

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Upstream Thinking and where is it?

- Upstream Thinking is a project funded by South West Water and delivered by a number of Partners including Westcountry Rivers Trust. It aims to proactively protect the water quality in our rivers and boreholes in areas which feed into our drinking water supply. In practice this means farm visits, advice or training – supported by capital grants where appropriate.
- For Westcountry Rivers Trust our target river catchments are the Exe, Fowey, Dart, Tamar and Otter.
- The work that this delivers helps provide benefits not only to your farm in terms of environmental protection, but also efficiencies in farm business. Wider benefits resulting from improved conditions include boosting biodiversity, contributing to natural flood protection, improved soil conditions and carbon capture as examples depending on the activity. Ultimately it is aimed at reducing levels of chemicals in the watercourses, in turn reducing energy consumption and costs at Water Treatment Works and contributes to keeping water bills down.
- This approach supports catchment sustainability and future resilience, protecting water quality and the environment in the longer term.

Is it everywhere?

- Within these river catchments the focus areas are those above abstraction points, on larger rivers there may also be smaller target areas within these which we consider a priority due to current conditions.

What type of work can be funded?

- The objective is to provide tailored and specific farm advice, to help identify opportunities for improvement whilst maximising the protection of rivers, streams or boreholes. Visits are free and confidential; the type of work recommended varies widely due to farm-specific conditions – however grants will contribute to funding capital works such as riverbank fencing, livestock drinking troughs or pumps, clean & dirty water separation, track or yard improvements etc.

How much money is there, how long does it run for and what is the time limit on work?

- This is the second 5 year round of the Project. Overall, across all delivery Partners in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset the project is worth several million pounds. This round runs from 2015-2020 with help and advice supported by capital projects planned to run throughout this period.

Do you support funding for new sheds or slurry pits?

- We have previously funded a number of large infrastructure builds; however, in the current round we have effectively limited large grants to ensure that funding is fairly and widely distributed to optimise benefits to water quality across target areas, and wisely invested. We are usually contacted by more farmers than we can possibly fund, but we do aim to deliver visits and advice to all those interested.

What is the intervention rate and how is it awarded?

- For Westcountry Rivers Trust, our standard capital grant intervention rate is 50%. Grants are awarded following an assessment process between our team of farm advisors and ultimately approved by South West Water as providing practical improvements to water quality and good value for money.

Is there an application form?

- There is no application form. In the first instance please contact the Trust (see contact details below), if you are in an eligible area the relevant Advisor will discuss your situation and circumstances to arrange to visit at a convenient time. From there, we can learn more about your farming operation, any future plans you may have and how we might be able to help.

Why are some items able to get grant funding and some not - what is the priority?

- Capital works on a farm will vary from site to site; but importantly we are unable to fund any work which constitutes statutory legal requirements. Work under Upstream Thinking is designed to deliver over and above that, similarly we will not fund work to rectify a breach of Cross Compliance terms, or pollution event. The priorities vary between river catchments and we have ongoing work to capture further data and evidence which the Advisor will be able to discuss with you. Broadly speaking the work is to protect water quality from nutrient enrichment, bacterial loading, soil loss and pesticide (Agro-Chemical) risks.

Is the Environment Agency involved in this, will my details be shared or reported?

- The Westcountry Rivers Trust team are qualified farm advisors, the Trust itself is a Charity – hence our work is non-profit and we have no regulatory powers. South West Water is the project funder and due to the nature of the work we are delivering we need to work alongside others in the Industry including the Environment Agency, Natural England and Catchment Sensitive Farming etc. so that they are broadly aware of what catchments we are working in and to avoid duplication. Our ethos is to provide free and confidential advice; we are here to help and support you, we do not report to any Government bodies on individual farms.

How does this affect my Basic Payment Scheme?

- It does not. This is a totally voluntary scheme which can add value to your farm enterprise, identify opportunities for best practice and cost savings.

What's the big deal with pesticides?

- In the current round there is a much greater emphasis on pesticides (all Agro -Chemical products) due to the risk they present in entering the drinking water supply, plus the fact they are difficult and expensive to remove at Water Treatment Works. In certain circumstances the raw water may be untreatable, meaning that the Treatment Works must be taken out of service with a consequent impact on a reliable supply to customers. As a result best practice for pesticide handling, updated training, use of professional contractors or alternative or lower risk products are a key message.

What is a Pesticides Amnesty?

- Westcountry Rivers Trust are trialling a Pesticides Amnesty during this phase whereby old, obsolete or banned products may be safely removed by a contractor to be disposed of free of charge. This removes the risk completely from the environment.

Why is South West Water involved and will they want to access my land?

- South West Water is the project funder, so they are involved in the agreement which accompanies any grant funding. Any site visits are organised directly between the farmer and the relevant Westcountry Rivers Trust Advisor only, over time this may lead to further visits to check progress etc. but always working with you in agreement.

Do I need quotes before starting any work?

- If a visit and advice given in a Farm Plan leads to a capital grant, there is some form-filling which your Advisor will complete with you. Some quotes may be required but these depend on the type of work and overall cost, where possible we aim to minimise the admin by using market rates for certain standard items eg. Current quoted Countryside Stewardship rates for fencing per metre.

Can I combine this grant with other works eg. Under Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) or Countryside Stewardship (CSS)?

- Any grant from Upstream Thinking must stand alone; it cannot be combined with other funds – which ensure the farmer is also committed to the investment on farm.
- We can and do work with CSF or CSS: It is possible to undertake separate projects on the same farm – for example Upstream Thinking supporting one job and CSF the other, but they must be distinctly separate items.

Can I receive payment up front, in part or in stages?

- The grant is paid out to you on completion of the works and following inspection by your Advisor, also on completion of all evidence and admin (such as photographs of the work and collecting all relevant invoices). The grant will be paid by BACS direct to your Bank Account.
- It is possible to undertake separate jobs on one farm under separate Agreements and hence separate payments – these must be completely separate items and will not avoid requirement for a Deed of Covenant where necessary i.e. rather to assist cash flow, reduce the need for borrowing, or due to seasonal work restrictions.

What is the duration of the Conditional Grant Agreement if I want to receive a grant?

- The Conditional Grant Agreements are legal contracts and last for either 10 or 25 years, these are based on the item not the value. For example we would expect fencing to be maintained by you in good condition and in place for 10 years; it would be unrealistic to expect this to last 25 years. Conversely, anything associated with a build such as new roofing should be expected to be maintained for 25 years.

Why is a Conditional Grant Agreement or Deed necessary?

- Any Grant requires a Conditional Grant Agreement which outlines the terms and conditions of the works in the form of a contract, to ensure it is clearly defined to all parties and a legal undertaking. Any Grant over £5,000 in value also requires a Deed of Covenant to be raised. This means that Westcountry Rivers Trust and South West Water will jointly register an interest at the Land Registry against the area of land where this grant funded work has taken place. It further 'protects' the agreement, by ensuring that any changes in land ownership transfer the terms of the agreement to the new owner for the duration. The Trust Advisor will complete this with you.

What happens if someone sells up or passes away after they are part of an agreement?

- There is a process whereby relevant Solicitors acting for the farmer will liaise with the Trust and South West Water to request a transfer or disposal of land, we assess initially whether this affects the grant funded work or not and if so whether we have any objection (we will only be interested in the actual 'footprint' of the granted works as identified in the Conditional Grant Agreement). Over the last 6 years or so, our experience has been a straightforward case of continued use for the original purpose, to which we communicate our consent with the Solicitors.

What happens if I go out of farming and want to change the use of the project?

- The Conditional Grant Agreement contains terms and conditions, including a formula for repayment, essentially if the project is no longer going to be used for the purpose it was granted (eg. a cattle shed for someone coming out of beef farming completely and diversifying into providing commercial storage space) then the Trust needs to be contacted within a defined period of notice. From this point it is possible to calculate the repayment sum based on the initial grant value and term of agreement left to run.

Why does the Conditional Grant Agreement involve both the Tenant and Landlord?

- Where a farm is run under a Tenancy, the Landowner/Landlord needs to be involved to initially agree in principle for works to proceed based on a discussion with his Tenant. Furthermore, in the Deed of Covenant the Landlord is a signatory due to their status as the legal owner and to complete the registration at the Land Registry where appropriate.

I have a mortgage on this property, how does that affect things?

- A Lender also needs to be informed and provide approval, plus they are a signatory to any Deed where appropriate.

Do I need a Solicitor for this?

- The majority of farmers (approx. 200 to date) who have contracted works with us in the last 6 years under this Project have not used a Solicitor, it is a legal contract and as you would anticipate is a comprehensive document but it is ultimately personal choice should you wish to seek further advice.

How will you know if the Project is working?

- Throughout the project we will be running a monitoring regime which will regularly sample our catchments and record a suite of parameters including biological and chemical, to help inform the current status - and as we move forwards. Technology allows us to utilise new equipment to capture long term and ad hoc spot data, alongside practical farm delivery. We will also develop a number of case-studies to ensure that the work is supported by scientifically robust evidence.

Full details of the overall Upstream Thinking Project, all other delivery Partners and their target areas can be found on the main website: <http://upstreamthinking.org/>



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