



FINAL

Minutes of Upper Itchen Initiative Meeting

1.30pm, 24 September 2013

Bighton Village Hall, Nr Alresford

Present:

Chairman - Graham Roberts (GR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Minutes Secretary - Carrie Hutchings (CH) Vitacress Salads Ltd
Ali Morse (AM) Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Ben Rushbrook (BR) Project Officer, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Bob Wellard (BW) Piscatorial Society
Charlotte Rose (CR) Natural England
Chris Jeffes (CJ) Alresford Salads
Kerry Evans (KE) Environment Agency
Mark Baring (MBAR) Riparian owner
Martin Burton (MB) Independent Consultant
Martin de Retuerto (MdR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Maxine Holden (MH) Environment Agency
Ollie Bedford (OB) The Watercress Company
Phil Turnball (PT) Sparsholt College / EA Placement Student
Roger Harrison (RH) Riparian owner
Rue Ekins (RE) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Simon Ffennell (SF) Riparian owner
Tim Sykes (TS) Environment Agency
Tom Davis (TD) T&I / Wessex Chalk Stream & Rivers Trust (from item 7)
Zam Baring (ZB) Wessex Chalk Stream & Rivers Trust (to item 7)

1. Apologies

Charles Barter (CB) The Watercress Company
Ernie Jeffs (EJ) Winchester City Council
Mike Rushworth (MJER) Vitacress Salads Limited
Pete Shaw (PS) University of Southampton
Serena Leadlay (SL) Natural England
Steve Rothwell (SR) Vitacress Salads/ Vitacress Conservation Trust
Tom Amery (TA) The Watercress Company

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 25 April 2013

A few minor amendments had been made to section 7 by KE and some post meeting updates added. The final version of the last Minutes will be circulated with this set.

KE/TS clarified the Minute regarding fish farm consents. One is currently being changed and discussions are progressing with another two fish farmers, but these are subject to sufficient financial compensation being available and therefore will not happen quickly.

3. **Matters Arising**

- a. **Item 4, Alresford Pond** – CJ explained that there are still two retail customers requiring chlorine wash for their salad products. He is confident one will switch with effect from 1 December, once further clarification has been agreed with the new technologist. GR/CJ are meeting the second customer on 16 October at which time GR will make a presentation on the Upper Itchen. If they do both change, Alresford Salads will be in a position to use a filtration system at an additional cost of £45k. CJ also commented that customers have not been seeking a return to chlorine washing in light of the current E. coli link with watercress.

4. **Environment Agency Project Updates**

- a. **Invertebrate Survey** – KE had earlier circulated a report entitled “Gammarus Trap Study of the Arle, Itchen Catchment”. Original work had highlighted a serious problem below The Watercress Company farms and Alresford Salads’ factory with a 100% mortality rate of gammarus put into the outflow by the following morning. The second study shows a significant improvement following changes to operations around discharges, settlement ponds etc.

The methodology of the study had been queried in that cages were only in-situ for one week. SDR had earlier in the day circulated a report of research on this subject conducted by Clare Marsden in 2006 which KE will review. Discussion followed on repeating the study, particularly once wash water is passing through the cress beds. BR suggested this would be an appropriate project for a student. CJ confirmed that Alresford Salads/The Watercress Company would continue their own monitoring but had no objection to the study being repeated independently.

RH expressed concern that this was the first the Group had heard in terms of the initial severity of the problem, pointing out that the more openness there is in terms of work / issues, the greater progress the UII will be able to make.

GR advised that the H&IOWWT will be meeting with Southampton University next week. An audit of all information available is to be conducted with a view to prioritising urgent research. Everything must be evidence based and duplication avoided.

- b. **Septic Tanks** – GR is hoping that the outcomes of Alex Poynter’s work on outflows from septic tanks can be presented at the forthcoming Chalk Stream Headwaters Forum. The issues are not as major as previously indicated, with more houses on mains drainage than originally thought. A summary of his work will also appear in the next edition of the Wildlife Trust magazine. BW will give AM details of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust contact as he felt this would also be relevant to their local members. Other avenues of publicity were discussed and MdR advised the Trust has drawn-up an overall press plan. TD was previously investigating opportunities to distribute leaflets in schools.

ACTIONS:

BW to advised contact for Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

TD to update on leafleting schools

RH recommended a sub-committee be set up and it was also suggested that MH’s group might be able to help. MB outlined the benefits of benchmarking, believing this would be an ideal student project to undertake periodic assessments in a systematic and consistent manner. This will be included in the Trust’s audit review being conducted next week.

ACTION: GR/AM to include in Trust’s research audit and prioritisation review.

- c. **Discharge Consents** – TS explained that the consultation period for proposed changes to discharge consents for watercress and fish farms will run from 23 October to 6 December 2013. Discussions between the watercress industry and EA Head Office have not yet been finalised but the objective is to establish the industry best practice value for discharge of phosphates. Local modelling of discharges from watercress and fish farms is being undertaken but this is at an early stage pending the outcome of the discussions with Head Office. Best practice value will be applied but alternative options, bespoke to each watercress farm, will be looked at. Options for changes to the permits for each of the major watercress farms and fish farms in the Upper Itchen catchment will be presented on 23 October for comment. These will be sent to the consent holders and relevant NGOs, as well as members of the UII. The closing date for responses is 6 December; with the EA formally responding to views received by the end of the first week in January. TS clarified that this is a review of consents currently in existence but the work will be applied to unconsented operations over the course of the next year. OB advised that the Watercress industry Code of Practice is still under review pending this process but operational changes have been made. TS stressed that a catchment approach is required, recognising that there are other sources of phosphate discharge than the watercress industry.
- d. **Challenges and Choices Consultation** – MH outlined this consultation which seeks identification of current pressures in each catchment across the whole of England. GR emphasized that the priority for this group is to focus on water quality.
ACTION: MH to circulate email (via CH) signposting members on how to complete the document.

5. **River Restoration Strategy**

KE explained that the Upper Itchen has been broken down into segments and surveys undertaken. 16 reaches require restoration; 36 rehabilitation and 52 further enhancement/conservation. The consultation has been concluded and once the outcome has been signed off KE will circulate to the Group.

ACTION: KE to circulate final Strategy document.

CR/TS outlined funding difficulties, particularly beyond March 2015. C.£90k is available next year which will be used on a preferred 50/50 contribution per project basis in terms of EA/land owners. GR suggested members should lobby their MPs regards funding and raise with Richard Benyon at this year's Chalk Stream Headwaters Forum. BW suggested looking at lower priority targets with willing partners which could also form demonstration / pilot sites. GR encouraged CR to seek support from groups like H&IOWWT when approaching DEFRA etc for funding.

6. **Natural England Projects Updates**

- a. CR explained that following the recent review NE will continue to exist but there will be a major restructure in April.
- b. **Diffuse Water Pollution Plan** – The second review of the joint EA/NE plan has just commenced, updating progress on actions. WFD funding bids need to be submitted by 11 October, a month before the EA. It is essential to ensure there is no duplication of bids.
- c. **ADAS Finger Printing Study** – CR explained that the report is not suitable for publication in its current form. Although there are some interesting outputs, there are some issues with explanation of the methodology and the data needs further discussion and recommendations made – the report is currently being revised to account for these shortcomings. For the next

two years WFD funds are available for further work and this will commence next month, concentrating on organic elements and impacts of watercress farms, fish farms, septic tanks etc, but just on the Upper Itchen.

ACTION: CR will obtain details of a national NE study looking at septic tanks, their distance from rivers and impacts on water quality.

- d. **Capital Grants Scheme** – The final number of submissions was 30, one of the highest in the country. SL is currently working through these.
- e. **Tracks** – The WFD funding to deal with problem tracks where they impact on SSSIs has been returned as the scale of the task was too onerous alongside grant scheme work.
- f. **Projects** – Fobdown Farm has been included in HLS, as well as Itchen Valley Fish farm. Tichborne Lake could not be included but there may be a small amount of funding through the NE Conservation and Enhancement Scheme. It is hoped to start desilting work on Avington Lake in the next two weeks.
- g. **Alresford Pond** – Funding has been secured for further investigation, focussing on priorities from previous documents and restoration.
- h. **Detailed Notification Review of SSSIs** – The Itchen is scheduled for next year and may result in additional areas being designated SSSI. A paper looking at headwaters is to be produced by NE's National Rivers Specialist, Chris Mainstone, justifying existing designations and looking at whether additional areas could be notified. The DNR process will look at adding or removing land; correcting SSSI boundaries; reviewing citations and the Operations Likely to Damage (OLDs) list etc. GR pleaded that none of the Itchen is denotified; CR believes the issue is more the flood plain rather than the river. CR asked interested parties to help her in the DNR process for the Itchen, and will be updating the UII on this at the next meeting.

ZB left and TD joined the meeting.

7. **Update on National Water Issues**

- a. **Catchment Based Approach** - AM outlined the catchment base approach in terms of future delivery of the Water Framework Directive, embracing local expertise and enthusiasm. The WCSRT and H&IOWWT are to co-host this on the Test and Itchen, with TD primarily leading for the Test and the Wildlife Trust for the Itchen, but not exclusively and collaborating as appropriate. The UII can feed into action on the Itchen to tackle all Water Framework Directive targets and develop catchment plans – no deterioration and protected area objectives will be incorporated.
- b. **Challenges and Choices Consultation** – The Wildlife Trusts (national office via AM) have responded to the National Consultation. Comments can be made by December via local Wildlife Trust websites. The final consultation will be used as a basis for River Basin District Consultation responses in the future

AM also mentioned that there are seven pilot regions where landowners will be allowed to undergo de-silting in rivers without needing EA consent. The only pilot in the South East is in Thames region. If this process is deemed successful it could be rolled out to all rivers which would be of great concern. [Update – NE is involved with this at a national level. It will not take place on SSSIs, but other waterbodies are vulnerable to this. A position statement from NE is imminent]

8. **Wessex Chalk Stream & Rivers Trust**

- a. **Catchment Based Approach – Catchment Partnership Fund**– TD advised that in addition to the Test & Itchen, the WCSRT will also be hosting the Avon catchment. He emphasized that this is a partnership and a mechanism for all interested groups to contribute views on the way the catchment should be managed. It is important not to repeat existing works, stressing the need to super impose the different plans in existence into a single one. CR commented that the Itchen has been chosen for a NE Site Improvement Plan as part of the IPENS programme (Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 – this is a EU LIFE Project, and the SIP will identify the gaps towards delivering favourable condition on the Itchen SSSI/SAC, collating information on the various measures/plans/strategies already underway. The SIP is scheduled to be progressed from October 2013.
- b. **Eco Systems Services Approach** – TD outlined a recent seminar he had attended at Exeter University, explaining how eco systems services might be used in catchment partnerships, with the focus moving from river restoration to water quality.
- c. **Funding** – The original bid for a grant of £15k was reduced to just over £11k. Other means of funding are to be sought from the private sector/water companies.
- d. **Water Resource Management Plans** – This has been a major focus of the WCSRT, balancing the needs of the Itchen as a SAC under low flow conditions and, as a consequence, putting greater pressure on the Lower Test.

TD commented that the water company is keen to take control of the Candover Augmentation Scheme but both the WCSRT and UII feel strongly that it should be retained by the Environment Agency.

Discussion followed about the involvement of water companies and the local authority and attendance at UII meetings. GR felt that this should be determined by weighting of certain aspects and the need for engagement. He highlighted the need to be careful about the role of the UII group and others to avoid duplication.

ACTION: TD, AM and MH will discuss separately the involvement of water companies in the Catchment Based Approach.

9. **Update on Alresford Salads / Chlorine Impacts** – see matters arising.

10. **Research Projects**

- a. **RMA Alresford Pond Report** – The meeting agreed this could be now circulated. GR asked the attendees to advise him of anything they consider a priority within the report.
ACTION: GR to publish the report next week.
- b. **Southampton University** – PS had tendered his apologies for this meeting but, as reported above, will be meeting with the H&IOWWT next week. MB suggested the summary of research projects, identifying start dates, completion deadlines and delivery objectives, be attached as an appendix to each set of minutes to show progress being made.
ACTION: AM/GR to forward summary document to CH for inclusion with Minutes.

Phosphates – BR emphasized the need to allow trends to be identified rather than basing conclusions on a small amount of data and asked members of the group to be patient for outcomes of this research project.

- c. **Itchen Valley Grazing Project** – RE advised that the H&IOWWT are now managing 150ha of land through the Itchen valley, with 150 head of cattle and 150 head of sheep. On that land there are 4 HLS agreements which are helping to fund the work. Negotiations are in progress for another 15ha. The Trust is also collaborating with the Butterfly Conservation on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester. Meat is being supplied to The Willow Tree pub in Winchester and other outlets are being explored.

Derelict land is being brought back into management and farmed land is being made more environmentally friendly, integrating water with the flood plain and encompassing the fishing side. Whilst the Trust is not actively looking to take on more land, instead focussing on delivery from existing holdings, they do have a number of areas earmarked where they would be keen to help if approached. The Trust is also taking management of more of its own reserves and grazing in-house. RE is also assisting the team in the north of the county by providing advice and stock.

- d. **Crayfish Study** – BR reported that female crayfish had been taken from the Candover to Bristol Zoo for captive rearing. Eggs were hatched in June – exact numbers are not yet known but BR estimates c.200 juveniles will be returned to the Candover. He is looking for a suitable isolated site which does not have environmental or agricultural inputs nor a high level of recreational pressure. He asked UII members to let him know of any possibilities or whether such a site could be created.

Crayfish have now been found on all three tributaries of the Itchen. Whilst there has been some movement, there is not much evidence of them moving up or down stream. BR is looking to facilitate distribution and move upstream if permission is given.

The next step is to look at captive breeding, hopefully taking males from the Candover and putting them with the females at Bristol Zoo. This could form the part of a five year PhD study at Bristol Zoo.

- e. **Cormorant Update** – SF advised that licences have been renewed from 1 September. Currently there are 9 birds roosting on Alresford pond but he expects them to increase over the next few weeks. Co-ordinated days of his team getting onto the river will begin by 8 October, but there are still one or two gaps, particularly below Easton lower bridge.

11. **AOB**

- a. **Chalk Stream Headwaters Forum** – Monday, 25 November at Sparsholt College.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday, 30 January 2014, commencing with a sandwich lunch at 1pm; meeting 1.30pm