encourage public, private and voluntary sectors to work together to deliver them.

Access the LNRS on GOV.UK [Local nature recovery strategies: areas and responsible authorities - GOV.UK](#) . Contact your Environment Agency Area LNRS Single Point of Contract. Each LNRS includes a 'statement of biodiversity priorities' that sets out the priorities in terms of habitats and species for recovering or enhancing biodiversity in the strategy area and the potential measures to deliver the priorities. The 'local habitat map' may identify specific locations where effort should be concentrated.