

Human-Beaver Interactions: Engaging with people living with beavers

Findings from interviews in East Devon, six years on from the River Otter Beaver Trial

August 2026

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR752



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Keywords

Beaver, Engagement, Human-Wildlife Interactions, Reintroduction, Social Science

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Foreword

This report was commissioned to inform Natural England's advice to government on the reintroduction of beavers in England.

The reintroduction of Eurasian beavers to England presents a transformative opportunity to restore ecosystems while benefiting local communities. Beaver reintroductions can bring numerous benefits from creating wetlands - reducing flood risks, improving water quality, boosting biodiversity, and supporting climate resilience. However, there is also the potential for conflicts when a species is reintroduced to landscapes where they have long been absent. To support coexistence between people and beavers, this report builds on previous research which was conducted during the River Otter Beaver Trial (2015-2020), by returning to the River Otter catchment to interview landowners and land managers who are experiencing beaver activity several years later. The aim is to develop a clearer understanding of how best to structure stakeholder engagement and deliver effective advice and guidance.

The findings of this report will support various stakeholders in beaver reintroduction, particularly beaver management groups, catchment-based partnerships, and beaver reintroduction projects. The report will help develop insights and inform approaches to effective engagement with local people who are living with the activities of beavers.

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Executive summary

The River Otter catchment hosted the licenced River Otter Beaver Trial from 2015 to 2020. During the Trial, interviews were conducted with individuals who reported conflicts with beaver. Six years on from the Trial's conclusion, the same researcher returned to interview people living with beavers today. This report explores the applicability of those earlier findings to the present day, in a post-reintroduction project context.

Ten new interviews took place: two repeat interviews with people who continue to live alongside beavers, and eight with new participants. Features of the earlier interviews were seen to have evolved and additional features emerged. Results comprise of four themes with features that can be practically applied by practitioners, two underlying themes which influence individual expectations of the management response, and three underlying themes which influence what management response can be undertaken.

Themes with Practical Application:

1. Preparation and Reactivity: Readily available support is essential, with a clear contact point. Proactive engagement with people living in river catchments is recommended, supporting them to undertake preventative mitigative actions. This may require a greater level of initial support whilst beaver activities are new to people, compared to later when beavers are more familiar. The impacts of beaver activities develop quickly, so there is need to provide a rapid response when an issue does arise.

2. Appropriate Communication: An approach demonstrating willingness to help is received favourably. A key part of relationship-building was empathy and a sympathetic approach towards addressing issues - taking concerns seriously. There is a need to appropriately manage expectations about what interventions may be available, or what interventions may or may not be likely to achieve.

3. Shared Decision-Making: Empowerment in decision-making is important for people living with beavers, requiring opportunity to input into the discussions about potential management interventions. Decision-making should recognise and address different objectives and contextual variation.

4. Ongoing Support and Monitoring: Beaver activity can be ongoing (with seasonal variation), requiring continued monitoring and input. There is a necessity for follow through beyond just an initial outreach in these cases. Ongoing monitoring of a situation may provide people with greater confidence and willingness to live alongside beavers.

Underlying themes which influence individual expectations of the management response received:

1. Emotion: Where positive emotions were evident, participants took greater satisfaction in management actions and exhibited a greater willingness to live with beavers. Positive emotions were strongest for participants who emphasised enjoyment in nature. Negative emotions and experiences can lead to resistance to living with beavers. Negative emotions can interact with senses of loss or change, or of imposition. There can be frustration at the need to manage beaver activities when people have not needed to do so previously.

2. Learning to Live with Beavers: For most there was an acceptance that beavers are in the wider River Otter area, reported both as a positive in most interviews and with a sense

of resignation in others. Localised to the study sites, perspectives varied dependent upon the length of time people lived with beavers; interviewees with longer experience expressed a greater sense that beaver presence was normalised. Where interactions were more recent, there was more sense of beavers as a new concept, requiring familiarisation with the species and management. Providing certainty is effective for reducing concerns, through successful management interventions or from individuals developing new knowledge of living with the beavers over time from experience. Areas of uncertainty raised by participants regarded: future beaver activities; future scenarios for beaver population growth; management actions available; and support for beaver welfare.

Underlying themes which influence the management response that wildlife managers can undertake:

1. Unfamiliarity with the governance of beavers: There was unfamiliarity with the governance of beaver management. Few interviewees reported familiarities with national policy context or of their local Beaver Management Group. But all participants knew of, and had experience of, support available from the local Field Officer.

2. Wider Knowledge-Sharing: There can be an influence from individual experiences of wider knowledge-sharing, with further engagement influencing viewpoints and experiences. Knowledge-sharing experiences included: engagement with Beaver Management Groups; learning from expertise; drawing on observations of other locations where beavers are present; or peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge or ideas.

3. Restrictions and Limitations: There was a recognition that a number of factors may limit the ability to provide readily available support, including: resource (eg time or finance); licencing requirements; and the accessibility of interventions (through individual financial availability, or physical abilities to undertake management interventions).

Concluding Remarks

The diversity of cases and varied responses underscore the inherently individual nature of beaver case management; there are context-specific elements of human experience, perspectives, and expectations. Hence when engaging with people living with beavers, there is need to understand individual experiences within place-based contexts; predicted conflicts or opportunities may not align with how individuals experience a scenario, or value the species, landscape, or features within it. This research emphasises the importance of having readily available and well-prepared wildlife managers, who demonstrate proactivity, responsiveness, empathy, and emotional sensitivity when engaging with, supporting, and sharing decision-making with people who are living with beavers.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Reintroductions and Renewed Coexistence

Drawing on human-wildlife interaction literatures, “coexistence” can be understood as “...a dynamic but sustainable state in which humans and [wildlife] co-adapt to living in shared landscapes where human interactions with [wildlife] are governed by effective institutions that ensure long-term [wildlife] population persistence, social legitimacy, and tolerable levels of risk” (Carter & Linnell, 2016). Thus, this is inclusive of actions that seek to address human-wildlife conflict issues, including those that occur between people about wildlife, as well as benefits that can arise for people and wildlife (Redpath and others, 2015; Glikman and others, 2021).

Renewed Coexistence refers specifically to coexistence with a reintroduced species, thereby one which is likely to be new for people living in localities where it has been absent for a time (Auster and others, 2026). Through recognising this branch of understanding, Renewed Coexistence conceptually reframes animal reintroductions to emphasise the human dimensions of reintroduction from the outset, through reintroduction, and into the future. The reframing encourages reintroduction projects to use approaches that seek to facilitate future coexistence with the species (Figure 1), to be considered as part of the local fauna, and deliver sustainability in desired project outcomes (Auster and others, 2026).

Whilst there has been growth in recognition of the value of social research for reintroduction projects, the emphasis has so far primarily been on the project lifecycle – through Feasibility assessment, Planning, and Implementation. Post-implementation there may be ongoing monitoring, but it is common that projects will be considered to have concluded with success or failure at this point (Marino and others, 2025).

However, as the reintroduced species and people continue to live within the landscape, a period of ‘Transition’ has been recognised in which governance is weaned off reintroduction project infrastructure and humans and wildlife learn and co-adapt to live together, until such time as they can coexist (Auster and others, 2026). This period of Transition has so far received minimal research and attention, but ‘what happens next’ will have significant bearing on whether a sustainable coexistence can be fostered.

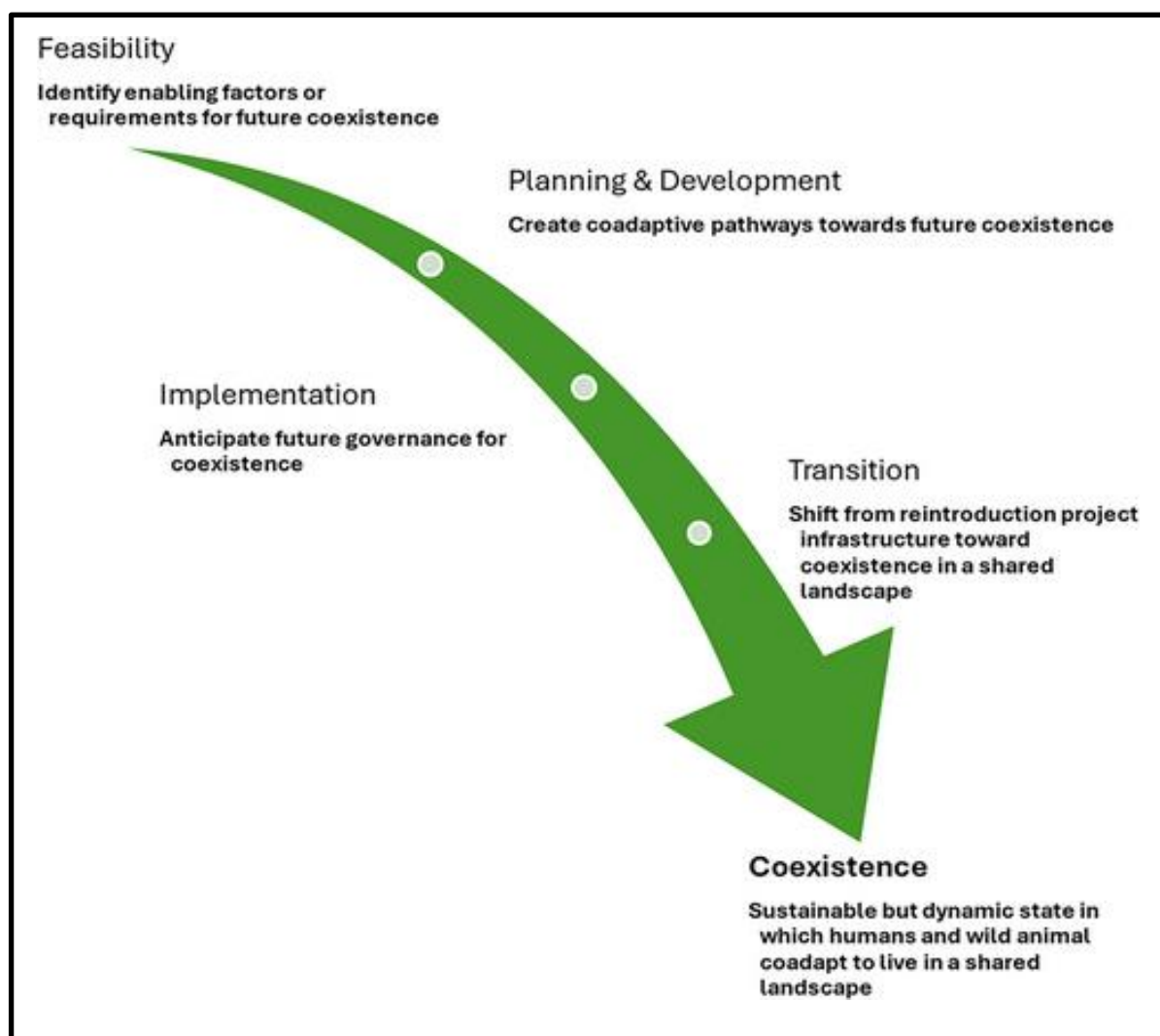


Figure 1: The integration of a futures-oriented framing of animal reintroductions throughout the process, seeking to foster long-term coexistence between humans and the reintroduced species. (Adapted from Auster and others, 2026. © The author(s) under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.)

1.2. Beavers in Transition

Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) reintroductions are progressing throughout England. Following a reintroduction trial project that concluded in 2020 (detailed in [section 2](#)), beavers were legally protected as a native species in October 2022, marking it as the first formally reintroduced mammal in England (Natural England, 2022). Since 2020 it had only been possible to obtain a licence to release beavers into an enclosure, of which there are now over 40, but in 2025 UK Government announced that new wild release licences could be obtained (Natural England, 2025). Since then, three new legal wild releases have taken place. In the interim, beavers were identified in several river catchments throughout the country thought to have arrived either because of unlawful releases, or more commonly, escapes from licensed enclosures.

At the local level across England, beaver reintroduction can be considered to be at different stages in the reintroduction process. There are localities in which feasibility studies are being undertaken, or new reintroduction projects are going through planning and development. There are locations where beaver releases are in implementation with post-release monitoring. And in some settings, beavers have been present for a time, so humans and animals are co-adapting to live together in a period of Transition.

At the national level, beaver reintroduction can be considered as in the period of Transition. Legally protecting the species indicates UK Government support for beavers to remain within the country, and their populations are permitted to grow and disperse naturally. Accordingly, there are now efforts within Defra to develop a Long-Term Management Plan for beavers which seeks to enable benefits to accrue, whilst providing an adaptive management approach towards minimising or managing conflict issues.

Currently, where conflicts with beaver occur, management decisions are subject to Natural England's 5-step Approach to Beaver Management, which details actions that can be undertaken without a licence and those that do require a licence (Box 1).

Box 1. Natural England's 5-Step Approach to Beaver Management.

The following five steps should be progressed through in order, only moving onto the next step once the previous step has been fully considered.

1. Engaging with beaver management groups established around wild-living populations, Natural England, and other expert organisations, to learn about the potential benefits of beavers and approaches to manage or minimise challenges.
2. Making space for beavers to avoid the need for further actions, such as leaving space around a waterway for beavers to use.
3. Taking proactive lawful mitigation and management actions that do not need a licence, such as installing tree guards to protect trees or removing a dam that is less than 2 weeks old.
4. Lower-impact licensed actions, such as reducing dam height or removing an established dam outside the breeding season.
5. Higher-impact licensed actions that only a specially trained and licensed person can carry out, such as modifying or removing a dam during the breeding season, beaver capture and translocation, or lethal control. Lethal control should only be considered as a last resort.

Further guidance on the 5-step approach can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/beavers-managing-beaver-activities-in-england>

(Accessed 25th February 2026).

Within this approach, there is a role for Beaver Management Groups (BMGs) – sometimes called Beaver Advisory Groups - as fora to engage local people and interest-holders in beaver management. There are several BMGs in effect having been set up around

existing, previously ‘unauthorised’ populations. New licensed wild release projects require a similar governance structure that includes representation from the licensee, a local beaver officer, an ecologist and project steering group. Natural England envisages a transition of governance to a beaver management partnership once the licensed project ends (Defra and Natural England, 2025).

Where they are functioning, a BMG seeks to support familiarisation with the species, provide management advice, and support the integration of the species into shared landscapes. A 2022 study (Auster and others, 2022a, 2023) identified BMGs to be adaptive processes rather than fixed structures or an end-point for governance in themselves, for their role is evolving as the species becomes more familiar locally. For example, there were new attendees in BMG forum meetings observed where new beaver conflicts arose, and others were observed to stop attending as they became more familiar with the species and actions they could take. Hence, whilst providing a valuable role as a “front-line” tool to support the integration of the species as beavers re-establish, the role of BMGs will continue to evolve as beaver populations grow, and whilst there will need to be some ongoing beaver management support, it was argued that BMG roles could be integrated into existing partnerships, organisations, or day-to-day activities over time (Auster and others, 2022, 2023).

1.3. Report Aim

As beavers are now becoming more widespread, an increase in human-beaver interactions can be expected. This may include new positive interactions or new challenges with the potential for generating human-beaver conflicts.

During a reintroduction project known as the ‘River Otter Beaver Trial’ (ROBT) that took place between 2015 and 2020, an interview study (undertaken by the report author and described in [section 3](#)) sought to learn from the experiences of individuals who reported conflicts with beavers during the project’s implementation (Auster and others, 2022b).

Six years on from the Trial’s conclusion, beavers remain within the catchment area and their population is growing. With reintroduction project infrastructure having evolved into a Beaver Management Group to support local people and beavers to co-adapt, the River Otter catchment can be said to now be in the Transition phase.

This project presents an opportunity to return to the River Otter catchment within this period, and to undertake a repeat set of interviews with people who are living or working alongside beavers since the River Otter Beaver Trial.

The aim of these interviews was to further advance learning around human-beaver interactions in the post-project period, developing insights to inform approaches of Beaver Officers or Beaver Management Groups towards effective engagement with local people on the ground, who are experiencing or living with the activities of beavers.

This report details the findings from a series of interviews undertaken between January and February 2026. The report will first introduce the study context of beavers in the River Otter Catchment and summarise the results of the prior interview study that informed this project's design. Following a summary of the methodology and ethical considerations, the new interview cases and findings will be outlined.

2. Beavers in the River Otter Catchment

The catchment of the River Otter is approximately 250m². The majority is situated in East Devon, with the top end extending into Somerset.

Evidence suggests beavers have been present in the catchment since 2008. Whilst the original source of these beavers remains unknown, camera trap footage captured in 2013 confirmed that they were breeding (Crowley and others, 2017).

In 2015, following a locally driven campaign, Devon Wildlife Trust was granted a licence by Natural England to monitor the beaver population for a five-year period. This included provision to release up to five individuals to support genetic diversity in the population. This period was called the River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT) and at its inception consisted of two known breeding beaver pairs in the lower river.

Devon Wildlife Trust's licence was conditional on a beaver health assessment and the collection of evidence of beaver impacts on both the environment and local people. During the Trial period (2015-2020), Devon Wildlife Trust held a legal responsibility through the licence for the management of beaver impacts and were expected to ensure the beavers remained within the catchment boundaries. To this end, Devon Wildlife Trust employed a dedicated Beaver Project Officer, who was supported by a Field Officer to provide on-the-ground support to local people and for monitoring.

In February 2020, a report of evidence and findings - the ROBT Science & Evidence Report (Brazier and others, 2020a) - was submitted to Natural England. This marked the conclusion of the Trial and was later supported by a suite of peer-reviewed publications (eg Auster and others, 2021; Puttock and others, 2021, Auster and others, 2020; Brazier and others, 2020b, among others). At the time of the report's conclusion, the beaver population was estimated to consist of about 13 beaver territories.

In August 2020, following their review of the Trial, Natural England declared the ROBT to have been a success and UK Government announced the River Otter beavers could stay and disperse naturally (including to new catchments) (UK Government, 2020). The River Otter beaver population has continued to grow and, at the time of writing, the latest estimate is that the Otter beaver population now consists of approximately 50 beaver territories within the catchment.

After the Trial, what was a project Steering Group evolved into a Beaver Management Group for East Devon, led by Devon Wildlife Trust. This is coordinated by a Delivery Partnership, with a wide Forum convened annually (Auster and others, 2022). Although no

longer legally required to manage beaver impacts in the same manner as during the ROBT, Devon Wildlife Trust continues to employ a Beaver Project Officer and supporting Field Officer, whose role is to continue providing on-the-ground support for local people throughout the year.

Although the ROBT as a reintroduction project has concluded, the reintroduced species remains within the landscape. Hence, the River Otter catchment is now in the period of Transition. Within the catchment boundaries, there are people who have lived or worked alongside beavers since the ROBT period, and others for whom local beaver activity is more recent (or even, new).

Beyond the boundaries of the River Otter Catchment, Devon Wildlife Trust also provides support across Devon in catchments where further beaver activity has been identified, including the Exe, Taw, and Tamar. The Trust coordinate a second Beaver Management Group for the Tamar.

3. Summary of Interviews Undertaken During the River Otter Beaver Trial

Whilst the ROBT was in progress, one aspect of study sought to capture the experiences of individuals who had reported conflicts with beavers. This was achieved through interviews undertaken by the author of this report, with people who had reported issues to the ROBT. The outcomes of these interviews were reported within the ROBT Science & Evidence Report (Brazier and others, 2020a), and subsequent, dedicated peer reviewed article: Auster and others (2021).

Where impacts had been reported during the ROBT, Devon Wildlife Trust responded with on-the-ground engagement by the Field Officer (or the Beaver Project Lead), who undertook management actions in most cases.

The reported impacts included:

- Damming in a watercourse near to a property;
- Damming in a watercourse on an individual's property;
- Felled Bramley apple tree, and wisteria of sentimental value;
- Felled willow tree of sentimental value;
- Dam-induced wetting of fields used for a spring calving dairy herd, near to a milking parlour;
- Flooded arable land behind a beaver dam, with waterlogged cattle crossing and felled poplar tree onto a fence;
- Collapsed beaver burrow and reports of a ram having fallen into it, with dam-induced waterlogged fenceposts.

An interview was undertaken with at least one individual from each of the above conflict sites, resulting in seven interviews with 13 individuals that took place between 10th October 2018 and 18th November 2019. From an inductive thematic analysis of the

interview transcripts, five themes were identified pertaining to the engagement of individuals in a reintroduction project context (Figure 2).

Three of these themes had a practical application that wildlife managers could implement when responding to individuals:

1. **“Proactive engagement or a fast response”:**
 - a. Proactive intervention to prevent conflicts taking place was viewed to be preferable, and thereby preventing potential for conflict escalation;
 - b. There was recognition that engaging everybody proactively would be difficult, particularly throughout a river catchment. But where proactive intervention is not achievable, a quick response when impacts were reported was received favourably and seen as likely to reduce the risk of conflict escalation.
2. **“Appropriate communication”:**
 - a. A sympathetic engagement approach that demonstrates willingness to listen and to take respondent concerns seriously was received more positively, and a key component for trust-building.
 - b. It was seen as important to appropriately manage expectations about what might - or might not - occur. Honest and transparent information that was seen as more likely to maintain trust and alleviate the potential for worry (and consequent influence on decision-making) if the actual situation deviates from the information given.
3. **“Shared decision-making”:**
 - a. Once trust has been built and dialogue opened, sharing decision-making about how to progress was seen as more likely to enable both common and differing objectives to be considered, and achieve a consensus decision that is more likely to be accepted among relevant parties. Feelings of empowerment in decision-making would be more likely to reduce risk of conflict escalation.

The remaining two themes were features identified that underpinned the outcome of engagement that could take place, by influencing individual expectations of the management response they should expect.

4. **“Sense that humans are responsible for conflicts with reintroduced species”:**
 - a. Although not unanimous, there was distinct association for some participants between the beaver conflicts they experienced and the people or groups who had reintroduced the species. Where this existed, there was a perception of those people being accountable, resulting in a higher expectation of the management response that should be received.
 - b. Whilst indicating need for wildlife managers to provide a sense for those individuals that some form of responsibility is being taken, this raised questions for the future about how and when the species would be considered ‘normalised’ as a wild animal and how this can be best facilitated. This would be expected to consequently reduce pressure on management resources through a less-high level of expectation, as beaver populations grow.
5. **“A need for certainty”:**
 - a. As living with beavers was ‘new’ for people in the locality, there was a sense of uncertainty about what living with beavers would look like and what will

happen with management processes going forward. This ‘fear of the unknown’ created worry. This was particularly salient as the ROBT was a defined period, and at the time it was not known whether beavers would be permitted to remain or how management approaches may look after its conclusion in 2020.

- b. Where uncertainty exists, it was considered there to be greater influence of emotion on decision-making. It was thus concluded that certainty – particularly regarding future management strategy and responsibilities – would be needed. Hence, management decisions made as soon as possible and clearly communicated was called for, to provide greater certainty.

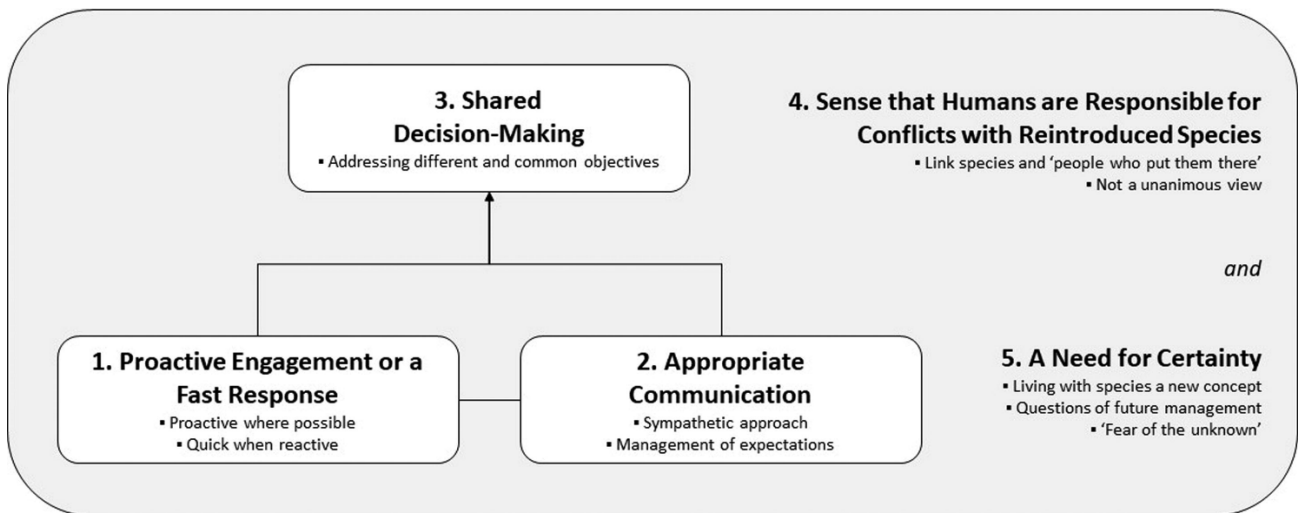


Figure 2: Outline of the five themes identified in the prior interview study, highlighting three practically applicable themes, underpinned by the remaining two. (Adapted from Auster and others, 2021. © The author(s) under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited).

4. Methods

4.1. Interview Design

As the study was designed as a follow-on from the interviews undertaken during the ROBT, a similar interview format was undertaken.

Interviews were semi-structured; an initial set of questions was developed to ensure topic coverage, whilst allowing participants to guide the interview discussion and to enable the flexibility to explore any new insights that may arise in the interview.

For the initial set of questions, the design was first informed by questions posed in the earlier interviews. These were reviewed with most adapted into this new set of questions, with some revision to be applicable for the present-day context.

With the development of Beaver Management Groups having occurred since the time of that study, which now play an engagement role, additional questions were included to understand whether participants were aware of or had engaged with the East Devon Beaver Management Group, and if so, whether they had reflections on their functioning.

The report author developed the questions independently and then shared the proposed list with Natural England for review, to ensure interviews would address the objectives of the Natural England commission.

An overview of the questions is provided in [Appendix 1](#).

4.2. Participants

The participants were purposively recruited to include individuals living or working within the River Otter catchment, who have experience of living or working alongside beavers and their activities.

Where beavers have had an impact in the River Otter catchment, Devon Wildlife Trust's Beaver Project Lead and Field Officer have either made contact with or been contacted by individuals within those contexts. Hence, they have access to contacts at sites where human-beaver interactions have been or are still taking place.

To recruit participants, an invitation was shared with individuals in the River Otter catchment with whom Devon Wildlife Trust's beaver team have had contact on behalf of the researcher. To maintain the author's independence and to minimise influence of Devon Wildlife Trust on participant responses, the invitation was written by the report author and shared in the format drafted via an email 'sent on behalf of the University of Exeter'. People willing to be interviewed were invited to then contact the researcher directly (ie not through Devon Wildlife Trust) to express their interest and undertake an interview, in the presence of the researcher alone.

Invitations were distributed to people living or working at 30 sites where human-beaver interactions had been reported to be taking place between 2015 (when the ROBT commenced) and the present day. In some cases, this meant inviting multiple individuals from a site. This includes sites where beaver activities have been interacting with human property, infrastructure, or agricultural land. Of these invitations ten people volunteered to participate; interviews were undertaken in all ten cases. (See [section 6](#) for a summary of interview cases).

To support participation, interviewees could opt for an interview to take place in person at a location of their choosing where they would feel comfortable to take part, or to be interviewed online. One interview took place online, and six interviews took place at the location where beaver activity had occurred. The remaining three took place in mutually agreed locations.

Interviews took place between 7th January and 24th February 2026. Where an interview took place at the site of beaver activity, there was an additional contextual site visit. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription and analysis only.

4.3. Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings, with support provided by [Devon Transcription](#).

Using Nvivo 14 software, interview transcripts were deductively coded by applying the themes and primary codes from the inductively developed coding framework from the prior study. This enabled exploration into the relevance of those identified themes from the implementation period during the phase of Transition. However, new codes could also be generated from the new interview data inductively, thereby also enabling the identification of any new insights from the data. The final thematic framework that includes those newly identified codes is presented in [Appendix 2](#).

5. Ethical Considerations

As is the case for all research involving human participants at the University of Exeter, this study was approved by an institutional Ethics Committee in advance of commencing any interviews (application ID: 11240832).

Key ethical considerations included the following:

- All participants were provided with a detailed research information document prior to interview to ensure they were fully informed of study aims and what participation would entail. All were asked to give their written consent to confirm they had read and agreed to these terms.
- Participation was on a voluntary basis, and participants could choose to stop an interview at any time or to withdraw in advance of report completion, without having to give a reason.
- For the purposes of analysis only, participants were asked if they consented to audio recording on a Dictaphone. Audio files were transcribed by Devon Transcription (in accordance with their [data protection policy](#)) and then deleted.
- Participants will be anonymised as far as is feasible, with no personally identifiable information given. In advance of interview, interviewees were informed that the researcher would do all that is possible to anonymise their participation, but that it could be possible for people familiar with their experiences to recognise them, dependent upon what they chose to share within the interview.
- Data were stored on a secure site, hosted by the University of Exeter, for which Dr Auster is the site administrator.
- All participants were informed as to who was funding the study, but that the researcher is undertaking the study operationally as an independent researcher.
- All participants were offered the opportunity to have the final report document shared with them on project completion; all participants opted in to receive this document. They were made aware that the report would become publicly available, and that it is the researcher's intention to develop a subsequent academic paper from the findings.

6. Interview Cases

Resulting from the 30 invitations distributed in the River Otter catchment, 11 individuals volunteered to participate in ten interviews. This section summarises each interview case, including: the beaver activity experienced; the participants' response; and the management response received. An illustrative quote is provided from each participant to capture their perspective in their own words; further details of participant experiences and viewpoints are discussed in the [Summary of Findings \(section 7\)](#).

Case 1 (7th January 2026)

The interviewee is the property owner, lives alone, and is a widow. At the property, two brooks converge in a corner of the garden before running through the garden itself. Behind the confluence is a public road.

Beavers were reported to have been present since 2021, following the ROBT's conclusion. Since their arrival, the beavers have repeatedly attempted to build a dam at the confluence, as well as lower down the brook. This has included use of materials from the resident's burn-pile and garden plants. They have gnawed on and felled garden plants, including two apple trees, and there is some erosion to the bank where the beavers are entering/exiting the watercourse.

The individual is concerned about beavers flooding the road, feeling there to be a pressure to prevent that from happening and attempting to remove new material most days from the attempted dam. The interviewee was also frustrated by the other beaver impacts throughout her garden.

The resident contacted Devon Wildlife Trust, resulting in management actions being undertaken to try and deter beavers from damming in the garden, including installation of hanging containers across the location (Figure 3). Whilst receiving support from the Field Officer, the resident would rather not have to live with beavers nor continue to undertake repeated management actions which she finds physically challenging.

“For me, it's causing an immense amount of physical difficulty and stress and just hardship generally and it happens very regularly. [...] I'm just so distressed by the whole situation.” (Participant 1)



Figure 3: Containers hung at the confluence of two brooks in an attempt to deter beavers from damming and flooding a road behind. (Photo: Roger Auster)

Case 2 (12th January 2026)

The interviewee is an employee of a large estate. They reported that, during the ROBT, the estate was keen to ensure there was someone in-house who could be ready to help deal with potential issues arising from beaver activities, so the individual engaged with activities to learn. Now, they have a role to respond to beaver activities where they occur across the estate, in addition to their ordinary forestry job role.

When beaver activity occurs on the estate land and the interviewee is called, they respond. Calls are usually from tenant farmers, or staff within farming or forestry teams. The individual has licences to be able to undertake practical management interventions where possible but will seek advice from other contacts when unsure how to progress. When issues are reported that have occurred off estate land, the individual signposts towards the Devon Wildlife Trust team.

The participant has much experience now of managing beaver activity, having been called to scenarios involving dam notching or removal, flow device installation, or tree protection, among others. To the interviewee, the presence of beavers was now accepted and, whilst highlighting a need for management support where issues arise, the management of beaver activity was for them seen as part of day-to-day activity.

“Now, it seems to be they’re accepted and people are much more just used to them.” (Participant 2)

Case 3 (12th January 2026)

This interview was with two individuals, an elderly mother and adult son. They are residents and property-owners. The River Tale runs through their garden, which includes an orchard. This interview was a repeat interview with individuals who had participated in the prior interview study, with that interview taking place on 27th November 2018.

The prior interview occurred during the ROBT. At that time, the beavers had felled a Bramley apple tree and sentimental wisteria, and the residents had concerns about possible negative impacts of beaver, including whether they may have a negative effect on flood risk to their property. Devon Wildlife Trust's Field Officer had visited and protected the remaining orchard trees with wire mesh.

Since, the beavers have remained active, however the residents now had a favourable view of the beavers. The wire mesh installed in the orchard remained (Figure 4), although they require occasional maintenance in response to surrounding plant growth. Beavers regularly move through the garden, use the pond, and have had some impact on riparian willow trees.

The residents were no longer concerned about beaver impacts. Few impacts were reported to have occurred since, besides from one further apple tree having been felled, and they had not experienced flooding of their property since the beavers' arrival. The residents had had less involvement with Devon Wildlife Trust staff since the ROBT, but occasionally call the Field Officer if there is an update.

"We were against it to start with. [...] But as it turns out, we're quite happy to have them, aren't we? [...] People that we knew weren't very happy with having the beavers coming up and down the river because they were nicking the maize out of the field. [...] And of course, when you listen to all these things, and that's what made us group together and go and say that we didn't want the beavers to be here. But nobody ever mentions it no more, do they?" (Participant 3.1)

"Everybody's sort of accepted that they're here and I think they're just getting on with their own thing." (Participant 3.2)



Figure 4: Tree protection installed in the orchard owned by Participants 3.1 and 3.2 during the ROBT in 2018, which has continued to protect the apple trees at least until the subsequent interview in 2026. (Photo: Roger Auster)

Case 4 (13th January 2026)

The interviewee is a small landowner and widow, who moved to the area eleven years previously with her husband. The interviewee loves the house and gardens and especially values the property's aesthetics. A river flows through the property, feeding two lakes (perched ponds) in the garden, as well as other smaller watercourses. There are mature trees, the upper lake has a wooden boathouse, and the interviewee lets out the property in summer months for holidaymakers to enjoy the gardens.

The beavers have been present for two and a half years. They were first noticed by the gardener who recognised beaver-chewed sticks. Since, the beavers have established a lodge in the perched ponds and are eroding the pond-banks where they enter and exit the water. The beavers have also felled trees, including an occasion in which six were reported to have been felled in one night, and they have gnawed on plants and fencing throughout the property.

The interviewee and Devon Wildlife Trust Field Officer have undertaken a range of management activities on site, including dam removal from the watercourses and tree protection using wire mesh, also applied to the boathouse. The interviewee has used exclusionary fencing to remove beavers from the upper perch pond and installed a new diversionary pond lower down the site, all at their own expense. Both the beaver activity and the fencing for management are regarded as factors that negatively affect the character and aesthetic of the gardens. The interviewee has found beaver presence to be very challenging, stressful, and emotive.

“I just don’t want to live like this. [...] It’s just a constant battle, just constant, but it’s always firefighting. [...] The gardens are basically what made me buy the place, well we did, and so they are my passion really more than the house and the property as a whole. [...] I want the beavers removed. I want these beavers removed.” (Participant 4)

Case 5 (14th January 2026)

The interviewee runs a sawmill which has been in the family since 1980. In 2022, the interviewee bought an adjacent 43-acre area of woodland that had been planted by their neighbour approximately 25 years previously, from which there is commercial timber value. The woodland contains two ponds.

Very soon after purchase, beaver activity was noticed within the plantation as beavers started to fell trees (Figure 5). When first discovered, the interviewee reported an initial sense of shock at the impact on the trees. The participant contacted Devon Wildlife Trust, with the Field Officer having been regularly in contact since.

The interviewee has since given space for beavers within the woodland, who have taken up residence in the ponds. Trees which the interviewee wishes to protect have been protected with wire mesh, and others intentionally left for beavers to use. Some of the wire meshing was implemented following a successful grant application, for which the Field Officer provided some support. Diversionary feeding material is occasionally left near the ponds, and some trees have been planted to provide beaver forage. To prevent erosion where beavers are entering/exiting the ponds the participant has installed wooden ramps, and they have obtained a class licence to enable further mitigative action to be taken.

“My view on it has changed a little bit. And I’m trying to give them a bit more space and a bit more time, rather than just go ‘No’ because they’ve damaged it. [...] I guess you’ve just got to let it progress and see where it goes, isn’t it, really?”
(Participant 5)



Figure 5: Trees felled in Participant 4's plantation woodland. (Photo: Roger Auster)

Case 6 (21st January 2026)

The interviewee is a resident in a town within the River Otter catchment. The interviewee described their back garden as being akin to a mini nature reserve, which includes a stream that is shared with their neighbours. The stream runs through a culvert which has previously been blocked (from debris unrelated to beaver activity) and contributed towards flooding in the town.

In 2025, the interviewee noticed that there were some marks on garden plants, that the interviewee recognised as beaver activity having seen it further down the river. The beaver then started to fell garden shrubs and build a dam within the stream.

The participant was excited by the presence of a beaver in the garden and enjoyed observing their activities. They had concerns about whether larger trees may be felled and cause damage for themselves or their neighbours so, having contacted Devon Wildlife Trust, the Field Officer protected the trees of concern with wire mesh. The respondent said there had been concerns at the Environment Agency about potential interactions between beaver damming activity and the culvert, resulting in dam management efforts. The beaver did not establish a permanent territory and has since moved on.

“It’s all very exciting, and to be honest, we loved it. We were so privileged to have had another wild animal feel that he could use what we class as our nature reserve in our back garden.” (Participant 6)

Case 7 (23rd January 2026)

The interview was with a landowner whose property includes a stream that runs into a river on the landowner's property. They have experience of beaver presence on their land since 2018. This interview was a repeat interview with an individual who had participated in the prior interview study, with that interview taking place on 10th October 2018.

The earlier interview took place following a dam being noticed approximately two months previously. At the time, the landowner was relaxed about the presence of beavers as they were on land intended to be set aside for nature, but their neighbours nearby had concerns about the impact of the dam on their property. The dam was removed a few times, working with the Devon Wildlife Trust Field Officer. The interviewee reported they were happy to manage this dam as they enjoyed having the beavers present.

Since, the beavers have remained in the territory. Whilst there had been what was reported to have been a substantial dam, now there is less damming activity and so less intervention is reported to be required. This is with exception of beaver attempts to dam a fish ladder, which the landowner has been continuing to clear (with the appropriate licence). The landowner had taken action to protect some trees using wire mesh.

The interviewee observed changes to the watercourse which they viewed as a positive, including water now flowing across an area which they were comfortable for beavers to use. They had also planted willow to provide beaver forage, which has been used. There is now less involvement by the Devon Wildlife Trust team as the interviewee reports there to be less need, but they stay in contact.

“[Beavers] continue to be here, now being whatever it is - eight, nine years, I suppose, since they first turned up - and they continue to exist down there. You can see how active they are [...] They continue not to do any harm as far as I'm concerned.” (Participant 7)

Case 8 (5th February 2026)

The interviewee is a property-owner, with their land including approximately 20 acres which had originally been a managed water meadow but had been “left to its own devices” for the 25 years in which they have been resident. During the ROBT, they had been approached by Devon Wildlife Trust as a release location for a pair of beavers, to which they agreed.

Over time since the beaver release on the interviewee's land, the release site has continued to develop as a result of beaver activity. There has been a large increase in wetland habitat resulting from beaver damming activity, with several ponded areas and areas that are perpetually wet. The interviewee reported observing an increase in biodiversity at the site.

Liaison with Devon Wildlife Trust has continued, with management activities having included tree protection with wire mesh, and the installation of a new walkway across a

wetted area of the site. The participant reported they were initially excited at the time of beaver release and continue to be so.

“[I] continue to be excited. And yeah, just watching the evolving situation over there and how it's never a finished thing, there's changes constantly year on year. And it's just fascinating.” (Participant 8)

Case 9 (7th February 2026)

The interviewee was a small landowner. Within an area of wood pasture on their property, which is managed for conservation, there is a small lake next to which there is a wooden cabin used as a retreat space to be in nature.

Approximately two years previously, beavers arrived and were first noticed as the water level of the lake had started to rise. This was the consequence of damming activity in a stream at the pond's outflow. Having contacted Devon Wildlife Trust, a flow device was installed to prevent the increased water level from flooding the cabin. Access to the cabin is now more difficult as it is wet, and there was some concern about tree felling, leading to the use of wire mesh tree protection for the trees of concern. The interviewee has completed the class licence training to be able to continue managing beaver impacts on their land.

“I'd say we've kind of got some mixed feelings about this really, because we were actually quite excited to have beavers here [...] It's quite a nice thing to have. We are, generally, positive about trying to have some conservation impact. But, on the other hand, it does create a lot of work to clear up the fallen trees and so on.” (Participant 9)

Case 10 (24th February 2026)

The interviewee is a resident in the catchment. They moved to the area three years previously, subsequent to the ROBT and without knowledge that it had taken place. Their garden includes a stream over which they have built a small footbridge, and it flows out under a road bridge. The stream was reported to be approximately six-foot wide.

In May 2025, the interviewee noticed a tree had fallen into their stream. Having removed it, they returned from work next day to find it in the stream again. It is at this point they did online research and discovered beavers were present in the area, which was confirmed with a trail camera. There was then damming activity, which the interviewee reported had resulted in the stream now being twelve-foot wide. Damming had taken place at the footbridge which he had cleared, and at the road-bridge.

Following outreach to Devon Wildlife Trust, the Field Officer implemented exclusionary fencing to keep them out of the garden and protect trees. The interviewee has established a WhatsApp group with their neighbours to provide updates on the beaver activity and supported their neighbours to proactively protect their trees with wire mesh. Damming attempts have since stopped and it is thought the beavers have moved upstream,

although the interviewee's cameras show that that beavers continue to travel through the garden for forage. The interviewee enjoys having beavers present in their garden and observing their activities.

"I love it. I'm fascinated with it all. One day, one evening, my dog, I let him out in the garden [...] and he was barking. I knew full well what he was barking at. So I went out there with my phone. It's the first time I'd see the beaver face to face. [...] And I was fascinated. I was well over the moon." (Participant 10)

7. Summary of Findings

This section will describe the results following analysis of the new interview transcripts. A description of each theme in the evolved framework ([Appendix 2](#)) will be presented, summarising the core findings as relates to the engagement of people who experience beaver impacts.

This includes:

- Four themes with features that can be practically applied by practitioners (Preparation and Reactivity; Appropriate Communication; Shared Decision-Making; Ongoing Support and Monitoring);
- Two underlying themes which influence individual expectations of the management response received (Emotion; Learning to Live with Beavers);
- Three further underlying themes which influence the management response that wildlife managers can undertake (Unfamiliarity with the Governance of Beaver Management; Wider Knowledge-Sharing; Restrictions or Limitations).

Primary codes within each theme will be represented in bold, capitalised text, and subsidiary codes will be represented in bold lower case. Each is then supported with the real words of interviewed participants.

The term 'Field Officer' is used when describing case-specific details (eg in quotations), as this was a specific job role, but the term 'Wildlife Manager' is used when discussing the findings.

7.1. Themes with Practical Application

7.1.1. Preparation and Reactivity

A strong point which was resonant across most interviews was the need to have **READILY AVAILABLE SUPPORT**, with a **clear contact point**. The availability of a wildlife manager that was easily contactable and able to manage human-beaver interactions was seen as a positive feature in the River Otter catchment. In future, following the dispersal of beavers into other catchments, one participant suggested the contact points should perhaps be centralised.

"And in fact, finding that there was an actual beaver liaison officer was an amazing feat. We were very grateful that there was someone who was actually dedicated to working in this way." (Participant 6)

"I think landowners would be a lot more comfortable if it was centralised and they had a phone number to ring and a beaver officer would come out and would help them and give them advice." (Participant 2)

PREPAREDNESS for beaver activities was seen as an important component of this support, to ensure people are prepared for the future presence of beavers, and in some cases to undertake management actions that prevent issues from arising in the first instance. Similarly to the prior interview study, this includes the need for **proactive engagement** with people living in river catchments and supporting them to undertake (or as managers to undertake) **preventative mitigative actions**, such as the protection of trees of social value or, in some cases, preventing beaver territory establishment where they would not be tolerated. Preventative intervention may require a greater level of **initial support** whilst beaver activities are new to people, compared to later when such actions may be more familiar.

“If people are near water, I think it’s a good idea to give them a heads-up as to how to prevent beavers going into their garden. A lot of people are proud of their gardens and if bushes and trees or laurel going missing, then, yeah. I think that’s the little knowledge that I have, I passed that on to my neighbours just to protect what they have in their gardens.” (Participant 10)

“I think the only lesson that to learn from it all was it needed that real sort of handholding in the early days, and that has definitely paid dividends.” (Participant 7)

“You have just got to get yourself prepared, haven’t you. It’s like us now, we’ve just found out they’ve found the second pond, we know what’s going to be going on. They’re going to start chopping trees, so we need to get some wire around some stuff soon to try and keep the trees that we want to keep.” (Participant 5)

Akin to the prior interview study, interviewees highlighted that a **REACTIVE RESPONSE** would be received more favourably when activities that were not proactively prevented than a response with delay. It was highlighted that **beaver activity develops quickly**, so there would need to be **rapidity in response** when an issue arises, to prevent issues escalating at pace and thereby facilitating a greater likelihood of resolving tensions.

“[Beavers] can be just incredibly destructive. But not just destructive. They are so destructive, in one evening they can take down... I think they took down six 30ft trees. I’m not very good on estimating the measurements but they took those down on one evening and the sheer power of the creatures is huge.” (Participant 4)

“Fair play to them. Devon Wildlife Trust got in touch pretty quick, [...] there’s no hanging around with [Devon Wildlife Trust worker]. I was surprised how quick her response was and how quick she came out.” (Participant 10)

“So, on a Sunday morning, somebody’s given this guy my number and he’s ringing me, and he’s really irate. Because suddenly, his whole paddock is under water. So, I went to see him, and it was actually a really easy fix. I had to go in the water, but unblocking that culvert, and then... So, suddenly, he’s really happy, within two hours, because his field drained away, he was happy.” (Participant 2)

7.1.2. Appropriate Communication

Where beaver management was required, a wildlife manager that demonstrated a **WILLINGNESS TO HELP** in their approach was received favourably. As was also the case in the prior interview study, a key part of relationship building in the management response was highlighted to be **EMPHATHY AND A SYMPATHETIC APPROACH** towards addressing issues that may arise, **taking concerns seriously** and with **friendliness** in attitude, whereas approaches which felt dismissive risk discontent.

“[Devon Wildlife Trust] have tried to be very good. [Field Officer] appreciates my position and she wants to help.” (Participant 1)

“We found it fantastic, to be honest, we really did. We were so thrilled that someone not only took it seriously, but came out and started the investigation thoroughly.” (Participant 6)

“I cannot honestly say enough good things about [Field Officer] really. For me, they’ve been very helpful. [Devon Wildlife Trust are] there and they’re going to try and help you as much as they possibly can. [...] You’ve got to try and sometimes take a bit of a step back and think, actually, they’re not just leaving everybody in the lurch.” (Participant 5)

“All kinds of agencies came. And I said, “Please will you take them away?” I found Natural England to be dismissive really of the case altogether [...] I don’t think he was here even long enough to even take it on board, or I didn’t really feel listened to or anything really.” (Participant 4)

A response which is **non-fanatical** in nature, is pragmatic, and listens to the concerns of affected people is likely to support the building of trust with people who are finding their experience of beavers challenging, thereby facilitating more constructive dialogue between wildlife managers and those affected.

“I have this conviction that people who are charged with looking after the environment tend to be fanatical. The guy who was ringing me up, he was absolutely aghast at the thought of putting any non-natural material along the banks. ‘Oh because you are going to disturb a meter of local wildlife in the local habitat, you are going to spoil the habitat’. But it is actually eroding my bank, of course. It’s damaging the property.” (Participant 1)

Expectation Management was a key feature of the prior interview study. This received less attention in the new interviews, however it remained important where it arose. Here, **information provision** and use of imagery within online material was reported to have influenced an expectation of management action that could be taken which, when it did not take place, contributed to discontent.

“So me and my partner said, ‘Well you can ring the beaver wildlife thing, they’ll come and take them away’. There definitely was, or is, a picture of the person on a website with a cat carrier. And I thought that was deceptive because it gives you the impression that they will come and take them away, but actually what you find is that they just come, they want to set up cameras and see it as a complete study.” (Participant 4)

7.1.3. Shared Decision-Making

The prior interview study highlighted that proactive or rapidly reactive engagement that is inclusive of appropriate communication could support trust-building. With trust, it is then more likely for people and wildlife managers to be able to undertake shared decision-making that addresses common and different objectives. This featured once again with importance, having carried through into the new interviews as a prominent theme. It was clear that **EMPOWERMENT IN DECISION-MAKING** was key for people living with beavers, requiring an **opportunity to input** into the discussions of potential management interventions. **RECOGNISING AND ADDRESSING DIFFERENT OBJECTIVES** between wildlife managers and the people living with beavers was key to finding socially acceptable solutions within the context; there was **RECOGNITION OF CONTEXTUAL VARIATION** between locations, and the different needs people may have.

“It was quite exciting at the time because it was interesting to find out about the beavers and stuff, but we were concerned about the water level. So, we had this chat to her, she said, “Yeah, alright, I can see you’ve got a... It could cause a bit of damage.” So, we talked about the options, and then we went for this flow device thing.” (Participant 9)

“It all depends on the situation, doesn’t it, and everybody’s situation is different.” (Participant 5)

“So yeah, I mean, personally, I think living with beavers is fairly easy and trouble free. I’m sure if you asked a farmer you’d get a very different answer.” (Participant 8)

“I mean, it’s different if it was a farmer and we had a maize field and they were throwing all that in the river, and float down. That’s different, isn’t it? But from us, they have a few apples.” (Participant 3.1)

The need to empower in shared-decision making was emphasised where an individual had felt the opposite. Feelings of **disempowerment influenced outlook** by contributing to frustration and a consequent lack of willingness to live alongside beavers at all.

“I want the beavers removed. I want these beavers removed. [...] You just feel out on your own against a massive... against the government basically because Natural England is the government. You feel that you are this tiny little blip that’s kind of trying to make a case to say, ‘Look, come on, I’ve done my thing now’. I have followed their process, I have made this pond, I’ve followed everything they want me to do and they still won’t take them, and I don’t believe that there’s nowhere they can take them to.” (Participant 4)

7.1.4. Ongoing Support and Monitoring

A resonant new feature of these interviews was the demonstration that management interventions would often not be a singular event but would require ongoing effort. This was predominantly due to **ONGOING OR CONSTANT BEAVER ACTIVITY**, in which participants could not easily anticipate subsequent events due to the **unpredictability of beaver activity**. The **ongoing activity** of beavers was highlighted as a feature that

requires continued monitoring and input, although there was highlighted to be **seasonal variation** whereby there may be more activity (or at least more visible activity) outside of the summer months

“[Beavers] seem to have their own little plan, don’t they, of what they want to achieve. But unfortunately, we don’t really know what’s going on, really, do we?” (Participant 5)

“It’s kind of a painting the Forth Bridge thing - while we might have busy times at work or go away on holiday and stuff, they don’t.” (Participant 9)

“They attack the sides of the lake constantly. My lakes are perch ponds. [...] So it’s just a constant battle, just constant, but it’s always firefighting, I’m always protecting things after they’ve had a go at it. [...] It’s a daily job, I just don’t want to live this this.” (Participant 4)

“Beavers, they’re really dynamic. So they’re there, and then suddenly, they’re not there for a bit. And they may well come back. [...] I think people want an answer that will mean that you don’t have to then manage the beavers ever again, and it just doesn’t work like that. [...] If you’ve got beavers locally, there will always be some issues that crop up, and it’s just being aware if that’s the case, and suddenly, you accept it. And everything that they’re providing is outweighing my time in doing it. Personally, I quite enjoy doing it.” (Participant 2)

“In the summer months you can barely tell they’re there. [...] But when you get to around about October time that’s when you start seeing quite hefty trees being chopped down, and sometimes quite a lot of stuff happens in quite a short space of time. I think it goes on through the winter, [...] till springtime, and then it seems to fizzle out again.” (Participant 5)

Thus, there was a perceived necessity for **FOLLOW THROUGH** in beaver management beyond initial outreach. Ongoing monitoring of a situation, including the maintenance of management interventions (such as tree protection and implementation of further interventions where necessary), was observed to provide people with greater confidence in decision-making and willingness to live alongside beavers.

“[Field Officer] has been fantastic as well. They all have, really. I know it stems a lot from them, but at least they’re following through on their help.” (Participant 5)

“Occasionally, I go and tie up the chicken wire again.” (Participant 7)

“[Recommend] putting it in the diary, giving them a ring every four months or something like that, say, is there anything we can do?” (Participant 7)

In this catchment, there was local memory of the beaver reintroduction context and so **comparison to the River Otter Beaver Trial** was made. Participants had observed (or been party to) greater levels of investment in hands-on support being provided for mitigation measures during the Trial, than had been the case in the post-Trial period. There was nonetheless satisfaction where there had been ongoing efforts by wildlife managers to keep in contact.

"I'll phone [Field Officer] up, she sorts it out. But in the beginning, it was a bit more hands-on, wasn't it? You saw them quite a lot." - "Yeah. Like I said, as soon as the five years was up, we shan't see anybody. And we didn't, did we?" – "No." – "For quite a while. Until they were having apples again, I suppose, and we got in touch." (Exchange between Participants 3.1 and 3.2)

"Through the five-year trial we were constantly in contact with them and frequent site visits. [...] And since the project has finished, we've continued to have engagement from them and others [...] So there's been continuing contact there and interest." (Participant 8)

"[Tree protection is] just as they've done it. But the only trouble is, it could do with being refreshed a little bit because the grass grows up in it. [...] So it wouldn't hurt, now and again, every couple of years for somebody to take it down and just clean it a bit." (Participant 3.1)

7.2. Themes that Influence the Expectation of Management Response

7.2.1. Emotion

It was clear in the interviews that beavers and their activities could be emotive for those experiencing or living alongside them. The emotions that were being experienced were one factor that could influence the individuals' willingness to tolerate particular management interventions or their willingness to live with beavers.

For some, **POSITIVE** emotions were experienced. Sentiments expressed included 'excitement', 'fascination', 'happiness', 'pride', and a sense of 'privilege'. These emotions were strongest where participants emphasised their **enjoyment in nature**, with the presence of beavers and opportunities to observe them contributing towards these positive emotions. Where positive emotions were evident, participants appeared to take greater **satisfaction in management** where this was required, or exhibited a greater willingness to live with beavers.

"I think it just made our house and garden feel very special for us. [...] "we have all sorts of things go on in our back garden that we absolutely love. So, we were very happy to have him, even though it cost us money and a lot of effort and ways of dealing with what was an issue, essentially, more for the waterways, really. We didn't mind him being there" (Participant 6)" (Participant 6)

"I like it. I'm fascinated with it all. So I'm fine with it." (Participant 10)

I think people are actually quite proud of it in [town area], I think people like that they're here [...] I think that people like it, supported what the government decided, and I think that, as a result, they will be supportive of that approach we followed elsewhere." (Participant 7)

“We were approached by Devon Wildlife [Trust] at the start of the beaver trial to see if we were prepared to be a site for a managed release and all the studies that went along with that. I mean, we’ve always been very interested in environmental issues and ecology and that sort of thing, so we were very enthusiastic about the project.” (Participant 8)

Others meanwhile experience **NEGATIVE** emotions. Sentiments expressed included ‘stress’, ‘worry’, ‘distress’, ‘cross’, and ‘pressured’. These emotions were observed to interact with wider experiences of the participant, such as where features of sentimental importance pertaining to an individuals’ life experience had been impacted by beavers, resulting in a **sense of loss or change**. The arrival of active beavers was sometimes reported to bring a **sense of imposition** upon their property or livelihood; in one case the imposition was cited to be a consequence of the reintroduction process. There could be a **frustration of a need to manage** their activities when they may not have needed to do so previously, or where this need is ongoing. Negative emotions and experiences could result in **resistance to living with beavers**.

“I’m just so distressed by the whole situation, I’d be happy to see them culled. I know that sounds atrocious. But I’ve been brought to that feeling.” (Participant 1)

“I mean, it’s adorable. Till you have to get down in the stream and drag out two logs which are really big thick logs. That’s just the toll on me personally, because unfortunately it led to these rather regrettably opinions.” (Participant 1)

“And to the naked eye, people say, ‘Oh the place is still very beautiful’. It’s not on a day like this but... But they can’t see all the plants I’ve lost, all the trees that have gone. It’s a very mature place. [...] This place is about maturity and it’s about mature trees and trees that have been here hundreds of years and now I think it looks very bare.” (Participant 4)

“I feel like a guinea pig. [...] I want them to be able to learn about them, but I don’t want to be that guinea pig. But I am that guinea pig because they are here on the lake.” (Participant 4)

“I feel cross at myself for not kind of dealing with the frustration better, but it’s just underlying there all the time. I can’t wait for these things to go, or be put into an area where we can live with them.” (Participant 4)

7.2.2. Learning to Live with Beavers

In the prior interviews, two underlying themes were identified to have influence on individual expectations of management responses: A Need for Certainty; and a Sense that Humans are Responsible for Conflicts with a Reintroduced Species. Within the new 2026 interviews, these were features that were present yet had evolved as the context had developed from one of an active reintroduction project with associated infrastructure, into the period of Transition. Each has adapted in response to this change in context, and so in reflection of this, they have been unified as sub-themes under the revised header of Learning to Live with Beavers.

The ROBT had commenced eleven years previously, with beavers thought to have been present in the catchment now for approximately eighteen years. Commonly within the interviews, there was an awareness of beavers being present within the catchment following the Trial - with one exception of Participant 10 who had moved to Devon in the years since without this prior knowledge – and suggestion that on a regional level at least, there was an acceptance of beavers in the landscape.

At the beginning [...] there was lots of scaremongering and things like that [...] And we're over that. People know beavers, generally, locally. I think it's good to see the progression from the last [...] eight / nine years, from where we started, to now, beavers have definitely been accepted" (Participant 2)

On the more localised level however, at the focal sites of human-beaver interaction as discussed within this report, the perspectives of interviewees to the presence of beavers noticeably varied dependent upon whether they had lived with beavers for some time, or whether their activities were more recent. For interviewees with experience of beavers since the ROBT, there appeared to be greater **NORMALISATION OF BEAVERS**.

Participant 7 had been previously interviewed in 2018 when beavers were new arrivals. Whilst favourable, they had discussed beavers as a new concept at that time and had been trialling management actions that were new to them with the support of a wildlife manager. In their new interview, the participant remained favourable toward beaver presence. They had few concerns requiring management support, with those remaining being familiar actions they undertake as part of their day-to-day.

"I think there is generally much more acceptance. I think that now people have seen or know that they're there and the stuff that [Field Officers] did to respond to their concerns, I think settled their concerns to a large degree. I know that if I had a problem and I needed help that she would respond to that. [...] But no, because they haven't been causing any problems as far as I'm concerned, there has been no need to call upon busy people's time. [...] I think the only lesson that to learn from it all was it needed that real sort of handholding in the early days, and that has definitely paid dividends." (Participant 7)

Similarly, participants 3.1 and 3.2 reported no longer needing the same investment of management support. At the time of their prior interview in 2018, they were unfavourable to beaver presence due to what they had heard locally and impacts they had experienced, requiring on the ground management intervention by a wildlife manager. In their new interview, the participants no longer had concerns and – with the implementation of effective management - accepted the beaver presence at their property.

"They're just here and that's it." (Participant 3.2)

In the more recent cases, there remained more of a sense that **BEAVERS ARE A NEW CONCEPT** requiring **familiarisation with the species and management interventions** available. This evidences that beavers remain as something 'new' for people as the beaver population grows and disperses into new territories and new human-wildlife interactions arise, beyond the end of the reintroduction project timeframe. This said, for most there remained an **acceptance of beavers** now being in the area, which exhibited

itself both as a positive in most interviews, but also with a sense of resignation to continued beaver presence for participants that were less favourable.

“Definitely locally, living in the village, people are... The general consensus was people were very pro-beaver, but it’s really nice to see that they’ve just become accepted, and people are used to them. And I’ve seen second-hand, first-hand conversations where people are telling other people who’ve come to the village about their beavers. It’s a bit of a sense of pride in a way. [...] Now, it seems to be they’re accepted and people are much more just used to them.” (Participant 2)

“I understand that the beaver... I think the beavers are here to stay in this part of the world.” (Participant 1)

In the previous interviews, although it had not been a unanimous view, there was a perception among some that beaver conflicts experienced were directly attributable to the ‘people that put them there’. Here, there was a noticeable evolution in this perspective. Most interviewees discussed **BEAVERS AS WILD ANIMALS**, without attributing their activities to any human or organisation. Only Participant 4 specified a statutory agency that they perceived to be directly accountable; in this case their view was linked directly to the UK Government decision to permit beavers to remain permanently. Participant 1 more broadly felt those wishing the reintroduction to be successful should contribute towards management support, whilst Participant 5 noted that Devon Wildlife Trust had followed through with their management support which to their mind was a positive ([section 7.1.4](#)).

“I don’t think they’re pets. [...] I think we just need something very particular, and I don’t know quite what that is. I don’t know whether it be through a local interest group or from the library or something that gives us a sense of ownership of the project, not the beavers.” (Participant 6)

“I think it should come from the people who really want to see the beavers successful.” (Participant 1)

“£10000 is a lot of money, I don’t see why I should have to pay it. It’s the arrogance of Natural England. You [NE] put them here, you should have a contingency fund. [...] In this country our English government has just let them go with absolutely no contingency so their budget is nil.” (Participant 4)

A NEED FOR CERTAINTY remained a feature of the new interviews, but this time there were also examples to support the argument previously made that certainty would be required to reduce worry, or the ‘fear of the unknown’. There were clear examples cited whereby it was shown how **certainty is effective** and reducing concerns and facilitating coexistence, either through the employment of effective management interventions or developing new knowledge from experience of living with the species over time. Participant 7 also referred to knowledge developed from experience, with specification of the ROBT having provided evidence that responded to those uncertainties.

“We were really, really worried about that aspect only, and that’s why we thought we must seek proper advice about what to do. And the tree wrapping did work. It was amazing, so the recommendations made by the officer were absolutely spot

on. Because it allayed our fears then about anything else, and the rest then was kind of like the privilege of him being there.” (Participant 6)

“I protected the trees that I care about, and that's always worked effectively. [...] Yeah, well, that's really the only thing that I do. I protected... We had some nice, mature golden willows down by the riverbank, and one of the first signs of them arriving was that they took one of the smaller ones, luckily, of those down. So, I protected those, it would have been eight years ago, with chicken wire, and so far there have been no problems.” (Participant 7)

“I've noticed that since [Field Officer] put the fencing up either side of the stream, it's stopped them from going in there getting everything. So yes, that has worked.” (Participant 10)

“I would have thought five years was ample, and I would be surprised if anybody would turn around and say there have been many consequences that weren't envisaged within the scope of that report. Certainly, haven't been as far as we're concerned.” (Participant 7)

Nonetheless, there remained uncertainties cited by participants that influenced their perspectives on beavers and thus was reflected upon as an influence on participant level of willingness to live alongside beavers.

“I think the other thing that we're starting to think about as well is what happens next?” (Participant 9)

Focal areas of participant uncertainty were: regarding **beaver activities**; future scenarios for **beaver population growth**; **management actions** that might be possible; and support for **beaver welfare**. Examples of participant questions are summarised in Table 1.

Theme	Summary	Example Quotes
Beaver Activities	Uncertainties about potential future impacts of beavers, particularly where these interact with human interests, can contribute to worry or concern.	“They [beavers] seem to have their own little plan, don't they, of what they want to achieve. But unfortunately, we don't really know what's going on, really, do we?” (Participant 5) “So, our land goes up to the end of this fence. So, we were a bit concerned whether it might spill into the field, but it looks like it probably won't.” (Participant 9) “It does raise all sorts of things in your head because you want to leave them to it, but then you do worry about what's going on as well at the same time.” (Participant 5)

Theme	Summary	Example Quotes
Beaver Population Growth	Uncertainties about how beaver populations may develop, and consequent growth in interactions with human interests, could contribute to concern and influence perspectives on management, or trust in the ability of wildlife managers to address impacts.	“Once you know what to look for, you see them all over the place now. So, what happens when the area gets saturated with them?” (Participant 9) “They have no predators. Of course, they are going to expand and I question whether this was considered adequately during the Trial since it’s clearly a situation which is getting worse [...] So they are expanding. And my assumption is that it’s just going to get worse and worse and worse.” (Participant 1) “I don’t know how well the Wildlife Trust are going to be able to cope when beavers have fully spread around Devon.” (Participant 2)
Management Actions	Uncertainties about whether there is a plan in place, or the degree to which impacts could be managed in future, can influence levels of concern.	“I feel like it’s ended and then it’s just been left to people like the Devon Wildlife Trust to just try and sort everything out, which I suppose, again, is where it is. But I’m not quite sure. I think they’ve just been now released and left to go wild. I don’t know if there is a plan. There probably may very well be. But I think some more funding should be in place for some stuff.” (Participant 5) “We are taking it that there’s four here and [Field Officer] said there could be up to ten with a place this big and so obviously the impact going forward from what ten will do to my property instead of four is huge and impactful and daunting and just the frustration that comes with that that we can’t stop them taking over.” (Participant 4)
Beaver Welfare	Uncertainty about where beavers may establish territories and whether they would consequently be treated in a manner that puts	“We weren’t worried about him moving further upstream, because the officer had told us that some farmers were happy, and they had been working with

Theme	Summary	Example Quotes
	their welfare at risk leading to worry about the beavers themselves.	them [...] but she said not all the farmers were happy about having beavers on their land. [...] So, I was a little bit worried about where he was going to go, but that was totally out of our control. Our best hope always was to think he'd make it back to the main river, where we know there are several other areas of beaver activity, and therefore they've obviously got their own little spaces that they go to." (Participant 6) "I did contact [Devon Wildlife Trust worker] and I said, 'Look, they've built a dam further upstream to the farmer's land and I know they do lots of game shooting there so my concern was whether they kill the beavers because it's affecting the farmland. And she said they shouldn't do because they know it's illegal to do that. [...] But I just wanted to bring it to her attention that that was my concern because I've just started to bond with... find a love of these beavers and understand them, so I just wanted to make sure" (Participant 10)

Table 1: Examples of participant questions that evidence uncertainties held. (Copyright: Roger Auster)

7.3. Themes that Influence the Delivery of Management in Practice

7.3.1. Unfamiliarity with the Governance of Beaver Management

There was a general sense among participants of **UNFAMILIARITY WITH THE GOVERNANCE OF BEAVER MANAGEMENT**, thereby also requiring some degree of familiarisation. This unfamiliarity was independent of whether beavers were considered by participants as a new concept, as participants for whom beavers were a normalised presence expressed similar sentiment. Few reported familiarity with national policy context or of the role (or in some cases the existence) of their local Beaver Management Group. However, all participants were aware of support available through Devon Wildlife Trust's Field Officer - either from having been contacted, signposting from others, or having found

the Officer's contact details to get in touch. There was awareness of the existence of licensing for some management actions, although primarily resulting from discussions with the Field Officer.

"I don't understand the relationship between [BMGs] and Devon Wildlife Trust."
(Participant 1)

"From my perspective, you've got Natural England there, the licencing work. And from them, it's into catchment areas. But I'm not aware that Natural England or a representative from the Government is then involved from that level on down. As far as I know." (Participant 2)

"We haven't been invited to do anything or know anything about the groups or anything." (Participant 3.1)

"I don't know a huge amount about the beaver governance, but I know obviously there's the Devon Wildlife Trust." (Participant 4)

"Well, I don't know much about it, and I don't feel like there is much. I don't know what is going on." (Participant 5)

"I wasn't aware of any real underlying project work going on, other than the initial beaver project at the River Otter, which we were all very excited about." (Participant 6)

"Well, it's a pretty vague understanding of it all." (Participant 7)

"Vague, I'd say. I wouldn't say I have a detailed knowledge of the situation."
(Participant 8)

"I haven't really, no. I think I vaguely, but not engaged with it." (Participant 9)

"Not really [heard about BMGs], no." (Participant 10)

Participants 2, 4, 7, and 9 had attended at least one Beaver Management Group Forum meeting. The perspective on these meetings was they were useful fora for sharing knowledge and advice, but – echoing findings from a previous BMG study (Auster and others, 2022a, 2023) - they reported feeling that these groups had become less directly relevant to them individually as beaver presence became further normalised (see further findings in [section 7.3.2](#)).

7.3.2. Wider Knowledge-Sharing

In a newly identified theme, there was observed to be an influence of the experience individuals had had with wider knowledge-sharing, with further engagement influencing their viewpoints and experiences. Knowledge-sharing experiences identified included: **ENGAGEMENT WITH BEAVER MANAGEMENT GROUPS** for the few participants who had done so; **LEARNING FROM EXPERTISE** including 'experts', conference fora, or informational resources; drawing on **OBSERVATIONS FROM ELSEWHERE** in other locations where beavers are present; and **PEER-TO-PEER SHARING** of knowledge and ideas.

In [section 7.3.1](#), it was highlighted that most participants were unfamiliar with or had not engaged directly with their local Beaver Management Group fora. Amongst those who had had **ENGAGEMENT WITH A BEAVER MANAGEMENT GROUP** however, the group meetings were cited to have provided an opportunity to share ideas and learn from other people in a similar situation, whether they had had either good or bad experiences. Groups such as these were positively viewed, although there were suggestions that perhaps there could be specialised groups for particular interests, and that participants felt they got less from these fora over time, once beavers became more familiar.

“It’s always useful to get a group of people who have got different interests together, and different points of view. So that’s always been a strength of those meetings, because you don’t want a room full of beaver lovers, and you don’t want a room full of people who don’t like them. So, that’s always been useful, and it’s a good place for science and evidence to come and be presented, and it’s certainly, definitely experience as well..” (Participant 2)

“For me, perhaps I’m not getting much out of them anymore, but actually, there are a lot of people there that are attending who now have beavers on their land. Yes, for them, it’s very useful” (Participant 2)

“I guess it would be quite nice if there was a forum maybe for landowners where the beavers are actually on their land but not necessarily with a farming focus.” (Participant 8)

“I think we felt that it was a slightly long-drawn-out process for what we could really add. If you were an expert and you were involved with them across a huge area, you know, absolutely, you can understand why swapping notes and all the rest of it would be important. But for us, it’s just people with very minor involvement; it was good to go along, and we know that if we have a problem... I think it may have coincided with the time when the rules changed, such that one needed to get a licence to notch dams and all that sort of stuff. So, it was quite useful in terms of knowing what we can and can’t do. But then, as I said, that’s become irrelevant because [beavers] haven’t done it.” (Participant 7)

Beyond BMGs, similar **LEARNING FROM EXPERTISE** was cited to have been beneficial, with participants having attended conference events or used a management handbook (Campbell-Palmer and others, 2016). **OBSERVATIONS FROM ELSEWHERE** where beavers existed was also cited. In a context where people did not have prior lived experience with beavers as a new concept, individuals were drawing on what they had observed or interpreted from elsewhere to develop their own understanding of beavers, what they may do, or perspectives on management approaches and possibilities.

“The Beaver Conference at Exeter Uni, do you remember that? [...] the site visit here was great, because we had [experts] from North America, and they’re doing this stuff all the time, and he just said, ‘Well, I’ll tell you why that’s not working.’ So, he gave a bit of advice, hands-on advice, was brilliant. We took that on board, we then re-did the work with [Field Officers], did three separate inflows, and again it works, but it only works for a certain amount of time.” (Participant 2)

“So I just feel that, strongly, that in Scotland they take them away.” (Participant 4)

“And when we looked at some of our trees, which we have managed professionally, we always get tree surgeons in, there were strange markings, that looked identical to some of the marks down at the River Otter where we walk quite a lot. And people had told us that the beavers had been active on the River Otter. So, I began to suspect there was something going on.” (Participant 6)

This was also true of **PEER-TO-PEER SHARING**, in which viewpoints and experiences were shared with people locally or working with similar sectors (ie sharing between individuals and organisations). In some cases, this had been cited to influence levels of concern having heard about other issues, and in others this was cited as an opportunity to alleviate concerns by demonstrating how impacts had materialised or been managed. Further opportunity was cited to support other people or neighbours to prepare for beaver presence with a willingness to help. In these instances, this was viewed as a chance to contribute towards preventative intervention, and supportive of familiarisation with the species and management actions that could be undertaken.

“Maybe just this friend of mine at [property], he's now got, as I say, multiple beavers on his land. [...] All I know is he occasionally vents his spleen at me because he knows that I am an absolute beaver supporter, whereas he's not because of what they've done. And I just think that people like that, who are quite influential because he's got a big group of friends in and around Devon, those are the sort of people that really need to be cosseted through the process, and maybe that should happen on a more proactive basis rather than just a reactive basis.” (Participant 7)

“One of the neighbours, he came round one day, he had his wellies on actually and we went up the stream and I showed him the dam and he was fascinated with it [...] So my advice is, ‘is your garden pretty?’ I said, ‘I know your garden is beautiful, but if I was you I would be going to get a load of chicken wire or some nice fencing and just wrap any of your small trees that you are growing’. No, they were extremely grateful of that.” (Participant 10)

“It was an engagement, kind of useful for us all, really, and that's why we all met. Because the Forestry Commission wanted to get a better understanding of things and also wanted to see what the Devon Wildlife Trust had to say about a few things as well.” (Participant 5)

“You know, if there was somebody having a real concern about the fact that the beavers had just arrived, I'd be very happy to talk to anybody and just talk them through our experience, or they could come and look and see the visible signs. And most people, unless they go down there with a view to trying to spot beaver-related activity, most people would walk along there, and if they weren't specifically looking for beaver stuff, then they wouldn't know that they had been there eight, nine years. So, I would show somebody that was concerned about it, that and say, “Look, these are the two or three things I've done to manage it and look at the consequences.” So, that offer still stands.” (Participant 7)

“So where we live, you've got my house, then you've got a bungalow, the other side you've got two more properties, so I let them know what the situation is with the beavers just in case they moved further downstream and what to look for. They

actually asked me to set up a WhatsApp group, so I set up a WhatsApp group with my neighbours.” (Participant 10)

7.3.3. Restrictions or Limitations

Whilst readily available management support was cited to be of high importance, there was a recognition that a number of factors may limit the ability to provide that support.

That which resonated most strongly was the availability of **RESOURCE**. Whilst it was recognised that the management responses were effective when there was resource available, when it was not this could contribute to concern of frustration among individuals. This included both **time** resource for available staff, and **financial** resources to support staffing, management interventions, or even as direct financial support availability to support individuals. Often, this intersected with **A NEED FOR CERTAINTY** ([section 7.2.2](#)) for the availability of resource was considered to directly intersect with the growth and dispersal of the beaver population, with worry about whether there would be sufficient resource allocation to support future management needs.

“I’m in a really good position, that I have the luxury to be able to do that through work. I have enough time, and the estate gives me that from my full-time job up [...] I can be flexible and do that. I’m not sure that many other job roles would be that flexible.” (Participant 2)

“There is no funding and there should be funding. There should be funding, backup, for people that are so impacted by them. [...] Devon Wildlife Trust] are so underfunded. Their annual budget is £6,000 and I’ve spent £10,000.” (Participant 4)

“If they know what to do but then they don’t have the funding then that’s not going to help anyone.” (Participant 1)

“I’m not sure it’s a true reflection of what will happen nationally, but I know the DWT, certainly [Field Officer], is very, very busy, and I’m not sure how that multiplies with more beavers without them employing more staff, if they’re going to be the lead on it.” (Participant 2)

“It’s just to make sure that there are sufficient resources to support people, communities that suddenly have beavers arrive on their doorstep and don’t really know what to do, some of the consequential effects that they have. I don’t know what resources Devon Wildlife Trust has got now, but I remember the days when it was [Field Officer] running around like a blue-arsed fly. You know, managing the conflicts. [...] So, I think it’s absolutely they’ve got to make sure the resources are there to help manage the beavers.” (Participant 7)

There was a note from Participant 5 that there was some financial support available for certain actions – in their case, they had successfully applied for Protection and Infrastructure grant BC4 funding from the Rural Payments Agency to protect trees in their plantation woodland. Devon Wildlife Trust’s Field Officer supported them to develop their application and the participant recommended that wildlife management could include similar advice for others, but with recognition that some effort would then be required to access such funding sources.

“There hasn’t been a lot of help financially, but obviously if there has been something and it seems to have been relevant, then they can suggest to you that maybe this might be a good route to plant these trees because there’s a grant available, or if you’ve got some good trees that you want to protect, there’s a grant available, and then help you with that process as well. Not do it for you but just ring them up and get some pointers, especially for somebody like us who has not really been in that farming. [...] So, I managed to apply [for BC4 Funding] for 44 trees, which I’m still in the process now of finishing off. [...] So yes, at least it’s a bit of help for something.” (Participant 5)

“I [asked] about whether other people have applied and stuff like that. And she was like, ‘Well, you put everything in place for people, but they don’t seem to be able to go any further with it themselves. They just don’t want to put their own self out.’ But you’ve got to. You’ve got to put a bit of effort into things.” (Participant 5)

LICENSING REQUIREMENTS were also cited as a potential restriction on management interventions to be undertaken. Primarily, this arose as something that could frame a boundary around the ability to undertake actions, for some interventions require a licence to undertake. Regardless of the licence criteria itself, the access to a Class Licence (or holder) was something required where affected individuals are not already themselves a licence-holder. Access could be provided where there is readily available management support, or individuals could undertake training – which some interviewees had undertaken, with comment that a version of the training tailored to support individuals as well as agencies may be beneficial. However, it was highlighted that where a licence-holder was not immediately available, this could pose a challenge for responding reactively due to the time taken to obtain a licence whereas beaver activities could develop rapidly in the meantime (see [section 7.1.4](#)).

“You have to apply for this, and apply for that, but the beavers are doing things tonight!” (Participant 4)

“I guess the main one I’m aware is in terms of sort of dam management, but now there are rules in place around the removal of dams or the reduction in height of dams and whether that can be done. Also being an approved person to be able to do that, having had to undertake some training to do that. So that’s probably the main one that I’m aware of that would particularly impact us.” (Participant 8)

“The big thing about whether you can do anything is whether you’re supervised by a licence-holder or whether you hold a licence yourself. So whether [BMGs] could give individuals or individual landowners some sort of cover where they can do work, where you can supply somebody that can supervise the works, somebody licensed, or that there is another look at the licensing scheme that says maybe you have a sort of lower-level licence for landowners. Because I think at the moment the two levels of licence are more about how much you can do, as opposed to why you’re doing it.” (Participant 9)

“Obviously right here, because we were at the epicentre of the release, and we’ve now got many territories, so we’re seeing more and more issues. [...] I know many private folk like me have also been licensed, a lot of them have been done down here, so I understand that people themselves can do this. But it’s alright when they’re licensed, but without any experience is difficult.” (Participant 2)

A further limitation that influences the management support delivery is that of the **ACCESSIBILITY OF INTERVENTIONS** for the individuals being engaged with. This is particularly the case in scenarios where the interventions (or ongoing oversight thereof) is unlikely to be delivered by the wildlife managers themselves where other limitations are prohibitive. This includes the **financial accessibility** through associated costs, as some individuals may be better able to absorb management costs than others, and the **physical accessibility** of an intervention, as some simple activities may prove challenging for individuals of older age or with mobility issues.

“I noticed my next-door neighbour’s garden was flooded and I was like oh. And he’s 92. So I contacted his son, lovely couple, and I said, ‘Look, your dad’s place is flooded. Do you want me to go down and see what’s going on?’ He goes, ‘That will be great’. It turns out the beaver dam, I think they’d given up in my part of the stream, gone down a bit further and started building a dam there. So I notified [Field Officer], she came along, she gave the authorisation to remove the dam.”
(Participant 10)

“Sometimes I can just get a long fork and pull something, flick something out. But fall over in the ice and break my leg, this is my current nightmare, yeah, I won’t be able to do anything at all. And it’s only because I’m willing to clear lightweight material on a regular basis that it stops the road flooding.” (Participant 1)

“The only trouble is, [tree protection] could do with being refreshed a little bit because the grass grows up in it. And mother’s like, 86, and it’d be quite difficult for her to maintain around the apple trees.” (Participant 3.1)

8. Reflections on the Prior (2018/19) and New Interview Findings (2026)

Within these findings, the core themes identified from the study undertaken during implementation of the ROBT have remained relevant into the period of post-project Transition, but with observable evolution in the nuances within. In the intervening years between interviews there has also been development of lived experience that resulted in the identification of new features throughout these interviews.

Among the themes pertaining to the practical application of wildlife managers, proactive engagement or fast responses remain vital for **PREPAREDNESS AND REACTIVITY**, but there was greater emphasis on the need for **readily available support** with a clear contact point, and the need for **reactive responses** for experiences demonstrated that beaver activity can develop quickly. **APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION** continues to be a salient feature, with a **willingness to help, empathy and a sympathetic approach** most likely to support relationship-building required to foster **SHARED DECISION-MAKING**. As previously identified and remaining relevant, this will involve **recognising and addressing different objectives** in an approach where people feel there to be **empowerment in decision-making**.

Interviewee experiences have demonstrated the need not just for **readily available support**, but - as a new feature from these interviews – for there to be access to **ONGOING SUPPORT AND MONITORING**, beyond a singular engagement event as beavers are likely to remain active. In some cases, support may need to be ongoing until people have familiarised with beavers and, if necessary, actions that can be undertaken on a day-to-day basis (such as in the case of Participants 7, 3.1 and 3.2 for whom beavers have been present since the ROBT and are now a normalised presence). It will be important to note however that, for some at least, this may be challenged by the underlying **accessibility** of management interventions – ie, whether they are in a physical or financial position to be able to take such responsibilities upon themselves.

Among the underlying themes that influence the individual expectations on a management response, there was a marked evolution from the prior study, with **LEARNING TO LIVE WITH BEAVERS** now appearing to be more salient, above and beyond the notion of **beavers as a new concept**. Whilst still a new concept for those who have experienced beaver activity more recently, there was an observable acceptance that beavers are now present throughout the catchment; for some this was viewed positively while other participants exhibited a sense of resignation to this fact. Nonetheless, there was an observable **normalisation of beavers** and their presence for many of the interviewees, whether across the catchment or in their local setting; two interviews were with individuals who had been interviewed eight years ago, and in both cases the presence of beavers was now an accepted part of their day-to-day. Yet, there remains **a need for certainty** of future scenarios in some instances, particularly regarding the activities of beavers and access to management support as the beaver populations continue to grow.

As an emergent theme, the influence of **EMOTION** on the management process was especially salient. Those experiencing **positive** emotions tended to exhibit a greater willingness to coexist with beavers with satisfaction in management actions undertaken, whereas those experiencing **negative** emotions were more likely to exhibit a frustration at the need to undertake management actions that were not previously required, or even resistance to the idea of living with beavers altogether. It is vital to note that such feelings are not necessarily focused on beavers in isolation but can intersect with a **sense of imposition** or **sense of loss or change** to features that are of economic, intrinsic, or sentimental value to the individual, and may be exacerbated by **A NEED FOR CERTAINTY**. Thus, it must be stressed that those seeking to engage with individuals experiencing beaver impacts should be prepared to encounter such emotion, and potential influence of emotion influencing the decision-making process. This emphasises the need for **APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION** from wildlife managers in an empathetic, emotionally sensitive approach.

Finally, further underlying themes were identified from these new interviews that would have a bearing on the ability to engage and undertake management actions where human-beaver interactions occur. Individuals to be engaged with will respond in a manner according to their knowledge and lived experience. With **UNFAMILIARITY WITH THE GOVERNANCE OF BEAVER MANAGEMENT** likely, particularly as beavers remain a new concept for many, people are likely to draw on other experiences and **WIDER**

KNOWLEDGE-SHARING to infill their understanding of what it means to live with beavers. **Observations of elsewhere** or **peer-to-peer sharing** of experiences will likely influence individual understandings of what may be possible through **SHARED DECISION-MAKING**. The degree to which it will be possible to offer **readily available support** will then depend upon what is possible within the bounds of **RESTRICTIONS OR LIMITATIONS** such as **licensing requirements**, the **accessibility of interventions**, or the availability of **resource** for management support as beaver populations continue to grow and disperse throughout England.

9. Concluding Remarks

The diversity of cases and the varied responses expressed by participants demonstrate and underscore the inherently individual nature of beaver case management. Much is case-specific with different settings and impacts of beaver behaviours, but so too is there a context-specific element of human experience, perspectives, and expectations.

A growing body of research offers valuable insights into how beavers may move through landscapes, where habitats are suitable for beavers, and where beaver damming activity may be possible (see, for example, learning developed from the River Otter catchment in Graham and others, 2020 and 2022). This is essential knowledge to inform approaches toward coexistence with beavers on a larger scale, perhaps even through informing the allocation of resources within areas prioritised from identification through modelling approaches for where potential opportunities could be encouraged or conflicts may arise.

However, this research has exemplified that, when engaging with people living with beavers, insights from larger-scale modelling must be complemented with understanding of individual experiences within place-based contexts; predicted conflicts or opportunities may not align with how individuals experience a scenario, or value the species, landscape, or features within it. It is clear from these results that a range of factors shape an individual's expectations of how they wish to be involved in beaver management responses beyond the practicalities alone, including the influence of emotion and individual understandings of beaver as an animal.

Above all, this research underscores the importance of having readily available and well-prepared wildlife managers, who demonstrate proactivity, responsiveness, empathy, and emotional sensitivity when engaging with, supporting, and sharing decision-making with those people who are living with beavers.

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Glossary

Beaver Management Group: Fora to engage local people and interest-holders in beaver management, seeking to familiarise people with the species and management actions that can be undertaken.

Coexistence: A “dynamic but sustainable state in which humans and [wildlife] co-adapt to living in shared landscapes where human interactions with [wildlife] are governed by effective institutions that ensure long-term [wildlife] population persistence, social legitimacy, and tolerable levels of risk” (Carter & Linnell 2016).

Reintroduction: A specific form of translocation in which there is a release of individuals of a species to an area in which it was historically present but is locally extinct.

Renewed Coexistence: Coexistence with a reintroduced species, which may feel a new presence to people living in the locality in the present day. Renewed Coexistence presents a goal-oriented framing of animal reintroductions, encouraging approaches that foster long-term human-wildlife coexistence (Auster and others 2026).

River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT): A licensed five-year project that took place between 2015 and 2020 (prior to the legal protection of beavers in England), to monitor a small population of beavers in East Devon and gather evidence on their impacts (Brazier and others 2020).

Translocation: The intentional movement of organisms.

Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview Questions

Table copyright: Roger Auster

Topic	Primary Question(s)	Further prompts	Notes
Participant and site background	Please describe the context of your land use?	How does this relate to the watercourse?	Adapted from prior study.
	Please tell me the background about the beaver activities here, and what has happened/is happening.		Adapted from prior study.
Participant experience and views	What are your main thoughts about the presence of beavers here?	How has the presence of beavers made you feel?	Adapted from prior study (including prompt).
	What response have you received from local wildlife managers?	How much have you / have you not been engaged with by local wildlife managers?	Adapted from earlier question which asked 'from the River Otter Beaver Trial'. Kept open as Devon Wildlife Trust are managing beavers locally, but others may have responded, and DWT are not legally required to manage as they were during the ROBT.
	Would you be comfortable to summarise your views on beaver reintroduction and why?		Adapted from prior study.

Topic	Primary Question(s)	Further prompts	Notes
Beaver governance	Please tell me about how you understand the current context or governance around beaver management.		Main question is an alternative to a prior question, which at the time sought views on the ROBT as a structure.
	As the national context surrounding beaver reintroduction has developed (following the ROBT), have there been any observable implications for the context of beavers locally?		This question has been adapted from a 2022 study on BMGs (Auster and others, 2022).
Beaver governance	Please tell me about how you understand the current context or governance around beaver management.		Main question is an alternative to a prior question which sought views on the ROBT as a structure.
	As the national context surrounding beaver reintroduction has developed (following the ROBT), have there been any observable implications for the context of beavers locally?		This question has been adapted from a 2022 study on BMGs (Auster and others, 2022).
Beaver Management Groups	In East Devon there is a local 'Beaver Management Group'. Have you heard of this?	(If yes) Please summarise your understanding of this group. Who have you heard about BMGs from (or in what context)?	New question. If no, summarise as fora for engagement with local people and stakeholders, to familiarise with beavers and provide support for beaver management.

Topic	Primary Question(s)	Further prompts	Notes
	Have you attended a BMG forum, or been engaged with by a BMG?	Please tell me about this (how have you been engaged)?	Have you attended a BMG forum, or been engaged with by a BMG?
	Outside of BMGs, have you been engaged with in any other way, or participated in local activities, in relation to beavers?		New question.
Going forwards	In your view, what is the best way to move forwards from where things are now?	-At this local site. -For your local area. -In the national context.	Going forwards
Final thoughts	Is there anything else that has not yet been mentioned which you would like to share, or that you'd like to comment on regarding beavers or beaver management?	Are there any questions that should have been included but have not been asked?	

Appendix 2: Thematic Framework

Table copyright: Roger Auster

Thematic Category	Theme	Primary Codes	Subsidiary Codes
Practical Application	Preparedness And Reactivity	Readily Available Support	Clear Contact Point
		Preparedness	Proactive Engagement
			Preventative Mitigative Action
			Initial Support
		Reactive Response	Beaver Activity Develops Quickly
			Rapidity In Response
	Appropriate Communication	Willingness To Help	
		Empathy And A Sympathetic Approach	Friendliness
			Taking Concerns Seriously
			Non-Fanatical Communication
		Expectation Management	Information Provision

Thematic Category	Theme	Primary Codes	Subsidiary Codes
	Shared Decision-Making	Empowerment In Decision-Making	Opportunity To Input
			Disempowerment Influenced Outlook
		Recognising And Addressing Different Objectives	
		Recognition of Contextual Variation	
	Ongoing Support And Monitoring	Ongoing Or Constant Beaver Activity	Unpredictability of Beaver Activity
			Ongoing Activity
			Seasonal Variation
		Follow Through	Maintenance of Management Interventions
			Confidence
			Comparison To River Otter Beaver Trial
Underlying: Influence on Expectations of Management	Emotion	Positive	Enjoyment In Nature

Thematic Category	Theme	Primary Codes	Subsidiary Codes
			Satisfaction In Management Outcome
		Negative	Sense of Loss or Change
			Sense of Imposition
			Frustration of Need To Manage
			Resistance To Living With Beavers
	Learning To Live With Beavers	Normalisation of Beavers	
		Beavers Are A New Concept	Wildlife Managers Also Learning
			Familiarisation With The Species and Management Interventions
			Acceptance of Beavers
		A Need for Certainty	Certainty is Effective
			Beaver Population Growth
			Beaver Activities

Thematic Category	Theme	Primary Codes	Subsidiary Codes
			Management Actions
			Beaver Welfare
Underlying: Influence on Delivery of Management in Practice	Unfamiliarity with the Governance of Beaver Management		
	Wider Knowledge-Sharing	Engagement with Beaver	
		Engagement with Beaver Management Groups	
		Learning from Expertise	
		Observations of Elsewhere	
		Peer-to-Peer Sharing	
	Restrictions or Limitations	Resource	Financial
			Time
		Licensing Requirements	Ability to Undertake Actions
			Access to Licenses

Thematic Category	Theme	Primary Codes	Subsidiary Codes
		Accessibility of Interventions	Physical
			Financial

