

MEETING NOTES OF THE DART ESTUARY FORUM

MEETING HELD ONLINE ON TUESDAY 4th MAY 2021

1. INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Those present were:

Capt Geoff Holland	GH	Dart Harbour Authority
Julian Distin	JD	Dart Harbour Authority
Tom Hutchinson	TH	Vice chair & University of Plymouth
James Stewart	JS	IFCA
Lauren Henly	LH	IFCA
Rob Price	RP	Environment Agency
Christine Wood	CW	Marine Biological Association
Graham Anderson	GA	Dittisham Parish Council
Brian Deacon	BD	Stoke Gabriel Boating Association

AONB unit staff attending

Nigel Mortimer	NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager – note taker

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mike Pearey		Chair, local farmer & environmentalist
Cllr. Hilary Bastone		South Hams District Council
Cllr. Jonathan Hawkins		SHDC & Devon County Council
Ruth Crundwell		Natural England
Christine Hickson		Plover Rovers
Isabel Carlisle		Bioregional learning centre
Carol Strong		Marine Management Organisation
Neil Smith		Marine Management Organisation

- Dart Harbour Master, Capt Geoff Holland, was welcomed to the forum.
- The meeting was chaired by the forum Vice Chair, Tom Hutchinson.

2. APPROVAL OF 3 DECEMBER 2020 DEF MEETING NOTES

Further clarification on item 4.3 within the notes was sought by Julian Distin regarding the move to General Directions and stakeholder consultation. The following points were raised

- i. Harbour Byelaws will not be replaced by General Directions.
- ii. General Directions are powers given by Government to Harbourmasters, and do not involve other groups.
- iii. At the time of the meeting Dart Harbour were looking at getting General Directions in force. These subsequently came into power in March 2021.

2.1 The amended notes, to incorporate the above clarification, were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 It was noted that all previous meeting actions were completed or carried forward.

- 3.2 Dart Estuary Forum members are invited to send an email to Christine Wood cwo@MBA.ac.uk for a copy of the Marine Biological Association waterproof non-native species guide, together with an address it should be posted to. You can also view the guide online via the website¹
- 3.3 The Vice chair thanked John Bishop, MBA, for providing an interesting and informative talk on invasive non-native species and also gave thanks to Sharpham for their rewilding project talk. The 'Dart Estuary Aliens and the Rewilding of Sharpham' online talk is available to watch on the South Devon AONB YouTube channel²

4. AONB ESTUARIES OFFICER REPORT AND UPDATE

4.1 The AONB Estuaries Officer provided an update of recent activity. Activity included:

- i. Estuary meetings
The online format of Estuary forum meeting talks meant these could be recorded and kept available on the South Devon AONB YouTube channel³.
- ii. AONB Construction Environmental Management Plan Preparation Guide commissioned. When received, the draft will go out for peer consultation.
- iii. Pacific oyster community Science project
 - a. A significant three year project lead by Natural England colleagues that concluded in July last year with a report to Defra. Activities took place on a number of South West estuaries, with Nigel leading activities within the South Devon AONB estuaries.
 - b. The project report is currently being peer reviewed at the request of Defra and will be shared as soon as published
- iv. Impact of higher visitor numbers
 - a. Concerns regularly voiced at estuary forum meetings over the volume of post-lockdown visitors and concerns raised over the increase in disturbance from recreational activities
 - b. Working with partners the AONB is promoting positive messaging on how to enjoy the benefits of the area while encouraging responsibility.
 - c. Dittisham Parish Council have formed a working group to consider the range of pressures increased visitor numbers have introduced and ways to positively tackle this.
 - d. It was asked if Totnes Canoe Club, along with other clubs in the area, can put out messaging, in particular with alternative locations/ideas to relieve pressure on the popular areas.
 - e. DHNA have been installing signage at some popular launch sites, aimed at kayakers and paddleboarders, promoting safety and responsibility.
 - f. The Estuaries Officer reported that South Hams District Council have extended the 'high season' due to anticipated visitor numbers, increasing the number of locality officers for that period. Everyone is encouraged to report issues, such as full bins, to SHDC.
- v. Catchment Based Approach activities

¹ <https://www.mba.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/ID%20NNS%20English.pdf>

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgGw_wkmTOc&t=13s

³ <https://www.youtube.com/user/southdevonaonb1/videos>

- a. Notice of upcoming South Devon Catchment Partnership meetings are shared with estuary forums.
 - b. A number of statutory consultations are due to take place this year including
 - Flood Risk Management Plan
 - Water Framework – reasons for not achieving good status
 - Drainage and Waste Water Management Plan
 - c. The Estuaries Officer thanked everyone that took part in looking at the South Devon Catchments pages and completing the forms that provided input into the upcoming River Basin Management Plan.
 - d. Upstream Thinking Project, led by West Country Rivers Trust, works with farmers and landowners within the River Dart catchment freshwater reaches. Funding is available for a variety of projects that help to reduce the risk of sediment, nutrient and chemical run off into the water courses as well as the creation of new aquatic habitats and ability of land to hold water within the soil. Contact Annabel Martin at West Country Rivers Trust annabel@wrt.org.uk to find out more.
 - e. Devon and Cornwall Soils Alliance have had studies in seven targeted catchments thought to be in Cornwall that looked at soil health. The findings will be written up and shared and used to inform long term catchment solutions. Where suitable, funding will be available to facilitate change.
 - f. Development of an Aquatic Environments Literacy teacher training and resources package - working with University of Plymouth and Plymouth Marine Aquarium on marine literacy. This aims to 'teach the teachers'
- vi. The Rivers Trust have produced a map of sewer storm overflows⁴
- a. The Dart Harbour Master asked what amount of sewer overflow is released into the Dart each year. Rob Price informed he group that the Environment Agency measure time, not volume of outflow. The question has been referred to colleagues who will be able to provide further information on what data is collected for this asset and also go through other information such as type of overflows, risks associated etc.
ACTION 1 (GH): Contact the Vice chair post meeting to continue this discussion. There is a lot of work taking place around waste water input and there is potential for student work that could add data in this area.
- vii. The Estuaries Officer asked for updates on the following:
- a. Fleet Creek
 - A draft terrestrial ecology report, from a survey conducted in 2020, was already made available to forum members.
 - More recently the estuary forum Chair and Vice chair walked the route and took an informal visual survey of the marsh.
 - No further activity to report however the Chair and Vice chair are taking an active interest and encourage forum members to contact them for an informal update.
 - b. Totnes Stoke Gabriel Cycle Path
 - No new update available
- viii. Crabbing

⁴ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a6dd42e3bc264fc28134c64c00db4a5b&extent=-401307.0872%2C6628364.5565%2C-130261.3849%2C6788576.5678%2C102100>

The DHNA Harbourmaster provided an update on issues encountered with discarded crab lines and the initiative in Looe Harbour providing a crab line recycling scheme⁵

- a. DHNA are keen to get a similar scheme in place for the Dart where crabbing takes place and are in contact with the Looe Harbourmaster to find out more.
- b. The Vice chair suggested it may be worth contacting LandWorks⁶, a local charity that are able to make wooden items from their base in Dartington.
- c. During a discussion it was suggested appropriate messaging should be formulated around the use of plastic in crabbing kits, including the plastic packaging it comes in.
- d. It was suggested that it would be useful to update the crabbing guide
ACTION'd (NM): Provide copy of current AONB crabbing guide to Graham Anderson so he can review and suggest updates.

4.2 The Vice chair thanked the Estuaries Officer for his activity report and those who worked with Nigel to provide online talks including the MBA and Sharpham Estate.

5. ESTUARY FORUM PROGRESS AND PROPOSALS FOR NEXT SIX MONTHS

5.1 The Vice chair summed up proposals made earlier in the meeting

- i. Dart Estuary Forum members be pro-active and keep a watchful eye to encourage responsible behaviours for small craft users such as kayakers and paddleboarders.
- ii. If there are issues that Totnes Canoe Club and other clubs play their part encouraging best practise.

5.2 Julian Distin enquired about MCZ management proposals and when these are due to be released for the new MCZ created for the upper Dart⁷.

- i. The Estuaries Officer informed forum members that Ruth Crundwell, Natural England, has reported there will not be specific MCZ management proposals for the new MCZ. [Post meeting update, a conservation advice package for the Dart MCZ has now been completed⁸]

6. ROUND TABLE UPDATES

6.1 James Stewart, Devon & Severn IFCA

MCZ update

- i. Fishing activity reports will be linked to MCZ assessment.
- ii. Level of baiting activity is unknown. Many staff hours have been invested and surveys carried out with little activity found. There is not thought to be a great deal of this activity on the Dart however this needs to be confirmed.
 - a. IFCA would like to engage with stakeholders, requesting the report locations and timing of any baiting activity seen. The reports will be used to inform what habitats may be at risk from baiting activity.
 - b. **ACTION'd 2 (JS):** Circulate information on bait digging and provide contact details for James plus the duty phone number where bait digging, or suspicious activity, should be reported.
- iii. Lauren Henly will attend future Dart Estuary Forums on behalf of Devon and Severn IFCA

⁵ <https://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/uks-first-crab-line-recycling-scheme-reduce-plastic-pollution-launched-looe>

⁶ <https://www.landworks.org.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-dart-estuary>

⁸ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/SupAdvice.aspx?SiteCode=UKMCZ0057&SiteName=dart&SiteNameDisp=lay=Dart%20Estuary%20MCZ&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=&NumMarineSeasonality=>

6.2 Graham Anderson, Dittisham Parish Council

- i. Would like to publish a practise guide for kayakers on their website and social media.

ACTION 3 (GA): Contact the Vice chair outside of this meeting to further discuss.

6.3 Brian Deacon, Stoke Gabriel Boating Association

- i. Keen to understand the sewer discharges better. Wish to be alerted when this happens or is about to happen to be able to advise children to stay out of the water for a period of time. South West Water have acknowledged the request and are looking into this.

With no representative from SWW in the meeting the Vice chair asked Rob Price for comment. Rob mentioned the Safer Seas and Rivers Service from Surfers Against Sewage that sends out alerts when sewer overflows discharge⁹. Although this type of model is not easy to deliver, it would be fantastic to have something similar reporting and providing alerts along this location. Another option would perhaps be to consider investigating having a bathing water designation.

IT WAS PROPOSED THAT

Invite SWW to make a presentation at a future meeting, potentially the November meeting, so that estuary forum members can understand the issues.

6.4 Rob Price, Environment Agency

- i. Environment Agency incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60
- ii. Contact details for Devon and Cornwall: enquiries@environmentagency.gov.uk
- iii. Some significant fish passage projects in progress due to be completed by March 2022.
 - One project represents a total investment of £300k working in partnership with Buckfast Abbey to replace a large barrier to fish passage with a modern technical fish passing design by autumn.
 - A further project is to replace an unregistered barrier near Dart Country Park working with them to replace this in a similar timeframe to the above.
- iv. Environmental Land Management project pilot of the Sustainable Farming Incentive¹⁰ has been launched. South Devon farmers have been invited to take part, with a cap of 800 for the pilot scheme nationally [[post meeting update: now extended to 2000 due to interest & demand](#)]
- v. Second round of the Green Challenge Recovery Fund, up to £40m funding available. A number of projects have been submitted from this area.
- vi. Large number of bids, including a local bid, have been made to the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. NEIRF looks for eco systems services that generate revenue and attract private sector investment to improve overall quality of the environment.
- vii. Bringing forward their refresh to end June for the Environment programme. The Catchment Action Plan is used to identify projects that will deliver improvements throughout the catchment aiming to prioritise funding to deliver improvements against the Water Framework Directive.
- viii. Final consultation on the River Basin Management Plan will be available from September, to be finalised in December. The next cycle starts in January 2022 and will have a South Devon element on the Catchment Pages that go up on the Catchment Data Explorer.

6.5 Christine Wood, Marine Biological Association

- i. Working on risk assessments for non-native species entering the UK and Europe. Dredging has become obvious as a major pathway for local and international spread. If anyone is approached

⁹ <https://www.sas.org.uk/safer-seas-service/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sustainable-farming-incentive-pilot>

for Marine licensing comments on any form of dredging activity, Christine can provide details on work in Wales that can provide useful input for your comments.

6.6 Capt Geoff Holland, Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority

- i. Following issues with harbour seals going onto boats on the Dart, a pontoon has been installed and is already being made use of.

6.7 Julian Distin, Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority

- i. Julian asked if anything further was known about the decision on Lighthouse Cove as part of the England coast path stretch from Kingswear to Lyme Regis¹¹.

[Post meeting update: The Secretary of State has signed off NE's plans for a section of the new England coast path between Kingswear and Lyme Regis. There is an opportunity to reopen an old right of way in Kingswear to access Lighthouse beach. There is some final work following signoff however it is anticipated that the Act will follow in the autumn at which point access to the beach will be restored.]

7. **NEXT MEETING**

Evening of Wednesday 1st December 2021 was suggested, venue and time TBC – see below.

Capt Geoff Holland offered use of their boardroom, however, numbers would be limited to around 12.

ACTION'd (NM): Totnes Boating Association have kindly offered the use of their Steamer Quay club house on 1st December at 6pm. (<http://www.totnes-boating.co.uk/>)

Therefore, subject to any conditions active at the time, we shall hold our autumn DEF meeting on **Wednesday 1st December at 6pm** within the **Totnes Boating Association club house** or 5pm if considered necessary online. Confirmation of the venue and time will be confirmed at least one week before the meeting date.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-kingswear-to-lyme-regis>