Phosphorus Reduction Scheme

Fencing to exclude livestock from watercourses

Funding is offered for fencing off watercourses to prevent access by grazing livestock, with the aim of improving downstream water quality. It will prevent the direct deposition of nutrients in manure, as well as stabilising banks to reduce erosion and nutrient ingress. By excluding livestock from the bankside it will also deliver biodiversity benefits through making space for nature. Replacement of existing fencing and fencing already funded by any other environmental stewardship scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship) is **not** eligible. Applicants are encouraged to set the fence as far back as possible from the watercourse to maximise habitat creation. *Additional payments may be available for taking rotational arable or intensive grassland out of production by erecting a fence further into the field. Please contact the project team for further information. Funding for installing alternative water supplies is also available upon request.*

Length of agreement available

- 2023 until 2033 (10 years). This is the minimum period of time that the fence should be kept and maintained to exclude livestock from a watercourse.

Where to use this measure

- Next to watercourses to prevent livestock access
- Alongside ditches through which water flows for some of the grazing season
- Where no fence currently exists
- In fields that are farmed intensively or semi-intensively i.e. only fields that receive manure/fertiliser and/or are grazed intensively or semi-intensively. Rough grazing and conservation grazing is ineligible.

Where this measure cannot be used

- **Do not** use this option:
    - to replace or maintain an existing fence in any state of repair.
    - on historic or archaeological features.
    - on a site where a fence has previously received a grant in the past 10 years
    - on fields which are used as rough grazing or conservation grazing
    - for fencing that has been funded by any other funding scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship)

Watercourse fencing cannot be funded in situations where the management of the field is in breach of the Farming Rules for Water or Nitrate Vulnerable Zone rules (if applicable). Successful applicants are required to sign the declaration described in the record keeping section below.

Important considerations

- Heavy trampling by livestock can erode banks and increase inputs of nutrients, sediment and organic matter into watercourses such as a river, stream, lake, pond or ditch. This can harm water quality by degrading freshwater habitats and fish spawning grounds, and can also lead to the contamination of bathing waters and drinking water supplies
- Livestock can also damage sensitive riparian habitats through poaching and overgrazing along watercourses. Preventing access by fencing off watercourses is a simple solution to help reduce this type of pollution and damage
- However, care should be taken where fencing off watercourses because it can sometimes create new environmental problems. For example, ungrazed banks are more likely to develop problems with invasive problem plants, such as Himalayan balsam, and in some cases can result in excessive woody growth which can have detrimental impacts on some nationally important species (for example, water voles prefer tussocky grass margins).
- Therefore, the need for watercourse fencing needs to be carefully considered on a case by case basis by assessing the risks to the watercourse in relation to the timing of grazing, the grazing density, the habitat and the risk of invasive weeds.
- Once the decision has been made to fence, there is no minimum or maximum distance that the fence needs to be positioned from the watercourse. However, it is important to locate the fence on stable ground away from the immediate bank edge as this may be vulnerable to erosion. It is also worth considering locating the fence a suitable distance from the top of the bank to enable occasional mechanical control of vegetation. In this case a point of access may be needed. *Access gates may be funded by this scheme – please contact the project team for further information.*

Requirements

- Retain the fence in its original location for at least 10 years from the agreement start date. If the purpose of the fence is to exclude livestock from a permanent feature such as a newly created woodland or wetland it must be retained indefinitely.
- Remove all old fencing materials before putting up the new fencing.
- Ensure that all timbers, wire, netting and staples consist of new materials.
- Use softwood timber that is fully peeled, coated with wood preservative (but **not** creosote) and pressure treated, or treated with an HSE approved industrial wood preservative (to comply with Use Class 4 as defined in BS8417:2014 ‘2014 ‘Preservation of Wood – Code of Practice). Untreated durable timber (including split chestnut) can be used as set out in the Forestry Commission guide to forest fencing.
- Metal posts are permitted (e.g. Clipex posts and other brands).
- Do **not** use creosoted posts and strainers, unless agreed in advance with the project team.
- Ensure that all materials meet the relevant British Standards.
- Put up a fence at least 1.05m high.
- Do not use trees and shrubs as strainers or fencing posts, or attach wire, staples or netting to them.

Wire requirements:

- Use strands of galvanised 4mm mild plain steel wire or 2.5mm two-ply barbed wire
- Attach wire to posts with galvanized staples.
- Use enough strands of wire to control the livestock, and at least three strands.
- The top wires of any fencing erected next to public access routes must consist of plain wire or an additional line of plain wire must be affixed to the outside of the posts closest to the route in question.

Straining post requirements:

- Use straining posts that are a minimum of 125mm cross section and are at least 2.0m long (or at least 2.4m long for metal fence posts)
- Set the straining posts at least 750mm into the ground, or at least 1100mm for metal fence posts, and no more than 150m apart
- Place a straining post at every change of direction (horizontal or vertical) and at each end of the fence

Strut requirements:

- Attach struts at each end of the fence line and at all changes of slope and direction.
- Use struts that are at least 60mm diameter and 1.80m long
- Struts must be supported by either a base plate or a suitably positioned intermediate post.

Intermediate post requirements:

- Use intermediate posts that are at least 65mm top diameter and 1.65m long (or at least 1.8m long for metal fencing). Longer stakes may be needed in soft or uneven ground conditions.
- Set the posts at least 600mm in the ground (or at least 700mm for metal fence posts) and no more than 3.0 to 3.5m apart.

Consider adding a gate to enable bankside access:

- Access gate requirements are:
    - Install a metal or wooden gate
    - Hang and clap all styles of gate separately from an adjoining fence line – do not use the hanging post as an end strainer
    - Either:
        - Set gate posts at least 900mm into the ground and surround with concrete at least 450mm by 450mm wide and 600mm deep, *or*
        - Erect gate posts without concrete surrounds and set at least 1.1m below the ground surface, with the soil compacted around the posts in 150mm layers
- *Wooden gate wing requirements:*
    - Install wings on both sides of the gate
    - Each wing must consist of at least 3 wooden rails fixed between 2 posts
    - Avoid fixing rails to the hanging post of the gate
    - Rails must be at least 38mm by 87mm
    - Posts must be at least 100mm diameter half round, 1.8m long and sunk 0.7m into the ground

Consents and permits

- The Environment Agency should be consulted on all fencing along designated ‘main river’ locations as consent may be needed in these circumstances. If your land lies on the floodplain you will also need to talk to the local Internal Drainage Board office before erecting any permanent fencing. One or two strands of electrified plain wire attached to permanent posts may be the most suitable option on floodplains.
- Fencing should be avoided on sites of archaeological or historic importance. You should ensure you have any relevant consents such as Scheduled Monument consent from English Heritage before carrying out the work if fencing is needed in such circumstances. Visual intrusion and impacts on landscape character should also be considered in the construction and alignment of new fencing lines, particularly in designated landscapes or historic parkland.
- In wetland Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and other priority habitat areas such as county wildlife sites, the grazing of ditch banks and riparian grazing marsh is often essential to maintain the ecological interest of the site. Natural England will not issue a consent for fencing on a designated site (SSSI etc) where this is considered detrimental

to the conservation objectives. If you are fencing off streams and rivers within a floodplain, you may need temporary fencing which will only remain during the grazing season as permanent wire fencing can collect debris from flooding and can result in the collapse of the fence.

Restrictions

- **Do not** use trees and shrubs as strainers or fencing posts, or attach wire, staples or netting to them.
- **Do not** block or restrict access to open access land or obstruct public rights of way.
- **Do not** use barbed wire where fencing runs alongside a public right of way, unless this is unavoidable.
- **Do not** use creosoted strainers or posts unless agreed in advance with the project team

Record keeping and payment terms

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them with *the payment claim*. Payment will only be made upon satisfactory receipt of all of the following records:

- Photographs of the site before the new fence is erected.
- Photographs of each newly erected fence line.
- Soil analysis results (pH, P and K as a minimum) for the relevant fields dated within the past 3 years.
- Farm and field information needed to run a phosphorus loss tool for the farm and calculate the reduction in phosphorus loss to water arising from this work. This will include farm data relating to livestock numbers, cropping areas and fertiliser / manure inputs.
- Self-declaration that the terms of the project agreement have been adhered to *(key terms are listed above).*
- Successful applicants are required to sign a declaration confirming that:
    - reasonable precautions are taken to prevent nutrients and soil from the relevant field entering watercourses or from being leached to groundwater - to an extent that could cause pollution.
    - the relevant fields have not been (i) the source of a recorded pollution incident which could have been prevented by the farmer taking reasonable precautions to prevent that pollution and/or (ii) the subject of a warning, fine, prosecution or BPS deduction issued to the farmer by the Environment Agency or RPA for a breach of NVZ rules or Farming Rules for Water in the past 5 years.
- It is expected that to support and inform the above declaration, successful applicants will complete the Environment Agency's Agricultural Compliance Tool (ACT) by 31st December in each year of the agreement and submit it when completed to Wessex Water (who will hold it in confidence) and address any actions identified by the ACT. For agreements involving annual payments of more than 5 years duration and/or with a value in excess of £5,000 of annual payments, this is a requirement.
- Agreement holders are required to complete a Wessex Water supplier application form in order to receive their first payment. A copy of this is available on the scheme website.

Photo credit: DAERA NI

Photo credit: Woodland Trust

Watercourse fences to exclude livestock and protect newly planted wooded buffer

Additional Information

Championing the Farmed Environment: https://www.cfeonline.org.uk/watercourse-fencing-vm4/

Game and Wildlife Conservancy Trust film (with the longer-term benefits of watercourse fencing shown at approx 4 minutes in)**:** https://www.gwct.org.uk/blogs/news/2022/november/gwct-video-farmer-led-conservation-of-the-river-ebble/

Fencing dairy cattle out of a stream: 10 years on.

Photo credit: GWCT / Environmental Farmers Group