

Minutes of Upper Itchen Initiative Meeting

10am, 9th October 2012

Abbotstone Farm House

Present:

Chairman: Graham Roberts (GR) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Gwen Isaacs (GI) University of Southampton (Minutes)
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
Zam Baring (SBAR) Riparian owner – son of Lord Ashburton
Simon Ffennel (SF) Riparian owner
Roger Harrison (RH) Riparian owner
Charles Barter (CB) Watercress Company
Ollie Bedford (OB) Watercress Company
Tom Amery (TA) Watercress Company
Ben Rayner (BRa) Environment Agency
Tim Sykes (TS) Environment Agency
Tom Davis (TD) T&I / Wessex Rivers Trust
Serena Leadley (SL) Natural England
Charlotte Rose (CR) Natural England
Steve Rothwell (SR) Vitacress Salads/ Vitacress Conservation Trust
Chris Jeffes (CJ) Alresford Salads
Martin Burton (MB) Independent Consultant
Ernie Jeffs (EJ) Winchester County Council

1. Apologies

Gail Taylor (GT) University of Southampton
Pete Shaw(PS) University of Southampton
Kerry Evans (KE) Environment Agency
Rue Ekins (RE) Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Tim Nevard (TN) VCT
Rose Timlett (RT) WWF UK

1a. Minutes from the Previous Meeting on 9th May 2012

Minutes were accepted. GR had a copy of the invertebrate report entitled 'Invertebrate Monitoring Spring 2012.' The River Alre Catchment and Alresford Pond New Alresford, Hampshire'. Copies had been emailed to the attendees before the meeting.

GR thanked Tim Sykes (TS) for standing in for Kerry Evans.

2. Environment Agency Update.

TS gave update. They were working towards changing the discharge consents for watercress and fish farms with specific focus on P, as well as liaising with Southern Water with regard to abstraction at Otterbourne. Christmas 2012 was the deadline for completion of “Review of Consents Process” with regard to this issue

TS reported that there had been an increase in the number of reports of poaching in the Meon and the Itchen. The Environment Agency was out and about at night to try to catch the poachers. TS appealed to the meeting for any intelligence regarding poachers. The eel population has reduced by 5%. Eels are protected. Eel racks may be being used to catch eels and then they are sold on a commercial basis. TS again appealed to the meeting for any intelligence on eel catching. There is an 0800 hotline to call on the Environment Agency website or Crimestoppers could be called.

The meeting agreed that it would be good to have some way of raising people’s awareness of eels and how serious the practice of trapping them has become.

3. Natural England Update

CR reported that the Diffuse Water Pollution Plan was being reviewed. Natural England was working with the Environment Agency. The plan was due to be signed off in December 2012

Sediment sampling work was due to start soon. ADAS would be doing this. Sampling was to be done in the Upper Itchen and Bow Lake. The objective is to “fingerprint” sediment and thus identify sources of in-channel accumulations. February 2013 for report completion.

Draft Restoration Strategy was due in December 2012 with the final version in February 2013. There is no timescale for delivery yet. Funding would need to be sorted. WFD funding will be bid for.

SL had received 27 applicants for the capital grant scheme with regard to the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative. 23 of these have been successful. There had been 30 1:1 visits including pesticide and water audits.

Two specific events were planned. One for 29th Nov 2012 and one for 30th Nov 2012. The topic was ‘Being Precise With Your Fertiliser’.

SL had distributed newsletters to target areas which included specific farmers within the two catchments. TD asked what percentage of landowners were included. SL agreed to find out for next meeting. A map showing farming areas would be useful.

[ACTION Serena Leadley \(SR\) – to find out what percentage of landowners were covered in her catchment area and to produce a map showing farming areas.](#)

4. Alresford Pond

CJ reported that a lot of time had been spent with Kerry Evans finding out how to reduce the various discharges from Alresford Salads. Of particular concern has been the continued use of chlorine in the washing plant and organic material (fragments of leaves and cress) getting into the settlement area and thence the Pond. Alresford Salads hope to convert their last washline running on chlorine to a non chlorine process in the future.

The Watercress Co claimed a quote of £150,000 had been received for de-silting their settlement pond. There needs to be zero impact to River Itchen SSSI/SAC on any discharge caused from dredging the pond. It will drain to the Pond first.

CJ reported that there were 3 wash lines; 2 were water only but the 3rd one is still using chlorine. The amount of chlorine used had been reduced by 1/5th over several months.

There had been a recent scare where cryptosporidium had been found in humans. Investigations were taking place to see if this was linked to salad. The symptoms were malaise and tiredness.

There was considerable frustration from several members of the group that more was not being done to alleviate the discharge problems from TWC as this unacceptable situation, although known, had failed to be sorted. CJ assured the group that chlorine would be removed from the washing process by the end of February 2013 if at all possible.

TD said that he was surprised that the salad companies didn't advertise more widely the fact that water was used to wash the watercress.

RH asked what was happening re septic tanks. TS reported that DEFRA wanted to start a register but that cost was an issue. The Diffuse Water Pollution project had recognised it as an issue. CR said that the study that ADAS was doing would show that septic tanks are causing problems.

TS said that there was a 5 year rolling Asset Management Programme starting in 2014. The person involved (Sarah ??) should be invited to the next Ull meeting. RH said he thought that a lot more should be done.

The whole situation with regard to sewage discharges into the Bourne Rivulet is under discussion. The increased loads from the village of St Mary Bourne, failing infrastructure and particularly recent high water levels are continuing to cause concerns for this river above and below Vitacress's operation. Southern Water reputedly have spent £2 million trying to sort the problems out but with little success. Vitacress have offered the potential building of a wetland on their land to help alleviate these issues as a bridging solution to ameliorate the filtered sewage overflows. Concerns were expressed that Vitacress should not be responsible for sorting out issues relevant to Southern Water's responsibilities

TD said that a campaign of information re septic tanks would be useful as many owners were not aware of the consequences of over filled tanks, for example.

[**ACTION Tom Davies \(TD\) – to approach Southern Water for more information about septic tanks.**](#)

CB said that there were some inaccuracies in the invertebrate report that had been circulated before the meeting. This report had stated that there were massive detrimental impacts on invertebrates below the salad washing factory.

[ACTION ALL – to annotate the invertebrate report with any changes and email back to Graham Roberts.](#)

[ACTION Graham Roberts \(GR\) – to collate changes received to invertebrate report and re-circulate amended report to Ull group.](#)

KE was going to work with BR on link between phosphorus and gammarus.

5. Southampton University

PS had sent his apologies for absence. His VCT funded student was looking at impact and sources of phosphorus in Test and Itchen headwaters.. Felicity Shelley from Queen Mary College, London was looking at sediment samples by the Bush Inn. It was thought she could attend the VCT Forum. GR passed Shelley's email to BR. TD said he would also contact Queen Mary College.

SF asked about water sampling. Arthur Leung may not be at that stage yet.

[ACTION Graham Roberts \(GR\) – to ask Pete Shaw what is happening with water sampling.](#)

There would be updates on this work at the VCT Forum.

6. Project updates from HWT, WCSRT etc

MdR reported that their Upper Itchen Restoration bid had failed but that the work may still happen via the Restoration Strategy. The Itchen Valley grazing project was still in development and several new agreements were underway

BR said that the report on water augmentation scheme was now complete. There would be further studies next year into the strange behaviour of crayfish. BR thanked MBAR and ZBAR for allowing him to undertake the crayfish studies on their land. BR had spoken to Bristol zoo about captive breeding. BR was still looking for sites and asked the meeting to let him know of any potential ones.

TD from the Wessex Chalk Rivers Trust reported that they had a new chairman – George Selligman, who had been a solicitor. Nick Giles was now full time. He was a Programme Development Manager and was a zoologist before taking up this role. They were also unsuccessful with catchment bids. ZBAR had recently joined their Board.

7. Cormorant Update

SF reported that licences were renewed and operational. John Renney had been good at chasing up owners.

TD reported that the Test & Itchen EGM would be on 4th November 2012. Nick Giles would speak on assessing cormorant impacts.

8. AOB

EJ said he was willing to discuss the issue of septic tanks with his fellow councillors but about a year ago, cost issues of replacing the tanks were a problem. EJ was chair of the planning committee. TD said that he suspected that the problems were with the older tanks.

TS said that the Salmon and Trout Association had contacted the European Council about protecting rivers. The focus was on abstraction. The Environment Agency had not been forceful enough regarding SAC streams.

SF asked about Alex Pointer. He is still with the University and will give an update at the next VCT Forum.

9. Date of Next Meeting

25th April 2013 at 1pm for a sandwich lunch to be held at The Christy Hall, Old Alresford, SO24 9DJ