



FINAL

Minutes of Upper Itchen Initiative Meeting

1.30pm, 30 January 2014

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
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
Ollie Bedford (OB) The Watercress Company
Roger Harrison (RH) Riparian owner
Rue Ekins (RE) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Simon Ffennell (SF) Riparian owner
Steve Rothwell (SDR) Vitacress Salads/ Vitacress Conservation Trust
Tim Bernhard (TB) Natural England
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
Charlotte Rose (CR) Natural England
Mike Rushworth (MJER) Vitacress Salads Limited
Pete Shaw (PS) University of Southampton
Serena Leadlay (SL) Natural England
Tim Sykes (TS) Environment Agency

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 24 September 2013

Item 7a – Catchment Based Approach - TD clarified that Rupert Kelton is leading this for the WCSRT.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

3.1. Septic Tanks – AM outlined the PR campaign conducted by the H&IOWWT, including contact with other Trusts, press coverage and their own magazine to members. TD advised that whilst the WSSRT do have an educational programme, it does not extend to this area at the present time.

3.2. Benchmarking / Research – GR explained that this would require time and resource. However, BR has drawn together a bibliography of all papers and studies that are known to the H&IOWWT.

ACTION: BR will circulate the details electronically to UII members and asked that they email him with any other publications they are aware of, sending him electronic copies of the documents. The Trust will then act as the central holder of such information.

3.3. River Restoration Strategy – This will be signed of by the EA imminently and then needs to be sent to NE.

ACTION: KE will try to ensure that it is published before the end of the financial year.

3.4. Water Resource Management Plans – KE advised that the EA remains resistant to passing the licence for the augmentation scheme over to the water company. Consideration is being given to supplementing water supplies elsewhere in the catchment.

GR believes Southern Water have commissioned Atkins to carry out a scoping report on the installation of a pipeline to avoid disturbance to the crayfish. However they failed to consult with the landowner about the plan until last week. It was stressed that there are also a lot of other partners in the valley, including the Piscatorial Society, who need to be consulted.

ACTION: GR will raise with Southern Water

3.5. Southampton University – There are 5 or 6 current studies, some of which are quite relevant to issues on the Itchen.

ACTION: BR will circulate details and timeframes with the bibliography

4. RESEARCH PROJECTS

4.1. Itchen Valley Grazing – Negotiations continue on two areas, with a third landowner also approaching the Trust, which will add a further 25ha to the project area. The weather has been challenging but the project is moving forward on all areas of land. There are now 150 cattle, including RE's on loan. Two restaurants are now being supplied with meat, and a third is in contact. In the wider Trust a trading arm has now been established to undertake capital works, fencing etc but also to develop a meat trading enterprise.

4.2. Crayfish – The captive rearing at Bristol Zoo is going well with over 400 juveniles from the 12 females, which will probably be released in June. In October males were collected to breed with the females over the winter and they are all carrying eggs which appear to be fertilised.

BR is still looking for a suitable location to introduce crayfish where they have never been present before, but this must be free from non-native crayfish.

BR is working with the Piscatorial Society to improve biosecurity awareness across the Itchen and will be erecting signage for the coming fishing season.

Vitacress' investment in recirculation at Fobdown Farm is welcomed, but BR stressed the phosphate and flood alleviation work needs to be co-ordinated.

4.3. Cormorants – SF/MB explained the birds are changing their behaviour and feel the only solution will either be concentrating on the roost itself or, those individuals with licences will have to ensure vigilance throughout the culling period. There are still a few gaps in overall coverage which would need to be covered to maximise impact on the Upper Itchen Population

The birds are expected to leave the Valley next month, with the juveniles returning in July and the adults later. RH suggested applying to get the licences earlier than the September commencement date bearing in mind the behaviour changes.

- 4.4. University of Southampton Projects** – K Chun Leung (Arthur) is in the final stages of his phosphorous PhD. There is also a citizen sampling network where landowners are helping with regular data which is being used by AY. Independent monitoring by The Salmon & Trout Trust has been providing compelling evidence of high phosphate loads on the Itchen.

A MSc dissertation by Katherine Hesketh is being undertaken regarding the exchange and mobilisation of phosphates from sediments on the Itchen.

5. Environment Agency Update

- 5.1. Discharge Consents** – KE thanked those involved in the consultation on watercress and fish farm consents. The response was circulated yesterday and it has been concluded that details of a new licensing regime will be issued by the EA to the watercress growers by the end of March.

KE welcomed the positive response from The Watercress Company and Vitacress. Both companies have plans to be compliant with the new licences in terms of phosphate levels. OB commented that TWC have already reduced their applications by 65%.

SDR believes more focus is required on monitoring post implementation, feeling that the proposed monthly sampling will not adequately account for the good practices of those companies who make significant investment to comply. KE explained that the EA doesn't have the resource to conduct more frequent monitoring but James Humphries has indicated to GR that independent monitoring will be accredited if verified by the EA.

CJ updated the meeting on Alresford Salads' progress in eliminating chlorine from their washing process. One customer moved to washing in water in December, and a meeting with the new Technical Manager of the other customer still using chlorine is planned for February. If agreement cannot be reached Alresford Salads will no longer process their product. He advised that £75k has been invested in a filtration system which will be installed by the end of February.

The UII Group felt some questions raised during the consultation required specific answers, but recognised that some information is confidential and commercially sensitive. Once permits are in place with improvement plans the information becomes a public record. TD saw the consultation as a "point on the direction of travel" and wants to see evidence that the new regime is working, particularly bearing in mind that some of the data input into the modelling may have been inaccurate. GR sees the EA response as "regulatory" and feels it needs to be defined with a timescale.

ACTION: KE will feed the concerns of the UII back to the EA.

- 5.2. Septic Tanks** – KE advised that modelling highlights that septic tanks are a bigger issue in terms of phosphate discharge than previously thought. A consultation on the issue will take place February/March and KE asked the attendees to respond to that. AM advised that Alex Poynter's study for HWT found that many household products had less phosphorus than was expected, but some dishwasher products had levels of 30% or more. With effect from 1 January 2015 it will be illegal to sell domestic laundry cleaning products containing more than 0.4% phosphate (currently the limit is 30%). A subsequent amendment to the Regulation will also impose a restriction on phosphates in dishwasher detergents, but the timescale for this is unknown. GR felt there may be scope to develop Alex Poynter's work as part of the consultation.

Discussion focussed on the confusion around legal requirements, discharge licence parameters, registration and the lack of political will to enforce maintenance and asset management in terms of mains drainage.

ACTION: MH will ask Dawn O'Neill, EA representative who sits on the National Committee, to attend the next UII meeting.

Post Meeting Note from CR:

The Itchen has been chosen, along with several other SSSI/SACs, as part of a national NE septic tank study – investigating the impacts of septic tanks on the watercourse, with a particular reference on the distance of septic tanks from the SAC. As it is a national project, I'm not sure exactly what the study entails, but it will be carried out during 2014, with the final output expected March 2015.

5.3. Abstraction Licence Changes – The EA are still agreeing the level of compensation payable to Franklyns Farm but have decided to start discussions with the other two businesses.

5.4. Challenges and Choices Consultation – MH advised that nationally 750 responses were received; 75 in the South East region. 2/3rds were from groups and organisations; 1/3rd individuals.

ACTION: MH will circulate some of the detailed comments

Comments with national application will be dealt with generically; there will be a discussion about how to incorporate catchment specific issues into the Group Based Management Plan. There will be a six month consultation on the latter commencing in July.

MH outlined cost benefit information, explaining that this and other information will be pulled together into Catchment Summaries which will hang off River Basin Plans and linked to Catchment Partnership Plans. These will be drafted in February and completed April/May. Actions identified for the Test and Upper Itchen are cost beneficial; those for the Lower Itchen and Southampton are not. Assigned costs which are not associated with protected area activity but will have added benefit will be presented to DEFRA to decide what can be afforded. Measures anticipated before 2015 will not be put into cost benefits.

5.5. Flooding – A questionnaire to gain an understanding of the impacts associated with recent flooding is to be published by the EA.

6. UPDATE ON ALRESFORD SALADS / CHLORINE IMPACTS

Chlorine was covered under item 5.1 above.

By the end of April, which ties in with the UK watercress season, Alresford Salads' discharge will be recirculated through the beds at Drayton.

ACTION: Gammarus testing will be undertaken and CJ will report back to the next meeting.

7. RIVER RESTORATION STRATEGY UPDATE

As above, KE hopes to publish this by the end of the financial year. ZB suggested it could be published on the WCSRT website. KE suggested that if any issues relate to reaches operated by UII attendees they contact Heb Lehman. There will be money to use in partnership funding to deliver some of the improvement measures.

Post Meeting Note from CR:

This has now been signed off and we're planning works for next year, having provisionally been allocated some funding from NE and EA. It will be published on the EA website in due course, but due to changes to government agency websites, for the short term it will be published on

the WCSRT website.

8. NATURAL ENGLAND PROJECT UPDATE

GR updated the meeting on SL's work:

- 8.1.** The Capital Grant Scheme window for new applications opens 1st February and closes end of March (brought forward one month from previous years). Same capital items, no special projects available. Of the 35 applications submitted last year, 22 were successful. However wet soil conditions are hampering works but they need to be completed and claimed by the end of February. SL is concerned that some people may withdraw.
- 8.2.** SL has held several events in the Catchment, one on Organic Matter and Groundwater in November at Leckford; one last week nearer Salisbury on Precision Farming. She also did an event in October for Sparsholt College to show diffuse pollution issues and solutions to future farmers/farm managers.
- 8.3.** SL has additional funds for more grants as the Itchen is designated at a European level. She is currently contacting various farmers in the catchment but if any land owners are interested they should contact her direct.
- 8.4.** There are some funds for potential new HLS agreements in the catchment focused on WFD. SL has one potential on the Test side; any thoughts on the Itchen should be passed to CR/TB as soon as possible. AM explained that new applications for NELMES start in 2015 but will not be active until 2016. In the interim there is a small amount of money available for HLS falling out of the countryside agreements and protected areas.

Post Meeting Notes from CR:

- *Diffuse Water Pollution Plan: Progress with the second review continues and will be agreed with the EA by the end of this month.*
- *Sediment fingerprinting: I have finally managed to get the initial report finalised with the contractor, on sediment investigations on the Upper Itchen (and Bowlake). Please find it attached. Further sediment work is underway, as per the recommendations of the report, and will be reported on by March 2015. This is focusing on the organic part of the sediment, and on the Upper Itchen only. I'll keep the group updated, and thanks to those who have allowed site access for sampling.*

9. NATIONAL WATER ISSUES AND CATCHMENT PARTNERSHIPS

- 9.1. Alresford Pond** – The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust received funding through Natural England to conduct a feasibility study into the restoration of Alresford Pond. One of the main components, the hydrogeological assessment, has been underway since November and a report is due very shortly. The investigation has shown that mobilisation of phosphates particularly is more likely to happen in shallow lakes and that temperature and turbidity following heavy rainfall may trigger the chemical process and consequently phosphate release is more likely to happen in Alresford Pond as it is heavily silted. The next stage is an extended feasibility of restoration options identified by Rob Murdock.

Restoration opportunities for other lakes in the Upper Itchen Catchment are also being reviewed, e.g Grange Lake, Drove Lane Lower Lake, and will be a component of the final report. CR is looking at Tichborne Lake separately.

The report will be submitted to Natural England by the end of the financial year and CR will use this when bidding for further funds to complete the restoration.

Avington Lake has now been completed and KE commented that pre-monitoring of phosphorous levels above and below the lake did not show anything; SF has been sampling whilst the work has been in progress. BR reminded the Group to send research such as this to him.

9.2. National Water Issues

- a) Details of the national consultation on abstraction regime were circulated after the meeting.
- b) NGOs are currently occupied with dredging and flooding issues.
- c) **Catchment Based Approach** - Details are awaited regards the announcement that further funding for the continuation of Catchment Based Approach will be available. It is understood that more of this will be directed at supporting Partnerships than in the past, but some will still be required centrally for reporting work such as data management.

A launch event for the Test & Itchen Catchment Partnership was held in December and attended by c.40 key stakeholders. The announcement of further funding removes some of the pressure and allows more time to draw together the existing myriad of information, identify gaps and priorities, and obtain input from consultations, before pulling it altogether into one single working plan which will be continually developed. This will link into the River Restoration Strategy, the IPENS programme etc.

GR re-iterated the need to avoid duplication. TD commented that this issue was also raised at the BRI meeting and agreed that once this phase is completed some form of rationalisation is required. ZB stressed that the Catchment Partnerships are meant to be a conduit for delivery.

- d) **Keeping Rivers Cool** – This is an EA project on the Test & Itchen catchment, targeting areas for riparian planting to help shade and warm rivers.
ACTION: AM will circulate further information of areas highlighted for potential

10. WESSEX CHALK RIVERS TRUST UPDATE

Covered under Catchment Partnerships above.

11. FEEDBACK ON VCT CHALK STREAM HEADWATERS FORUM

RH gave a vote of thanks to Vitacress for funding this initiative. The meeting felt the Forums have improved over the years and are now far more varied and have a wider geographic spread. Attendees at the Forums now have a better understanding of the issues which allows for more productive contributions. MH suggested that if each Forum is going to have an underlying theme it would be beneficial to brief key stakeholders such as the EA and NE so that they can be represented by the most appropriate member of staff.

Suggestions for future presentations were hydropower and fracking. In relation to the latter TD advised he had attended a recent conference on this subject and feels the main issues of concern are the integrity of the drill casing and disposal of water used for hydraulic fracturing.

12. AOB

There was no other business to discuss.

- 13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** –Thursday, 3 July commencing with a sandwich lunch at 1pm; meeting 1.30pm.