# Legal challenge targets Shropshire poultry giant over river pollution fears



In a legal challenge currently underway at the High Court in Cardiff, campaigners advocating for clean rivers are contesting a planning permission granted for a large-scale poultry megafarm in Shropshire. Dr Alison Caffyn, representing these clean river campaigners and supported by environmental group River Action, contends that Shropshire Council’s approval of the farm's expansion failed to properly account for the environmental consequences, particularly those associated with manure spreading on agricultural land.

The megafarm in question is designed to house approximately 230,000 chickens at any one time, representing a significant intensification of poultry farming near Shrewsbury. Dr Caffyn’s court documents describe this expansion as part of a "reckless and unsustainable" growth in intensive factory farming throughout the region, which she argues is causing serious environmental harm. “There are now nearly 65 chickens for every person in Shropshire – and the council is allowing even more. We believe huge volumes of chicken muck are leaching into our rivers. They need to call a halt to it,” Dr Caffyn said.

The primary environmental concern raised is the impact of rising numbers of intensive poultry units (IPUs) on the water quality of the rivers Wye and Severn, both of which drain through this region. Chicken manure contains particularly high levels of phosphates, substances that reduce oxygen availability in waterways and harm aquatic plants and fish. These pollutants are compounded by nitrogen in the form of ammonia, contributing further to air and water pollution. The counties of Shropshire, Herefordshire, and Powys collectively host over 50 million chickens at any given time, placing a substantial burden on the local ecosystems.

Dr Caffyn’s legal challenge contrasts responses from neighbouring counties; while Powys and Herefordshire councils have implemented restrictions on the number of IPUs, Shropshire Council approved the megafarm project in May 2023. Charles Watson, chairman of River Action, which is funding the judicial review, criticised the council’s approval process, stating: “Shropshire council is simply rubber-stamping massive chicken factory farms without considering the potentially horrific cumulative environmental impact of stacking these industrial units up against each other. These farms are appearing all over the river’s catchment like a septic rash, with no credible plan to sustainably manage their huge toxic emissions of chicken manure. If we don’t stop them now, it’ll be too late for yet another iconic British river.”

This judicial review follows a recent decision in Norfolk, where local councillors rejected proposals for one of the largest poultry and pig industrial farms in Europe, citing environmental and climate concerns.

Shropshire Council has responded to the legal challenge by confirming that the planning application included four poultry rearing buildings along with the necessary infrastructure. The application was supported by an environmental statement detailing assessments of the proposal’s likely environmental impacts. The council also sought technical advice during the application process from bodies such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, and its own ecology and public protection teams. The council noted that the grounds for the judicial review relate specifically to the assessment and management of manure produced by the poultry operation and how the habitats regulations assessment was conducted.

The ongoing case highlights increased scrutiny over the environmental implications of industrial-scale poultry farming in this part of England, especially regarding potential impacts on water quality and protected natural sites. The outcome of the judicial review will be closely observed by various communities and environmental groups concerned about the future sustainability of farming practices and river ecosystems in the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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