

Western Rother Beaver Group (WRBG)

Terms of Reference

Background

In March 2025, the UK Government announced their intention to support beaver recovery at a landscape scale to England. Natural England invited licence applications for Expressions of Interest (EOI) to release beavers into the wild as part of catchment boundary projects between March-May 2025. Up to this point, licences could only be sought for releasing beaver into fenced enclosures across England.

Several EOIs for catchments across South-east England were submitted to Natural England. Following a period of review, in August 2025, some EOIs were asked to provide further information prior to an invite to formal application. This includes a proposal for the Western Rother catchment ('The Catchment'). The Western Rother Beaver Group (WRBG), hereby referred to as The Group, are working to provide this information to Natural England.

Natural England advises that all local beaver recovery projects are supported by a pro-active partnership of engaged stakeholders, formally collected into a named group. Members of this group will act as representatives of the organisations that are involved, providing a point of insight and decision-making for group activities. This group will compliment others present on catchments across South-east England and nationally.

The purpose of this document is to introduce and define the Terms of Reference, including roles and responsibilities of the membership which collectively form the Group.

Scope and purpose

The Group will be the recognised Beaver Group for the Western Rother catchment. The Group and its membership will ground truth, corroborate and assist with the application and management of the licencing process for the Western Rother catchment. The Group will provide a platform for decision-making, evidence gathering and knowledge sharing for beaver recovery in the Western Rother catchment and surrounding environs. If beavers start to return to the Western Rother, it will continue its work long-term to act as the first point of contact for communities in support and management matters.

The Group will coordinate support and act as a hub for advice and guidance for local communities. The Group will bring together local stakeholders in the Western Rother catchment, for example, landowners, farmers, anglers, NGOs, and community groups - to ensure that if any new beaver population expands within the catchment any issues that arise are promptly and effectively managed.

This group will work closely with the Sussex beaver advisory group, and other beaver management groups in surrounding catchments. The group will be flexible in its activities to cover possible dispersal routes into surrounding catchments.

Where the Group reaches a shared position, this will be recorded and does not bind individual members or their organisations, who retain the right to take independent positions.

Where consensus cannot be reached, differing views will be clearly recorded. Members are not required to support positions they do not agree with.

Participation in the Group does not replace or prejudice the statutory roles and responsibilities of members or relevant authorities, including responses to licensing or regulatory processes.

Aims

1. To investigate the potential to proceed with a licence for free living beavers on the Western Rother catchment, and to support an application for such, if deemed appropriate by Natural England.
2. To provide oversight, coordination and guidance for current and proposed beaver recovery work on the Western Rother catchment
3. To support effective long-term beaver management and monitoring strategies in the Western Rother catchment
4. Where resources allow, to provide pro-active response, advice and support for beaver management issues and enable targeted mitigation work, based on accepted best practice
5. To gather evidence on the positive and negative impacts of beaver activity in the catchment such as silt remediation and effects on the treescape
6. To increase knowledge and awareness with local communities and other key stakeholders of beavers and their effects on the riparian landscape (such as riverine ecosystem, hydrology, sediment, water quality and fish populations) To ensure that beaver recovery and management is delivered in a way that maintains or improves the condition of designated sites and priority habitats, with appropriate mitigation and management actions implemented where adverse impacts are identified.

Relationship to surrounding Advisory and Management Groups

The Group will be a platform for advice and support and will work with advisory and management groups across the surrounding landscape.

The Group will, where possible :

- Have an active presence on other local beaver groups
- Attend other group meetings and give updates on the Group activities at a local level
- Work collaboratively with other groups, incorporating strategic level guidance on approaches to beaver recovery

The Group currently interacts with:

- **Thames Beaver Advisory Group**
- **Hampshire Beaver Advisory Group**
- **Sussex Beaver Advisory Group**
- **Adur Beaver Working Group**

This list will adapt and change over time.

Relationship to the Arun and Western Streams Catchment Partnership

The Group agrees to work openly and collaboratively with the Catchment Partnership and its Rother sub-group. They agree to enable their respective members and representatives to be heard, supported, advised and guided in relation to beavers. This will include:

- Catchment Partnership representatives having a regular presence at Group meetings
- The Group representatives having a regular presence at Catchment Partnership meetings
- The Group representatives sharing clear communication relating to beavers
- The Group, Beaver project staff, or their representatives providing occasional bespoke training and upskilling to Catchment Partnership representatives
- The Group will also maintain contact with other surrounding catchment partnerships

Governance

This is a voluntary group. Representatives of organisations will report back to their wider organisations / groups.

Group members agree to the following:

- The Group will normally consist of no more than 20 representatives of local communities and stakeholders. New organisations may be added to this membership by agreement. Expert specialists and members of ancillary groups may be invited to attend occasionally; representatives of the Beaver Trust and Natural England Nationally will be kept in touch with activities of the group but will not necessarily attend group meetings
- Representatives will be nominated by their organisations, proposed by the Group members or may request an invitation. Continuity of participation is preferred
- The Group will meet at least quarterly. Additional meetings may be called to deal with pressing matters
- Subgroups may be established as required. These may include: a Monitoring and Evidence Group & a Learning and Engagement Forum etc

- The Group will help seek funding for a project officer to support delivery across the Western Rother Catchment. The post holder may be hosted by one of the member organisations. The role will operate on behalf of the group, with priorities agreed collectively. Line management and day-to-day supervision will sit with the host organisation, while strategic direction will be provided by a Steering group.

Participation in the Group is on a without prejudice basis. Engagement in discussions, sharing of information, or contribution to group outputs does not constitute endorsement of any proposal, position or outcome. Members retain their independence and the right to take their own positions in any formal or statutory processes.

Organisation	Name
Steering Group Members:	
Environment Agency	Damon Block
Forestry Commission	Sebastian Crichton
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group South East (FWAG)	Suzie Robson
Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust	Nicola Wheeler
National Trust	David Elliott (chair)
Natural England	Penny Scott-Andrews
NFU	Polly Lawman
RSPB	Zeno Wijtten, Chloe Rose
South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)	Jake Barnes, Paul Bushell
Southern Water	Jennifer Pollitt
Sussex Wildlife Trust	Fran Southgate
Western Sussex Rivers Trust (WSRT)	Chloe Clarke
Independent	Chryssa Brown
SWT Arun Valley Regional Group	Paul Davy
Wild Trout Trust	David Oakley
Weald to Waves	Gareth Williams
Beaver Trust	Rob Needham
National Specialists to be kept in touch with group but not expected to attend meetings:	
Beaver Trust	Roisin Campbell-Palmer
Natural England	Amy Radford and Giles Wagstaff
Wider Consultees to be kept in touch with activity of group and cc'd in to communications:	
WSRT	Aimee Felus
National Trust	Katie Archer
SDNPA	Tom Garriock, Angela Ward

Responsibilities of Group Chair(s)

- The Chair of the Group will plan and lead meetings and provide guidance and leadership on actions and next steps
- The Chair (or other nominee) will attend other group meetings and feedback to the Group
- The Chair will co-ordinate the group to review (every two years) the Group's Terms of Reference (ToR) and Beaver Management Strategy.
- The Chair will be nominated by the members of the Group and appointed following a vote. The position of Chair will be held on a 2-year basis but can be rolled over by agreement
- The Chair will bring impartiality and objectivity to meetings and will provide clarity for decision-making amongst the Group membership

Responsibilities for Group members

Administrative

- To advise on compliance of Western Rother beaver projects with licences, agreements, risk/benefit assessments and regulations (specifically IUCN Guidelines on Conservation Translocations and Animal Welfare Act) – supporting the delivery of expectations set out in the Reintroductions and Conservation Translocation Guidelines
- To oversee and review relevant documents and published materials (such as web content) relating to beavers within the Groups' respective organisations
- To enable / support the training of relevant individuals in the necessary class licences and provide an oversight of activities carried out under licence
- To identify and support staffing, resourcing, funding and delivery opportunities within the Western Rother project area
- To respect confidentiality and adhere to GDPR in relation to group activities, beaver sites, maps and contact information
- The Group will review changes in policy and licencing process and maintain contact with relevant Natural England staff

Advice / Guidance

- To provide a point of contact to manage the beaver-human interface, communicating guidance to landowners, communities and stakeholders
- The Group will work proactively with the Beaver Trust to ensure current best practice is followed and will share outcomes of the Groups discussions with them.
- To provide advice and guidance to those wanting beavers or who have beavers on their land, including projects with existing licences and communities living with beavers within the Western Rother catchment

- The Group will support a clear and proportionate approach to managing beaver-related impacts. Where issues arise, these will be triaged and escalated through appropriate mechanisms, ensuring a timely response. Advice, mitigation and, where necessary, intervention will be delivered by the relevant competent organisations in line with best practice and licensing requirements. The Group will not replace the roles and responsibilities of individual organisations or statutory bodies in resolving specific issues.

Social and Ecological Feasibility

- To facilitate ecological and social study and research for the Group
- To support and train volunteers in beaver monitoring and social engagement
- To ensure that an inclusive approach is adopted and that stakeholders' interests are represented in decisions made about how beavers and associated riparian landscapes are monitored and managed
- To guide and lead engagement on the positive and negative impacts of beaver recovery in the Western Rother
- To actively promote beaver welfare, including genetic health

Communication & Information sharing

- To share information, resources, experience and advice with local community groups, landowners, stakeholders and the wider public
- To raise awareness locally around beavers and beaver related issues. The Group membership will share views of stakeholders they represent to guide decision-making
- The Group will feed back relevant information about beaver management to their organisations and disseminate to other stakeholders where appropriate, acting as a conduit for information exchange

Due to be reviewed by WRBMG March 2028