

RIVER DART NON BENEFICIARY GROUP.

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Minutes of Meeting in Ashsprington 24th September 2008.

1. Present

Councillor John Baron (Chairman) JB	Dittisham
Mr Philip Charlesworth PCh	D & K Society
Councillor Terry Connolly TC	Ashsprington
Captain Philip Gibbon (Secretary) PG	Anthony Steen MP
Councillor Ian Longrigg IL	SHDC
Councillor Ian Slatter IS	Totnes
Mr John Stevens (Treasurer) JS	
Councillor Barrie Tulloch BT	Kingswear

Visitors

Mr Roger Jobson RJ	RAMROG
Mr Nigel Mortimer NM	Estuary Officer
Mrs Sue Pudduck SP	DHNA
Mr Nick Walbridge NW	LUG
Mr Jonathan Weekes JW	RAMROG
Captain David White DW	DHNA

Apologies

Councillor Richard Rendle	Dartmouth
Councillor John Robinson	Stoke Gabriel
Councillor Becky Taylor	Cornworthy

[Sec's Note; Mr Nigel Mortimer's address is South Devon AONB Unit, Follaton House, Totnes, TQ9 5NE. Tel 01803 1465 or 07971 544010. nigel.mortimer@southhams.gov.uk]

2. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting especially Mrs Sue Puddock and the other visitors who had taken the trouble to come to Ashsprington. He then asked Mr Nigel Mortimer to give his presentation.

NM gave a brief introduction to the way he saw his work developing to cover the five South Hams estuaries. He described his background as a marine ecologist. He worked for a period as a ranger in Scotland and then returned to the SW as the estuary officer for Kingsbridge, a job that latterly had also included a watching brief over the Avon and Erme. He must now spread his time covering a much wider area. He admitted to a lack of familiarity with the Dart that had been so well served by Ray Humphreys and pleaded for help and support from local people and organisations such as the DNB. In particular he highlighted two areas in which he needed help 1) in monitoring planning applications and 2) in building communications with the public. These are now discussed in greater detail;

1) TC pointed out that Ashprington PC might comment on about 10 planning applications/month of which maybe three might have some connection with the river. He saw no difficulty in NM seeing PC comments on such applications. IL said that comments on planning applications are available on the SHDC web-site [*Sec's Note; See*

http://www.southhams.gov.uk/index/council_index/nav-how-council-works/ksp_council_meetings/ksp-council-agenda-minutes/spec-agenda-minutes-list-9.htm]

and he assured Councillors that, in his experience chairing a Planning Cttee, PC comments were taken very seriously indeed. PG suggested that a less formal 'point of contact' could also help NM. The individual members of the DNB Cttee knew their local patch, were concerned with its welfare and could often respond with useful background information without compromising their PC responsibilities. NM welcomed this and will 'give it a go'.

2) NM explained that, with the demise of DEEM, the Dart Marine Forum was dissolved. DEEM used to arrange its annual meetings in Dartmouth and Totnes chaired by an SHDC Councillor or the DHNA Chairman both of whom were DEEM Trustees. NM questioned whether the DNB could, in some sense, take the Forum's place. TC doubted whether the DNB as a PC based group could or should try to cover the wide field of marine interests that the Forum embraced. This view was generally supported by other speakers. However there was a general feeling that 'meeting fatigue' among the general public meant that trying to set up some new 'forum' was unlikely to succeed. The Estuary Officer appears to have workable groups with whom he can 'report/liaise' for the Kingsbridge, Avon

and Yealm so, although the DNB does not offer itself in this rôle, nevertheless it was felt that the four Dart Stakeholder Groups between them should endeavour to fill the bill.

The above comments highlight the much bigger question of communication between 'officialdom', estuary-users and the marine-oriented section of the general public. DEEM's 'Tidelines' publication played a useful part but NM saw no prospect for its revival nor for an equivalent covering the four estuaries. DHNA's 'Dart Harbour Guide' and web-site are specific to the Dart and excellent for their purpose but should not be expected to cover the range of interests contained within Tidelines, Teign Scene or Exe-press. There is also a plethora of other sources of information such as the AONB Newsletter, Devon Maritime Forum, Village Green (IS), Dart Line, etc. *[Sec's Note; SP has provided contact details for 'Dart Line' and these are being followed up]* However this question of interaction with the public gives cause for concern and it is hoped that the Funding Partners will give the matter their attention (*Sec's Note; Two elected members of the Dart Forum were on the DEEM Board of Trustees in addition to the funding partners. There are no comaparable 'public voice' on the present Funding Partners Cttee*). **Requested action; NM and**

Funding Partners.

The DNB asked Robin Toogood to put two issues on the new Estuary Officer's 'agenda' namely 1) Sharpham Marshes and 2) Environmental Impact Assessments for Noss & Baltic Wharf.

1) With the demise of DEEM the future of Sharpham Marsh and the 'Hole-in-the-wall' appears to have dropped off the radar. NM said that early pictures of the marsh before the retaining embankment was built show the main channel very much as it is now. DW suggested that maybe the current edges of the 'hole-in-the-wall' should be stabilised but the best way beyond that may be no action. IS raised Totnes' concern about silting in the channel between Sharpham and the Bridge. DNB recommend that a study should be commissioned to advise upon the future of Sharpham Marsh, the impact of the continuing dilapidation of the embankment, sea-level rise and the effect that these will have upon the main channel up to Totnes.

Requested Action; NM

2) NM said that a partial EIA had been produced for those parts of the Noss project that had come before the Planners so far but this was not yet in the public domain. PG said that the DNB Cttee was not 'the public' and that we needed this information in order to fulfil our remit. NM said he would raise the matter. DW said that he understood that the Baltic Wharf project could be considered 'change of use' and so no EIA was needed.

Requested Action; NM

3) **Minutes of the May Kingswear meeting.** There were no amendments and JB signed the Minute Book.

4) **Matters arising.**

4.1 **Noss.** NM said there were two possible ‘showstoppers’, a mud-worm and the short-snouted sea-horse.

PCh and BT both welcomed the reductions in the scale of the marina pontoons shown in the latest publicly released plans from the developers. PG asked whether this meant that the DHNA moorings up-river from Noss could stay put? DW replied that negotiations with the developers continued.

BT said that Kingswear PC had requested the inclusion of a public slip for launching boats from the site. IL asked whether this matter had been raised as a planning item and, if not, then it should be raised asap. IL also emphasised the importance of the Noss – Dartmouth ferry link that had been in the plan from the beginning.

Action; BT

4.2 **Higher Ferry Slip.** Jonathan Hawkins had raised this item but was not present to explain his concern. DW said that the current Ferry Licence runs out in May '09. The present ferry carries 16 cars - the new wider ferry can carry 32 vehicles including charas and heavy goods. The present ferry is self-propelling - the new ferry pulls itself along the mooring cables; there are on-going discussions about the likely clearance over these cables when under tension. Side thrusters will be fitted to the new ferry to minimise the ‘footprint’ of the new set-up. In the ensuing discussion great concern was expressed by BT and IL about the increase in traffic on both sides of the river but this issue is outside the DNB remit. *[Sec’s Note; Mr Kerry Southern (Operations Manager, Higher Ferry) in September’s ‘By the Dart’ says “The queues to get on the [new] ferry will dramatically reduce due to the size and amount of vehicles we will be able to carry. There will be less congestion throughout the town and it will make our carbon footprint considerably lower”]*

DW explained that some dredging would probably be required at the margins of the slips. He thought it unlikely that dispersal dredging would be permitted but as yet no decisions had been made nor was the TBT contamination of the spoil known. He was concerned that a tight programme of work was growing ever tighter.

4.3 RAMROG. *[Sec's Note; RJ has been away so I've held up publishing the Minutes. I now understand from him that he is happy with the following wording]* RJ explained that his group, formed in 2004, has some 100 members. Its mission statement reads "RAMROG is the forum specifically for those who own property adjacent to the River Dart and/or have mooring rights attached to their property". Since its formation the group has been granted accreditation by DHNA and has endeavoured, with it is hoped some success, to aid the good governance of the estuary over a much broader field than riparian mooring rights even where this meant overlapping the remits of other stakeholder groups.

Mr Colin Morris of the DfT made clear during the meeting at Follaton House that there was merit in reducing the number of groups. RJ suggested that a reduction could strengthen the stakeholder system as a whole and reduce the administrative load on DHNA. RAMROG was willing, indeed anxious, to disband PROVIDED its members were persuaded that their interests, other than specific issues affecting riparian mooring rights, were fully catered for within the CUG, LUG and DNB.

RJ was particularly concerned by what he perceived as a communication gap in the 'stakeholder system'. For example, the DNB was based upon PC's and other Associations, the LUG upon Yacht Clubs, Rowing Clubs, etc all of them more or less inaccessible/insensitive to the individual estuary-user. For himself he said that the PC had never contacted him on river matters. TC rejoined that in his many years as an Ashprington Parish Councillor he had never heard RJ raise a question on river matters to his PC i.e for communication to be effective it must be two-way. *[Sec's Note; DNB have on numerous occasions expressed concern that the 'stakeholder system' generally has failed to 'catch on' with the general public and is seen neither as a channel of communication/complaint nor as a champion/safeguard against abuse. It had been hoped that this important issue could be thrashed out in the 'DHNA Review' requested by the DNB four years ago. Maybe this issue might be a matter for debate during the proposed 'get-together' of the Stakeholder Groups in next January]*

PCh queried whether RAMROG should be viewed as 'Beneficiary' rather than 'Non Beneficiary'. PG said that the DfT Guidelines drew a reasonably tight definition around who should be classified as Beneficiary (people having a statutory connection with DHNA) but the rules are vague on the much larger and more diffuse Non Beneficiary constituency.

JB said that members of RAMROG would always be welcome at DNB Meetings and they had always been free to voice their views. However it had been made clear from the first meeting between RJ, RB & PG that

there was a problem with RAMROG, as an accredited Group, sending a representative to the DNB Cttee on the same footing as the PC's, D & K Soc and National Trust none of whom have the privileged access to the DHNA Board that comes with accreditation. That privileged access is already available to RAMROG through their accreditation and it would be anomalous for them to have a second route of access through the DNB or other accredited Group. It was decided that RJ and PG should seek a 'way ahead' such that, given the agreement of the RAMROG membership, the Group could be represented on the DNB Cttee over, say, the next couple of years. *[Sec's Note; RJ agrees to the 'Associate Membership' idea i.e the same privileges as other members but no vote. This proposal would be subject to ratification by both DNB and RAMROG Cttees]* **Action; RJ & PG**

5. Treasurer's Report. JS said our a/c stood at £42.43 and that, since the majority of our business is done by e-mail, this was satisfactory. He had written to all the parish clerks, the D & K Soc and National Trust requesting a £10 contribution and all except Stoke Gabriel, Totnes (IS took note) and Dartmouth had paid up. JS was instructed to write again to the non-payers. IL asked whether SHDC had been asked for a contribution and on being told 'No' said that a £10 contribution should be sought. **Action; JS**

6. AOB. PG reported that he and Mr Doug Twigg (D & K Soc) attended a Kingsbridge meeting dealing with coastal management. Teignbridge Council are tasked with studying coastal management from Durlston Head (near Swanage) to Rame Head and have contracted out the survey work to Halcrows. The final Halcrows report is due in October. In view of the forecast figures for sea-level rise (due to be up-dated by the IPCC next month) this report concerns all of us.

7. Date and Venue of next Meeting.

It was proposed by IL and supported by NW & RJ and DNB Cttee members generally that we should arrange for a meeting of all four Groups not only to discuss common ground but, in IL's words, to have a glass of wine and get to know each other better. It was decided that the LUG, CUG and RAMROG Chairmen should be invited to convene a get-together in January to which a number of members from each Group should be invited to attend. JW suggested we should meet in either the RDYC or DYC and offered to arrange this. *[Sec's Note; JW has made a provisional booking with RDYC for Thursday 22nd January 2009. JB is e-mailing the other three Chairmen]*

Action; JB, JW & PG

