

**MEETING NOTES OF THE
DART ESTUARY FORUM**

**MEETING HELD ONLINE
ON THURSDAY 3rd DECEMBER 2020**

1. INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Those present were:

Alex Curd	(AC)	Marine Management Organisation
Dave Curno	(DC)	Royal Yachting Association, South West
Brian Deacon	(BD)	Stoke Gabriel Boating Association
Julian Distin	(JD)	Dart Harbour Authority
Ian Fenton	(IF)	Royal Yachting Association, South West
Leaf Lovejoy	(LL)	Stoke Gabriel Neighbourhood Forum
Sir Geoffrey Newman	(GN)	Dartmouth Slipway Trust – Chairman
Mike Pearey	(MP)	Chairman, local farmer & environmentalist
Rob Price	(RP)	Environment Agency
Christine Wood	(CW)	Marine Biological Association

AONB unit staff attending

Adam Davison	(AD)	AONB Project Office
Nigel Mortimer	(NM)	AONB Estuaries Officer
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager – note taker

Apologies for absence were received from:

Graham Anderson		Dittisham Parish Council
Cllr. Hilary Bastone		South Hams District Council
Rebecca Fry		Blackness Marine
Cllr. Jonathan Hawkins		SHDC & Devon County Council
Christine Hickson		Plover Rovers
Tom Hutchinson		Vice Chair & University of Plymouth
Catherine Lockwood		Environment Agency
Beshlie Pool		South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen
Sue Puddock		Dart Harbour Communities Group
Emma Reece		National Trust
Bill Robertson		Dart Fisheries & Conservation Association
Christine Singfield		Natural England

It was noted Ian Fenton has replaced Roger Jobson as the representative from the Royal Yachting Association (South West).

2. APPROVAL OF 19 NOVEMBER 2019 DEF MEETING NOTES

- 2.1 It was decided that due to the significant time elapsed since the last meeting and COVID-19 restrictions, actions from the Dart Estuary Forum held on 19 November 2019 would not be reviewed.

3. AONB ESTUARY OFFICER REPORT AND UPDATE

3.1 The AONB Estuaries Officer provided an update of recent activity. Topics included:

- i. Estuary meetings
 - a. A 'Dart Estuary e-forum Comms Spring 20' update was circulated in lieu of the Spring meeting, cancelled due to COVID-19
 - b. Meetings will be online going forward, with this one formed from the 'round table updates' format. A stand-alone meeting, with presentations / talks, will be set-up and recorded. Topics may cover:
 - Sharpham Farm rewilding project
 - Update on invasive non-native species survey results
- ii. Continued to co-host the South Devon Catchments Partnership, with Westcountry Rivers Trust: <http://south-devon.org/>.
- iii. Planning and MMO license consultations.
- iv. All Estuary Biosecurity Plans updated - <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Dart-Harbour-Estuary-Biosecurity-Plan-2020-edit.pdf>.
- v. Pacific oyster Community Science project update
 - a. Ended in the summer. Report will be sent to Defra – needs to be peer reviewed before being released publicly.
 - b. Hope for further funding to continue project with local volunteer groups.
 - c. Natural England would like us to try to manage Pacific oysters within the new Marine Conservation Zone
 - d. Project led to the discoveries shown below. The Estuaries Officer wishes to make everyone aware, so they are alert to the potential to find these on the Dart:
 - Honeycomb worm reef discovered in the mouth of the Erme estuary
 - Dwarf seagrasses found washed up near Beesands that could just be from either the Dart estuary (but where?) or Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary
- vi. Sharpham Marsh - comparative drone survey carried out and report prepared
 - a. report shared with DEF members
 - b. report suggests no significant erosion or deposition within the marsh in the last 12 months
- vii. Post COVID-19 lockdown wildlife disturbance
 - a. concerns over increase in disturbance from recreational activities
 - b. AONB promotion of 'Countryside Code' & responsible wildlife watching
- viii. Electric Vessel workshop hosted with the help of the RYA & DCC – workshop recorded. Contact the Estuaries Officer for a link to the recording

4. ROUND TABLE UPDATES

4.1 Adam Davison, AONB Project Officer

- Working with Western Power Distribution on undergrounding cables to improve views; current project located at East Prawle.

It was requested that

DEF members contact Adam Davison about any other potential candidates for undergrounding in the AONB.

4.2 Brian Deacon, Commodore of Stoke Gabriel Boating Association

- Replacing an outboard on one of four SGBA boats that have outboards with electric. Welcomes any information available on conversion of boats to electric to better inform their membership.

ACTION 1 (Estuaries Officer): Circulate link to Electric Vessel Workshop with the meeting notes [See Appendix 1].

- Membership numbers have increased during 2020, believed to be because of the COVID-19 effect meaning many more people decided to 'staycation' rather than travel abroad this year.
- Projects are undertaken to engage members. There is an annual litter pick, would now like to encourage SGBA members to get involved with controlling Pacific oyster populations around Mill Point.

It was requested that

DEF members contact Brian Deacon with any projects that may have the potential for SGBA members to get involved.

- i. The potential for a water quality project focussed on Stoke Gabriel was raised. Please send suggestions and ideas for this to Adam Davison, AONB Project Officer. Meanwhile, everyone is encouraged to look at the South Devon Catchment Partnership website: <http://south-devon.org/>

4.3 Julian Distin, Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority

- Julian introduced himself to DEF members and provided an update on his background and experience.
- Julian is now the DHNA representative for the Dart Estuary Forum and the Communications Group and will regularly attend meetings.
- Harbourmaster recruitment process is virtually complete, with a press announcement due week ending 11th December. DEF members will be notified by email the day before.
- In addition to the Harbourmaster, a further four board members have left. There will be an audit next year to determine what gaps in expertise, as specified in the Harbour Revision Order, need to be filled.
 - Responding to a question, Julian informed DEF members the move from Byelaws to General Directions is well advanced. It may be preferable to involve all established groups rather than have a dedicated group for this.
- DHNA looking at replacing their RIBs; electric vessels an area of interest.
- Happy for DEF members to get in touch with any questions and is willing to assist where possible, for example the use of a boat if required in monitoring Pacific oyster populations.
- Responding to a question on whether the Dart was affected by post COVID-19 lockdown disturbance, in particular by Jet Skis, Julian confirmed that although these still visited the Dart in groups, there is not a great deal of Jet Ski activity generally.

Wildlife disturbance is unfortunately more likely to occur around the Mewstone, outside of the harbour patrol area and can be caused by a number of different water-based activities.

4.4 Dave Curno, Royal Yachting Association (South West)

- Winter is usually when educational talks are provided to clubs and RYA organisations. Last one was given to Totnes Boating Association, held on the Friday before lockdown. That talk focussed on three priorities:
 - i. Non disturbance
 - ii. Non-native species
 - iii. Control of anti-fouling
- These talks are given to RYA members however the message needs reach a much wider audience to help with these issues.

4.5 Sir Geoffrey Newman, Dartmouth Slipway Trust (Chair)

- Geoffrey gave an update on the proposed new slipway for Dartmouth
 - i. Pre-app approval received
 - ii. Environmental Appraisal Report was submitted to Natural England, the Environment Agency and the AONB Estuaries Officer; responses have been received and are currently with the consulting engineers.
 - iii. Planning application being prepared however progress has been slow due to COVID-19 effects.

4.6 Alex Curd, Marine Management Organisation

- Marine Plans have been submitted to Defra. If everything goes smoothly, sign-off by the Secretary of State anticipated Spring 2021.
- SW Marine Plan has been published and is now a statutory consideration. A survey ran to obtain feedback for MMO monitoring purposes (closed 15 December 2020).

4.7 Christine Wood, Marine Biological Association

- Will provide a short talk on the results of the non-native surveys carried out on the Dart – part of a wider Non-Native Species (NNS) project focussing on non-natives in estuaries.
 - It was clarified that NNS are spread by human means whereas gradual migration changes are not considered 'NNS' but natural movement, for example movement precipitated by climate change. The latter is monitored via another project.
- The promised NNS talk to DEF members, to include a box of non-natives that can be handled, is necessarily postponed until the Dart Estuary Forum meetings can take place in person.
- Would like to see the Trumpet tube worm when the Mill Pool is empty – advised during the meeting that through the winter, this regularly empties on each tide (decision rests with DHNA).
- New waterproof guide to NNS now available, email Christine for a copy: cwo@mba.ac.uk - please include a postal address.
 - Dart Estuary Forum Chair, Mike Pearey, has requested a copy.

ACTION 2 (Christine Wood / Estuaries Officer): Send waterproof NNS guide to the DEF Chair.

4.8 Rob Price, Environment Agency

- Environment Agency incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60
- EA COVID-19 response included being part of local resilience forums response (Cat 1 responder).
- Thanked everyone that responded to the Challenges and Choices consultation; South Devon stood out in terms of responses received. Preparing for the next stage of the consultation on the River Basin Management Plan through the South Devon Catchment Partnership; this will focus on the development of Catchment Pages that will identify the priorities in South Devon Management Catchment for the next cycle.
- EA 2025 (5 year plan) has been officially launched.
- Working on Fish Easement on the Dart – adapting physical barriers to provide opportunities for fish to reach spawning grounds.
- Natural Flood Management project on Dartmoor. Pilot phase now coming to a close. Second phase pilot being planned.
- Funding secured to extend the Myers project on Dartmoor.
- Confirmation of South West Water’s upstream thinking project, looking at water quality, working with landowners, Devon Wildlife Trust and West Country Rivers Trust.
- Water quality update
 - i. Bathing water - Dartmouth Castle and Sugary Cove are excellent for the fourth year running (note this year has not been officially assessed as only partial sampling data collected due to COVID-19).
 - ii. 2019 Water Framework Directive (WFD) Waterbody assessments released; can be found on the EA Catchment Data Explorer <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3123/Summary>.
 - Two water bodies on the Dart catchment have moved from moderate to good
 - Failure against the chemical aspects of the WFD, largely due to adding elements for monitoring, including Mercury and chemical ‘PBDEs’ – Polybrominated diphenyl ethers – flame retardant organobromine compounds.
 - Effective policies and regulation for these have been around for some time. No intervention available however these are not increasing and will diminish to a residual level in time.
 - Responding to a question on potential Mercury sources, Rob referred to research done by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology that deposition can occur through the water cycle. Link to paper: http://www.pollutantdeposition.ceh.ac.uk/sites/pollutantdeposition.ceh.ac.uk/files/UK_HeavyMetals_Final_report_2006_final_version.pdf
 - iii. In response to a question regarding burning tyres, Rob advised the Local Authority should be called for illegal burning. The EA would still be interested from a waste perspective:

<https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/29/waste-crime-help-spot-it-and-stop-it/>

- iv. In response to a question from the Chair regarding salmon populations in the Dart, the feasibility for encouraging their return and the issue of medication in human waste passing through the treatment process: Rob confirmed the EA have an overall plan of action on fish of which encouraging fish return is part. The WFD is a key indicator of water quality, and fish diversity and abundance are key components of the biological assessment.

4.9 Ian Fenton, RYA South West

- Ian introduced himself to DEF members and provided an update on his background and experience.
- An update was provided on works taking place at Noss. RYA expect to return in July and be open for business in September.

4.10 Dart Estuary Forum Chair, Mike Pearey

- Marine Conservation Zones –directive that shows how the MCZ should be managed is awaited.
- Wildlife sightings are up, with increased otter sightings in several creeks. This may be related to reduced human activity during COVID-19 restrictions.
- An update was provided on Fleet Mill Marsh
 - 6 Ha in size.
 - Freshwater before the sea wall was broken through in Spring 2017. Now increasingly saline with species of plants changing towards a more typical estuarine creek community.
 - Updated County Wildlife Site survey conducted by the Devon Biological Records Centre on 28 August. This will be sent out to all with a covering note in due course.
 - Eel elva have been found at the site.
 - Initial thoughts were to restore the wall and return the marsh to freshwater. However, this is currently being discussed.

It was requested that

DEF members pass any thoughts on Fleet Mill Marsh to the Chair.

5. **FLEET MARSH & NEW CYCLE PATH PROPOSAL**

The Dart Estuary Forum Chair provided an update on the proposed cycle path.

- 5.1 Engaged with a Stoke Gabriel team who are trying to establish a cycling route from Totnes to Stoke Gabriel and on to Paignton. This could improve access to riverside recreation and biodiversity sites, including Fleet Mill Marsh and Sharpham Wilding project, providing additional educational opportunities around the harbour.
- 5.2 If the project is successful, there may be further opportunities such as extending to Galmpton, Greenway and Kingswear along with the potential for circular routes incorporating a ferry crossing - providing access by foot and bicycle to the Dart estuary.
- 5.3 The following update was provided by Leaf Lovejoy, Stoke Gabriel Neighbourhood Forum, via Zoom chat:
 - Leaf is on the Stoke Gabriel cycle path group.

- Last time there was general aversion to both routes due to the gradients. The Chair noted that with the increase in e-bikes these gradients become more manageable.
- Still floods, even given the new bridge

6. NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 4th May at 5pm venue TBA

APPENDIX 1 – Electric boating workshop

An Electric Boating virtual workshop “Decarbonising Recreational & Support Boats” was held on 6th August 2020. It was both interesting and informative; you can watch a recording of the event here: <https://youtu.be/oucYgTDSaHM>

The video is around 3 hours long; section timings are as follows:

Emily Reed, Devon Climate Emergency	0:00:00 to 0:10:30
Phil Horton, RYA Sustainability Strategy	0:10:50 to 0:23:45
Ross Wombwell, British Marine Environmental Roadmap	0:23:45 to 0:32:40
Dan Reading, Head of Sustainability World Sailing Challenge 2024	0:32:40 to 0:47:55
Discussion:	0:47:55 to 1:18:50
Steve Bruce, ePropulsion	1:18:50 to 1:27:00
Alex Newton Southon, RS Pulse58	1:27:00 to 1:40:50
Alex Cottle & Blake Lucas, Island RIBs	1:40:50 to 1:55:51
Jamie Marley, Marine Electrification Solutions	1:55:51 to 2:09:10
Discussion:	2:09:10 to 3:01:33