



FINAL MINUTES OF THE UPPER ITCHEN INITIATIVE GROUP MEETING

HELD AT BIGHTON VILLAGE HALL, NR ALRESFORD, HANTS

TUESDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2014

1. **PRESENT:**

Graham Roberts (Chair)	- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Carrie Hutchings (Secretary)	- Vitacress Conservation Trust
Mark Baring (MB)	- Riparian Owner
Zam Baring (ZB)	- Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust
Charles Barter (CB)	- The Watercress Company
Kerry Evans (KE)	- Environment Agency
Simon Ffennell (SF)	- Riparian Owner
Roger Harrison (RH)	- Riparian Owner
Chris Jeffes (CJ)	- Alresford Salads
Maxine Holden (MH)	- Environment Agency
Serena Leadlay (SL)	- Natural England
Steve Rothwell (SDR)	- Vitacress Ltd and VCT
Ben Rushbrook (BR)	- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Pete Shaw (PS)	- University of Southampton

2. **APOLOGIES**

Ollie Bedford	- The Watercress Company
Martin de Retuerto	- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Tom Davis (TD)	- Test & Itchen Association
Rue Ekins (RE)	- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Ali Morse (AM)	- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Charlotte Rose	- Natural England
Tim Sykes (TM)	- Environment Agency
Gail Taylor	- University of Southampton
Bob Wellard	- Piscatorial Society

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 July 2014 were agreed as a true and fair record.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Exchange and Mobilisation of Phosphorus – KE confirmed that the EA modelling is showing the same trend as the University sampling.

5. UPDATE ON NATIONAL WATER ISSUES AND T&I CATCHMENT PARTNERSHIP

5.1. National Water Issues

Consultations on the draft updated River Basin Management Plans and draft Flood Risk Management Plans will begin on 10 October and will be open for 6 months and 3 months respectively. As local stakeholders it is important to ensure that the correct 'framework' is in place, off which to hang the actions that need to be delivered locally. MH advised that within the South East River Basin Management Plan, there will be "Catchment Summaries" which will contain local information relevant to each catchment, including one for the Test and Itchen catchment. In addition, there will be further catchment specific detail and data. Feedback from the draft consultations will then be analysed with a view to re-shaping the final plans which are due for publication in December 2015. KE stressed the Itchen, as a protected area, is a "must do" in terms of cost benefit assessment of actions identified to improve water quality within the River Basin Management Plan.

ACTION: MH will circulate links to both consultations on line and signpost people to the relevant parts

5.2. Test & Itchen Catchment Partnership

16 potential projects delivering against the priorities identified in the draft Catchment Action Plan were presented at a Stakeholder event in June. A number were selected to progress including an awareness-raising campaign for septic tanks; "Keeping Rivers Cool" project; riverfly monitoring. Larger potential projects (depending on support and funding) are sediment pathways and catchment management. MH explained that the Partnership is keen to develop ideas so that they are ready to be implemented if potential DEFRA funding becomes available (more information is expected in December).

RH referred to the issue of septic tanks and suggested householders should be liable for producing a certificate to confirm tanks are in good working order when selling a property.

ACTION: MH will feed this idea to AM to raise at the next Partnership meeting

It was agreed that the UII Group should use whatever tools are available to them to influence OFWAT / water companies to install mains drainage in the Upper Itchen villages and protect watercress growers from the microbiological impacts of septic tanks. SDR highlighted the situation in Alresford, where although the town is on mains sewage, the system acts as one large septic tank with discharge to ground.

ACTIONS:

- **ZB will try to make a further approach to the Chair of Southern Water through the Catchment Partnership and WCSRT.**
- **MH will give ZB the contact details for Will Warner.**

6. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY PROJECT UPDATES – KE updated the meeting as follows:

- ### 6.1. Watercress and Fish Farm Permits –
- New watercress permits were issued in April and both The Watercress Company and Vitacress' plans to meet the new phosphate conditions have been agreed with the EA. Fish farm permits have also been changed. Whilst the standards were already being met and no significant changes are required, the EA is working

with the fish farms to get Environmental Management Systems in place.

The next step is to deal with sites which are not fully consented, with every individual fish and watercress farm in the catchment being inspected and discharge permits, abstraction licences being checked along with screening at fish farms. KE circulated a map showing all of the known locations (fish farms = blue dots; watercress farms = yellow dots) and asked that she be advised of any others to add to the programme. She stressed that most are already licensed; the objective is to ensure they are right. In future traditional and intensive watercress farms will be working to the same standards where they are not already. KE explained that several fish farms are being restricted in the amount of water they can abstract as part of the Review of Consents which at some sites impacts on the fish farms business, hence compensation arrangements are being made.

It was agreed that longer term it would be useful to have a better understanding of the cumulative effect of any chemicals being used.

ACTION: BR will try to locate previous Portsmouth University work regards Test Valley farm.

6.2. Invertebrate Monitoring – The first analysis of data from the WCSRT's catchment invertebrate project has been completed and the maps will now be posted on the website. A second analysis of data, with 50 extra samples at species level (siltation, flow, phosphorus and organic) across the Avon, Test and Itchen, above and below trout farms and as close to outflows as possible, was completed by the end of September and analysis of results should be available by Christmas.. Historic EA data back to 1978 is also being analysed (the methodology changed in the 1990s).

6.3. Flood Risk Management – MH advised that Flood Risk Management teams are exploring integrated short and longer term schemes taking into account the nature of the chalk catchment and the impact of groundwater flows.

6.4. River Basin Plan – Natural England will be posting documents regarding water quality standards (including phosphate) on their website.

6.5. River Restoration Strategy – Heb Leman continues to work on a number of projects on the Itchen, including Chilland, Twyford and Winchester College.

ACTION: KE will give MB Heb's contact details.

7. NATURAL ENGLAND PROJECT UPDATES – SL updated as follows:

7.1. Website – Natural England's website will be moving to gov.uk

7.2. Test & Itchen Diffuse Water Pollution Plan– CR, AM and SL will be reviewing current actions.

7.3. Sediment Fingerprinting – The results of this year's monthly sampling on the Upper Itchen will be published at the end of February.

- 7.4. **Tichborne Lake** – An acceptable resolution has yet to be found to restore the SSSI river channel. In the meantime the Estate has applied to the EA for a small partial dredge.
- 7.5. **SSSI/SAC** - Draft revised targets for the SSSI/SAC as part of the River Basin Management Plan consultation have been posted on NE's website <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5953871591505920> . These cover draft proposed standards in the future for phosphates and several other chemical parameters as well as flow. NE are also assessing land which is not part of the SSSI to determine whether boundaries are correct and will report in February. GR believes that any re-notification will apply to the whole catchment.
- 7.6. **Groundwater and Leaching**
ACTION: SL will circulate a link to a "Youtube" video in relation to an event held at Leckford.
- 7.7. **Pesticides** – SL outlined statutory changes to "grandfather rights" and is organising related training in November/December.
- 7.8. **Crop Cover Trials** – SL outlined trials being conducted across the SE with one in the Upper Itchen catchment using 7 different seed mixes to establish which is the most effective as a winter cover crop.
- 7.9. SL is hoping to have an event with EBLEX in the catchment in December. This is linked to the tool they have funded for the development of grassland assessment into both soil structure & soil biology. A joint event has been arranged with HGCA for late January with a focus on nitrogen management and variable rate nutrients.
- 7.10. **Catchment Sensitive Farming** – CSF is due to finish at the end of March next year.
- 7.11. **Capital Grant Scheme** - This year's Capital Grant Scheme applicants have to complete and claim the works by the end of January (max £10kpa – 30 successful applicants from each catchment). GR believes there are opportunities on some parts of the Candover.
ACTION: MB/SL will have preliminary discussions.
8. **WESSEX CHALK STREAMS AND RIVERS TRUST**
ZB outlined recent changes with the resignation of Tom Davis and the appointment of a full time Director, Paul Jose (PJ). The focus will continue on fund raising but PJ will also support the two Catchment Partnerships and ZB hopes to see a step change in activities of the Trust. TD will continue as a Director of the Test & Itchen Association.
ACTION: CH will invite PJ to the next UII Meeting.
9. **IDEAS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS / CAMPAIGNS**
Suggestions tabled for future projects / campaigns included:
A. Eco-friendly detergents.
ACTION: SDR will circulate details of new regulations which came into force last summer requiring manufacturers to reduce phosphorus levels in products once

existing stocks have sold out (CJ believes this is only applicable to laundry products).

B. Phosphate and nitrogen nutrient data gathering, linking academia - ZB suggested IBM could help in terms of processing power, advising he is meeting with them next week to brainstorm way of working together.

ACTION: ALL were requested to feed in any relevant information .

C. Septic Tanks – Lobbying Government / House Builders Association to introduce a certification system as part of house sales, recognising the need for scientific evidence to substantiate any environmental impact claims.

10. SOUTHAMPTON UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PROJECTS – PS reported:

10.1. Phosphorus PhD – Arthur is entering the final stages of his PhD, which has included some novel data analysis of phosphorus speciation using ecological software.

10.2. Terry Langford and Pete Shaw are about to publish a paper advising physical restoration of rivers is more important than ecological restoration in terms of water quality.

10.3. "Keeping Rivers Cool" – PS highlighted the need for properly directed research to optimise tree planting in the correct places.

10.4. Sampling - ZB suggested IBM might be able to help with analysis of samples.

10.5. Release of Nutrient from Sediment in Still Water Lakes – Samples have been collected for analysis and a report is due in May 2015.

10.6. Nitrates in Chalk Streams – PS advised the long term legacy is past land use, with increases from 1962/3 but levels now flattening.

11. PROJECTS

11.1. Crayfish – BR reported:

- Sightings of signal crayfish on the Lower Itchen have been confirmed. Dead signal crayfish have also been found on the banks of the River Arle and he highlighted the need for vigilance in terms of bio-security between other tributaries. Very good numbers of native crayfish have still been found but he is in consultation with Sparsholt College to set up an emergency response plan.
- An exciting technique is being used monitoring DNA to establish a measure of presence and abundance of crayfish.
- The breeding programme continues, with Vitacress now a core sponsor. So far 200 juveniles have been released and a sweep of females taken to Bristol Zoo to hatch, although there is concern they may not be as productive as last year.
- He is working closely with the team at Fobdown to ensure the continued protection of the white clawed crayfish in conjunction with flood alleviation and discharge consent operations work.

11.2. Augmentation Scheme – The Arle scheme has been dropped. BR highlighted issues with the proposed Candover Scheme in terms of the impact on crayfish, advising one option is to bypass the Candover entirely. GR highlighted the implications for the Upper Itchen in terms of flows and water quality and, whilst the consultation is not yet formally open, stressed the need for all interested parties to voice their concerns.

ACTIONS:

- **BR to confirm details of the consultation**
- **KE to update regards the EA's position**
- **H&IOWWT; UII; WCSRT; Itchen Stoke Estate should all comment**
- **MB/ZB will meet with the Chairman of Southern Water**
- **GR will make local MPs (Steve Brine and George Hollingbery) aware**

11.3. Grazing Project – GR advised that H&IOWWT, together with their partners, are now grazing a considerable amount of land with traditional breeds but are now at capacity

11.4. Cormorants – SF reported a change in the licensing system whereby the whole of the Upper Itchen is now governed by one licence, thus ensuring key problem areas can be focussed on. He is the key point of contact, with the licensing overseen by Natural England and The Angling Trust.

12. ANY OTHER

12.1. Chlorine – CJ advised Alresford Salads still have not yet been able to eliminate chlorine from their process. The UV filtration equipment to deliver potable water back into the watercress beds is now on site but will take a couple of weeks to plumb in. GR has agreed to attend a meeting on 23 October with the last remaining retailer to move away from chlorine washing. If they do not agree to remove chlorine production will be transferred to another Bakkavor site

12.2. Chalk Stream Headwaters Forum – This year's event takes place on Friday, 7 November at Sparsholt College. The Q&A sessions will be based around the speakers' presentations, holding any significant issues raised until the afternoon.

ACTION: CH will put forward the recommendation to Tim Nevard that questions be captured on Post-its as was the practice at the early events.

12.3. Marine Workshop – MH reported on a workshop held last week based on similar work to Catchment Partnerships but looking at the marine environment. Nitrogen loading from the Test & Itchen links into work this group is interested in.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday, 11 February 2015.