

Bathing water resource bid

Executive summary

[information redacted] We are therefore submitting a business case for one policy post to develop *[information redacted]* two project posts, focused on the 2023 poor bathing waters, Ogmore-By-Sea and Watch House Bay, as demonstrator projects. This demonstrator project will deliver water quality improvements at two popular South Wales beaches and allow us the opportunity to develop a framework for how to manage poor water quality throughout Wales. *[information redacted]* This bid is for a total of 2 years, covering the development phase of the project. Following this evidence gathering phase and project scoping, we will develop a subsequent business case detailing the requirement for an implementation phase with a full project plan.

Introduction

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has a statutory role in delivering the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 (the Regulations). This role includes, establishing a monitoring programme; classifying bathing waters as poor, sufficient, good or excellent; producing bathing water profiles for designated bathing waters and making this information available to the public. Under Section 13 of the Regulations, NRW must undertake management measures at 'poor' bathing waters, including identifying and resolving the reasons why the bathing water failed to achieve a classification of "sufficient". This programme is delivered under a service level agreement using grant in aid funding. However, bathing waters is a rapidly evolving high profile work area.

In 2023, 98% of designated Welsh bathing waters met the standards set by the Regulations of sufficient or above. Watch House Bay and Ogmore-by-Sea, both of which are located in the Vale of Glamorgan, were the only two bathing waters assessed as Poor in 2023. In 2024, Ogmore-By-Sea remained at poor, while Watch House Bay has improved to sufficient, but remains at risk, while overall compliance with the Regulations remained at 98%.

[information redacted]

Purpose of this financial proposal

The purpose of this proposal is to seek additional funding for two years to develop and deliver:

1. **Vale of Glamorgan Bathing Waters Project** – establish a demonstrator project to develop a local plan to improve the water quality at Watch House Bay and Ogmore-by-Sea (both classified as poor in 2023), aiming to deliver wider benefits for local communities and for tourism and develop a framework which can be applied across Wales.

[information redacted]

The local and strategic elements of the proposal tie together as learning from the project at Watch House Bay and Ogmore-By-Sea will be used to support development of Wales' approach to managing poor bathing waters, including how we work with wider stakeholders to prevent, reduce or eliminate the causes of pollution at poor bathing waters. However, the specific project aims and objectives of each element of this business case are set out separately below.

Funding is initially sought for two years to develop the projects and begin implementation. For full delivery of the learning from this phase and water quality improvements, it is envisaged that a subsequent bid will be developed and submitted at the end of the project.

Project 1: Vale of Glamorgan Bathing Waters Project

Watch House Bay and Ogmore-by-Sea were newly designated as bathing waters in 2023. Both were classified as 'poor' after their first year of monitoring. Both are large, complex catchments which will take significant resource to investigate thoroughly, understand the reasons for poor water quality and seek to improve them. Ogmore-By-Sea is the only bathing water in the catchment. Bathing water quality has never been monitored or investigated in the Ogmore catchment prior to designation and there is no existing conceptual model. Additionally, while Ogmore-By-Sea is not an inland bathing water, it is strongly influenced by the River Ogmore, and as such investigations would be largely based around the water quality in the river. Therefore, the learnings from this project are likely to be applicable to inland bathing waters. Within each catchment there are a number of pressures influencing water quality, including urban and agricultural point and diffuse sources. Both beaches had periods of significantly reduced water quality particularly during wet periods over the 2023 season. NRW local operational teams are already prioritising their work plans to target pollution risks and incidents in the catchments of these bathing waters, however there is no capacity to develop the required collaborative catchment approach which will deliver sustainable water quality improvements.

Ogmore-By-Sea has received a 'poor' classification for 2 years in a row, and if this continues, will be automatically de-designated following the 2027 season. If the proposed reforms to the Regulations are enacted, there will be a review of Ogmore-By-Sea in 2027, where Welsh Government will take a decision on whether to de-designate, based on evidence provided by NRW. Undertaking this project will allow us not only to reduce the risk of this eventuality, but also to assess whether it is feasible and cost-effective to improve the beach to 'sufficient' status.

Purpose of the funding

NRW are initially requesting additional funding for two project officers for a period of 24 months to establish a *Demonstrator Project*. The project officers will lead development of a collaborative catchment approach to improve the two bathing waters, including establishing a catchment steering group with stakeholders at each site. Lessons learned can then be applied to other bathing waters. Undertaking a pilot study in these South Wales catchments would support the PfG commitment, particularly through strengthening

water quality monitoring. This phase of the project will allow us to gather the evidence we need to apply the actions identified in a future project.

Project Objectives

There are 3 key objectives of this project

1. Improve bathing water quality to at least sufficient standard and deliver wider benefits to the community and to reduce pollution
2. To undertake an evidence gathering exercise to establish where the evidence gaps are, and identify causes of poor water quality and what actions could be taken to improve water quality in the Vale of Glamorgan catchments.
3. To undertake this work in a collaborative way, developing a catchment approach with stakeholder engagement to deliver maximum benefits to local communities.

Scope of work

Overview:

The key focus area is bathing water quality improvement and pollution control in the demonstrator catchments of Ogmore-By-Sea and Watch House Bay. The actions we will take to achieve this are as follows:

- Use Welsh Government funding to recruit two experienced project staff to establish a demonstrator project.
- Bring together stakeholders (including Welsh Water, local councils, RNLI, businesses and community groups) and host regular meetings, in order to establish a collaborative approach.
- Work with Welsh Water, Vale of Glamorgan Council and others to investigate and identify priorities for wastewater investment, resolving misconnections and surface water management in the catchment to address impacts from point sources of pollution.
- Review of Wales' and UK good practice and World Health Organisation guidance in water quality management and investigations into poor bathing waters.
- Undertake a baseline study of catchment water quality to establish evidence gaps and the factors contributing to the poor water quality at the beaches, which may include urban and rural diffuse pollution, impacts of dogs and birds, wastewater infrastructure, private sewage treatment and misconnections.
- Development of project and catchment plans with success criteria and integrated actions to deliver nature-based solutions, multiple benefits and ecological resilience.
- Undertake a 'Natural Capital Assessment' – used for working collaboratively across the catchment to give a strong evidence base for key organisations in the catchment to make more informed decisions for long term sustainable development which drives resilience and maximises multiple benefits.
- Begin to undertake investigations to address evidence gaps, including water quality sampling and assessment, water quality modelling, and drainage surveys.

- Establish a communications plan for the project, to be agreed with Welsh Government.
- Develop a further business case to Welsh Government for a delivery phase of the project, where actions identified in the development phase will be implemented.

Measurable goals

Year 1

- Summary report of Wales and UK good practice
- Baseline assessment of water quality in both catchments and identification of priority evidence gaps
- Stakeholder mapping, detailing which stakeholders will be involved in the project
- Communications plan
- Project plan
- Report from natural capital assessment
- Annual progress report including expenditure and projected expenditure
- Nature based solutions opportunity mapping

Year 2

- Evidence piece on water quality in the catchment and pressures on the beaches including results of initial further investigations and water quality testing
- Detailed catchment plan focusing on how we propose to improve water quality and the two beaches and bring wider benefits, which will be used as evidence to inform a subsequent bid.
- Misconnection surveys and strategy
- Nature based solutions feasibility study
- Annual progress report including expenditure
- Subsequent bid to Welsh Government for implementation of water quality improvement work

Budget breakdown

Staff costs

Two grade 6 project officers for 24 months. Calculations below were provided by NRW finance accountant and are based on internal secondment including NRW overheads and 5% pay increase in 24/25 and 25/26.

2 (Grade 6) x £66 057 = £132 114 p.a.

Over 2 years = £264 228

Additional costs

Stakeholder catchment workshops (facilitation) = £10 000

Stakeholder training = £11 000

Venue hire, Travel & Subsistence = £2000

Natural capital assessment = £50 000

Misconnection and drainage surveys = £25 000

Nature-based solutions work = £20 000 p.a.

A catchment plan will be agreed towards the end of the project (18 months) which will also require both revenue and capital costs to deliver a suite of both strategic and on the ground interventions.

Costs	Year 1	2
Staff	£132k	£132k
Additional	£93k	£45K

Justification for funding

Impact assessment

The project will

- Develop a plan to improve water quality at two popular bathing sites in the Vale of Glamorgan where the current advice is not to swim due to water quality issues.
- Improve stakeholder and public understanding of the reasons for poor water quality, along with planned actions and outcomes.
- Work with stakeholders to develop, design and implement nature-based solutions to improve water quality, including DCWW plans to implement a rainscape approach within the Barry catchment. Explore opportunities for rainscape approach in the Ogmore catchment.
- Support transformational change and build trust and confidence in a multi-stakeholder approach through a Catchment Partnership.

Monitoring and evaluation

Performance indicators will be identified early in the project and agreed with WG. Given the short term nature of the project funding they are likely to focus on output measures linked to project milestones and deliverables. WG will be kept informed of project progress via monthly and annual project reports.

Potential measures include:

- Environment – water quality will be monitored at the two bathing water sampling points; reasons for poor classifications at Ogmore-by-Sea and Watch House Bay will be investigated and identified; measures to address pollution will be delivered; area of sustainable drainage implemented; volume of surface water removed from sewer.
- People – number of stakeholders and local communities actively engaged in the project; members of public and bathers informed; increased understanding of bathing waters and water quality.
- Economy – project costs will be tracked and reported. Where possible benefits will be monetised or assessed qualitatively.

[information redacted]