



MINUTES OF THE BOURNE SUB CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP MEETING

HELD AT VITACRESS SALADS LTD, LOWER LINK FARM, ST MARY BOURNE

THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2014

PRESENT:	Pete Shaw (PS) (Chair)	-	University of Southampton
	Carrie Hutchings (Secretary)	-	Vitacress Conservation Trust
	Bridget Culley (BC)	-	St Mary Bourne Parish Council
	William Daniel (WD)	-	Famous Fishing
	Peter Evans (PE)	-	Advisor
	Henry du Val de Beaulieu	-	Apsley Farms
	Shirley Medgett (SM)	-	Environment Agency
	Clare Read (CR)	-	Hurstbourne Priors Parish Council
	Steve Rothwell (SDR)	-	Vitacress Ltd and VCT

1. APOLOGIES

	Tom Davis (TD)	-	Test & Itchen Association
	Tim Nevard (TN)	-	VCT
	Gail Taylor	-	University of Southampton
	Bob Wellard	-	Piscatorial Society
	Alison Graham-Smith (AGS)	-	Natural England
	Ali Morse (AM)	-	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
	Michael Malyon (MM)	-	Lower Wyke Farm

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Sub-Catchment Management Group Meeting held on 29 January 2014 were agreed, although PE did point out that SM had expressed concern regarding the quality of the discharge that would feed into a wetland.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

3.1. **Aquaterra Report** – This has now been circulated.

3.2. **Hydrogeological Survey** – WD advised that the company who employ Alistair Morris have indicated they would have to outsource a hydrogeological survey. PE again highlighted the need to have the right information to feed into a wetland proposal and asked whether Reading University or CEH would still be considered for conducting a survey.

- 3.3. **Wetland Contractors** – Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have employed the services of Ron Allen on a number of occasions. *This was discussed further under Wetland on the agenda.*

4. **SOUTHERN WATER AND SEWAGE ISSUES**

- 4.1. **Southern Water** - BC advised tankering stopped last weekend, apart from at the pumping station adjacent to Vitacress. Work will start in the summer sealing laterals and replacing a stretch of pipe. The Infiltration Reduction Plan is now available on Southern Water's website.
- 4.2. **Flooding** - BC praised the EA and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council for their work during the winter flooding - erecting barriers, pumping and supplying sandbags. She explained that once the new Parish Council is in place another Flood Action Group will be set up, with the primary objective of looking for people to protect their own properties. PE also highlighted the need for riparian owners to maintain river beds. The problems associated with SW's proposal to possibly secure more land up the valley to flood were discussed. PS suggested the A&P process is the correct route to follow.

ACTIONS:

SM will ascertain the current position re any OFWAT submission regarding sewer integrity for St Mary Bourne and the timescales and actions.

BC will report back regards ongoing flood prevention initiatives.

SDR advised the Vitacress farm has never been so badly affected by flooding with river water entering several beds. As a precaution it was necessary to destroy c.£100,000 worth of over-wintered crop. The beds have been cleaned, re-graveled and re-planting has now commenced but c. two months behind programme. To ensure safety extensive testing was undertaken but no pathogenic E.coli has been found. Unfortunately it was not possible to make an insurance claim.

- 4.3. **Watercress E.coli Incident Autumn 2013** – SDR explained some 6,000 samples have been tested at a cost of over £300,000 and no trace of any O157 organism found. As the same genetic E coli fingerprint had been referenced in two cases in February from another supermarket not supplied by Vitacress the hypothesis is that the issues related to French seed which was being used at the time.

SDR advised as of early April all watercress is now being sanitised at Amesbury in 1-2ppm chlorine dioxide. The material is then dried and brought to St Mary Bourne for washing.

5. WETLAND

- 5.1. HCC's archaeology department has advised that the land below the viaduct was historically a water meadow but they do not have any current records. It is unclear what the implications of this would be.
- 5.2. **Scoping** - SDR has shared the Wetland and Wildfowl Trust's pre-scoping document with Ron Allen who was very critical of it. SDR outlined RA's proposal to conduct the work.

ACTIONS:

SDR will meet with RA and pay the consultancy fees for him to carry out an initial site walk, review the work undertaken to date and obtain his initial views, reporting back to the next meeting.

SM will ascertain the view of the EA's Fisheries & Biodiversity team who are also keen to be involved in any scoping.

- 5.3. Discussion turned to the purpose of the wetland. The attendees were reminded that at the last meeting it had been agreed that the wetland would be for biodiversity rather than for clarifying the discharge and, as such, would need to be designed correctly.
- 5.4. PE tabled the Executive Summary from a report commissioned through Nick Everall of Aquascience to review EA data from the last ten years. This indicated that from c.2003 what had been a severely degraded river downstream had been improving. However, over the last year or two there has been a decline in quality, with zero Gammarus and Serratella and large amounts of Asellus, which could indicate there is an oxygen issue.

SDR was surprised as Rob Murdock's routine sampling of the stream had not indicated such a severe decline in quality. He is due to report recent sampling imminently and will discuss his findings with SM.

WD was upset that he had not been consulted by Simon Caine about the re-grading of the Eastern channel in 2012 which has pushed sediment further downstream. SM was concerned the channel appears to have reverted to previous condition, advising she had not fully understood the nature of the re-grading which will have had an impact in terms of disturbance.

PE commented that whilst the discharge consents are not being breached they do not reflect the continuous factory operations. SDR outlined his long held argument that the consents should be load based. SM defended the EA, advising the watercress industry had initially lobbied very hard against load based consents and flow measurements, but appear to have changed tact. SDR advised that was not the

case. The Industry simply pointed out discharge flow measurement was not needed if load base was assumed to be on licenced volumes.

SDR advised he was not aware of any changes to management practices either on the farm or in the factory. He explained that c.£1/2m has been invested in improvement measures such as the installation of a recirculation system through the watercress beds for the settlement tank and for factory washwater, stressing that the company is constantly striving to minimise its impacts. HdvdB recognised the work undertaken to date but stressed that an economic solution viable for all must be sought, working with the EA to ensure they can consent to it. HdvdB commented that the watercress beds are currently effectively being used as a surrogate wetland but current results raise doubts as to whether a wetland below the viaduct will be effective, with a more industrial solution such as a filtration system, possibly being required between the factory and the wetland. WD commented that it is baffling that the recirculation was initially successful, with the gammarus numbers increasing significantly. HdvdB reminded the meeting of Graham Robert's assertion that all water abstracted in the UK should be returned in the same condition.

WD commented on brown algae seen in the eastern channel during weed cutting compared to none in the western channel, although he acknowledged the stream looked better this morning.

SDR confirmed monthly phosphorous testing is undertaken.

SM suggested Claire Marsden's caged gammarus work could be re-visited on the eastern arm but suggested this wait until RM had carried out his latest sampling which she can then review alongside Nick Everall's work. WD has two Sparsholt College students who could possibly help with this work.

PS raised concern that the first three points of Nick Everall's Executive Summary refer to information that has not been made available to the meeting.

HdvdB recognised Vitacress' desire to sort the issues but emphasised that an action plan, with timescales is required that all interested parties can sign up to, threatening to take further action if acceptable results are not forthcoming.

It was agreed to shelve the wetland project pending investigation and establishment of the nature and extent of the problem in the eastern channel. PS commented that this could relate to a one-off event, e.g. recent wet winters, the re-profiling of the river.

ACTIONS – PS summarised the discussion and agreed action as follows:

1. **SDR** will ensure Rob Murdock carries out further sampling before the end of May and circulates results within a month.

2. **PS/SDR/SM/RM** will review this work and identify actions required. From that a clear plan of action can be drawn up.
3. Caged gammarus work could be undertaken quite quickly and might help define if there is an issue to address through better management practices.
4. **PE** will circulate the full Aquascience report (once he has gained permission).
5. **WD** will try to weigh and measure fish for PS to assess against his database.
6. **HdvdB** will forward specialist engineering contact details to SDR to review current systems and propose new solutions to mitigate the siltation process if that is identified as a problem. SM commented that fish farm effluent is fine organic material and they have engineering solutions.

6. **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON RESEARCH**

- 6.1. PS advised the remit of the phosphorous PhD is to cover the headwaters, stopping at Easton on the Itchen and The Mayfly on the Test.

ACTION: PS requested any anecdotal information regarding the Test - **ALL**

- 6.2. The project to establish the interaction between phosphorous and sediment on chalk streams is not indicating any correspondence between high particulates with rainfall or weed cuts. Whether sediment releases or takes out phosphorous depends on the concentration levels but there is no clear pattern. PS does not believe septic tanks are such a problem as previously thought, provided they are installed and operated correctly.

7. **FUTURE OF BRI AND RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER GROUPS**

PS had intended to use the Upper Test Catchment Partnership presentation to segment into this item, but Rupert Kelton had not been able to attend. Therefore it was agreed to defer the discussion until the next meeting. Concern was expressed regards the narrowing focus of the BRI towards discharges to the Bourne.

ACTION: SDR represents the watercress industry on the Test & Itchen Catchment Partnership and will ascertain any commonalities.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 8.1 **Reduction of Phosphates on the Itchen** – SDR outlined work being undertaken on Vitacress' farms on the Itchen to recirculate water. The system will be designed this summer; permissions sought from the Council and EA in the Autumn, thereby entering 2015 ready to start work and being fully functional by 2016. This will give information which could be applied to other farms. In parallel there is ongoing debate with the EA in deriving a good practice value for the level of phosphorus leaving a watercress farm.

- 8.2 **Gravel** – HdvdB raised concern that the gravel heap on the watercress farm is a suspected source of pollution and unsightly in an Area of Outstanding Beauty. He suggested a scientific study be undertaken, taking samples from around the site and

the gravel itself. He also commented that the creation of a contained site by installing a membrane lining would be a relatively cheap solution.

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday, 22 September at 10am at Vitacress' office, St Mary Bourne, with the action plan regards the river quality issues circulated in advance.