

Dart Harbour Non Beneficiaries Group Meeting.

Minutes of Meeting Wednesday 26th September 2018 in Tuckenhay, Ashprington

Kindly hosted by Sheelah and Ralph Seeley

1. Present	Mike Pearey (MP)	Ashprington PC (Chairman)
	S. Seeley (SS)	Ashprington PC
	Linda Mabe (LM)	Cornworthy PC
	Rob Lyon (RL)	Dartmouth TC
	Graham Anderson (GA)	Dittisham PC
	N. Mortimer (NM)	S.Devon AONB
	T. Bumby (TB)	National Trust, Kingswear to Coleton
	M. Cooper	Dart Harbourmaster (HM)
	Penny Johns (PJ)	Senior Administrator DH
	Sue Pudduck (SP)	Secretary
	Prof Tom Hutchinson (TH)	University of Plymouth (Guest);
2. Apologies	L. Maurer	Kingswear PC
	R. Searle	Kingswear PC
	P Charlesworth	Dartmouth & Kingswear Soc
	Tony Whitty	Totnes TC
	James Dodd	DH Board rep
	Becky Taylor	Cornworthy PC

NEW SECTION: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ACTIONS FOR PARISH COUNCILS

I hope this summary of actions from this meeting will help Parish Councils focus on key areas for them to discuss (MP).

Action: All Parishes please continue to encourage maximum levels of recycling, and support efforts at litter picking or 'beach cleans' (para 5)

Action: Suggestions for short term environmental science projects to MP or HM by NLT 24 October please. They will then draw up a final list for TH (para 7)

Action: Parishes please seek volunteers for the Pacific Oyster project. Names direct to Nigel Mortimer at the AONB Office, Follaton House: 01803 861384 (para 8)

Action: Parishes are encouraged to review the new draft AONB Management Plan, and pass comments to the AONB office by 5 Nov (para 8)

Action: Parishes please advertise the upcoming vacancies on the AONB Council. Names of volunteers to NM via 01803 961384 (para 8)

Action: Parishes are asked to remind river users of the 6 knot speed limit, and advertise HM efforts to curb speeding on the river, including – ultimately – the risk of prosecution (para 9)

Action: All. Any additional comments on the temporary pontoons, particularly from Dittisham and Stoke Gabriel, to be fed back to HM (para 10)

Action: MP to send out to group parish representatives the draft letter concerning raising the profile of our old bridges for the AONB Management Plan review (para 12)

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3. In opening remarks the Chairman welcomed Professor Tom Hutchinson, Head of Environmental Sciences at Plymouth University.

4. **Minutes from meeting** held on Tuesday 6th Feb 2018 were agreed.

5. **Matters Arising.**

- **Beach Cleans;** NM had been unable to set up a group registration with MCS for whole of Dart Estuary. TH recommended working across boundaries, rather than being too parochial. TB advised that the NT buy "sharps boxes" for needle collecting
- **SHDC Recycling;** It was felt that confusion about recycling resulted in poorer than necessary recycling rates, and more waste in the environment, so MP had undertaken to clarify the situation across SHDCs area. He reported that SHDC is about to begin a complete review of recycling policy, both to recycle more materials and to aim towards conformity of policy across the region. NM stated that the SHDC existing contract ends in 2020.

Action: All Parishes please continue to encourage maximum levels of recycling, and support efforts at litter picking or 'beach cleans'

6. **DEFRA's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Proposal in the Dart Upper Estuary**

The MCZ proposal had been a useful challenge for the Non-Bens, and much had been learned about garnering responses from members out-with the framework of our meetings cycle: deadlines imposed by outside authorities need to be met! Views on the proposal was split so the response outcome, where AONB and NT (supporting the proposal) submitted individual responses to DEFRA and the majority of Non-Bens' responses (neutral or against the proposal) were embedded within the DHNA response, was probably the optimum outcome. Only Totnes of the Councils submitted a direct response to DEFRA, again 'voting' against the proposal. The main objection was that the proposal lacked any information on the proposed management of the MCZ, so it was impossible for stakeholders to assess potential impacts. HM thanked the group for their contributions in the consultation process. (*Chairman's post meeting note: we should have recognised during the meeting that HM deserves credit for energizing the whole response process over the summer period – thank you*). It is unlikely that any information on a decision about the proposal will be available before next year. **No Further Action** until DEFRA decision announced.

7. **Open forum led by Guest Speaker, Professor Tom Hutchinson (TH)**

Professor Hutchinson grew up on a traditional mixed family farm in Yorkshire before a 21 year career in the pharmaceutical and chemicals industries. He then worked for Plymouth Marine Laboratory and CEFAS for seven years prior to joining the University of Plymouth in 2013. Based on his PhD in marine biology and the health of fish, he led a number of projects to clean up coastal and estuary pollution around the UK, North America and Japan. He subsequently worked on the prevention of pollution by hormone mimicking chemicals in rivers and coastal waters. Today he is Head of Environmental Sciences at the University of Plymouth. He is also a member of the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides and has served as an adviser to the UK Government's 'Futures of the Sea' Programme. He is a keen sea kayaker and Chair of Totnes Canoe Club. TH led a fascinating and wide-ranging discussion. He highlighted some of the misconceptions that surround environmental protection, particularly the issue of chemicals entering watercourses. In the public's mind, in the SW, the main culprit to river pollution is often

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perceived to be farming. However, domestic waste, the things we put down our sinks and WCs, also have a significant impact. Hormonal medicines such as the contraceptive pill and more recently, anti-depressants, are examples of the wider environmental issues than most people realise. There are solutions such as enhanced water treatment systems, but these come at a cost.

TH always seeks positives in environmental work, and pointed out that older chemicals such as arsenic and DDT were far more destructive than those used today, so there are success stories in repairing damage to the environment. Anti-fouling on boats decimated the shellfish industry, but that is now recovering, albeit sometimes threatened by invasive species such as the Pacific Oyster. There are now regular sightings of otters on the Dart and nationally there has been a huge change in the health of river water. The natural environment is often the first indicator of negative or positive changes. He highlighted that SW Water has been running a successful project with farmers to stop effluent going into the watercourses. This is a particular problem in the SW because of the steep valley sides. MP mentioned that the 2019 Countryside Stewardship Schemes have new capital grants to help farmers achieve this. He discussed the presence this year of more algal blooms, which can be more environmentally damaging than chemicals in our rivers. One cause of this is believed to be local farmers ploughing up grassland to grow whole crop maize for cattle feed: these fields are heavily fertilized and suffer from increased run-off compared to grassland. While it is important to educate farmers we should also to look at success stories.

It was agreed that the public are now becoming engaged in the environmental debate but there is still too little information to allow consumers to make informed choices. TH cited the work of Unilever, who have removed plastic micro-beads from their products, yet other companies continued to use these environment-damaging ingredients. There was general agreement that the public struggles to make sense of the ingredients listed on products to differentiate between the heroes and villains.

Finally, TH advertised that he has a new intake of International Masters students who are available to undertake any suitable environmental research projects. Suggestions include measuring water quality run-off from farmland: investigating algal blooms in our creeks; research into the spread of Pacific Oysters; sampling sediment metals; and research into the growing risks to our road infrastructure from increase and heavier traffic. He asked for proposals from the group to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to further our knowledge of the Dart Estuary, using the skills of students and staff at the University of Plymouth. On behalf of the group, MP thanked TH for his excellent insights, and the offer of research support.

Action: Suggestions for short term environmental science projects to MP or HM by NLT 24 October please. They will then draw up a final list for TH.

8. Report from the South Hams Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Office (NM)

- NM out-lined the **Pacific Oyster project**. This invasive species is spreading within Devon estuaries, and can reach densities of hundreds per square metre. They cause particular problems to beach and river users because they have razor sharp edges and are found near the water surface rather than at depth where our native oysters grow. Volunteers are sought to walk the foreshore, map the hot spots, monitor them and possibly destroying them. Training will be provided. MP questioned whether build up of Pacific oysters might affect navigation, though HM had no reports of this being an issue. Wider uses for these

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Pacific Oysters are being considered, such as using their crushed shells to reduce coastal erosion, but these ideas need more research.

Action: Parishes please seek volunteers for the Pacific Oyster project. Names direct to Nigel Mortimer at the AONB Office, Follaton House: 01803 861384

- **The South Hams AONB Management Plan review.** This plan:

- Highlights the special qualities and significance of the AONB.
- Presents a vision for the future of the AONB.
- Set out objectives and policies to secure the vision.
- Identify what needs to be done, by whom and when.
- States the condition of the AONB and how the effectiveness of its management will be monitored.
- Reflects the views and aspirations of a wide range of AONB stakeholders and parties with an interest in it.
- Co-ordinates the work of different partner organisations.

The new draft plan has now entered a 6-week public consultation period, which ends on 5 November. It has been sent out to all Parishes and other stakeholder bodies for comment. Find it here: <http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/about-the-aonb/looking-after-the-aonb/aonb-management-plan>

Action: Parishes are encouraged to review the new draft AONB Management Plan, and pass comments to the AONB office by 5 Nov.

Action: NM will check that the draft AONB Management Plan is being sent out to ADRUC , Commercial Users Group, and to the HM.

- **AONB Open Forum** The annual AONB open forum will be held at The Flavell centre, Dartmouth, on 22nd October. The AONB are seeking Council Representatives to serve on the body. Parishes have been emailed with the details.

Action: Parishes please advertise the upcoming vacancies on the AONB Council. Names of volunteers to NM.

9. DH Update (HM)

- **Moorings.** The HM reported that there had been +8% increase in visitor moorings (visitor mooring are 10% of DH moorings) this summer. Regatta takings had been down 10%, which was identified as fewer motor vessels. DH plans to increase income for DHNA by optimising mooring use.

- **Second water taxi.** The introduction of a lower fare and a second water taxi appeared to have reduced the number of vessels without lights operating after dark. The taxi service is also recognised as providing a safer method for sailors getting ashore and returning to their boats.

- **Speeding** is still an issue and DH are near to initiating a prosecution that will, hopefully, improve behaviours. CCTV cameras are to be introduced although education is still seen as providing the best solution.

Action: Parishes are asked to remind river users of the 6 knot speed limit, and advertise HM efforts to curb speeding on the river, including – ultimately – the risk of prosecution.

10. Extra Mooring Facilities (HM)

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The HM sought the opinion of the group on the temporary pontoons, this year at Dartmouth, Dittisham and Stoke Gabriel, which had been introduced to try to improve accessibility to the river for more people. The temporary pontoon at Stoke Gabriel allowed the trial of a new water taxi service, whose use suggested that about 65% of journeys were Dittisham residents or visitors going to Stoke Gabriel to eat. DHNA had received one objection from a Dittisham river user stating concerns about safety, over-crowding, and the lack of enforcement of DHNA rules. However, HM has also received written comment that the temporary pontoon at Dartmouth had allowed for easier access from Kingswear and must result in more trade for the town. Overall the feeling of the meeting supported DH in providing more temporary moorings for smaller vessels. GA stated that Dittisham PC, who approved the temporary pontoon in 2017, felt that management of the pontoon had been better this year. It was recognised that educating the public in safety practices and awareness of other vessel users would improve the general management of the temporary pontoons. The general increase in paddle boarders and kayakers, creating new and additional pressures, was also noted. The trialling of temporary pontoons will continue.

Action: All. Any additional comments on the temporary pontoons, particularly from Dittisham and Stoke Gabriel, to be fed back to HM.

11. Neighbourhood Planning. (MP)

TW was not available to update on the Totnes LP, so MP drew attention to a growing potential risk of not having a Neighbourhood Plan. Initially, advice locally was that smaller parishes didn't require a plan. Now there are commercial "Land Promoting" companies who deliberately target land for development where there is no protection from development in an NP/LP. NM reported on three small Yealm Parishes who have combined to produce a plan to reduce management effort and costs.

12. General Discussion Points.

- **New Name for Group.** It is still the intention to give the group a more positive name, rather than sticking with the "Non-Beneficiaries Group" tag originally given by the DETR in their late-1990's "Modernising Trust Ports" guidance. The proposed "DRIP" (Dart Riparian Parishes Group) acronym had been, rightly, questioned by the DHNA as not representing all group members, but GA pointed out that it could still be used by altering the wording to **Dart Riparian and Interested Parties Group.** PJ suggested ACCORD (**Association of Councils and Community Organisations on the River Dart.**) *Chairman's Post Mtg note: the DHNA Marketing advice is that DRIP is still rather negative. They suggest **Dart Interested Group** ("DIG") as an option, though personally I feel this is a bit vague. More to do on this issue!*

Action: All group members please let MP and SP know whether you have a preference for the new name, or any other new proposal, by mid-December.

- **Ash die-back.** MP outlined the way in which ash die-back (*Chalara fraxinea*) is likely to affect the South Devon, where about 20% of all our large trees are ash. TB endorsed the severity of the problem and discussed how the NT has been managing the issue over the last two or three years. There was some discussion about what age of tree was most at risk although even ash trees that survive *Chalara fraxinea* will then probably face the more destructive threat from the Emerald Ash Borer beetle that is spreading west through Europe. MP suggested that Councils

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might wish to think about managing trees in their landscapes to mitigate against the worst effects of ash death.

Action. MP will email out his 'laymans guide' article on Ash Die Back to members.

- **Stone Bridges.** MP highlighted the increasing risks to our old stone bridges from heavier and wider vehicles, as well as much increased traffic flow. He is working on raising awareness of the issue, including a possible AONB-wide audit of our bridges and increased visibility in both the AONB Management Plan and within DCC Highways protocols. In the short term he is writing a comment for the AONB Management Plan review, which he will ask group parish members if they wish to jointly sign with Ashprington Parish Council.

Action: MP to send out to group parish representatives the draft letter concerning raising the profile of our old bridges for the AONB Management Plan review.

Action: TH offered to investigate if there was a Geography Post-Graduate that might be interested in doing a research project on this topic.

13. Future discussion points.

Action: All. Group members please consider topics for the next meeting; send to SP & MP.

14. AoB

- **DHNA is currently seeking 2 new Board members.** An interest in structural engineering, or HR would be welcomed but is not a requirement. Closing date for applications 6th October.

- The **Dart Estuary Forum** has been re-established. The next meeting is scheduled for November.

- **Planning applications and required regulatory body inputs.** The HM still has concerns about the processes for dealing with planning applications which require comment from several different regulatory bodies: S.Hams, Dart Harbour, Environment Agency, Natural England, AONB. There appears to be little communication and joined up thinking.

Action: HM to continue to seek clarity for the process.

- **Aish Steps, in Stoke Gabriel parish.** DH and AONB had both registered an objection. The steps below MHWS have now been removed. The feeling is that it is likely that the Planning decision will be challenged.

15. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

TB (NT Warden) had kindly volunteered to host our next meeting, probably at Greenway and provisionally planned for first week in March 2019. Thanks TB.

Mike Pearey

Chairman

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The Govt Environmental Incident Hotline number 0800 807060