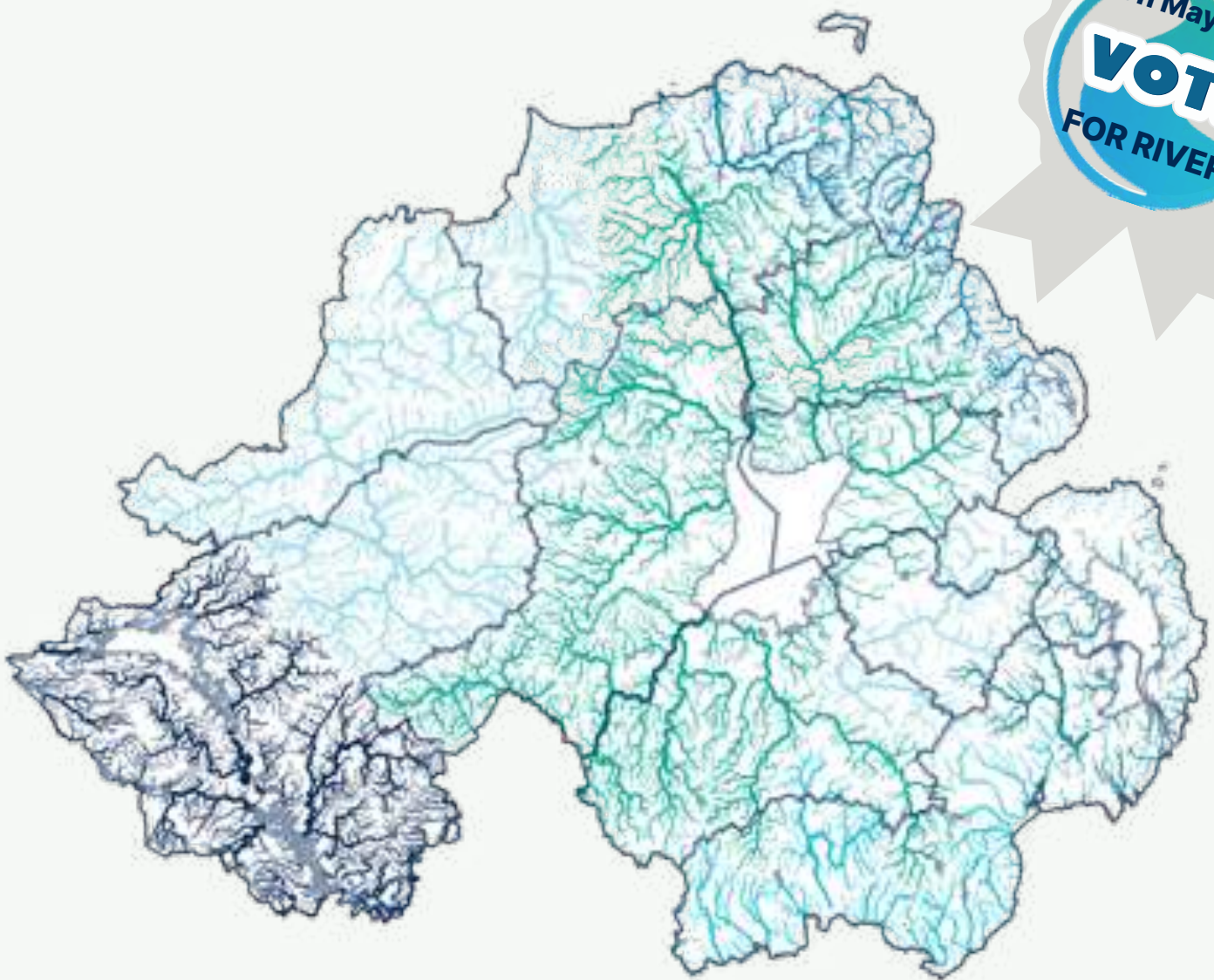




The Rivers Trust

Manifesto for Healthy Rivers in Northern Ireland 2023



What is The Rivers Trust?



Mark Horton
All-Ireland Director
The Rivers Trust

The Rivers Trust are conservation experts with a wealth of data and expertise at our fingertips. We work with our member trusts across Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Great Britain, to make our shared vision a reality:

wild, healthy, natural rivers valued by all

Our rivers are dying...

When rivers thrive, so do local communities. Water is fundamental to the survival of every living thing, including us. But our local waterscapes are under threat due to pollution, abstraction, modification, and under-investment. More than ever, our precious rivers in Northern Ireland need us all to work together to recover and revive.

...but we can still save them if we work together and act now!

With The Rivers Trust's expertise and reach, and our member trusts' local knowledge, we currently work with government agencies and departments, farmers and landowners, residents and organisations, and the business sector, to provide practical solutions, advice, and resources for supporting and restoring river health.

We bring together the people, knowledge, data, and intelligence to help rivers thrive again; for us and for future generations.

We recognise that our rivers are an integral part of our communities, and we are leading the growing movement to protect them.



The Rivers Trust wants to support Northern Ireland's newly elected councils to protect local rivers because they play a vital part in all our lives



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Rivers are vital ecosystems that support a wide range of plant and animal species. Protecting rivers and their associated habitats helps to preserve biodiversity and maintain the natural balance of ecosystems.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Rivers and lakes are the primary source of Northern Ireland's drinking water supply. Rivers also provide a range of recreational opportunities for people, such as fishing, swimming, and boating. They are also important for public health, providing natural green spaces that promote physical and mental well-being.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Rivers are an important economic resource, supporting industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. Protecting and improving river health can help to maintain these industries and provide sustainable economic growth.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Local councils have a legal duty to protect the environment. The Rivers Trust wants to support councils to meet their legal obligations and ensure that they are doing everything they can to protect rivers and human health and supporting sustainable development goals.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The Rivers Trust believes that partnership working between local councils, environmental organisations, and local communities, is crucial to protecting and improving river health. By working collaboratively, we can gain greater insights and look at the bigger picture of river health, which is complex and interconnected.

Urgent action is needed

The Rivers Trust wants to support and empower all Northern Ireland councils and councillors to protect our local rivers because healthy rivers benefit both people and the environment. Without realising it, every citizen of Northern Ireland is dependent every day on their local waterscape and therefore rivers play a central role in civic life. By working together, we can ensure that rivers are cleaned up now and protected and maintained for future generations.

We live in a time when the health and well-being of our planet and its inhabitants are under threat. In every country in the world, one of the most critical issues we face is the pollution and degradation of rivers. These rivers are the lifeblood of communities, providing water for drinking, agricultural irrigation, and recreational activities. They also support diverse ecosystems and wildlife that depend on them for survival. This is true regardless of where you live on the planet – including Northern Ireland.

Our local rivers are in serious trouble and facing increasing threats. In 2021, the Water Framework Directive Statistics Report revealed that none of Northern Ireland's 496 rivers, lakes and coastal waters achieved a 'good overall status' rating for water quality. As usage and pollution pressures on our waterscape increase, we must address the legacy of decades of neglect and now work proactively to value and save these precious natural resources.

Political representatives at all government levels are responsible for protecting and improving our local rivers. Via the ballot box, they agree on a social contract with their electorate to create a fair, safe and healthy local infrastructure for homes and businesses to flourish.

So, river health is not just an environmental issue but also a public health matter and an economic driver. Polluted water can lead to a host of human and animal health problems. In addition, the economic impact of a polluted river, drought and flooding can devastate local businesses and communities.

Local councils in Northern Ireland have a key role to play in protecting and improving river health in their districts. On behalf of the health and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland, we urge you to take action now to protect and improve our local rivers.



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10-point plan for Northern Ireland's local councils to improve river health

By taking these simple actions and making river health central to policy discussion and development, local councils in Northern Ireland can save money and make a significant contribution to improving river health and protecting the environment.

1

Review and implement planning and land use policies

Each council is responsible in their area for local development planning, development management and planning enforcement. When making planning decisions we want councils to make rivers and loughs and the wider environment a top priority in the decision making process. Protecting our floodplains from over development will benefit not just the river environment but society as a whole, by avoiding development in flood prone areas and avoiding costly and environmentally damaging flood relief schemes.

2

Encourage sustainable landuse

Local councils can work with landowners to encourage sustainable farming and land use practices that reduce the amount of pollution entering the water. Councils should invest in promoting responsible land use practices, such as reducing fertiliser and pesticide use, farm waste disposal/recycling schemes and implementing conservation programs such as tree planting along rivers to protect the health of our local waterways, and the wildlife that depend on them.

3

Promote public education & citizen science

Local councils can educate the public about the importance of river health and how they can take action to protect their local rivers. Invest in education, outreach and biodiversity action programs such as an annual Water Blitz to gather water quality data and raise awareness about the importance of clean water and the impact of pollution on our health and the environment. This can help to increase community investment in, and public support for, river conservation efforts.

4

Implement water-friendly green infrastructure & SUDS

Local councils can invest in green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and green roofs, and sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) methods to help reduce the amount of stormwater runoff and pollutants entering the rivers. Run-off from impermeable surfaces has been identified as a significant source of diffuse pollution, particularly in urban areas. This problem is compounded in Northern Ireland as over 70% of the public sewer system is 'combined', meaning it was constructed to collect both sewage and stormwater. During intense rainfall, the capacity can be exceeded causing out-of-sewer flooding of untreated foul sewage.

5

Support water conservation

Encourage and incentivise individuals and businesses to reduce their water usage and adopt more sustainable practices. This can include everything from promoting low-flow toilets to rainwater harvesting systems. This will also help businesses save money. We encourage councils to establish a rating and award system for local businesses based on their efforts at water conservation and responsible water stewardship.



6

Implement and support river restoration projects

Local councils can work with experienced and knowledgeable environmental organisations such as local Rivers Trusts to implement river restoration projects. These projects can help to restore damaged river ecosystems, mitigate against flooding, tackle invasive species, clean up litter, and improve the health of the river.

Through partnership working and combining our efforts we can make our resources go further and have a bigger positive impact on our environment.

7

River Asset Management

We call on local councils to undertake a comprehensive review and audit of the economic and social benefits that rivers and local waterways deliver to their borough or district. Explore in financial terms the economic worth of a river to a council district in terms of tourism, leisure, agriculture, household water supplies, etc. This will help to make the case for meaningful investment in river conservation, bringing environmental, social and economic benefits to the area.

8

Improve knowledge and access

Provide training, information, and engagement sessions for elected representatives and council staff regarding river protection and restoration so that it can be considered at all levels of decision-making. We are calling on councils to proactively engage with conservation experts and organisations to host information sessions and develop nature-based solutions to tackle risks to rivers. By working together, legislators and environmental experts can pool their resources, share knowledge, and develop effective strategies to protect rivers. We also ask councils to lead by example and commit to reducing pressures on water resources in all council activities.

9

Appoint dedicated staff for water quality improvement

Create recruitment opportunities for dedicated council water officers to help develop and implement water-friendly policies and support community groups to invest in the health of their local river.

Set river health goals and targets with reviewed KPIs. Work with local universities and colleges to create monitoring and conservation programs.

10

Collaborative working

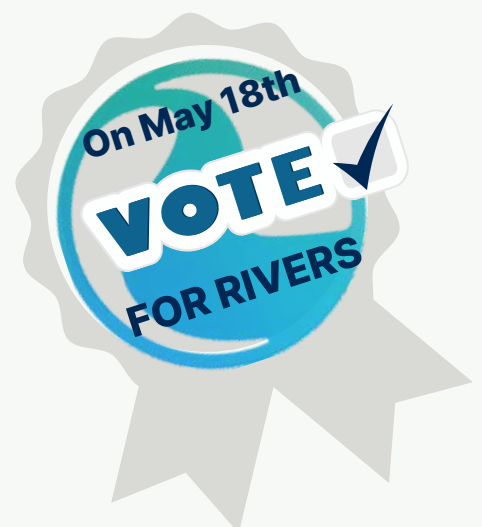
The Rivers Trust believes that partnership working between local councils and environmental organisations is crucial to protecting and improving river health. By working together, we can pool our resources, share expertise, and develop effective strategies to protect rivers at catchment scale. We encourage councils to work together with other organisations to develop comprehensive plans to protect and restore our local rivers. River health is a regional issue that requires collaboration between local councils, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to ensure sustainable success.



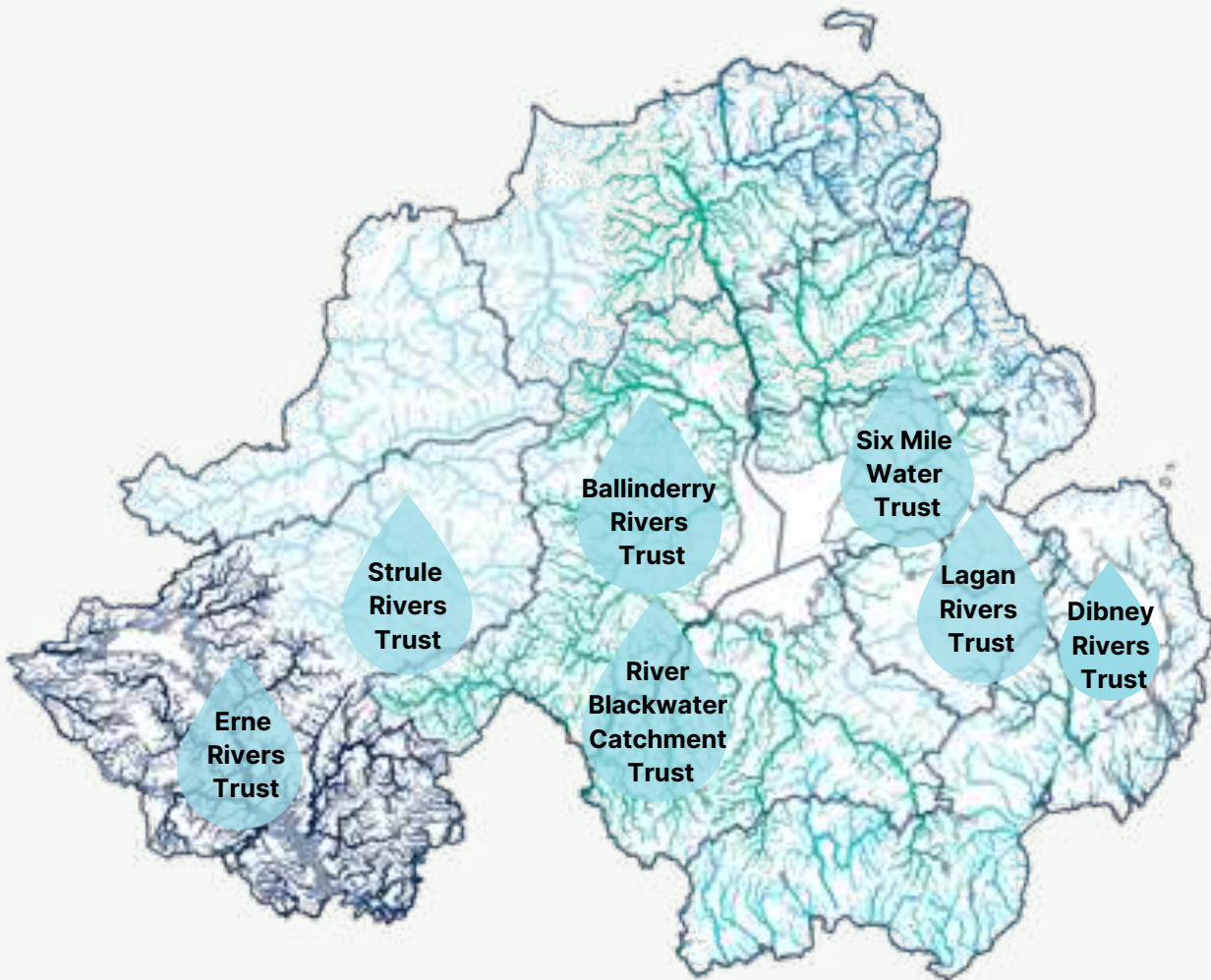
5 key questions to ask your local council candidates ahead of the Northern Ireland local government elections on May 18th, 2023

- 1 What policies will you implement to reduce pollution in our local rivers?
- 2 What steps will you take to ensure that the local sources of raw drinking water are safe and free from contaminants?
- 3 How will you encourage sustainable land use practices to protect the health of local rivers?
- 4 What specific actions will you take to restore degraded river habitats and promote biodiversity in local rivers?
- 5 What steps will you take to engage and educate the public on the importance of protecting local rivers and how they can help in these efforts?

Asking these questions can help you understand the priorities of local politicians when it comes to protecting and improving the health of rivers in your area so that you can hold them accountable for their future actions.



The Rivers Trust in Northern Ireland



There are currently seven local Rivers Trusts in NI working to create and preserve wild, healthy rivers, valued by all. Visit www.riverstrust.org and click on our interactive map to find out more about the rivers in your area.

Support Us



If you would like to know more about the work of The Rivers Trust, go to www.theriverstrust.org

If you are interested in volunteering or setting up a local Rivers Trust in Northern Ireland, please contact Mark Horton at mark.horton@theriverstrust.org

