

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

VIRTUAL MEETING HELD  
ON TUESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER 2021

## 1. INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

### Those present were:

|                       |    |                                    |
|-----------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| Rob Everitt           | RE | Dart Harbour Authority             |
| Julian Distin         | JD | Dart Harbour Authority             |
| Cllr Jonathan Hawkins | JH | Devon County Council               |
| Tom Stratton          | TS | Duchy of Cornwall                  |
| Rob Price             | RP | Environment Agency – joined later  |
| Ruth Crundwell        | RC | Natural England                    |
| Phil Goodhead         | PG | Salcombe Harbour Authority         |
| Hugh Marriage         | HM | Salcombe Harbour Authority         |
| Nigel Mortimer        | NM | AONB Estuaries Officer             |
| Roger English         | RE | AONB Manager                       |
| Vanessa Gray          |    | AONB Office Manager – minute taker |

### Apologies for absence were received from:

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Kirstie Pritchard | Devon County Council |
| Richard Snow      | National Trust       |

## 2. NOTES OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021 ESTUARIES PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP MEETING FOR APPROVAL & ANY MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The minutes were approved.

## 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.
- i. There are ongoing concerns over disturbance, on the whole it appears that people are being more respectful this year. Messaging encouraging responsible behaviour is in place.
  - ii. More people are visiting the coast and with greater access to affordable vessels there are concerns over damage to sea grass, saltmarsh and shores. The Estuaries Officer will raise awareness in a number of ways including via harbour guides.
  - iii. Water quality matters
    - o Raising wider awareness of water quality issues is a mainstay of our work and continues through our Catchment Based Approach activities etc.
    - o Working with Environment Agency, considering ways to capture silt and polish water within a stream that flows into the Kingsbridge basin.
    - o Progress on activities within the Wembury catchment, temporarily stalled until new National Trust officer for the area recruited.

- Funding is being offered via a new Defra project, 'Championing Coastal Coordination' or '3Cs', and joining with other estuary partnerships in Devon to work towards a state of the Devon Sea report.
  - Also applying to the 3Cs fund to work with someone with social media skills to widen the audience of the 'The Drip' to inform on water quality matters and engage responsible behaviour.
  - Sewage outfalls
    - The Rivers Trust has an interactive map showing the number and duration of treated effluent and overflows of untreated effluent and storm water into rivers in England & Wales:  
<https://www.riverstrust.org/key-issues/sewage-in-rivers>
  - It was raised whether closer engagement with farmers with targeted interventions could be linked to Catchment Sensitive Farming or Environmental Land Management activities.
    - **ACTION 1 (Ruth Crunwell):** will find out from colleagues to see what is proposed.
    - Roger English: The broader AONB team is involved in ELM advocacy work, farm facilitation activity on the Avon (and now elsewhere) and Farming in Protected Landscapes. At present we understand the additional funding announced for Catchment Sensitive Farming will increase the number of advisors and amount of support but not necessarily provide access to mid-tier water capital type interventions. There are opportunities available and there are farmers that are not presently taking advantage, including on priority catchments such as the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary. All are encouraged to feedback any issues they spot, including the location and potential options, so the AONB can work with John Grimes and our temporary FiPL officer to assist meaningful interventions.
- iv. Pacific oyster community Science project
- The project report was published on 30<sup>th</sup> October<sup>1</sup>
  - Ruth Crundwell: Roger Covey, Natural England Principle Adviser has agreed to take any media or policy queries about the report, there is also a marine mailbox address available in the report.
  - Natural England national specialists will be reviewing the recommendations in the report. DCIoS Area team are also reviewing the recommendations and how they can be taken forwards locally – NM liaising.
  - Pacific oysters are displacing native species and communities and can lead to a loss of beach amenity such as we have on the Yealm.
  - There are areas where managed control can make a difference however continued support is required from volunteers and for co-ordination. The Estuaries Officer will continue work to work with volunteers however consideration needs to be given to funding support for these activities. Volunteers need suitable clothing and equipment and reimbursement for their out of pocket expenses.

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<sup>1</sup> [Partnership led strategy to monitor and manage the spread of Pacific oyster populations in south Devon and Cornwall - NERR100 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)

- Tom Stratton: The Duchy may be able to support a project for removal of Pacific oysters, if removal is feasible, with crushed waste used as fertiliser locally.
  - o There is a concern that Pacific Oysters are covering intertidal dwarf seagrasses.
    - An MSc Plymouth Student project is being proposed to consider most sustainable method of Pacific oyster management within dwarf seagrass meadow areas
    - The Estuaries Officer had discussions with Salcombe Harbour Authority. The oysters could be removed at high tide using the harbour barge however the impact of removal needs to be less impactful than the oysters themselves.
  - o There are Pacific oysters along the sea wall at Dartmouth. Access to collect and remove waste here is difficult - just knocking them off the wall and leaving them has the potential for a reef to form at the base of the wall.
  - o What to do with collected Pacific oyster 'biological waste' is an ongoing issue. The Estuaries Officer has been following this up however there has been no significant progress to date. There is a degree of legislation involved constraining what can be done with the waste material.
  - o A question was raised regarding whether Defra has a national policy for the farming of Pacific oysters.
    - Understand that a request for a license will not necessarily be granted in areas that do not currently have Pacific oyster farms.
    - Natural England advisors will be liaising with Defra for guidance.
  - o The one or two remaining licensees for Pacific oysters on Duchy owned estuaries in Devon are now moving away from farming them and trialling native European oysters.
- v. Assisting Plymouth University with dwarf seagrasses research on the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary.
- o Drone survey carried out for a baseline mapping
    - showed more extensive dwarf seagrass than previously thought
    - Green seaweed cover on the mud flats has the same spread but there is maybe less of it than before (this can vary annually).
  - o Ongoing research on the seagrass meadow conditions to see where dwarf seagrass may be supported and investigating the carbon trapped by the leaves and meadows into the sediment below.
  - o There are now more patches in the seagrasses on the eastern side of the mudflats than a few months before. Need some active management of these sensitive areas. The Estuaries Officer will liaise with Salcombe Harbour Authority to look into the possibility of having starboard markers.
  - o Tom Stratton: There may be potential for the Duchy to help expand seagrass work if appropriate.
- vi. On the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary the red tide seemed less extensive and shorter lived than usual – hopefully a trend and not an outlier.
- vii. New research projects for example funding has already been obtained for sea wall research on the Dart estuary.

- viii. The final draft AONB Construction Environmental Management Plan Preparation Guide has received positive feedback from the District Council's Planners. The draft is currently with the AONB Manager prior to final publication.
- ix. Harbour guide pages will be refreshed, encouraging people to take responsibility and change behaviour for the better.
  - Salcombe Harbour Guide may have more space available
  - Discussions with Dart Harbour to make more use of infographics and increasing the messages on what people can do to help

#### **Observations and in discussion**

- x. Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary
  - Problems of gaining access to foreshore from Rowden Point was discussed
  - Dwarf eelgrass at Widegates. Boatmen report there is an extension of beds that seem to be thriving.
- xi. Climate change and the environment
  - Estuaries Partnership members are encouraged to look for anything that can make a significant positive impact in addition to the smaller changes that cumulatively make a big impact.
  - Suggested that a short action plan be drawn up that takes us toward what we need to do to address the more significant issues, including oysters, water quality and seagrass.
- xii. Pacific Oysters
  - The Duchy can influence what oysters are farmed as well as the location
- xiii. Other
  - Litter
    - Increase in littering and litter messaging was discussed. There was some concern raised about the potential problem of the 'take it home' message for those staying in hotels. It was suggested local accommodation and food take-away businesses are encouraged to accept visitor waste & come up with initiatives to help the situation.
    - The Clean Devon campaign group work with partners from across Devon to reduce litter and fly tipping <https://cleandevon.org/>. Steering Group members are encouraged to feed back any concerns regarding litter or messaging to Kirstie via the AONB Estuaries Officer.

#### **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.

- i. The National Marine Park was discussed. The AONB is positive about the concept of a National Marine Park and raising awareness, with some concerns over the very Plymouth-centric focus. There is a need to ensure that benefits are accrued for the whole area and take into account features of interest across our patch. Although involved in some conversations, in general the AONB and members of the Estuaries Partnership are not involved in detailed conversations so there is a lack of understanding of what is being taken forward. It is understood that if the Horizon bid is successful Plymouth City Council will consult more widely during the next phase.

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

- i. Tom Stratton: The Estuaries Partnership can help influence, in particular on the important issues such as climate change, water quality and Pacific oysters.

## 5. FINANCIAL REPORT

5.1 The AONB Manager went through the 2021-22 figures contained in the papers and reported the budget is balanced with no concerns.

5.2 Next financial year budget:

- i. The AONB Manager highlighted that at some point the budget will increase as activity returns to pre-covid levels.
- ii. The Estuaries budget is reliant on Catchment Based Approach Partnership funding to support Estuaries Officer work.
- iii. The AONB Manager reminded the Partnership the March 2021 RPI figure, published 21 April 2021, is 1.5%. This figure will be applied to budget setting for the 2022-23 financial year.
- iv. The AONB Manager thanked those partners who are able to increase their contribution by the RPI figure and offered to confirm the new amount via email on request.
- v. **ACTION 2 (all):** Would partners that have not yet done so, confirm their expected contributions for the 2022-23 financial year to the AONB Manager as soon as possible.

## 6. PARTNER UPDATES

6.1 Julian Distin, Dart Harbour & Navigation Authority

- i. Currently recruiting for the vacant Harbour Master position
- ii. Covid has slowed progress on environmental projects this year.

6.2 Rob Everitt, Dart Harbour & Navigation Authority

- i. Hydrographic survey starts in 1.5 weeks if anyone is interested in the information from that please get in touch. Will take a look at the Hole-in-the-Wall with a multi beam scan to hopefully discover if there have been any significant changes.

6.3 Hugh Marriage, Salcombe Harbour Authority

- i. The acting Regional Director at the Environment Agency provided water quality data on a spreadsheet to the local MP. There is a great deal of water quality information for the upper part of Salcombe harbour.

**ACTION 3 (Phil Goodhead):** liaise with Nigel to send a copy to Rob Price.

- ii. Salcombe Harbour Board are developing a strategy on water quality – Water Environment Action Plan

6.4 Phil Goodhead, Salcombe Harbour Authority

- i. South West Water have been doing drainage, outfall and sewerage reconstructions around the harbour. They have finished their Ditch End works and believe they have completed the South Sands works. In process of hatch cover and intersection replacements around the Salcombe foreshore.
- ii. Heavy rain popped some drain covers in Salcombe. Had the flood barrier been closed, may have encouraged flooding by preventing water flowing out.
- iii. No negative impacts from the recent dredging.
- iv. No obvious ongoing signs of issue following the diesel spill in February.

6.5 Rob Price, Environment Agency

- i. Report environment incidents to the incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 - <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident>

- ii. Significant fish pass projects have completed
  - a. A weir has been removed in the River Dart Country Park, removing a significant barrier to migratory species.
  - b. A new fish pass has been opened on Buckfast weir allowing fish to get over the weir, in particular at low flows, to get to spawning grounds upstream.
- iii. Final assessment on all bathing water for this year has been delayed to January/February 2022. The delay is to accommodate an additional data sweep needed to avoid any challenges for bathing water status.
- iv. Discharges from the water industry, together with agricultural input, is impacting water bodies. In 2019 the number of telemetry devices installed on water company assets monitoring the duration of diluted sewage discharges into water bodies increased from 800 (2016) to 12,000. There is a vast amount of evidence and a lot of information is now being published. The EA have recruited six new environment officers for a period of 18 months to focus on the agricultural sector, freeing up resources to focus on the water industry.

**ACTION 4 (Rob Price):** send links to further sources of information on discharges

#### 6.6 Tom Stratton, Duchy of Cornwall

- i. The Duchy is committed to putting resource towards tackling some of the challenges
  - a. Working on a draft plan looking at achieving net zero.
  - b. Commissioned Bournemouth University to perform a piece of work on the marine estate in Devon looking at the condition of habitat. Will continue to engage with the Estuaries Officer on this.

#### 6.7 Ruth Crundwell, Natural England

- i. Working with the ReMEDIES project, looking at how to alter some anchoring and mooring practices for recreational boaters to see what can be done to reduce impacts on vulnerable sea beds, including seagrass. Further detail here save our seabed <https://saveourseabed.co.uk/>
- ii. Funding available for a suitable 'ready to go' project that would have results by end of March. Not much known about dwarf seagrass, interested in the University research project outlined earlier.

#### 6.8 Jonathan Hawkins, Devon County Council

- i. South Hams District Councillors were allocated £3,000 each for environment initiatives, with up to £9,000 available around the Dart area. A number of members have yet to find suitable projects; contact Councillors with any small projects benefitting the environment that could be supported by this fund

### 7. DATES FOR 2022 MEETINGS

Tuesday 17 May at 10am

Tuesday 1 November at 10am (proposed date to be reviewed at Spring meeting)

The AONB Manager confirmed that meetings will remain via Microsoft Teams for now.

Anyone with a preference for a physical meeting is invited to contact the Estuaries Officer.

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