

Preserving and Caring for the Severn Catchment

# River Friendly Severn



## **Impact Report April 2019**

With grateful thanks to the Arwain Leader Fund for supporting this fantastic project







Project Name: River Friendly Severn

Project Code: RDP024

Project Dates: 01 October 2016 – 30 September 2018

**LEADER Theme:** Adding value to local identity and natural and

cultural resources

### **Project Funding Summary**

Total Expenditure:	£121,055.39	100.00%
RDP Funding:	£96,844.312	80.00%
Match funding:	£24,211.078	20.00%

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Severn Rivers Trust



@severnrivers

## **Contents**

Contents	3
Introduction	4
Highlights	5
What we achieved & how we did it	5
Awareness raising	5
Engaging stakeholders	7
1. River Friendly Schools	8
2. Friends of the river volunteer groups	10
3. River Friendly Businesses	11
Networks for developing and sharing knowledge and skills	13
Severn Uplands Salmon Redd Counting Network	13
2. Severn Uplands Black Poplar Tree Network	16
3. The Severn Uplands River Invertebrate Monitoring Network	16
4. The Severn Uplands Invasive Species Monitoring Network	18
Impact in communities	19
Safeguarding staff	19
Appendix: Documentation and supporting evidence	22

#### Introduction

The River Friendly Severn project was delivered by the Severn Rivers Trust over two years (2016-18) in northern Powys, across the former county of Montgomeryshire.

Clean rivers are important for recreation, for wildlife, for fishing, agriculture and for many businesses relying on ample supplies of clean water.

The river Severn and its tributaries suffer from a number of pressures including:

- Pollution from industrial, agricultural and domestic sources
- Concrete and paving in built-up areas limit water storage and drainage
- Barriers in rivers that stop fish from swimming freely
- Poor land management leading to loss of habitats and key species
- Alien species such as Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed which smother river banks and cause increased erosion

The River Friendly project enabled our Senior Community Officer to work with local schools, businesses and volunteer networks. We supported local people in taking action for their rivers to improve water quality, restore habitats and celebrate the diverse wildlife that call them home.

We built relationships with local primary and secondary school teachers in five key river catchments in Powys. Pupils learned how the river provides important habitats for a range of fascinating wildlife. After an introductory whole school assembly and class workshops children achieved the 'River Friendly Kids' Award.

They then undertook site surveys and designed a range of improvements for their school grounds to help make them 'River Friendly Schools'. Specially commissioned rain gardens have been built in three schools which store rain water and reduce pollution into rivers. They also offer a focal point for community engagement and learning about conservation and the importance of rivers.

We engaged local businesses through the **River Friendly Business** Award. This was designed to demonstrate the benefits of getting involved with local communities and practical river conservation. Businesses were involved in a number of ways, for example donating money for high-vis jackets for school children, offering corporate volunteering time, and even making physical improvements for the river on their properties. We have built strong relationships with businesses and continue to work with them to improve the Severn catchment.

Finally, by working with volunteers and establishing networks of specialist knowledge and best practice we have ensured a high level of skill and technical understanding among local people within the community. These networks are extremely important for Severn Rivers Trust as they enable us to have multiple 'eyes and ears' on the ground and extend our reach. With the input of volunteers we can track the impact of our conservation work, identify any threats such as pollution, and understand more about river wildlife. Not only this, volunteer groups provide invaluable contributions to practical conservation tasks including invasive species control, making in-stream improvements and planting and caring for the rare river trees such as the iconic *Black Poplar*.

### **Highlights**

- 544 participants supported through awareness raising at events
- 300 stakeholders engaged
- 25 businesses engaged, of which 13 directly benefited
- 4 networks established
- 5 communities benefitting
- 3 rain gardens built
- 10 bird boxes installed
- 1 weir removed
- 1 stretch (1km) of invasive species controlled
- 1 pilot activity undertaken
- 1 job safeguarded

#### What we achieved & how we did it

#### **Awareness raising**

Participants were engaged through attendance at local shows; Llanfyllin Show, Churchstoke Summer Fun Day and Guilsfield Show; community events and outreach with uniformed organisations (Brownies, Scouts and Guilds), events at schools following the initial consultation (for example for World Fish Migration Day); and through a programme of volunteering activities.

## 544 participants were engaged through a series of animation events under the River Friendly programme.

Attending events and shows allowed Severn Rivers trust to promote our work and the River Friendly project with local people including farmers, families and business owners. Our interactive SuDS allowed people to have fun and get a better understanding of simple changes they can make in their own homes to improve water collection and reduce pollution into rivers. Our septic tank quiz challenged home and business owners to get them thinking about the impact of waste management and their own responsibilities.

**Working with local uniform groups** (Brownies and Cubs) allowed us to do fun informal learning activities outdoors with children. They investigated water filtration on different surfaces, built their own insect hotels, looked closely at a septic tank, and collected and identified samples of river invertebrates.

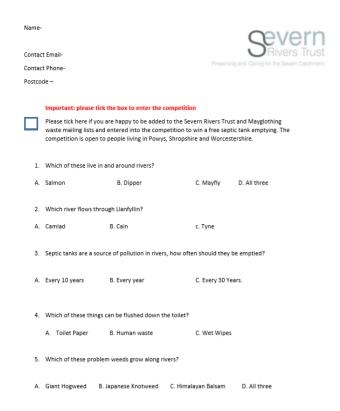
**Work in schools** celebrated World Fish Migration Day, an international event to highlight the importance of free flowing rivers and improving connectivity for migratory fish species. Children from 3 local schools created beautiful salmon flags, and enjoyed an interactive video session combining Welsh language and stunning images of salmon in the river. They visited their local river site to investigate the local wildlife and explored how they could play their part in protecting the river in the future. This was in addition to the River Friendly Kids and Schools sessions (see below for further details).



The interactive SUDS model house at Llanfyllin Show



Llanfyllin Primary School celebrate World Fish Migration Day



#### The Septic tank quiz

#### See Appendix of Evidence for:

- Participant forms from events and shows
- Completed septic tank quiz sheets
- Volunteer sign in sheets
- Teachers sign in sheets for River Friendly Schools including feedback
- Minutes from community group meetings

#### **Engaging stakeholders**

#### **Definitions**

**Stakeholder:** Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the project objectives. These can be people, groups or entities that have a role and interest in the objectives and implementation of a project. They include the community whose situation the project or programme seeks to change.

**Engagement:** Stakeholders who become actively involved in the project's implementation at any stage.

300 stakeholders were engaged in the River Friendly Severn project.

#### 1. River Friendly Schools

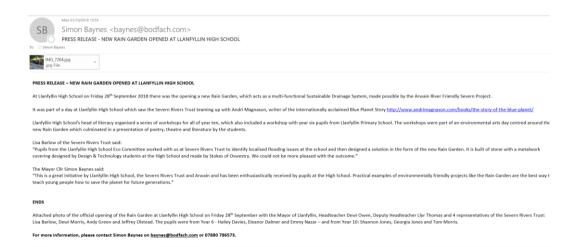
Primary school children were actively involved as stakeholders through the River Friendly Schools programme. They were initially engaged with a River day to introduce key themes and ideas. They were then supported to take their investigations further. They sampled for river invertebrates and discovered how these are used to measure water quality. They took an active role surveying their schools and designing sustainable drainage installations to collect rainfall, manage localised flooding and reduce pollution caused by rainfall run off on their school grounds. By working in this way, we were able to ensure that the project addressed site-specific problems and that the pupils were fully involved and empowered through taking part. Children applied their understanding in the real world to work together and come up with creative solutions for their schools. They developed a deep understanding and appreciation of how rain gardens work and the benefits that they bring for the river and wildlife as well as enhancing the school for pupils and teachers.

The work with schools supported by the River Friendly Severn Project has allowed us to maintain excellent relationship with schools in the area. Teachers at primary and secondary schools were important stakeholders, and we worked closely with them to make sure education sessions fitted with the National Curriculum and that the project was fully supported by the whole staff team as well as the wider community This work has also helped us to engage businesses, who are keen to work together in community engagement.

#### Images:



Photo showing the Llanfyllin High School rain garden, opened with transition activity with Llanfyllin Primary School



### Press release from the Mayor about the Llanfyllin High School rain garden



#### Front cover of the River Friendly Kids Booklet in English



Example of an activity in the River Friendly Schools pack in Welsh



Salmon transfers on stones created by year 10 Llanfyllin High photography students to decorate the rain garden

See Appendix of Evidence for:

- Stakeholder sign in sheets
- Minutes from River Severn Custodians meeting
- Evidence of relationship building and communications with teachers
- Designs for the Llanfyllin High rain garden by the Eco Club pupils
- River Friendly Schools pack which was designed and produced in partnership with Severn Trent Water including a specially commissioned illustration from a local artist, and both Welsh and English language versions of the booklet.

#### 2. Friends of the river volunteer groups

Members of a network of community 'friends of' the river group were engaged as stakeholders in the project. These were groups initially set up by the Severn Rivers Trust (before the River Friendly project) to be independently run and self-sustaining. The groups continue to thrive offering fantastic benefits and opportunities for Severn Rivers Trust to extend the reach and impact of our conservation efforts in the Severn catchment. For the River Friendly project it was important to link up with these groups to gain community support and steer for the project from passionate and knowledgeable local enthusiasts.

These community groups know their local river in detail and are an excellent network of people to survey rivers for the location of invasive species for example. Through the River Friendly Severn Project, we were able to work in a cost effect way with the Upper Tanat Fishing Club and the Cain Valley River Group volunteers to locate invasive Japanese Knotweed and organise it's removal. These community groups also help us to engage local business who are keen to get involved with local people and build their local profile.

Community groups are based in Newtown (The River Severn Custodians), Llanfyllin (Cain Valley River Group) and Meifod (The River Vyrnwy Community Group).

See Appendix of Evidence for:

 Meeting minutes for the River Severn Custodians, Cain Valley River Group and River Vyrnwy Community Group

#### 3. River Friendly Businesses

The River Friendly Severn project engaged 25 businesses in Powys, of which 17 were met in person and completed a River Friendly Business form.

The project engaged businesses in a number of ways. Some were through a light touch, advisory capacity, for example a face to face discussion at a public show with information about water friendly practices and the benefits of corporate volunteering. Not all of these conversations led to further partnerships or engagement, but they were useful for Severn Rivers trust in raising our profile locally and highlighting the importance of responsible water management.

In some notable cases our initial conversations led to more in-depth engagement. For example, Peter Baur of Shared Water who had no previous dealings with Severn Rivers Trust went on to join our Riverfly monitoring network and became a valued member of the Cain Valley River Group.

This flexible approach of starting conversations and building relationships allowed us to get a better understanding of businesses' priorities and needs. For example, we were delighted to undertake important work with Stadco, Llanfyllin, a metal fabrication company who took part in the project because they are interested in maintaining good relationships with the community around their factory in the town.

Stadco staff installed bird boxes and bat boxes with the Cain Valley River Group and undertook a river survey on their site. They identified invasive Japanese Knotweed on their riverbank, which they have controlled in the past, but their efforts have been ineffective due to the plat being present on the opposite back (public land).

The project worked with the Cain Valley River Group to complete a Japanese Knotweed survey on the river Cain and the volunteer group have agreed to control the Knotweed on the public side of the river. Stadco plan to treat the Knotweed on their site, meaning that the impact of the non-native plant will be greatly reduced on this stretch.

The survey also identified a historic weir on the river Cain on Stadco land. The Senior Community Engagement Officer identified that this weir was a barrier to migration of course fish, which made them vulnerable to predation. The weir also impounded the river, which reduced the habitat in the river for wildlife. Working with Stadco and a contractor from Seed and Spur and with Natural Resources Wales, we completed a full survey of the river and its morphology, and a consultation with the home and business owners in the area. The top layer of the weir was removed and the river regained its riffles and movement upstream.

These fantastic results were possible thanks to a careful process of listening, sharing, investigation, planning and action.

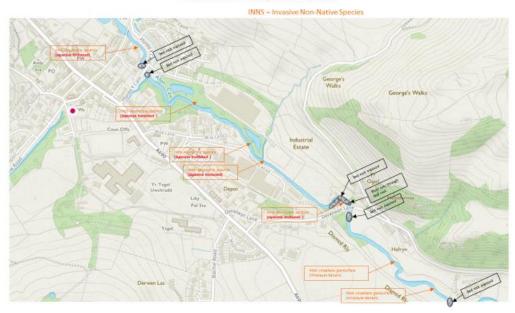
We are thrilled to have facilitated the continuing care and joined-up thinking to protect the river by reducing and removing main threats posed by invasive species and barriers.



Stadco staff and Natural Resources Wales following successful partial weir removal on the river Cain

Afon Cain walk on Monday 19th June 2017

Plant and Geology Observations



Cain Valley River Group map showing locations of Japanese Knotweed



Stadco donating hi vis jackets for River Friendly Schools

See Appendix of Evidence for:

- Copies of completed River Friendly Business forms
- Communications log with businesses

#### Networks for developing and sharing knowledge and skills

In addition to working with existing groups, four formal networks have been created as a direct result of the River Friendly Severn programme. These were not in existence prior to programme involvement.

The formal networks created are:

- 1. The Severn Uplands Salmon Redd Counting Network
- 2. The Severn Uplands Black Poplar Tree Network
- 3. The Severn Uplands River Invertebrate Monitoring Network
- 4. The Severn Uplands Invasive Species Monitoring Network

#### 1. Severn Uplands Salmon Redd Counting Network

The Atlantic Salmon is an iconic species of the river Severn the 'King of Fish'. Migrating adult Salmon return to the Welsh rivers they were spawned in from the Atlantic Ocean, to lay eggs in the clean stream gravels in nests called redds.

Habitat loss, pollution and poaching have led to a decline in the population of the Atlantic Salmon and it is a key aim for Severn Rivers Trust to engage communities in the celebration and protection of these fish.

In the past, Environment Agency Wales and later Natural Resources Wales monitored the location and number of Salmon redds in Wales. Today with resources

being much more limited such surveys are no longer prioritised or carried out systematically across large areas.

River Friendly Severn project funding has allowed us to train and support local people to identify and count redds and understand their place in the fascinating salmon lifecycle.

The Salmon Redd Counting Network began with an initial meeting where information on how to identify and record redds was shared among volunteers. Severn Rivers Trust volunteers and staff enjoyed the opportunity to get together and share stories and knowledge of the river, and hear from technical experts to learn the process of surveying.

The first meeting was followed up by an email to ask volunteers to share their contact details with the group. Due to the season in which the Salmon create their redds (around December), the group then aimed to meet in December on the river bank to practice counting redds. In December 2018, rainfall and high rivers levels meant it was not possible to count Salmon redds in the time allocated. Despite the frustrating inability to complete the practical training, the knowledge and skills have been used by staff and volunteers. For example, group members reported Salmon redd sightings on the river Vyrnwy.

Redd counting was also integrated into our school workshops as part of our assembly and classroom celebrations of salmon lifecycles and migration journeys. We also used information and resources from the network training to enhance riverfly recording network.

In the future, we will continue the work started with the Redd Counting Network to improve our community engagement and volunteer monitoring. We will continue to support groups in surveying river habitats and water quality, and this can now include reporting on red numbers. We will join the international 'mind the redd' campaign and work with NRW to encourage celebrating the Salmon in the Severn Uplands. We have secured continued funding from the Welsh government under the Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing Grant to hold a Salmon Festival and associated schools programme in Newtown 2019-2022.



Initial Salmon Redd Counting Network meeting



Salmon migration assembly at Llanfyllin Primary School



Photo of the 2015 Newtown Salmon Lantern festival

#### See Appendix of Evidence for:

- · Records of attendance
- Meeting minutes
- Follow up correspondence to network and responses
- Emails / communications log with volunteers / NRW etc regarding planning second meeting in winter when redds can be counted and notes on river levels preventing second meeting in 2018
- Riverfly training PowerPoint slides on redds and the Mind the Redd campaign

#### 2. Severn Uplands Black Poplar Tree Network

The Black Poplar is an important and threatened floodplain tree, which used to be common in the landscape of the Severn Uplands.

The Black Poplar Tree Network is a group of volunteers, supported by the River Friendly Severn project to propagate Black Poplar trees and distribute them in the landscape. The group met initially at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust to learn more about this fantastic species and work together to create an action plan for planting and caring for more trees in the area.

The support from Arwain has allowed us to start the Black Poplar Network and build momentum to make a difference in reversing the fortunes of this species which is in decline.

The Senior Community Officer led a successful funding bid to Natural Resources Wales for a grant for the *Roots and Water* project to continue this work between October 2018 and December 2019. This is a project which will see 10,000 native tree species planted across the Uplands to improve the water quality and slow the flow of run off into streams and rivers. An important part of this project will be further training and support for volunteers in taking and caring for cuttings from established black poplars (a method which mimics the tree's natural lifecycle) and planting them in strategic locations near the river.

The Black Poplar network has been strengthened by input from key partners including Open Newtown, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, the River Severn Custodians and Newtown Town Council.

See Appendix of Evidence for:

- Minutes of the initial Black Poplar Network meeting
- Roots and Water Project overview
- Notes on the second meeting with partners in Newtown

#### 3. The Severn Uplands River Invertebrate Monitoring Network

Water quality in the Severn Uplands is threatened by a number of factors, including diffuse pollution from agriculture, sedimentation from soil runoff and the impact of specific pollutants. We are able to monitor water quality by assessing the type and number of certain aquatic invertebrates, including the larval stages of Mayfly, Stonefly and Caddisfly. By supporting volunteers to join a network of river

invertebrate monitoring volunteers, who will sample monthly at a convenient site, we are able to detect pollution incidents across a wider area than the statutory agencies (Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales) are able to detect with their recording programme, which has been scaled down due to budget and staffing cuts.



Riverfly Monitoring Network volunteers

By joining a network, volunteers are able to motivate and support each other and feel that they are part of a wider project. They are able to share information and work together to protect their local rivers based on their awareness of water quality.

The river invertebrate monitoring network met initially in March 2018, and later at a workshop to share skills and were then supported remotely and at meetings. Going forward, these volunteers are integrated into the Severn Rivers Trust Riverfly Partnership work so that they can be supported in the long term through our catchment-wide programme. Networking with other organisations across the river Severn (Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and Wildfowl Wetlands Trust) and meetings with the Severn Rivers Trust team will continue support for these volunteers. Further training sessions will be held in 2019 so that the network volunteers will continue to grow and be supported.

#### See Appendix of Evidence for:

- March 2017 Cain Valley River Group meeting minutes
- List of delegates on the Meifod riverfly workshop
- List of delegates on the Llanrhaeadr Riverfly workshop
- Minutes of River Cain Riverfly Network 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018

#### 4. The Severn Uplands Invasive Species Monitoring Network

Invasive species along the banks of the river Severn cause loss of native habitat. Japanese Knotweed spreads along rivers and causes problems where it spreads to homes and businesses. Himalayan Balsam chokes the river bank and prevents the native grasses and other plants from growing and holding the river bank together. Losing the root structures associated with these native species causes aggravated erosion and topsoil is lost into the river. This not only takes agricultural land out of production, it increases sediment in the river which reduces the available habitat for fish spawning.

The Severn Uplands Invasive Species Monitoring Network is set up to gather the local knowledge of members of the community, who know their river bank, visit regularly and can locate the invasive plant species easily. The network then informs Severn Rivers Trust of the location of the species so that control of these plants can be coordinated.

Along the river Tanat near Llangedwyn and river Cain near Llanfyllin the River Friendly Severn Project funded spraying of Japanese Knotweed which was located by network members.

We also controlled Himalayan Balsam through our corporate volunteering sessions with Severn Trent Community Champions. By supporting this work, the River Friendly Severn project has enabled us to agree a third-year partnership with Severn Trent Community Champions to deliver river conservation sessions which provides match funding for our ongoing work and allows us to do much more intensive and effective ongoing invasive species control.



Severn Trent Community Champions clearing invasive Himalayan Balsam near the river bank

See Appendix of Evidence for:

- Meeting minutes January 2018
- Meeting minutes June 2018
- Agreement with Upper Tanat Fishing Club

- Agreement with Dewi Morris for the river Cain
- Email update from the Upper Tanat Fishing Club on Knotweed work
- Email between Cain Valley River Group regarding survey meetings and spraying of Knotweed

#### Impact in communities

5 communities in the river Severn Uplands benefitted from this project. They were:

- Guilsfield (Guilsfield Brook)
- Llanfyllin (River Cain)
- Llanrhaeadr (River Tanat)
- Churchstoke (River Camlad)
- Meifod (River Vyrnwy).

Communities benefitted in a number of ways. By engaging with local community schools and uniform groups we inspired young people to think differently about their rivers, and consider the way their own behaviour impacts them. Brownies and cubs created a green roofed insect hotel, learned about water quality and invertebrates and investigated soil health and water infiltration through fun activities and games.

Working with schools and uniform groups allows us to start a 'bottom-up' process where children inform and engage their family members and change attitudes and behaviours as a result. Children are the next generation of conservationists, scientists, engineers, policy makers, business people, volunteers, enthusiasts etc. We know that if children understand and care about rivers now, then they are more likely to prioritise, nurture and protect them in the future.

Engaging business allowed us to work with communities in different ways, and staff who volunteered with us benefitted by spending time outdoors being active. Members of our networks benefitted by gaining new knowledge and skills and the practical conservation carried out by all these local people brought about lasting benefits to the river.

With the ongoing support of Severn Rivers Trust, communities will continue to care for and celebrate their rivers in the future, and they in turn will benefit from improved health and wellbeing and an enhanced river environment. This is a real achievement of the River Friendly project, and a legacy of the funding provided by Arwain.

See Appendix of Evidence for:

Letters of support from members of the communities

#### Safeguarding staff

One job was safeguarded as a direct result of this project. The role of our Senior Community Officer has been to share our enthusiasm and passion to make a positive difference to the lives, aspirations, skills and values of people that we work with by providing meaningful experiences and connections with the natural world.

The Senior Community Officer has facilitated active involvement from stakeholders that has contributed directly to our work, meaning we could do more to protect enhance and preserve rivers in the Uplands. By creating community networks we

have not only shared learning, we have involved local people in decision-making and tapped into their specific knowledge and contacts.

By safeguarding a post in this area, is has been possible to build on the relationships we have with members of the community and develop new projects which are both sustainable and embedded in the Severn Rivers Trust five year strategy.

#### See Appendix of Evidence for:

• Letter from Mike Morris, CEO of Severn Rivers Trust.

## **Appendix: Documentation and supporting evidence**

Evidence	Supporting	Additional Comments
Participant forms from	Awareness raising and	
events and shows: (2,3,7,9-16,23)	participation activities	
Completed septic tank quiz	Awareness raising and	
sheets (8)	participation activities	
Volunteer sign in sheets	Awareness raising and	
(1,4,5,6)	participation activities	
Teachers sign in sheets for River Friendly Schools including feedback (17-22)	Awareness raising and participation activities	
Stakeholder sign in sheets (24-31,33)	Engaging Stakeholders (River Friendly Schools)	
Minutes from River Severn Custodians meeting (32)	Engaging Stakeholders (Friends of the river volunteer groups)	River Severn Custodians, Cain Valley River Group and River Vyrnwy Community Group
Evidence of relationship building and communications with teachers (34)	Engaging Stakeholders (River Friendly Schools)	
Designs for the Llanfyllin High rain garden by the Eco Club pupils (35)	Engaging Stakeholders (River Friendly Schools)	
River Friendly Schools pack English and Welsh Language versions (36)	Engaging Stakeholders (River Friendly Schools)	
Meeting minutes from community 'Friends of' groups (37,38)	Engaging Stakeholders	Cain Valley, River Vryrnwy Community Group (Meifod)
Copies of completed River Friendly Business forms (39)	Engaging Stakeholders (Businesses)	
Communications log with	Engaging Stakeholders	Stadco, Greggs, Shared
businesses (40)	(Businesses)	Water
Plan to partially remove Stadco weir (41)	Engaging Stakeholders (Businesses)	
Press release Stadco Weir (42)	Engaging Stakeholders (Businesses)	
Records of attendance / meeting minutes (43/44)	Establishing Networks (Redd Counting)	

	T	,
Emails / communications	Establishing Networks	
log with volunteers / NRW	(Redd Counting)	
etc (47,48)		
Riverfly workshop	Establishing Networks	
PowerPoint including slide	(Redd Counting)	
on redds / Mind the Redd	(i tead eeaniing)	
campaign (46)		
Minutes of the initial Black	Establishing Networks	
Poplar Network meeting	(Black Poplar)	
(49)	(Black Poplar)	
Roots and Water Project	Establishing Naturals	
•	Establishing Networks	
overview (50)	(Black Poplar)	
Minutes of second meeting	Establishing Networks	
with partners (51)	(Black Poplar)	
March 2017 meeting	Establishing Networks	
minutes (52)	(River Invertebrates)	
List of delegates on the	Establishing Networks	
Meifod riverfly workshop	(River Invertebrates)	
(53)		
Minutes of the Cain Valley	Establishing Networks	
River Group (54)	(River Invertebrates)	
Minutes of the Cain Riverfly	Establishing Networks	
Network (55)	(River Invertebrates)	
Agenda for the Riverfly		
species level workshop (56)		
Meeting minutes (57,58)	Establishing Networks	
3 1111 (1 ,11)	(Invasive Species)	
Agreement with Upper	Establishing Networks	
Tanat Fishing Club (59)	(Invasive Species)	
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Agreement with Dewi Morris	Establishing Networks	
for the river Cain (60)	(Invasive Species)	
lor the fiver Calli (00)	(IIIvasive Species)	
Email update from the	Establishing Networks	
· ·	(Invasive Species)	
Upper Tanat Fishing Club on Knotweed work (61)	(IIIvasive Species)	
	Establishing Naturalis	
Email between Cain Valley	Establishing Networks	
River Group regarding	(Invasive Species)	
survey meetings and		
spraying of Knotweed (62)		
Letters of support from the		
community (63)		
Letter from Mike Morris,	Job Safeguarding	
CEO of Severn Rivers		
Trust. (64)		
Media log / press releases	Positive coverage and	
for the River Friendly	awareness raising	
Project (65)		