

# Minutes of Upper Itchen Initiative Meeting

10am, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011

Old Alresford Place Alresford Hants. SO24 9DH

Present:

Chairman: Graham Roberts (GR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust  
Rue Ekins (RE) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust  
Martin de Retuerto (MdR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust  
Ben Rushbrook (BR) Project Officer, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust  
Mark Baring (MBAR) Riparian owner – son of Lord Ashburton  
Roger Harrison (RH) Riparian owner  
Simon Ffennel (SF) Riparian owner  
Chris Jeffes (CJ) Alresford Salads  
Charles Barter (CB) Watercress Company  
Ollie Bedford (OB) Watercress Company  
Martin Burton (MB) Independent Consultant  
Steve Rothwell (SR) Vitacress Salads/ Vitacress Conservation Trust  
Keri Evans(KE) Environment Agency  
Tim Sykes (TS) Environment Agency  
Tom Davis (TD) T&I / Wessex Rivers Trust  
Charlotte Rose (CR) Natural England  
Gwen Isaacs (GI) University of Southampton (Minutes)

## 1. Apologies

Gail Taylor (GT) University of Southampton  
Tim Nevard (TN) VCT  
Rose Timlett (RT) WWF UK  
Pete Shaw(PS) University of Southampton

## 2. Introductions

Graham Roberts introduced himself as did all attendees at the meeting.

## 3. Date of Next Meeting

Graham Roberts welcomed everyone to the meeting. A date was set for the next meeting – 26<sup>th</sup> January 2012. Venue to be decided.

## 4. Update from Environment Agency (EA)

EA are to change the way they deliver the WFD (Water Framework Directive). They are going back to the catchment approach. Alison Matthews is the contact at EA for this. A replacement is being sought for the person involved in restoration work.

KE distributed maps to the meeting showing Gammarus numbers on the River Itchen. 300 to 500 is expected number in middle reaches, 500 to 1000 in upper reaches. KE explained the method for monitoring invertebrates.

TD had also carried out Gammarus sampling. His figures were similar to KE's apart from Pinglestone.

KE distributed a list of possible causes of declines in Gammarus numbers:-

1. Cress Farms (Phenolic mustard oils – Bourne Rivulet, Chlorine)
2. Fish Farms – ammonia
3. Weed management/habitat
4. Behaviour – breeding etc
5. Predation (invertebrates, fish and waterfowl)
6. Siltation
7. Flow
8. Temperature (prefer well below 20 deg C)
9. Lack of food – omnivorous – decomposing plant material including riparian tree leaves, graze on algae
10. Insufficient oxygen in water
11. Organic sewage
12. Phosphate

She suggested that 3 items were selected from this list as a priority.

The meeting talked about the use of Chlorine. The EA was asked to find out whether small growers are still using Chlorine.

SR reported that they saw no improvement in Gammarus numbers when they stopped using Chlorine but numbers increased when discharge of water containing watercress juice was stopped.

SR said his top 3 priorities were 1,2 and 6.

TD said that convening a small group of growers to discuss the problems and the evidence needed, would be useful.

**ACTION GRAHAM ROBERTS (GR)** – Facilitate a meeting with watercress growers. EA were asked to present at this.

Outcomes from this group would feed a code of practice for growers. Many growers are not aware of the situation.

BR reported that there were potential projects for the University of Southampton e.g. use of ammonia and Gammarus sampling. He has been in contact with Pete Shaw about these.

The meeting talked about how important it was for Phosphate to be excluded from every day use.

The meeting agreed that the 3 priorities from KE's list were 1,2 and 6.

## **5. Update from Natural England**

CR reported that they are involved in a 1 year feasibility study connected with Addington Park. By next year there should be some actions addressing agricultural run-off.

They will be bidding for money to look at Alresford Pond next year.

BR suggested they talk to PS about this at the University of Southampton.

## **6. Presentation for Tom Davis – Upper Itchen Issues**

Tom Davis presented his presentation 'A Strategy for the Upper Itchen' to the meeting. A copy of the presentation will be distributed with these minutes.

GR asked that all feed back at the next meeting (26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2012), on discussions with watercress companies so that the EA can act on the issues.

TS said that a large amount of funding under the WFD, is awarded to water bodies that fail. Many pass which means they won't qualify for WFD funding. Candover and Cheriton pass so they won't receive WFD funding. TS said that targets in the review of consent, are as tight as possible and it was not in the EA's gift to make them tighter. A change of legislation would be required to make them tighter.

RH reported that SAC and WFD limits are conflicting. MdR said that geo-morphology doesn't appear to be included in WFD so the SAC criteria may be more relevant to the Itchen.

TS reported that they could change the constraints but most rivers already meet these so this wouldn't make a difference.

The meeting discussed issues including over widening of rivers, habit restoration, low flows and nutrient feeds.

TS reported that there was only 1 abstraction licence in the Itchen, so flow had increased due to processes carried out by watercress companies.

**ACTION TIM SYKES (TS)** to forward flow figures to the meeting members.

GR reported that there could still be time to get water quality included in the upcoming Water Bill.

## **7. Alresford Pond**

GR had spoken with Tony Chambers. The pond is in a bad state. We would like the EA to help with this.

TS reported that the problems were with 4 other ponds too; Grange, Tichbourne, Drove Lane and Avington Lake. TS proposed that a feasibility study be carried out with costed options describing actions to be taken on the ponds

**ACTION TIM SYKES (TS)** to investigate doing a feasibility study, preferably in this financial year, and to consult with BR on the work he was involved in with PS.

GR asked CB to ask about funding at his company, also, SR to ask about funding.

BR said that there have been University projects connected with this. 2 of the 4 projects were looking at work associated with the benefits of pond restoration. The work included a cost/benefit analysis albeit a very brief one.

GR asked TS if there could be some response on the feasibility study by the next meeting (26<sup>th</sup> January 2012). It would be better if the study was externally led.

TD would lead on this.

TS said they would scope Grange and Avington Lake initially.

### **8. Southampton University**

GR reported that PS had managed to secure funds (£18000 over 3 years) for the Phosphate PhD work. Work to start 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012. PS will present at the Forum on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

### **9. Hampshire Grazing Project**

RE reported that she was now working for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust involved in grazing management. She provides advice to landowners on how to manage their land.

### **10. Crayfish and Southern Damselfly Update**

BR gave an update. He is working as a Project Officer at the Trust. He is working on a project – ‘conservation of crayfish and southern damselfly’.

He is doing monitoring work with KE on an augmentation scheme that’s been running since September.

He has collected lots of data but no assimilation as yet. He has to report to the EA by the end of the year. The Crayfish plague suspected did not happen. Now looking as ways of consolidating the crayfish population. BR was happy to talk to landowners about increasing bio-diversity at their sites.

All should alert BR if they find any American crayfish. These crayfish should be killed.

SF gave a Cormorant update. Cormorant shooting took place last winter. Hoping that the owner of Alresford Pond will get a licence so that he can sort out the roost. In next couple of weeks, river stretches will be manned.

MdR reported that they were starting year 4 of a lottery funded restoration project. The Trust has control of the flood plane. They are going to start putting in habitats. The river restoration involves reconnecting the river with flood planes, rehabilitation of modified channels and making the river function more naturally. They have taken a new approach to restoration and will be looking at self-sustaining techniques. Looking at developing a sustainable wild fishery. MdR said he would like to invite people to come and look at what they’re doing. RH reported that it was first rate and well worth a look.

### **11. AOB**

MB reported a success story. The sediment flow at Itchen Stoke was the issue. The site was visited, actions were agreed and now the sediment has been captured. Water has been taken off to a drainage path.

**ACTION Martin Burton (MB)** to write up a side of A4 on this work for the EA.

RH expressed a big thank-you to the EA for all their support.