

MEETING NOTES OF THE DART ESTUARY FORUM

MEETING HELD ONLINE ON WEDNESDAY 18 MAY 2022

1. INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Those present were:

Julian Distin	JD	Dart Harbour Authority
Lauren Henly	LH	Devon & Severn IFCA
Rob Price	RP	Environment Agency
Emma Magee	EM	Environment Agency
Christine Wood	CW	Marine Biological Association
Sophie Kendall	SK	Marine Management Organisation <i>in place of Lilly Anna Stokes</i>
Graham Anderson	GA	Dittisham Parish Council
Valda Smith	VS	National Trust
Ian Fenton	IF	South Devon College, based at Noss Marina

AONB unit staff attending

Nigel Mortimer	NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Roger English	RE	AONB Manager <i>chaired meeting</i>

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mike Pearey	Local farmer & environmentalist
Cllr Jonathan Hawkins	South Hams District Council & Devon County Council
Cllr Hilary Bastone	South Hams District Council
Paul Britton	Dart Harbour Authority - <i>connection issues</i>
Stephen Westcott	Seal naturalist - <i>connection issues</i>
Vanessa Gray	AONB Office Manager

Abbreviations used: WRT – Westcountry Rivers Trust; MCZ – Marine Conservation Zone; MMO – Marine Management Organisation; JNCC – Joint Nature Conservation Committee; WFD – Water Framework Directive; DLNP – Devon Local Nature Partnership; DISI – Devon Invasive Species Initiative; MPA – Marine Protected Area

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

- 2.1 Mike Pearey has now stepped down as Chair of the Dart Estuary Forum. Mike has served as Chair of this forum for almost four years, double the usual term. The AONB Manager formally recognised Mike's service and support for the forum and his fantastic work with four years at the helm.
- 2.2 Nominations received for Vice-chair
 - a. Graham Anderson, Dittisham Parish Council, was thanked for putting his name forward for Vice-chair.
- 2.3 Nominations received for Chair
 - a. None received to date.
 - b. In the absence of a replacement Chair, the AONB Manager acted as interim Chair for the meeting.
 - c. The Dart Estuary Forum is an important forum and an independent Chair is preferred to help steer the group over the next term of two years.

- d. **ACTION (all):** Forum members are requested to consider becoming Chair of this group and are also requested to speak to contacts in their networks to seek a suitable person who may step forward.

3. APPROVAL OF 1 DECEMBER 2021 DEF MEETING NOTES

- 3.1 No issues or corrections were raised on the meeting notes of the last meeting; notes approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 None raised.

4. AONB ESTUARIES OFFICER REPORT AND UPDATE

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

4.2 Pacific oysters

- i. The Pacific oyster report is now being considered by Natural England area team on how some of the recommendations can be taken forward locally.
- ii. Pacific oysters within the Dart estuary are considered to be damaging to the Marine Conservation Zone. NE would like to see managed control within the upper Dart estuary MCZ.
- iii. Pacific oyster numbers have been increasing on the shore around the pontoon at Stoke Gabriel, signs have been put up there warning about sharp shells. Pacific oysters are found on The Flats, used for cricket at low tide in the past, and around the Mill Pool. (Another non-native species is also found at Mill Pool: *Ficopomatus enigmaticus* - Trumpet tube-worm)
- iv. Currently applying for the permissions to start local volunteer groups to control numbers around the Dart estuary. Future action – calling for volunteers.
- v. Although normally settling onto rocky foreshore (aka Rock oyster), Pacific oysters also seem able to settle onto native bivalve shells, attracting others with the potential for oyster reefs developing here too. As could potentially become the case for The Flats if left unmanaged.
- vi. What to do with collected Pacific oysters is an ongoing issue. On rocky shores, the shells are split apart and the flesh left for fish and crabs to pick over. Removing them from steel piled seawalls is a particular issue, just chipping them off risks leaving live oysters settling at the bottom to reef and proliferate further?
- vii. There are a couple of obstacles holding things up
 - Waste: what to do with the oyster biomass is an ongoing issue, there are a number of hurdles and legislation regarding this type of waste.
 - Funding: recompensing volunteers' expenses and funding co-ordination.

4.3 Habitat enhancement – steel piled walls

- i. Progress to date has been slow.
- ii. There is a charity in the Isle of Wight that produces 'MudFlats'¹, an intertidal habitat system for steel for sheet pile.
- iii. Would like to trial these in the Dart. Unable to weld these to the sheet pile or penetrate the steel in any way. Will look into options for hanging these from the concrete above the top of the wall.

4.4 Saltmarsh

- i. Looking at a project to survey all of the saltmarshes and tidal reedbeds within the Dart to assess their condition, health and carbon uptake. Consultants will be engaged to provide a set of active management prescriptions that should enhance the saltmarshes - these may then be

¹ <https://www.artecology.space/blog/2021/4/5/introducing-artecology-mudflats-our-soft-sediment-intertidal-habitat-system>

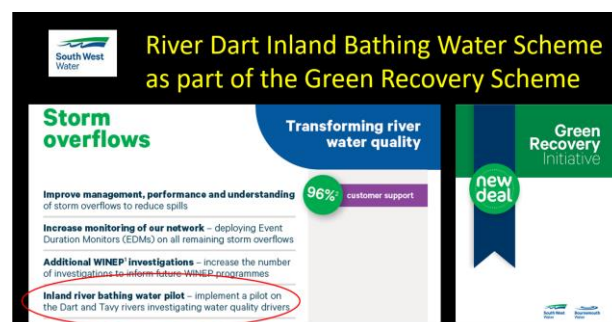
offered to the relevant landowner(s) together with advice on the funding available for carrying out the works. There may be nature based and carbon credit payback schemes available.

4.5 South Devon Catchment Partnership

- i. Continue to co-host the South Devon Catchment Partnership with West Country Rivers Trust.
- ii. Four meetings held annually.
- iii. Let the Estuaries Officer know If you would like to receive meeting notices/invites as well as relevant updates and are not already doing so.

4.6 Inland River Bathing Waters²

- i. Several DEF members have been invited by South West Water to attend this meeting - in particular to discuss the proposal for the inland river bathing water pilot within the River Dart .
- ii. As there has yet to be an initial stakeholder meeting, SWW have declined to attend this DEF until this has taken place.
- iii. Hopeful of SWW attendance at our Autumn DEF meeting to talk about the pilot project and what it may involve.



4.7 Story Maps

- i. South Devon AONB have released State of Nature story maps³.
- ii. Successful in obtaining Championing Coastal Coordination ('3Cs') funding from Defra championing coastal co-ordination.
 - Devon coastal officers secured funding to produce a 'State of Devon Sea report' - but it is a huge undertaking and the project window narrowed before the project could formally start, so limited tangible progress made this year.
 - We also secured some funding to promote our 'The Drip'⁴ animation via social media – however, with the subsequent formal time-window for our project our contractor felt unable to progress the project to their usual standard and declined the contract.

4.8 Farming in Protected Landscapes programme⁵

- i. There are two new members of the AONB team for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme: Henry Lucas, FiPL Officer and Phoebe Rhead, FiPL Administrator.
- ii. The first year of the three year funding programme has completed. The programme will run until March 2024.
- iii. Open to farmers and land managers within or benefitting the AONB for support to carry out projects that support nature recovery, mitigate climate change, provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and support nature friendly sustainable farm businesses.
- iv. The next round of new applications will be considered in July. Expressions of interest is via the South Devon AONB website. Interested parties may speak with the FiPL Officer Henry Lucas beforehand.

4.9 Publications

- i. A State of the AONB nature report is available via the AONB website⁶.

² <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/greenrecovery> [page 22 - PDF 6.5MB 64pages]

³ <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/state-of-nature/>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSrgPLkvP8Q>

⁵ <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/opportunities-for-farmers-2021-24/>

⁶ <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/state-of-nature/>

- ii. The Dart Harbour Guide has been revised and updated for 2022 and is available on the Dart Harbour website⁷.
- iii. The Estuaries Officer has been approached to prepare a guide to the Upper Dart Estuary Marine Conservation Zone for users of the estuary. A draft has been produced and sent to the Stakeholders User Group. For most recreational users of the estuary (& Harbour), we should encourage the same level of environmental awareness, respect and care within all areas of the estuary, and indeed its water and coastal catchment areas, following the general guidance within the current Dart Harbour Guide. Those considering developments and commercial users, that could potentially have a greater impact on the estuarine environment, should check against the guidance signposted with the MCZ guide, etc.
- iv. Final version of the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) Production Guide has been per reviewed and is now with the District Council design team for publication. Encourages best practise with run off; consideration of how building waste is transported and stored; site lighting and spill; and hoped that the resultant CEMP will be included as condition of planning approval if given.

4.10 Stoke Gabriel to Totnes Cycle Route

- i. No updates received on this for some time.

4.11 Meetings

- i. Meetings have been held exclusively online for some time now.
- ii. Moving forward, it is hoped to offer hybrid meetings where people may attend in person or online *[see Next Meeting details below]*.

4.12 Questions and in discussion

- Rob Price, Environment Agency
 - CEMP is a huge step forward, innovative and looking forward to seeing it published. Would like to have permission to share with other estuary forums in neighbouring catchments.
- Graham Anderson, Dittisham Parish Council
 - CEMP is a good document. The Parish Council tends to respond to every planning application and would like this to become part of the District Council planning conditions.

5. ESTUARY FORUM PROGRESS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

5.1 Julian Distin, Dart Harbour Authority

- i. New Harbour Master recruited; Paul Britton is now in post.
- ii. Reviewing strategic plan, has been out for consultation and is hoped to be available soon.
- iii. Will work on a draft moorings policy later this year with consultation likely in the autumn.
- iv. Dart Harbour hope to put on a large river trip for people to meet board members and officers and take a look at what we talk about, on-site.

5.2 Sophie Kendall, Marine Management Organisation

- i. Lauren James has left the MMO. A new South Planner has been recruited and will take up their post soon.
- ii. There are a number of other vacancies including Principal Marine Officer for the south west and also a couple in the evidence team.
ACTION (SK): let the Estuaries Officer of personnel changes so he can update his mailing list.
- iii. Marine planning update (from the wider MMO)

⁷ <https://www.dartharbour.org/about-dart-harbour/harbour-guide/>

- Call for evidence on the impacts of fishing using bottom towed gear on designated features on thirteen Marine Protected sites, including some based in the south west.
- UK seafood fund infrastructure scheme to fund projects that build capacity across the UK seafood sector supply chain closes for applications on 24 May.

5.3 Valda Smith, National Trust

- i. There are a couple of sites by the Dart where ash dieback is significant: Dyers Wood and Gallants Bower. Works will take place and although there will be some felling, ash will be left standing where that is possible [dead standing trees are a hugely important component of natural woodland communities]. Alternative routes for permissive paths will be used where possible however some permissive paths may be lost where there is no alternative.
- ii. Observations and in discussion
Julian Distin, Dart Harbour Authority: whilst operating in Dyers Wood - some of the wood used for stepped paths there could do with being looked at.
AONB Manager: Link to Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum⁸

5.4 Graham Anderson, Dittisham Parish Council

- i. Met with the new Dart Harbour Master last week. Paul comes across as knowledgeable about the area, engaging and positive. A separate meeting will take place to look at items affecting Dittisham.
- ii. Annual beach clean took place in March. Will organise a separate plastic clean due to the increase in the amount of plastic coming down.
The Estuaries Officer added that the AONB has beach clean equipment available to borrow including pickers and hoops.
- iii. Seeing more ash dieback this year. Planting several trees for each tree felled; have a new tree policy and planted a hundred new trees in the last year.
- iv. Dart river trip is a good idea.

5.5 Christine Wood, Marine Biological Association

- i. Will attend the South West Non-Native Species workshop being held at Roadford Lake tomorrow and will be handing out some ID guides⁹.
- ii. Natural England have gone out to tender on a review of marine biosecurity planning across the UK with a view to developing good practise.
- iii. There are a few new marine species that are in Plymouth, will provide details to the Estuaries Officer.

5.6 Ian Fenton, RYA / South Devon College

- i. RYA are in dialogue with the MMO regarding seagrass and anchoring areas. The concern is regarding vessels needing to anchor where areas are closed. Aware alternative moorings trial taking place so wishing to discover more.
- ii. The College has taken delivery of two unmanned surface vessels for courses and research. These may also be used commercially for bathymetric surveys etc.
- iii. Plan to do some beach cleans, let Ian know of any local beaches that would benefit.
Estuaries Officer – The Marine Conservation Society¹⁰ has a Beachwatch App, to survey what is found on beach cleans. The MCS collates litter survey data to campaign for a cleaner, healthier ocean.

⁸ <https://www.devonashdieback.org.uk/>

⁹ <https://plymsea.ac.uk/id/eprint/9075/> [low res 1.6MB]

<https://plymsea.ac.uk/id/eprint/9076/> [hi res 26MB]

¹⁰ <https://www.mcsuk.org/>

5.7 Lauren Henly, Devon & Severn IFCA

- i. Fishing activity report and MCZ assessments on the Dart have now been drafted. Outcomes will be shared once finalised.
- ii. The response to the call for information on hand gathering, bait digging and other fishing activities on the estuary was useful. Feedback suggests levels of activity for this is low on the Dart estuary.
- iii. Happy to receive reports of these types of fishing activities through the meeting, email or telephone.

5.8 Rob Price, Environment Agency

- i. Rob gave a presentation to provide an update on recent activity.
- ii. A reminder to report potential water pollution incidents via the Environment Agency's free 24-hour hotline, 0800 807060¹¹
- iii. For general enquiries, email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk, copy to Emma Magee*. [** The South Devon Catchments area now has its own dedicated Catchment Coordinator Emma Magee, emma.magee@environment-agency.gov.uk, who we look forward to welcoming at our autumn meeting*]
- iv. Publications – four new environmental handbooks published last autumn relating to estuary and coast¹²
 - Restoring Estuarine and Coastal Habitats¹³
 - Saltmarsh Restoration Handbook¹⁴
 - European Native Oyster Restoration Handbook¹⁵
 - Seagrass Restoration Handbook¹⁶
- v. River Basin Management Plan final draft consultation has now closed (22nd April).
- vi. Catchment pages are being updated on the Catchment Data Explorer¹⁷
- vii. The Upstream Thinking project works with landowners to make changes to how land is managed to protect our rivers.¹⁸
- viii. The Environment Agency submitted a co-ordinated response on consultations from Defra on the Nature Green Paper¹⁹ and Environment Act²⁰.
- ix. Final assessment on all bathing water for last year had been delayed to accommodate an additional data sweep needed to avoid any challenges for bathing water status. The recently released data²¹ shows that all bathing waters in South Devon AONB are either good or excellent and Castle Cove and Sugary Cove are excellent.
- x. Combined Sewage Overflows - after the Environment Bill, there were a number of voluntary submissions to EA and Offwat, requesting investigation as they believed their assets were under-performing. Significant joint investigation²² - includes blog.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/restoration-handbooks-published-to-give-best-practice-advice-on-creating-new-estuarine-and-coastal-habitats>

¹³ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/restoring-estuarine-and-coastal-habitats-with-dredged-sediment/>

¹⁴ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/saltmarsh-restoration-handbook/>

¹⁵ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/european-native-oyster-restoration-handbook/>

¹⁶ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/seagrass-restoration-handbook/>

¹⁷ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/v/c3-draft-plan/RiverBasinDistrict/8>

¹⁸ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/upstream-thinking/>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defra-nature-recovery-green-paper-consultation-environment-agency-response>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defra-environmental-targets-consultation-environment-agency-response>

²¹ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>

²² <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2022/02/16/environment-agency-investigation-into-sewage-treatment-works/>

- xi. EA funding has been reduced by 55% in Devon and Cornwall. One reason is the emergence of a number of other funding schemes such as:
 - Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. The second round for the NEIRF has completed, successful applications will be announced in June. Great learning from the first round: creating intertidal habitats, salt marshes, inter-tidal reed beds etc. These have an ecosystem services value (habitat, carbon sequestration, polish water, water habitat provision, fish nurseries etc.). The value could be unlocked by offering to provide carbon offsets for emissions, allowing companies to invest in the development of that intertidal habitat or ongoing maintenance. The NEIRF fund has been looking at how this could be achieved.
 - Local nature recovery fund targeting land owners. Pilots of small scale interventions will start at the end of this year.
 - Landscape Recovery Fund looking at large scale land enhancement.
- xii. Looking forward to seeing the Dart Harbour strategic plan. The EA use the objectives and environmental ambitions to justify the investments made. Other key documents used are the AONB Management Plan and the Estuary Management Plan.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Responding to a question on Noss Marina and whether it is fully operational

- i. Julian Distin - the marine infrastructure appears virtually complete and berthing is taking place however there is significant work still to be done on land.
- ii. Ian Fenton pontoons are almost finished, just a few at the lifting end to do. Boat storage area is not complete but is in use and the dry stack open for business. The multi-story car park will be next to open.
- iii. AONB Manager – in terms of the hotel and residential accommodation that is still to be built. The next phase now has planning permission.

6.2 Graham Anderson: South West Water had tankers on the Ham last week as they were having problems with the pump for the toilets. The pump is high voltage however only a low voltage cable goes to it. If the pump stops working the toilet could overflow with implications for the Dart. Dittisham Parish Council are liaising with SWW on this.

7. NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 23rd November @ 6pm* within the Totnes Boating Association clubhouse, Steamer Quay Rd, TQ9 5AL

Please note that this meeting will be held as a **'hybrid' meeting** – meaning that you have a choice of joining us in-person at the TBA Clubhouse or on-line – venue directions and Zoom joining details will be sent out nearer the time.

* in-person joiners are welcome to join us for informal networking from 5:30pm as NM sets up

Minutes remain in draft until approved by members of the Dart Estuary Forum at the next meeting.