

MINUTES OF THE SOUTH DEVON AONB ESTUARIES STEERING GROUP MEETING

HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE
ON TUESDAY 5th NOVEMBER 2019

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Those present were:

Penny Johns	PJ	Dart Harbour Authority
Kirstie Pritchard	KP	Devon County Council
Phil Goodhead	PG	Salcombe Harbour Authority
Nigel Mortimer	NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Roger English	RE	AONB Manager
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager – minute taker

Apologies for absence were received from:

James Dodd	Dart Harbour Board
Tom Stratton	Duchy of Cornwall
Rob Price	Environment Agency
Hugh Marriage	Salcombe Harbour Authority

2. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING (8th MAY 2019) AND ANY MATTERS ARISING

- 2.01 Action 1 (RC) – Wording has been added to NE responses on terrestrial and marine planning where it goes into the intertidal area.
- 2.02 Action 2 (RC) – No update on whether progress has been made on the feedback process from MCZ consultations run by Defra. Christine Singfield is on a one year career break and Natural England do not currently have a marine officer to represent them at meetings.
- 2.03 Action 3 (RE) and Action 4 – These actions were in reference to the hole in the wall issue on the Dart estuary and finding comparative historical information to investigate whether this is progressing over time. The AONB Manager informed those present the AONB have Environment Agency data from 2006 in their archives. There is also access to historic LiDAR data via the link distributed in the papers for this meeting. As LiDAR data is in GIS format, the AONB Manager would like to know if Dart Harbour can make use of data in this format or if further interpretive work is required.
- The AONB Manager mentioned that Simon Roper from AMBIOS, who may have historical data that could be made available to DHNA, is now based at Lower Sharpham Barton.
- Penny Johns added that DHNA archives have ‘Dart Estuary Environmental Management’ (DEEM) files and may also have some of the work Ray Humphries completed.
- 2.04 Action 5 (NM) – Copies of the DEEM leaflet, compiled with assistance from Stephen Westcott, have been circulated to this Group and also to members of the Dart Estuary Forum.
- 2.05 Action 6 – This action was in relation to monitoring Pacific Oysters discovered near the double steps on the Dart Estuary by taking regular photographs. The AONB Estuaries Officer

asked if he could be taken by boat to photograph the Pacific Oyster population from time to time to survey. Penny Johns suggested going out with either a river officer or Clare Hodge.

Action 1 (NM): AONB Estuaries Officer to let Dart Harbour Authority know when he would like to be taken by boat to survey Pacific Oysters.

2.06 Action 7 (NM) - 'Crabbing with kindness' notices were sent to Dart Harbour Authority who put these up along the embankment. Following an incident, further notices were put up along the embankment advising anglers not to cast if a seal is spotted in the water.

Action 2 (NM): Distribute a copy of the 'crabbing with kindness' notice to Phil Goodhead.

2.07 Action 8 (NM) – This action was in relation to whether a Sharpham BioBlitz took place this year and whether data from their BioBlitz can be shared.

Action 3 (NM): AONB Estuaries Officer to find out when the next Sharpham BioBlitz is due and whether historical records can be made available.

2.08 Action 9 (NM) – To look into possible prevention/mitigation of the breach in the Sharpham saltmarsh retaining wall in advance of the second drone flight.

The AONB Estuaries Officer informed the Group that the second of two drone flights will be surveying for change so can only take place after a sufficient time period has elapsed. Penny Johns requested access to images from the drone flights for Dart Harbour Authority to compare with aerial photography they have dating from 2006/7.

The AONB Manager said that LiDAR data will show heights and allow for an element of analysis of change over time to be done. A number of options, including relatively low cost measures, including leaky dams, were discussed with the Dart Harbour Master on a recent boat trip on the Dart. Although the present advice is that the situation is not progressing, or is progressing slowly, prevention measures could be put in place on key routes, targeted towards the area of most concern, reasonably easily.

2.09 Action 11 (RE) – Formally request RPI increase from South Hams District Council. The AONB Manager clarified that the scope of this was to all funding partners. This will be covered under agenda item 5.

2.10 Action 12 (KP) – The 2018 climate projections for the UK were published in December, a 10-year update on previous predictions. A document comparing new projections with old has been circulated.

2.11 Action 13 (RC) - Circulate link to Natural England Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly email address.

DevonCornwallAndIslesOfScilly@NaturalEngland.org.uk

2.12 Action 14 (RC) - Circulate coastal access documents and liaise with Jane (Natural England) regarding ferry operations on the Yealm and Avon. The AONB Manager informed the Group that the proposals have not been formally released by Natural England.

England Coast Path

The AONB Manager updated the Group on the England Coast Path and the changes required to form a new National Trail all around England's coast. There are two schemes covered on the Dart:

- i. Kingswear. Work concluded 2-3 years ago and proposals have been submitted to the Secretary of State. A decision is awaited from the Government for this scheme.

- ii. Dartmouth to Cremyll Point. Natural England team responsible have been having conversations with stakeholders and landowners and are developing proposals. The timetable has been affected by other priorities for Government such as the withdrawal from the European Union. We understand from the South West Coast Path Association that proposals are expected imminently. Any effect on the Dart and Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuaries would be limited (if any) as their passenger ferry services run year-round and these are fairly close to the mouth of the estuary. Impact would be greater for the Avon, Erme and Yealm.

3. ESTUARY OFFICER'S CURRENT ACTIVITY REPORT AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

3.1 The AONB Estuaries Officer gave a report on activity that has taken place since the spring meeting. A full list was provided within the meeting papers. In discussion:

- i. Climate Emergency

Since the last meeting, all South Devon AONB Councils have declared a Climate Emergency with South Hams District Council also declaring a 'Biodiversity Emergency'.

The AONB Estuaries Officer said behaviours that are beneficial to the estuaries and their conservation and enhancement are promoted and encouraged in a number of ways. There are also four (arguably five) main estuarine communities that are very important for the amount of carbon they sequester from the environment and also the amount of carbon they store long term:

- o Saltmarsh
- o Seagrass meadows
- o Tidal reed beds
- o Tidal mudflats (and seabed)

Whilst the geography of our estuaries would make the expansion of any of these communities very difficult, without the loss of another, it is very important that they are conserved with minimal disturbance that might lead to their rerelease of carbon and that their overall extent is not lost or diminished.

The Erme estuary has a significant new area of saltmarsh formed following a retaining wall breach in January 2007, allowing a former area of grazing to flood tidally.

- ii. At each of the estuary forum meetings, the Environment Agency Emergency incident telephone number is promoted (0800 80 70 60 – 24-hour service) and everyone encouraged to recognise change and report any concerns.
 - o There have been a greater number of reports of scum on the water this year, possibly showing a greater awareness of water quality issues – although red tide events have not received the same attention.
 - o Small issues are regularly reported such as grass cuttings tipped over boundary walls and finding their way into the estuary.
- iii. Pacific oyster project

- A number of volunteers have been attracted to take part, surveying most estuaries. Culling is performed where possible. A report will be compiled in the spring showing
 - a. the population density of Pacific oysters on the estuaries in the South Devon AONB.
 - b. The number of volunteers.
 - c. Efficacy of culling.
- The AONB Estuaries officer advised the Group that there are three active oyster farms currently, on the Yealm, the Avon and the Dart.
- Updates by estuary:
 1. YEALM
The situation is particularly bad on the Yealm. The volunteers will continue to survey this estuary however no more culling will take place due to the density of the problem here.
 2. ERME
The Western side has been surveyed, the Eastern side will be surveyed later in November.
 3. AVON
Locals suggest there are very few on this estuary. Will be surveyed this winter.
 4. SALCOMBE KINGSBRIDGE
Good progress made on surveying to date. North Sands to Salcombe and around Blanksmill. Due to survey around to Frogmore next week. Still seeking permission from the East Portlemouth owners association to be able to survey and cull the oysters on the foreshore in that area.
Action 4 (PG): Approach existing contacts to discover the route to gaining blanket permission to survey and cull on the foreshore.
 5. DART
Struggling to attract volunteers and there are difficulties surveying the sea walls. A further volunteer has just come forward and the Estuaries Officer will go out with them to survey Stoke Gabriel. Together with the Marine Biological Association, two surveys have been completed North of Stoke Gabriel, finding a couple of unusual Pacific oysters opposite Sharpham. There will be a natural limit to the range of the Pacific oyster on the Dart due to the increasing prevalence of freshwater upstream.
- iv. The AONB Estuaries Officer requested everyone promotes the Biosecurity plans produced for each of the estuaries (available on the [website](#)).
Action 5 (all): Send biosecurity plan out electronically, perhaps with the annual mooring agreements.
- v. Seagrass
 - Two new seagrass areas are believed to have been found during Pacific oyster survey work. Within the Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary a large area has been found south-west of Snapes Point, ca. 60m long but difficult to survey depth due to turbid waters disturbed by boat traffic. The

Environment Agency may be able to map the bed more effectively using their drop-down camera next time the area is surveyed. On the western side of the Erme estuary washed up seagrass has been spotted. The Estuaries Officer will go back on a low tide to try to identify the location of the bed.

- The dwarf seagrass meadows within the heart of the Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary are believed to be extending its area. There is a concern that Pacific oysters may displace areas of seagrass here. The Estuaries Officer is currently looking how to get volunteers there safely to remove oysters from the area. Potential options include the possibility of working with Gary Jolliffe ('Till the Coast is Clear') and his small landing craft.

- vi. Marine Conservation Zone outcomes announced. Three new MCZs have been created in South Devon

- Erme estuary
- Avon
- Upper Dart

The Estuaries Officer is still hoping to work with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) etc. to better understand a new restriction requiring 'like for like' mitigation so that the appropriate advice on mitigation can be given going forward.

- vii. Trial seawall habitat enhancement

Funding is available to work with University of Plymouth students to trial habitat enhancements of steel piled seawalls, aiming to attract a richer mix of wildlife there. Mark Cooper had suggested seawall on the Kingswear side of the Dart estuary could be included in the trial. Penny Johns also suggested contacting Dartmouth Marina to arrange a visit with the University.

- viii. BioBlitz 2019 took place at Wembury on 27-28 September. The AONB worked with local children to investigate the health of the freshwater streams there through the presence & absence of sensitive indicator species. The relative number of stonefly nymphs found in one stream indicated very healthy waters.

- ix. Research

- The Estuaries Officer has been assisting a partnership of Universities with some local saltmarsh sediment collections - samples were taken from saltmarshes, such as the Sharpham tidal reed bed, and sent off for analysis as part of their 'Carbon Storage in Intertidal Environments' project. Part of this national project is considering how saltmarshes might cope with sea-level rise and their importance in carbon sequestration & long-term lock up.
- Salcombe Harbour Authority assisted the National Museum of Wales by taking samples of 'eyelash worms' - samples were taken for DNA analysis from the site where the species was first identified.
- The Estuaries Officer continued working with the University of Exeter looking into red tide events within the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary and potential reasons for them. Samples were taken over 2018 and are being processed with results expected next year 2020. As there is no river flowing into the estuary to flush them out, nutrients may build up here; it is thought

that these nutrients along with seasonal rising temperatures and daylight, may support the dinoflagellate blooms.

3.2 The AONB Estuaries Officer went through the priorities for the next six months as outlined in the agenda papers. In discussion

- i. MMO's draft South West Marine Plans will go out for public consultation later this autumn or during winter. The Estuaries Officer will work to engage local communities within these important consultations.
- ii. Continue efforts to understand the changing proposals with the National Marine Park.
- iii. Continue to co-host the South Devon Catchments Partnership. The Environment Agency have released a major consultation for the South West river basin – 24.10.2019 – 24.4.2020. Workshops will be held with our local communities encouraging them to look at the 'Water Challenges and Choices' Consultation and to provide their own feedback.
- iv. A project in Stoke Gabriel is under consideration to work with the local community who are concerned at the number of storm water overflows of waste waters into the Mill Pool. Working with the community, the project would look at choices individual households can make to reduce this, for example sustainable drainage systems: reduces gutter water volumes, helping to minimise the overloading of the waste water treatment system (that can lead to emergency release of untreated waste waters).
- v. Potential for a seagrass conservation project off East Portlemouth. There is a need to explore and discuss potential options to preserve seagrass and improve safety for swimming with the East Portlemouth Foreshore Owners Association. Responding to a question, the Estuaries Officer informed the Group that he has received a copy of the NE/EA seagrass survey but has not received permission to circulate this.

4. ESTUARIES AND CATCHMENT PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS AND LONGER TERM

4.1 The AONB Manager asked the Group to consider whether the key areas covered by the Estuaries Officer, in particular relating to priorities in the next six months, are representative and reflect the interests of their organisations and the suite of actions in the Estuaries Management Plan.

- i. Kirstie Pritchard mentioned that Devon County Council are in the process of developing a Carbon Plan. There is a call for evidence currently open to everyone. A series of thematic hearings will be followed by a citizens' assembly to be held in February. Evidence and data gathered will play a part in the creation of a Devon Carbon Plan showing the road map to become Net-Zero by 2050 at the latest. Although the process has started it is important that actions are taken now. The work outlined supporting communities and how they can make a difference and looking into options such as carbon storage in saltmarshes.

Action 6 (NM): Send a link to the research that has been done on the saltmarsh to Kirstie Pritchard.

- ii. Kirstie Pritchard would like to see the National Marine Park on the six month priority list.
- iii. Penny Johns will provide a report from this meeting for the Dart Harbour Master who will then be able to provide feedback to the Estuaries Officer, potentially at the next Dart Estuary Forum.

5. FINANCIAL REPORT AND BUDGET

Agenda item 5 has been redacted in full as this item deals with staffing and finance matters.

6. "ROUND THE TABLE" UPDATES

6.1 Kirstie Pritchard

- i. Devon Carbon Plan
 - a. The Devon Climate Emergency Response Group (DCERG) have appointed a Net-Zero Task Force to produce an evidence led Devon Carbon Plan.
 - b. The Task Force has issued a call for evidence that is open to everyone. The gathering of data and evidence will be complemented by a series of four thematic hearings, taking place over November and December 2019. These will provide an opportunity for the Net-Zero Task Force to discuss, with invited participants and experts, the opportunities and challenges in more detail. A series of hearings to help gather views, evidence and data that will have an important role in the creation of a Devon Carbon Plan. The call for evidence opened on 23rd October 2019 and will run until early 2020. Submissions with evidence that could be called before one of the hearings, should be made by Sunday 10th November.
Action 8 (all): Estuary Steering Group members are encouraged to make a submission and to encourage others in turn to provide their input.
www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/devon-carbon-plan/call-for-evidence/
- ii. The Devon Maritime Forum conference 'Managing Our Coast in a Changing Climate' is taking place on 26 November 2019 in Plymouth.
www.devonmaritimeforum.org.uk/conference/south-west-coastal-change-conference-2019/

6.3 Penny Johns

- i. Dart Harbour Board have budgeted money for environmental projects. There is disappointment that no firm ideas for projects have been put forward by members of the Dart Estuary Forum for consideration. The AONB Manager mentioned that there are key areas and some opportunities for potential DHNA investment and recognised the need to have some initiatives ready.
 The Estuaries Officer mentioned the Dart Estuary Forum members have requested the Climate Emergency be discussed at the next meeting taking place on 19th November 2019 and how they can be involved.
- ii. Dart Harbour Authority are reviewing Port Waste Management Plans this autumn with a view to introducing next year. Plastic is not currently recycled, DHNA are looking into trade waste options for this. The AONB Manager mentioned that South Hams District Council are introducing new recycling initiatives for West Devon and South Hams. The residential recycling initiatives have now been scoped and

contracts agreed, so it is an opportune time for DHNA to contact them to enter into conversations regarding commercial recycling options.

- iii. The Estuary Officer informed Penny that Dart Estuary Forum members have requested the proposed new public slipway at the Dart Estuary Forum be discussed at the next meeting.

6.2 Phil Goodhead

- i. Salcombe Harbour Authority would usually receive alerts of South West Water storm overflow events. There has been a lot of rain recently however no alerts received.
Action 9 (PG): Check if the same process is in place and working.
- ii. Planning permission has been granted to redevelop Salcombe Harbour Office, the workshops and the commercial units at Batson. Work will commence with demolition work starting in January.
- iii. Harbour charges will change in April, publicity will start in the next two weeks. Harbour dues linked to length and horsepower of boats. Paddled craft are an exception that will have a flat rate of £6 (reduced from £10) to register.

6.3 Rob Price

An update from Rob Price was circulated prior to the meeting. Matters arising were as follows

- i. The Environment Agency have a Challenges and Choices consultation on river basin districts. The consultation is currently open, closing April 2020. The Estuaries Officer will co-ordinate the Estuary Partnership response and will also hold workshops with the Catchments Partnership.
Action 10 (NM): Circulate a draft response to the Challenges and Choices consultation.
- ii. Planning application questions are recurring themes at Estuary Forum meetings. Should an item on the planning process be covered on the next round of forum meetings. The Estuaries Officer felt that although the various roles could be clarified, the right target audience should be in attendance.
Action 11 (NM): Explore opportunities for this and look into the appropriate audience to invite to each estuary forum meeting in support of this.
- iii. The Environment Agency has a five year strategic plan with an emphasis on Climate Resilience.
- iv. What direction could the Estuaries Partnership Steering Group take in terms of Climate Change?
 - o DHNA are looking into the viability of electric vessels.
 - i. The size of the estuary may mean that having all electric vessels is not feasible
 - ii. A patrol boat for the Dartmouth area may be an option
 - iii. Retro-fitting an electric engine may be another option
 - o Salcombe Harbour Authority have looked into the feasibility of using electric vessels extensively.
 - i. Looked into replacing a launch with an electrically driven boat. The battery weight for power required meant this was not feasible
 - ii. Have retro-fitted with an electric engine into a launch. Control and power has been good. However this would not be suitable for a harbour taxi which typically works two 8-hour shifts back to back
 - iii. Have looked at hybrids and the complexities that involves

- iv. Have also investigated Torqeedo electric outboards on the short trip patrol boats. The expense balanced against the battery requirement for them to run all day means that this is not a feasible option for now.
- v. Have a facility to charge their own vessels and select resident vessels on a temporary basis on Normandy pontoon. Looking at power down to Batson pontoon as part of the development effort.

Action 12 (NM): Convene a meeting to discuss and share the different research that has taken place to date and develop ideas to take forward.

- There may be a place for virtual meetings although appropriate options would need to be looked at to ensure people are engaged and feel part of the meeting.

Action 13 (NM): Investigate possible options

- v. It may be beneficial to share the South Devon Catchment Partnership programme
 - The programme itself is very large however a smaller version could be shared

Action 14 (NM): Investigate the possibility of creating a smaller, simplified version of the South Devon Catchment programme for wider distribution.

- vi. Flood Risk Mitigation Measures Assessment on the Dart has been delayed but will be picked up again in the new year.

7. DATES AND VENUES FOR 2020 MEETINGS

2020 Meeting dates:

- Next meeting:
Wednesday 13 May 2020 at 10am, Follaton House
- Proposed date for Autumn meeting:
Tuesday 3 November at 10am, Follaton House

Minutes remain in draft until approved by members of the Estuaries Partnership Steering Group at their next meeting.