



FINAL

Minutes of Upper Itchen Initiative Meeting

1.30pm, 3 July 2014

Bighton Village Hall, Nr Alresford

Present:

Chairman - Graham Roberts (GR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Minutes Secretary - Carrie Hutchings (CH) Vitacress Conservation 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 de Retuerto (MdR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Maxine Holden (MH) Environment Agency
Pete Shaw (PS) University of Southampton
Roger Harrison (RH) Riparian owner
Rue Ekins (RE) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Simon Ffennell (SF) Riparian owner
Serena Leadlay (SL) Natural England
Steve Rothwell (SDR) Vitacress Salads/ Vitacress Conservation Trust
Tim Sykes (TS) Environment Agency

1. APOLOGIES

Ali Morse (AM) Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Ben Rushbrook (BR) Project Officer, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Charles Barter (CB) The Watercress Company
Ollie Bedford (OB) The Watercress Company
Tom Davis (TD) T&I / Wessex Chalk Stream & Rivers Trust
Zam Baring (ZB) Wessex Chalk Stream & Rivers Trust

2. "A CATCHMENT WETLAND APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE ECOLOGY OF THE UPPER ITCHEN"

Dr Mark Everard and Rob McInnes gave a presentation exploring how the potential solutions identified in the WeSTERN bid (which did not secure funding under the DEFRA PES Pilots phase 3 call) could be put in place in the Upper Itchen. A paper outlining the proposal, value of multiple wetland ecosystem services, benefits and potential funding sources had previously been circulated to all attendees.

Discussion focussed on the need to look at the whole rather than individual parts of the system but the difficulties presented by the high number of riparian and land owners and the protective nature of individual groups etc. would make it difficult to address the whole Itchen catchment at one time. It was highlighted that the volume of water flow in the Upper Itchen is significantly different to the work undertaken by RMcI on ditches in Ireland, large expanses of land would be required for the wetlands and statutory licensing / planning requirements etc would also

need to be taken into account. ME explained wetlands would be positioned at strategic pinch points where they would deliver the most benefit. SDR identified the benefits of the proposal in flood defence management / the overflow scheme for Fobdown watercress farm, but explained the level of TRP to be applied to watercress farm effluents would lead to wetlands far larger than land existing within the watercress farm holdings. ME pointed out a wetland can never be too big and that neighbouring land owners should be approached to collaborate to mutual benefit. (Post meeting note: MD indicated he would be willing to explore the opportunities for a wetland below Fobdown Farm).

RE felt that the proposal ties in well with the Wildlife Trust's Living Landscape / Land, Fishery and Farming Management Plan and MH thought it could set another agenda for the Catchment Partnership Groups

The need for more research was highlighted and a possible source of funding would be through the Local Enterprise Partnership.

ACTIONS: **MH** to consider how these ideas could be incorporated into Catchment Partnership Group project ideas.
 MB will talk to ME/RMcI further to identify any potential sites on his land.
 GR/DR will feedback to Debbie Tann (H&IOWWT CEO) who sits on the LEP Board.

GR thanked ME/RMcI for attending and asked RMcI to circulate further background information (attached to these Minutes).

ACTION: **Attendees** should raise any further questions / comments once they have had a chance to review this information.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 30 January 2014**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2014 were agreed as a true and fair record.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

GR thanked KE, MH and BR respectively for circulating details of the River Restoration Strategy, Challenges & Choices consultation comments and the research bibliography. Other matters arising were taken under specific agenda items.

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

MdR gave an update on behalf of AM:

- 5.1. Catchment Partnerships** – The longterm objective is that Partnerships should self-generate funding but an additional cash injection from DEFRA has been received for the Test & Itchen along with a considerable sum from Southern Water, which is being split between the Rivers Trust and the Wildlife Trust. DEFRA are also supporting the national resource team.

At local level the T&I Catchment Partnership's key output has been the draft Catchment Action Plan which provides a mechanism for stakeholders to prioritise all of the actions identified as short, medium or longterm. The considerable work undertaken by AM and Rupert Kelton (Wessex Chalk Stream & Rivers Trust) in drawing this together was acknowledged. MH advised the Plan will be launched at a stakeholder workshop to be held next Monday which will outline progress to date, identify projects and how these might be delivered.

- 5.2. "Keeping Rivers Cool"** – This project will now be embraced within the Catchment Partnership Plan and has received support/funding through the Wild Trout Trust and Rotary Club in Winchester. Detailed data and technology has been used to pinpoint parts of the river which would benefit from shade and other work. MdR circulated maps and MB expressed interest in

identifying opportunities on his stretch of river. KE explained that she has worked closely with NE to ensure tree planting will be in appropriate locations and she has also built on data generated by Terry Langford at Southampton University. TS thanked KE for her work.

6. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY PROJECT UPDATE AND PROGRESS ON WATERCRESS PERMITS.

6.1. Abstraction Licences – TS informed the meeting that in the first week of April the abstraction licence for one of the larger fish farms on the Itchen was modified to protect the river. Negotiations with a second fish farm continue, working with him to enable him to continue his operation but protecting the river in line with EA requirements.

6.2. Discharge Consents – TS reported:

- New permits for both watercress and fish farms were issued in April, to be enforced as of 2016.
- Improvement plans for three watercress farms, mapping out actions to be completed by 2016 to ensure they comply with the stringent standards, need to be finalised by the end of August and agreed with the EA.
- One watercress permit, upstream of a fish farm which discharges into the same point, still has to be modified pending completion of probate matters.
- Watercress operations which were not previously licensed will require permits going forward. TS confirmed these will include a P limit where appropriate.
- The fish farms licences are effective now and they are already compliant.

SDR updated the meeting on the measures being taken by Vitacress on its two farms, which include changing the fertiliser application regime / formulation and re-engineering to re-circulate water, effectively taking the farms "off line" from the river. It is hoped work can commence this year, with a view to having one of the three systems running in 2015 giving time for any modifications ahead of the go-live date in 2016. In parallel a PhD is being funded at Southampton University looking at improving phosphorous uptake efficacy in watercress.

TS thanked SDR for the work Vitacress is undertaking and advised the Watercress Company are working equally as hard.

SDR advised autosamplers would be deployed below the Fobdown and Pinglestone watercress farms shortly and undertook to share the results of Vitacress' daily sampling with the EA and the UII group. TS advised TWC have had an auto-sampler in the Itchen for more than a month.

6.3. Chlorine – CJ informed the meeting that it has taken longer than expected to eliminate chlorine from the washing process but a resolution is very close. Further discussions with the one remaining customer still insisting on a chlorine wash are scheduled for tomorrow and a decision is expected by the end of the month.

Due to the wet spring / high water tables and the need to re-design the system, plans to recirculate Alresford Salads' discharge through the beds at Drayton were also delayed. It is now hoped this work will be completed by September.

6.4. Flooding – MH advised that the Test & Itchen are unlikely to attract a lot of flood defence aid, therefore the EA/HCC are looking at a portfolio of different measures to better manage the flood risk, e.g identification of pinch points, engineering, land plan changes, river restoration. This work will be integrated into the Catchment Partnership work, focussing on the priority communities identified by HCC's mapping exercise.

Conditions regarding toilets etc have now been waived under DEFRA's Repair and Renew grant which is designed to help those affected by flooding to install resilience measures for their properties.

Simultaneous consultations will commence on 26 September for a period of 6 months on the next River Basin Plan and Flood Risk Plan.

ACTION: MH will circulate more information when the consultations go live.

MH advised that a wide range of measures looking at more integrated catchment solutions, working with natural processes where possible, are being considered in terms of replacing the temporary dam which was installed by the motorway to protect Winchester.

TS informed the meeting that flood risk management and modelling have been incorporated into the plans for the Barton Farm development, involving a lot of SUDs. Whilst there is a wetland at the bottom of the valley it will probably contribute to flows.

7. RIVER RESTORATION STRATEGY

This has been circulated by KE. If anybody identifies any opportunities in the catchment please contact Heb Lehman at the EA.

8. WATER QUALITY TARGETS / COMMON STANDARDS MONITORING

CR thanked the EA for their modelling work to identify locally tailored targets for the Test and Itchen for the revised water quality standards. These targets will become part of the management plan consultation in September. In terms of phosphates, interim goals have been agreed for 2021 (statutory), with longer term targets for 2027, based on flow and typology. They are considered aspirational but realistic. The aim is for 20ug on the upper headwaters. SDR asked if this would necessitate a revision of watercress farm P permits. TS advised modelling to date shows the biggest opportunity for improvement is diffuse pollution, not watercress or fish farms. GR thanked the whole team involved for their inputs.

9. NATURAL ENGLAND PROJECT UPDATES

- 9.1. Sediment Fingerprinting** – The initial report from last year has been circulated. This year monthly sampling will take place on each of the sites on the Upper Itchen looking at organic content, reporting in March 2015.
- 9.2. HLS** - Two HLS agreements have been issued this year, one of which is for the Wildlife Trust at Easton Meadows.
- 9.3. Alresford Pond / Avington Lake** - The NE were unsuccessful in securing funding for Alresford Pond and Avington Lake restorations. Some of the weightings and criteria will be revised to look at options and the feasibility of taking the lakes off-line. In terms of Alresford Pond components will be looked at individually, e.g the reed bed would meet SSSI requirements on its own. Consultation with the respective landowners, the public and users will be required.
- 9.4. River Habitats** – A river habitats survey on the Itchen has been contracted out and CR is hopeful work will start at the end of this month. Any queries or access issues should be addressed to CR. The resultant report will be tied into other parameters and will not therefore be available until March.
- 9.5. Site Improvement Plan** – The site improvement plan has been submitted to NE National and published on their website. This will form part of the management plan consultation.

- 9.6. Tichborne Lake** – The recommended option had been to restore to river as part of SSSI and SAC. However, a middle ground to suit all interested parties is being sought. There are no funds for implementation.
- 9.7. Capital Grant Scheme** – SL advised the window for applications was extended to the end of May. All 21 applications were successful.
- 9.8. Events** – ADAS are running a Sustainable Water Systems for Livestock event in Kings Worthy next Wednesday. 9 farmers are booked to attend. SL is planning an event on peat and one on routes of slurry and tracks.
- 9.9. Cover Crops** - SL outlined trials being conducted across the SE growing 7 different types of cover crop, both with and without nitrogen inputs.
- 9.10. Septic Tanks** – This is a national project, the first phase of which looked at the distances phosphorus travels from soak away, but the report is not yet available. A literature review of different systems will look at comparisons of package plans and sewage treatments Risk assessments of 20 SSSIs, including the Itchen, were scheduled for June.

10. RESEARCH

10.1. Southampton University - PS updated the meeting on Southampton University research as follows:

- **Exchange and Mobilisation of Phosphorus** - There is more evidence of a consistent pattern in that the Tichborne and Candover are relatively low in P; the Arle is high and Easton is in between, but within all there is a high level of variability. 20ug (pristine level) has been measured at Easton gauging station.
ACTION: PS will compare this to the EA modelling.
- Work on whether sediment acts as a source or sink has found a high level of variation. Of 3 samples taken from Grange Lake, 1 was neutral; 1 acted as a sink; 1 acted as a source. The source was the most gravelly sediment of the 3.
- **Phosphorous PhD** – Arthur's work ends in 2014 but PS advised there are many more questions to be answered, e.g migration of phosphorous in groundwater systems. He explained that the 30 to 40 year lag in nitrate impact on groundwater may be mirrored by P, but over a longer period. SDR thought P was locked by chalk into calcium phosphate but PS explained that cannot always be assumed.
- **Follow-up Studies** – PS outlined opportunities for Southampton University to part fund new research, highlighting a number of areas where underpinning by science would be beneficial, e.g. NE targets; watercress farming; septic tanks; Alresford Pond etc.

10.2. Cormorants – SF advised that the work is planned to re-commence in September.

ACTION: KE will forward SF details of new Fisheries Management Advisor

11. PROJECTS

11.1. Crayfish

- MDR advised signal crayfish have been identified at the top end of the lower Itchen, emphasizing the need for conscious bio-security measures.
- The captive rearing and trans-locating project between Bristol Zoo and the Wildlife Trust continues, with the VCT now principal funders. 200 new borns were released into an undisclosed location on the Itchen and a new batch of females has been taken to the captive rearing facility.

11.2. Grazing – RE advised the grazing project is going well but unfortunately cattle have had to be removed from Fobdown Farm. A new site at Easton has been secured.

12.ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12.1. Chalk Stream Headwaters Forum – This will take place at Sparsholt College on 7 November

13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Tuesday 7th October at 10am**, finishing with a sandwich lunch at 1pm at Bighton Village Hall