

South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**South Devon AONB Estuaries  
Steering Group Meeting**

to be held at

**10am on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Remote Video Meeting  
via Microsoft Teams**

**Agenda & Papers**



**Encouraging sustainable use and enjoyment**

**[www.SouthDevonAONB.org.uk](http://www.SouthDevonAONB.org.uk)**

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## **AONB Estuaries Steering Group Membership**

Dart Harbour Authority

Geoff Holland

Julian Distin

Devon County Council

Kirstie Pritchard

Cllr Jonathan Hawkins

Duchy of Cornwall

Tom Stratton – Apology given

Environment Agency (Catchment Based Approach)

Rob Price

Natural England

Ruth Crundwell

National Trust

Richard Snow – Apology given

Salcombe Harbour Authority

Cameron Sims-Stirling

Board member TBA

South Hams District Council

Rob Sekula

Elected rep TBA

### **AONB Unit staff attending**

AONB Estuaries Officer

Nigel Mortimer

AONB Manager

Roger English

AONB Office Manager

Vanessa Gray (minute taker)

## Agenda

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Item 3	Estuaries Officer's current activity report, and priorities for the next period – presentation & verbal report	Page 11
Item 4	Estuaries and Catchment priorities for the next 12months and longer term?	Page 14
Item 5	Financial report	to follow
Item 6	“Round the table” session - any topical issues to be raised by members of the Steering Group - National & Regional Coastal & Estuary Catchment Issues	Verbal
Item 7	Date and venue for Autumn 2021 meeting	Verbal

## Agenda item 2

### MINUTES OF THE SOUTH DEVON AONB ESTUARIES PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP MEETING

VIRTUAL MEETING HELD  
ON TUESDAY 3<sup>rd</sup> NOVEMBER 2020

#### 1. INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

**Those present were:**

Cllr Jonathan Hawkins	JH	Devon County Council / South Hams District Council
Kirstie Pritchard	KP	Devon County Council
Julian Distin	JD	Dart Harbour Authority
Tom Stratton	TS	Duchy of Cornwall
Christine Singfield	CS	Natural England
Nigel Mortimer	NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Roger English	RE	AONB Manager
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager – minute taker

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Cameron Sims-Stirling	Salcombe Harbour Authority Deputy, Phil Goodhead, unable to connect
Richard Eggleton	Dart Harbour Authority
Rob Price	Environment Agency

#### 2. NOTES OF THE 13<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020 ESTUARIES PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP MEETING FOR APPROVAL & ANY MATTERS ARISING

- 2.1 The notes of the last meeting were accepted as true record.
- 2.2 It was noted that most actions are progressing or completed.
  - i. The specific reason for action 4, to send estuary forums terms of reference to South West Water following a change of staff there, is unclear. RP and NM to compare notes.
  - ii. The AONB Manager has been in touch with most partners regarding 2020-21 funding. However key National Trust staff are furloughed so the AONB Manager will get in touch upon their return to work.

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

- 3.1 The AONB Estuaries Officer gave a presentation on activity that has taken place since the spring meeting. Details were provided within the meeting papers. Additional information presented at the meeting:
  - i. Within the Catchments Partnership, looking at a project within Wembury beach catchment to improve Wembury bathing water standards. The project, that requires funding, would work with the community and landowners on projects to slow the flow and improve quality of water, for example with reed beds, as it flows down the valley.

- ii. Approval of the Dart estuary biosecurity plan by Dart Harbour Board has been delayed by the change of Harbour Master.

**ACTION 1 (JD, DHNA)**: raise the updated biosecurity plan with the Interim Harbour Master.

- iii. Pacific oyster community Science project led to other discoveries
  - Seagrass has been found washed up on the shores of the Erme estuary in significant quantity, leading to speculation that there may be a new seagrass meadow outside the mouth of the estuary.
  - Discovery of honeycomb worm reef in the mouth of the Erme estuary.
  - Awareness raised of the extent and health of the dwarf seagrasses on the upper Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary
- iv. Salcombe Kingsbridge Estuary
  - Some concern the green algae may be growing over areas of dwarf seagrass. Efforts to reduce nitrate levels within the estuary should lead to an improvement. Note that the EA have cautioned that a significant period of time may elapse before improvement from work to reduce nitrates is seen on the estuary.
  - Red tides, dinoflagellate blooms, continue to affect the estuary with this year being particularly affected. The Estuary Officer identified it as a benign species.
- v. Plymouth University
 

The Estuaries Officer is proposing research projects for the new MSc Marine Biology course.

  - Projects that aim to quantify the natural capital worth of seagrass conservation works that may lead to funding from a carbon offsetting scheme for future seagrass conservation work.
  - Project to trial transplanting dwarf seagrasses to other sites within the Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary - requires NE approval.
  - Further study into dwarf seagrass meadows to help define what may make them special.
  - Learn more about the biology of the tentacled lagoon worm.
- vi. Fleet Marsh, Dart Estuary
 

Following the Estuary Officer's update on Fleet Marsh, the proposal for a cycle route from Stoke Gabriel to Totnes was discussed.

it was then

**RESOLVED**

The Estuaries Officer is to contact Stoke Gabriel Cycle Group to determine whether Fleet Marsh proposals may affect their plans to open a Totnes-Stoke Gabriel cycle route. Contact details to be provide by Cllr. Hawkins.

- vii. Second lockdown estuary use was discussed. The Estuaries Officer informed the group that DHNA had issued a notice advising the Dart estuary could continue to be used by locals however it would be closed to vessels arriving by sea. Salcombe was expected to follow a similar approach. It was noted that second lockdown is at a time that traditionally boats start to be hauled out for winter storage.
- viii. Christine Singfield raised the following on behalf of Natural England colleagues

- Simon Tame would like an update on sewage treatment works that have outflows into estuaries and SSSIs
  - Julien Sclater, works on planning matters for NE, would like to know when a nutrient management plan for the Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary SSSI catchment is expected. He would also like to know the status of the sewage treatment facility, capacity for preventing foul discharges as well as phosphate stripping information.
- ACTION 2 (Estuaries Officer):** Set up a meeting with the Environment Agency, Christine Singfield, Simon Tame, Julien Sclater and Jon Grimes from Natural England to discuss. Meeting to ideally take place before Christmas or early in the new year.
- ix. Cllr. Hawkins requested information on the current status of Lighthouse beach and access.
- The AONB Manager informed the group that NE colleagues working on the new England Coast Path have come forward with confirmation on a couple of stretches. However the stretch including Lighthouse beach requires ministerial sign off and is currently with the Secretary of State.

It was requested that

South Devon AONB staff unit and Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority lobby Anthony Mangnall MP to progress.

**ACTION 3 (AONB Manager):** draft a response with key documents and provide copies to Cllr. Hawkins and Julian Distin.

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

4.1 The priorities for the next 12 months provided in the papers were covered. The AONB Manager invited Estuaries Partnership members to consider whether the key areas covered are representative, reflect the interests of their organisations and the suite of actions in the Estuaries Management Plan. In discussion:

- i. Estuaries Partnership pages in harbour guides:
  - a. **ACTION 4 (Estuaries Officer):** share his submission for the Dart Harbour guide with Julian Distin.
  - b. Payment for pages in the Yealm Harbour guide will be met by PCC from ReMEDIES funding for the immediate future. A discussion is needed specifically on payment of these pages being met by Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC recreational impacts mitigation funding.
- ii. Timescale for Dartmouth north embankment access improvements is delayed due to several factors.
- iii. The issue of Pacific oysters on the Dart and limited volunteer support for the project was raised. Julian Distin would like to understand the project and options for targeted measures to see if these could be acted upon by the Harbour Authority themselves or the measures supported from the environmental projects budget. Tom Stratton added the Duchy would also support this.

**ACTION 5 (Estuaries Officer):** Provide project details to JD.

- iv. Trial of advanced buoy systems would be beneficial as marker buoys for trial seagrass transplantation on Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary.

4.2 The AONB Manager requests Estuaries Partnership members highlight any specific areas of work to prioritise in the Estuaries Officer work programme.

## 5. FINANCIAL REPORT AND BUDGET

5.1 The AONB Manager went through the approved budget for 2020-21 contained in the papers. Main points:

- i. Due to the Covid-19 situation leading to a slight underspend, additional support for the Estuaries Officer has been bought in to support key priorities.
- ii. The budget is on track to balance at year end.
- iii. The earned income component is relied upon each year and in 2020/21 this figure was boosted by work on the Pacific oyster project. Future years funding will remain reliant on income from projects. At the moment there are projects on the priority list that will make small funding contributions.

Following a discussion on the potential for an increase in funding from DHNA to match the contribution from Salcombe Harbour

It was then

### **RESOLVED**

The AONB Manager and Julian Distin to discuss in greater detail outside of this meeting.

- iv. The AONB Manager thanked partners for the RPI increase triggered this current year and reminded those present on the call that, regarding 2021/22 funding, key National Trust staff are furloughed so confirmation of their contribution is awaited.
- v. Estuaries budget 2021-22
  - The March RPI figure, published on 22 April 2020, was 2.6%. This results in an increase of £1,369 and will give an overall operating budget of £54,058 for 2021-22. Partners were written to at the beginning of September 2020 confirming this figure to aid budget setting for future years, recognising the different timescales and processes partners must work to.
  - DCC have previously confirmed their expected contribution for 2021-22 (subject to final DCC budget setting process); Tom Stratton confirmed the Duchy of Cornwall will be able to meet the increased contribution.
  - **ACTION 6 (all):** Estuaries Partnership Steering Group are asked to confirm their expected contributions for the 2021-22 financial year as soon as practicable if they have not already done so.
- vi. Cllr. Hawkins raised the SHDC Climate Emergency fund that has been made available for projects and asked whether the proposal to work with landowners to reforest some areas had been raised. The AONB Manager clarified that where the AONB does not qualify as a recipient of funding from this type of scheme, they work with community groups on a package of activity who then apply to the scheme.

The AONB Manager informed the Steering Group of a range of activities taking place around woodland planting, including the following:

- Plymouth City Council are proposing a community forest that would also extend out into South Hams and West Devon areas and potentially also Dartmoor National Park. This proposal has its own funding proposal and scheme.
- Work to identify land and landowners that may be supportive of woodland planting at various scales.

Process to date

- Invites have gone out to interested landowners and parties to highlight land that could be used for planting schemes with a view to arranging support for this to happen.
- Taking a strategic look at the area as a whole, identifying key strategic areas for woodland planting, for example where the woodland corridor network is sparse.
- There is also a county scale project through the Local Nature Partnership about Nature Recovery Networks.
- The AONB is a partner in the Trees Outside Woodlands project. In South Devon, the focus is on Bolt Tail round to Start Point and on to Torcross, Kingsbridge and Malborough. A second element operating at a county level focusses upon reintroducing trees into hedgerows, field corners that are difficult to farm, hilltop coppices etc. Although not woodland this range of activity makes an important contribution to landscape, nature conservation and climate change recovery. There are key sites along the Dart where this approach would be relevant. Estuary Management Plans also highlight the need to bolster woodland cover along estuary fringes.

**ACTION 7 (AONB Manager):** Contact Cllr. Tom Holway regarding the SHDC Climate Emergency fund.

**ACTION 8 (Estuaries Officer):** Contact Adam Williams, Climate Change officer at SHDC, to clarify whether the Plymouth University research project to quantify the carbon storage ability of seagrass and salt marsh could qualify for funding from the scheme.

## 6. "ROUND THE TABLE" UPDATES

All partners reported the impact of Covid-19. In addition, the following points were raised.

### 6.1 Tom Stratton, Duchy of Cornwall

- i. Keeping in regular contact with the two Harbour Masters and would like to commend everyone for keeping communications going over a difficult period.

### 6.2 Christine Singfield, Natural England

- i. Working on Pacific oyster report, completion due in November. Hoping this will be published and available early in the new year.
- ii. Working on conservation advice packages; currently formalising the Dart estuary MCZ conservation advice package, due end of the financial year
- iii. Updating the condition assessment for Plymouth Sound, includes Yealm estuary, due end of the financial year



- iv. Update to the spiny lobster feature in Skerries Bank and around to Start Point, MCZ.
- v. Monitoring
  - a. Obtained 2017/18 data from the Salcombe Kingsbridge estuary seagrass survey. Currently being quality assured prior to being published.
- vi. Pacific oyster project concluded. Report to be published at the start of next year.
- vii. ReMEDIES project – various work looking at advanced mooring systems
- viii. Planting out seagrass grown from seed in a lab in Plymouth

#### 6.3 Kirstie Pritchard, Devon County Council

- i. Climate Emergency update
  - a. Devon Carbon Plan
    - i. DCC are partners to signoff the draft Devon Carbon Plan for endorsement.
    - ii. Out for public consultation in December
    - iii. Second draft will have a wider impact. This will go before a Citizens' Assembly next year which is now likely to take place online.
  - ii. DMF steering group priorities
    - a. Blue carbon webinar taking place on 12<sup>th</sup> November, visit website to register [www.devonmaritimeforum.org.uk](http://www.devonmaritimeforum.org.uk)
  - iii. Devon Sustainable Transformation Partnership have put in an expression of interest for green social prescribing fund that is looking for four pilots. Hoping to hear whether the EOI was successful later this week and if so a full bid would need to be submitted by end of November.

#### 6.4 Julian Distin, DHNA

- i. Recruiting for a Harbour Master.
- ii. Annual Meeting likely to happen early in the new year

*Post meeting update: Captain Geoff Holland MN has been appointed Harbour Master, taking up the appointment on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021.*

#### 6.5 Rob Price, Environment Agency – update provided in advance by email

- i. EA 2025 (5 year plan) has been officially launched.
- ii. Refreshed Medium Term Plan - requested funding for 5 projects within South Devon Management Catchment; To be confirmed once funding is allocated.
- iii. Preparing next round of 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.
- iv. 2019 WFD Waterbody assessments released; can be found on EA Catchment Data Explorer; A short presentation to explain the results and next steps will be prepared for Estuary Forums and SDAONB Steering Group.
- v. Live programme currently includes:
  - o River Gara Diffuse Pollution Interventions (completion May 2021)
  - o Work on major fish barrier on the Dart (target completion Apr 2022)
  - o River Lemon Options Assessment (completion Apr 2021)
  - o Dogmarsh Weir Fish Easement (delivery Mar 2021)
  - o River Teign Fish Barrier Assessment (3 year programme)
- vi. There is a new Environment Officer addressing the Avon and Kingsbridge and Salcombe catchments – Robin Hooper; Robin is being brought up to speed on Kingsbridge paint pollution and reported concerns over farm pollutions on Torr Brook on the Avon.

- vii. Established a Land Management Pilot, within the Environment Programme, to increase improvements on land management
- viii. Working with SDAONB to develop project concept to scope and deliver sustainable improvements to Wembury stream (non-WFD water body).
- ix. Disappointed to hear the situation with the Yealm Shell Fishery and continue to liaise with Brixton Parish Council to help them understand the role the EA plays in planning and regulation of capacity of Sewage Treatment Works.
- x. The EA incident management roles are rostering up for duties associated with weather events, other environmental incidents, EU Exit and Covid-19 for the next 3 months.

## **7. DATES AND VENUES FOR 2021 MEETINGS**

Tuesday 18 May at 10am, virtual meeting

Tuesday 2 November at 10am, venue to be advised

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

### Agenda item 3

#### SOUTH DEVON AONB ESTUARIES PARTNERSHIP PERIOD REPORT NOVEMBER 2020 to APRIL 2021

The purpose of this brief report is to give an indication of the work carried out by the Estuaries Officer and in the name of the Estuaries Partnership over this period – further details are available on request.

#### Headliners:

- Five dwarf seagrasses research projects instigated with University of Plymouth students
- Winter programme of online illustrated talks on estuary conservation management matters
- Continuation of Estuary Forum meetings and outreach
- Production of draft AONB Construction Environmental Management Plan Preparation Guide for peer consultation
- Completion of the Pacific Oyster Project - excellent progress made on surveying the shores of the Yealm estuary and in assisting with the production with the final POP report.

#### Detail:

[Main EMP Policy/Action - Significant crossover of work and activities is inherent to the Estuaries Officer's work and the activity headings are not categorical]

1. Coastal forum meetings [Est63]
  - Yealm Estuary Management Group - autumn and spring online meetings
  - Avon Estuary Forum – autumn, 'special' and spring online meetings
  - Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum – autumn and spring online meetings
  - Dart Estuary Forum - autumn and spring online meetings
  - Dart Harbour Communities Group meeting attended
  - UK MPA Officers – online meetings
  - Devon Estuary Officers – online meeting
  - Tamar Estuaries Complex Forum – online meeting attended
2. Catchment Based Approach activities [Est16]
  - Wembury Water Catchment conservation project – online update meetings, work on a village self-guided water trail
  - Kingsbridge stream – initial silt trap project feasibility investigations
  - South Devon Catchments Partnership hosting – hosting discussions, local Catchment Pages consultations and assistance with a SDCP Newsletter production
  - Development of an Aquatic Environments Literacy teacher training and resources package with University of Plymouth Institute of Education & National Marine Aquarium
  - Continued raising of wider water quality issues within all associated AONB works [Est58]
3. Public consultations engaged and forwarded [Est52]
  - Wembury Marine Conservation Area Code-of-Conduct
  - Several very local 'consultations' e.g. Stoke Gabriel cycle path, Yealm seagrass awareness
  - MMO non-licensed activities
  - NE Countryside Code review
4. Beach clean events supported [Aware/P6] – none due to Cov'd19 restrictions
5. Awareness raising articles prepared [Aware/P1]
  - See Talks and Presentations

6. Formal education events [Aware/P4]
  - University of Plymouth – online lecture given to BSc Conservation Biology course and talk to BSc Applied Aquatic Biology course on Estuaries Conservation Management
  - Bicton College – online lecture to FdSc Conservation and Countryside Management course on Catchment Based Approach
7. Pacific oyster Community Science project [Est27]
  - No further positive progress – publication of project report delayed as Defra have required report to be peer reviewed
  - We remain very concerned about the unmanaged P. oyster population we perceive to threaten the dwarf seagrass meadow within the Salc-Kbr Est – part of the issue being able to access the foreshore with volunteers
8. Talks and presentations [Aware/P1]
  - Winter Estuaries Forums talks programme – series of four online illustrated talk events by local experts on matters of local interest to each Estuary Forum membership – all talks were recorded and are available via our YouTube channel
  - AONB Winter talks programme – online illustrated talk on our South Devon AONB Estuaries, their ecology and conservation management – also available on our YouTube channel
  - Wholescape Approach to Marine Management online workshop – presentation given on our experience of our Catchment Based Approach work
  - Dittisham Environment Group – online illustrated talk on estuaries/marine conservation
  - Stoke Gabriel Boating Association – online illustrated talk on why estuaries conservation matters to them and what everyone can do to help
  - North Devon Coastwise talk on South Devon Estuaries
9. Research projects assisted [Est69]
  - Plymouth University – assistance with permits for fish netting of flatfish within Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary
  - Plymouth University – dwarf seagrasses research – we now have a PhD student, two MSc students and two BSc students engaged with aspects of dwarf seagrasses research – have assisted with local advice, online and site meetings, securing of assents and permits, etc.
  - Letter of support prepared for PhD proposal to consider modelling research into suitable seagrass habitats for conservation projects
10. Planning & MMO license consultations [Plan/P1]
  - Salcombe-Kingsbridge
    - Ferry Cottage steps, Salcombe
    - Tacket Wood House, Kingsbridge, rebuild CEMP
    - Woodside outbuilding, Salcombe
    - Orestone End, Salcombe
    - Yalton Road defences MMO
    - Newbridge repairs, advisory
  - Dart
    - Dartmouth public slipway, site survey
    - Stoke Gabriel Boating Association Boathouse, foreshore access
    - Galmpton seagrass polytunnel
  - Yealm
    - Point View, Noss Mayo
    - Mill Cottage, Wembury, CEMP
  - Erme
    - Poultry Barn, Modbury, drainage

11. Conferences & workshops attended

- National Marine Protected Areas Management Officers webinars
- Coastal Futures conference
- SW Marine Ecosystems
- MMO Marine Plan Implementation
- Estuaries & Coastal Sciences Association SW Estuaries focus

12. Internal meetings

- AONB team meetings
- SHDC Staff COVID-19 updates

13. External meetings

- Dart Harbour Communities Group
- Devon online meeting of Estuary/Coastal officers
- Salcombe Harbour Board online meeting

14. Other

- Production of draft AONB Construction Environmental Management Plan Preparation Guide for peer consultation [Est49]
- Updated production of Salcombe TIC Guide, Salcombe & Yealm Harbour Guides pages [Est55]
- Totnes <-> Aish cycle way – discussions and input [Est41]

**Priorities for next 12 months**

COVID-19 traffic light (red/amber/green) categorisation:

- 😊 risk free
- 😐 some progress likely regardless
- 😞 most at risk

15. Continue to develop the AONB Construction Environmental Management Plan Preparation Guide for publishing and adoption as a matter of priority - 😊
16. Continue to develop and instigate a programme of virtual distance learning, lectures, discussions, workshops and meetings – allowing a form of normality to estuary community engagement and management, and with the benefit of Climate Change benefits - 😊
17. Preparation of local community water quality improvement projects to apply for funding – Wembury, Frogmore & Stoke Gabriel village communities - 😐; continued support and development of S.Devon Catchments Partnership - 😊
18. Encourage the appropriate conservation management of the Dart Estuary Sharpham & Fleet Marshes, and sustainability of public cycling track with relevant stakeholders - 😐
19. Develop habitat enhancement project for the Dartmouth N. Embankment Access Improvements as the opportunity arises 😐; assist DHNA where relevant 😊
20. Development of Yealm & SKE seagrass conservation projects;
  - Advanced ‘moorings’ trials and awareness raising - 😐
  - Collapit mudflats Pacific oyster management - 😞
  - Assist UoP seagrass research projects - investigating dwarf seagrass trials, dwarf seagrass community understanding, ecosystem & natural capital services - 😊
  - Progress seagrass conservation plans within South Devon estuaries - 😐
  - Assist ongoing Yealm Estuary component of NE ReMEDIES project - 😊
  - East Portlemouth seagrass conservation - 😐
21. Technical responses to planning and development applications and enquiries as required - 😊
22. Maintain an interest in the development of the Plymouth [centred] National Marine Park on behalf of the SD AONB EP - 😊
23. Continued work within AONB to explore alternative income generation - 😊
24. Subject to the publishing of our SW Pacific oyster INNS management project report consider our local future management of Pacific oysters? - 😐

**Recommendation**

25. It is recommended that the Estuaries Steering Group
  - i. Notes the current activity and progress report
  - ii. Gives its views on Estuaries Management Plan priorities to be actively pursued over the next period