

Minutes of Upper Itchen Initiative meeting
9.30am, 12th November 2010
Alresford Salads, The Nythe, Alresford, Hampshire SO24 9DZ

Present:

Chairman: Graham Roberts (GR) (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust)
Rue Ekins (RE) (Natural England),
Lord Ashburton (LA) (Riparian owner),
Chris Jeffes (CJ) (Watercress Company),
Charles Barter (CB) (Watercress Company),
Martin Burton (MB) (Independent Consultant),
Roger Harrison (RH) (Riparian owner),
Steve Rothwell (SR) (Vitacress Salads/ Vitacress Conservation Trust),
Keri Evans(KE) (Environment Agency)
Ollie Bedford (OB) (Alresford Salads)
Tom Davis (TD) T&I / Wessex Rivers Trust
Martin de Retuerto (MdR) H&IoW WT
Simon Fennel (SF) Riparian owner
Rose Timlett (RT) WWF UK
Pete Shaw (PS) (University of Southampton),

1. Apologies:

Gail Taylor (GT) (University of Southampton)
Tim Sykes (TS) (Environment Agency),

Graham Roberts welcomed everyone and thanked Alresford Salads for hosting the meeting.

GR advised of his intent to stand down as a Trustee of the Vitacress Conservation Trust (VCT) due to changed responsibilities within the Wildlife Trust. The intention is that MdR will take his place on the UII.

3.Minutes of the last meeting

These were accepted subject to some minor changes communicated by E mail to GR.

Matters Arising:

GR advised he was awaiting communication from Defra re cormorant control and would update the Headwaters Forum with this. He stressed it must be the group, not WT alone making the request

GR asked that all study minutes and that any actions assigned be carried out
CB had not received parish wildlife tool kit. GR to resend **Action GR**

4: Phosphate Study – PS

Arthur Leung has completed an MSc under PS, the focus was a study of the special distribution of phosphorus in the Itchen headwaters. PS thanked GR

for help with site identification. A total of 28 locations on the Arle, Candover and Cheriton stream were sampled. Analysis was for: Soluble reactive orthophosphate; soluble uncreative P and insoluble, particulate P

The Candover Brook and Cheriton Steams exhibited low levels of P, typically 1uM split 50/50 between reactive and insoluble. Particulate P was 0 to 1uM depending upon turbidity.

These were classified as low levels.

The Arle gave alarming results with upto 30 times the P, vast majority as soluble reactive. Particulate was 0 to 20 uM
The high levels were below watercress and fish farms. Worst sites Opswan Cottage and The Soak, below Alresford pond. Drove Lane was also high.

RT asked if this suggested septic tanks in Cheriton are not an issue.

PS felt more data, on a temporal as well as special distribution was needed.

He is also keen to fingerprint organic P in streams.

TD advised faecal coliform enumeration is a quick and cheap test for sewage contamination.

RE felt that as the Itchen is an SRC these levels should trigger EA action. KE countered that EA data show Itchen to be within standard for P.

Debate followed on impact of high P, triggering suspended and benthic algal blooms capable of smothering Ranunculus.

SF asked if Alresford Pond and the Northington and Tichbourne Lakes were contributory factors. PS felt they were bound to contribute but this study had not provided evidence.

PS keen to undertake continuous sampling at various sites

SR advised VCT have allocated funds of upto £20k pa toward a PhD under PS but more support needed.

TD, SR meeting with CPRE to discuss collaborative approach.

MB suggested Defra may help fund benchmarking on a river basin basis.

SR though too wide a remit favouring local focus, informed by the MSc.

Members asked for a copy of the MSc. GR agreed to distribute electronically

Action GR

RH asked if the high P may impact Gammarids. Gammarus count below 100 on parts of Arle.

Agreed need for further work on this. PS felt so far as fertilisers went ammoniacal N was more likely than P to cause an impact. This had not been measured.

AP felt some Birmingham Uni MSc students may be able to look further

5. Impacts of Environmental Stressors on River Itchen Ranunculus community, AP

AP explained he is seeking to measure the degree of environmental stress in a river by its effect on Ranunculus. He outlined key stressors as low flow, diffuse pollution and habitat degradation.

AP outlined his work to date. He has reviewed past data on flow, water chemistry and macrophyte growth in a multivariate analysis. Previous years flow is a big driver of subsequent year's growth. High P drives algal populations.

AP has run a trial in Vitacress experimental watercress beds at Fobdown. A remarkable finding was considerable blanket weed growth in low flows of deep sourced ground water whose P content was c 20ug/l.

The monoclonal plants he has raised have been planted into different conditions in the river together with some plant relocations within the river. These will be assessed to try to correlate changes in their production of secondary metabolites with stress.

This metabolomics work is the first to be applied to aquatic plants. Currently testing for consistency in same plants / clones / reaches against which changes can be measured.

The meeting thanked AP for his comprehensive report and looks forward to results of the metabolomics. SR invited AP to present to the next Headwaters Forum.

6. Diffuse Water Pollution Plan

A joint EA/NE initiative to draw up diffuse water pollution plans for the Test and Itchen, led nationally. Recognises that catchment sensitive farming was too restrictive. This initiative will identify sources such as road run off, fish and watercress farms and septic tanks. Aims to identify gaps in information requiring more research.

Completion target is December but consultation doc only just issued to TD. TD stressed that earlier consultation makes the exercise of more value, allowing time to reshape thinking.

SR asked that the NFU Watercress Growers Assn be consulted, if only to check for factual inaccuracy, stating 3 recent EA publications has contained avoidable errors in their description of watercress farming. **Action RE**

7. Cormorants and Swans

RH explained his concern regard the number of swans and cormorants on the upper reaches of the Itchen. The swans devastate Ranunculus whilst the cormorants deplete fish populations. A simple calculation of their requirement for fish and number suggests they are capable of a massive impact.

TD reminded the meeting that the brown trout is a protected species.

GR advised licences to control cormorants are issued but require co-ordinated action.

SF said this was the case in his area.

RE had no issue with control, so long as all other reasonable measures in place, such as allowing marginal vegetation to provide cover. She felt licences will not be issued in cases where riparian management is contributing to a problem.

MdR felt more focus needed on surrounding catchment land management if a sustainable solution is to be found. Eg fish farming draws in cormorants. TD agreed the control of both cormorants and swans has to be seen as a part of maintaining whole river health. But both are in need of control, swans by egg oiling.

GR stressed that whilst the WT supported appropriate control their role was to support vs lead any lobbying.

8. Alresford Pond

RE described the condition as a massive problem in need of massive restoration.

CJ referred to a past EA study concluding remedial works were not economically justified.

RE advised this was on a water level control basis, not on the basis of the pond being a threat to the SAC below

GR agreed to raise the issue at the forum, calling for buy-in from all interest groups

Action GR

AOB

RT distributed copies of Blueprint for Water. This is a collaborative work by 12 conservation organisations. It is being used to brief MPs on water issues.

RT agreed to distribute an e version though GR and to provide hard copies for the forum

Action RT/GR

RT updated the meeting on water metering in the Southern Water region. First in the country. Launch in Southampton Jan 11. Keen to keep public on side. Predict 8% reduction in use at end of 5yr implementation. Ultimate aim is seasonal pricing.

MB updated on the Water partnership calling for more engagement, esp with the planned July Water Festival. He has sent e news papers to all members of the group.

MB outlined plans for a mobile display to tour agricultural shows in Hampshire and will contact members on this.

KE distributed a Water Body Summary Sheet for the main Itchen (not headwaters) Overall is poor. Driven by lower reach diatom populations. Keen to engage support of upper catchment stakeholders to help alleviate downstream condition. Ull listed as a partner. GR and TD asked their organisations be added to the partner list.

Action KE

CJ asked if a simple report could be circulated explaining the scope and aims of each of the Ull members. GR undertook to construct this

Action GR

Date of next meeting to be confirmed by ne mail. Aim for April **Action GR**

GR closed the meeting, thanking CJ once again for the facilities,

