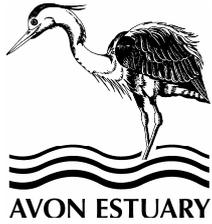


Avon Estuary Forum



Nigel Mortimer
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✉ Nigel.Mortimer@SouthDevonAONB.org.UK
☎ 07971 - 544010 (not 24/7)

Wednesday 12th May 2010

Dear Avon Estuary Forum member

Invitation to the Avon Estuary Forum meeting on Tuesday 25th May 2010 for 7pm in the Thurlestone Parish Hall

I am writing to invite you to our next Forum meeting, please find a copy of the *draft* agenda on the reverse of this letter - a revised agenda will be issued at the meeting as necessary. The meeting will be chaired by Cllr Bryan Carson .

A copy of the notes of our 18th March 2009 meeting are also attached.

I have booked the hall from 6:30pm and will lay out a 'help yourself' tea, coffee and biscuits - so please feel free to come along anytime between 6:30 & 7pm to casually network with others before the meeting at 7pm.

Thurlestone Parish Hall may be found at OS map grid ref. SX 679 432+ (for 'SatNav'ers' the hall's post code is TQ7 3LY). It is the first building on the left, past the Garage, as you enter Thurlestone from the Kingsbridge direction.

I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours sincerely,

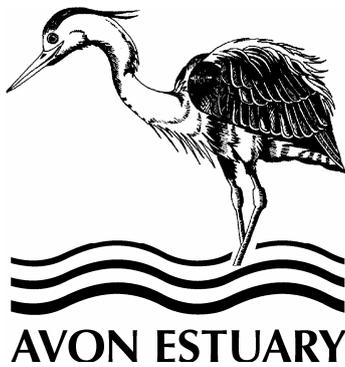
Nigel Mortimer

Enc.

AEF meeting draft agenda

AEF notes of the 24th November 2009 meeting

Please help to keep the Avon Estuary Forum mailing list up-to-date by letting Nigel Mortimer know of any changes, omissions, etc. or if you no longer wish to be a member. Please also let Nigel know if you are now able to receive these mailings by e-mail.



Avon Estuary Forum

7pm Tuesday 25th May 2010 - Thurlestone Parish Hall

Hall open from 6.30pm for casual networking, with tea, coffee and biscuits

Draft Agenda - an updated agenda will be presented at the meeting as required

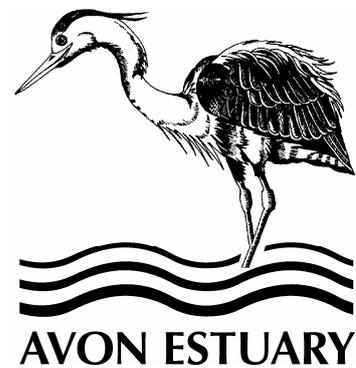
1. Welcome - Chairman - Cllr Bryon Carson TBC
2. Introductions and apologies
3. Approval of the notes of the last AEF meeting of 24th November 2009 [attached]
4. Matters arising
5. Election of Avon Estuary Forum Chairman (please let Nigel know of any nominations)
6. Marine Act & pSAC evolutions - Gavin Black?
7.  **LearntoSea** schools project - Maya Plass
8. Alien bashing & jetsam bagging ... what the ACA are up to! - Stuart Watts
9. South Devon AONB Estuaries, Sustainable Use & Enjoyment Projects - Nigel Mortimer

Interactive input and coffee break
10. Estuary Management Plan progress and proposals for the next six months - verbal reports of relevant management plan progress and future commitments from around the Forum please. [This is your chance to inform the Forum of any relevant projects being progressed by your organisation.]
Example update reports from:
 - Avon Harbour - Marsh Dawes
 - Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative
 - Environment Agency & South West Water - water quality issues
 - Devon Sea Fisheries - mariculture and fisheries
 - Significant Wildlife sightings / reports - Rod Bone et al.
 - South Devon Coastal Local Action Group - Alan Stapleton
11. Any other business?
12. Date for next meeting?

Avon Estuary Forum

Notes of the meeting held on
24th November 2009 at Thurlestone

Parish Hall



Notes in italics show post meeting updates and inclusions

1. Cllr Bryan Carson welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Introductions and apologies for absence**

Those present:

Peter Marsh	Aune Conservation Association (ACA)
Stuart Watts	ACA
Ros Bronsson	ACA & local resident
Nigel Mortimer	Estuaries Officer: S.Devon AONB
John Coates	Aveton Gifford PC
Sara Downham-Lotto	Avon Valley Project
Roger English	South Devon AONB
Gill Goddard	Evans Estates
Tony Goddard	Evans Estates
Jonathan Aylett	Evans Estates
Ryan Hooper	Evans Estates

Alan Stapleton	Kingsbridge & Salcombe Area Partnership
Fiona Woolmer	Local ecologist - (minutes)
Gerald Boalch	Marine Biological Association
Cathy Heath	South Devon Coastal Local Action Group
Cllr Bryan Carson	SHDC - (Chairperson)
John Watling	South Hams Society
Maya Plass	Learn to Sea
Neil Townsend	Devon Sea Fisheries
Lizbe Pilbeam	Natural England
Gordon Waterhouse	British Trust for Ornithology
John Tucker	Folly Farm

Apologies for absence were received from: Roger Halliday (Duchy of Cornwall), Sally Hope-Johnson (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group), Sarah Clark (Devon Sea Fisheries), Georgina Lewis (Environmental Health - Pollution), Pip Chorley (Royal Yachting Association), Mike Maslin (Environment Agency), John & Elspeth Peters (ACA), Mick Loates (Kingsbridge & District Natural History Society), Robin Toogood (South Devon AONB), Marsh Dawes (Harbour Master).

3. Approval of the notes of the last AEF meeting

The notes of the last meeting held on 18th March 2009 were approved following the discussion of matters arising.

4. Matters arising

- **Gillaroo** (house-boat at Aveton Gifford) - Roger Halliday has spoken to the owner to give notice to remove Gillaroo or it would be removed by the Duchy. On a related matter, the Duchy have requested that site deeds be shown as evidence of ownership with occupation for an adjacent area of shore / estuary fundus.

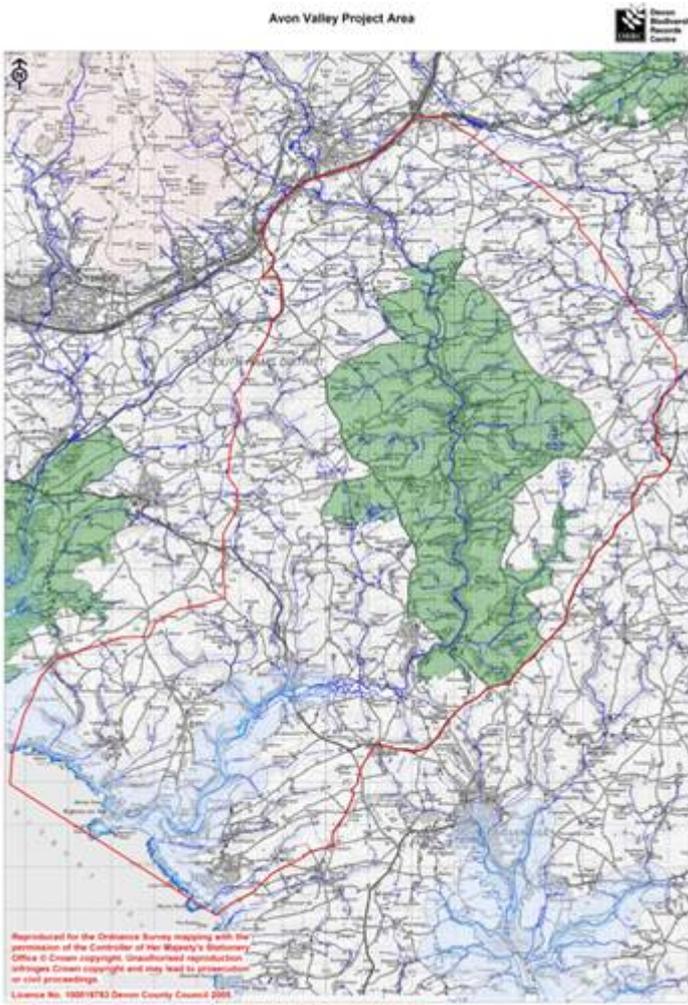
Lizbe Pilbeam's entry - note that Lizbe had concentrated her presentation at the spring meeting on the future of the Catchment Sensitive Farming project within the Avon catchment and not on the many achievements made while an associate status catchment within the wider project.

- **Draft Terms of Reference for the Avon Estuary Forum** - Amendments and comments included:
 - a) Nigel's change in title, now "South Devon AONB Estuaries Officer"
 - b) Bullet point 2 - (effective co-operation). SW pointed out that there was no representative from EA to answer. *Note - this is also an objective of the Avon Estuary Management Plan, which the EA have agreed with.*
 - c) Several members felt it was a 'sensible document' and the members present agreed that the Terms of Reference should be adopted
 - d) Proposals for Chair & Vice Chair were raised but it was agreed that these should be made in writing and carried forward to the next meeting

ACTION 1: (All) Proposals for Chair & Vice Chair in writing to NM for next meeting

5. River Avon Valley Project: Devon Wildlife Trust

Please accept my apologies for having missed the Avon Estuary forum meeting, a mistake on my part as to the meetings location. Nigel asked if I could provide a brief outline of the project that he could send out with the minutes. It is quite complicated to right in brief and in a way that fully describes its aims. I haven't had the time to link it in to the management plan and catchment sensitive farming at this stage - although it obviously does link in directly in many areas. If you should like further information please don't hesitate to contact me: Matt Boydell, Land Management Manager- 01392 279244 or mboydell@devonwildlifetrust.org



The project is still in a development phase and not all interested parties and potential partners have been approached. However the underlying aims of the project are based on rebuilding biodiversity within the Avon Valley Strategic Nature Area (SNA). It is proposed that the Avon Valley SNA will be the priority area for the project, with a secondary area based on the catchment of the Lower Avon buffering around the SNA. (see map)

The Avon Valley SNA encompasses a geographical area of nearly 3,500 ha, with the secondary focus adding approximately a further 8000ha. This particular SNA is of a significant size but has no others in close proximity. It lies on a primary river and has been designated primarily for its woodland habitat. It contains a SSSI, Andrew's Wood, which is managed as a Devon Wildlife Trust nature reserve.

The priority habitat for the SNA is woodland, of which the current resource is approximately 7-9% of the SNA area, the secondary target is other semi-natural habitats, with semi-natural grassland currently accounting for approximately

7% of the SNA. The habitat creation/restoration targets for woodland and other semi-natural habitats within the SNA are ambitious and cover a 50 year timescale.

The development of the project is grounded in habitat restoration / re-creation experience and expertise gained over the last ten years in the delivery of conservation on a landscape scale, both in the South Hams through the Dart Catchment project and Landscape Heritage Scheme, but also on the Culm through Green Gateway, Natural Networks and the most recent Working Wetlands Project.

Like Working Wetlands the project incorporates Rebuilding Biodiversity principles, aiming to restore neglected sites, create new habitat and link sites through the landscape - restore, recreate, and reconnect. Key to the successful delivery of the project will be working in partnership with other key organisations and local groups. It is hoped the project will be able to link with other activities /projects already active or in development within the area and it is the intention to work closely with Natural England, Forestry Commission, FWAG, AONB team, Woodland Trust and others.

The main area of delivery of the project will be working with landowners in providing advice in habitat management and assisting in Environmental Stewardship applications; looking at restoring grazing to areas of neglected land; and working with small woodland owners with a view to increasing woodland management and planting within the project area. The project will include as targets in its first year:

- Conduct biodiversity audit (assimilate current survey resource) and develop SNA land use map
- Maximise delivery opportunities of Environmental Stewardship/EWGS (English Woodland Grant Scheme) in project area
- Complete 20 condition assessment visits
- Advice delivered to 40 landowners
- Hold a workshop at Andrew's Wood on the restoration of grassland management (other workshop/practical events likely to include: practical management tasks at Andrews Wood, small woodland management workshops, livestock handling and husbandry.)

The project seeks to rebuild biodiversity through supporting local landowners, in part through maintaining and improving economic viability of small farms and land holdings. This will be achieved through investigating the possibility of new markets (e.g. developing markets for local small scale woodland management) and through assisting in returning marginal semi-natural grassland into productive agricultural activity. Some of the benefits to the local area will be assisting in the maintaining and developing the economic returns from land management; maintaining and improving the landscape character of what is already a stunning area of Devon; improving water quality of the River Avon with associated benefits to fisheries and tourism.

ACTION 2: (NM) Investigate DWT River Avon project and inform forum members

6. Avon Valley Project - Sara Downham Lotto

SDL outlined the project:

It was conceived 2 years ago with the idea of celebrating the beauty and diversity of Avon Valley. The aim was to achieve a 'multicultural' sense of community; bridge gaps between local

residents; and recognise the business potential of the area.

It was hoped to hold a public event in the Avon Valley and that this would become an annual celebration; creating a snapshot of working life.

30 businesses expressed an interest in taking part.

- SDL applied for funding for a pilot event based in the Loddiswell area with the theme 'Source to Sea' but the LAG funding process proved too complicated and was eventually abandoned.

Comments arising from SDL's presentation:

Maya Plass - Support and encouragement may be provided through the Women in Business Group

Gordon Waterhouse - Jo Pelly (Harbour House) may be able to make some helpful suggestions.

Alan Stapleton - This feedback is very useful from LAG's point of view. Whilst the project sparked a lot of interest, thought needs to be given about who could manage it. It is a shame that the pilot foundered as this could have led the way for future events.

- Perhaps an Enablement Fund is needed to support such a project.

7. Avon's Catchment Sensitive Farming project - Lizbe Pilbeam (LP), Natural England

LP outlined the ongoing work with farms in the South Devon catchments of: Slapton Ley, Salcombe to Kingsbridge, Devon Avon and Dart; and the Yealm and Erme estuaries. Under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), targeted rivers must be in good condition by 2015 and, with the established link between pollution from agriculture and water quality, relationships are established through the CSF project with local farms in order to draw up plans to reduce sources of pollution from the farm reaching the watercourses. So far, the financial investment from the farmers themselves has been £15m, plus £15m from CSF.

LP outlined two case studies:

1. Goveton - rills had formed due to soil compaction during the previous year's potato harvest. A buffer strip had compounded the problem by channelling the water onto the adjacent road. The solution was to sub-soil (plough deeper) in the affected field to allow the water to drain freely.
2. Blanksmill - cattle were accessing the stream at Blanksmill Creek (opposite shellfish beds), polluting the watercourse with faecal matter. The solution was to fence off stream. Additional measures also helped water management on the farm. Changes to the application of nutrients and keeping over-wintering cattle under cover were also instigated through Catchment Sensitive Farming.

DNA tests on the Yealm and the Avon to establish the relative proportions of human vs. ruminant E.coli pollution have shown that in general over 90% of the pollution is from livestock. Farmers are responding positively given these clear scientific results.

Plans for the future:

- WFD - work continues towards the predicted compliance for 2015. There remain some 'black spots' of non-compliance but new farms continue to come on board. The next 30% of farmers are being encouraged through offering incentives (e.g. free soil sampling followed by a 1:1 visit.) NE are working in co-operation with the EA (who can offer a harder line of regulation

enforcement when necessary, i.e. good cop, bad cop!). CSF looks at the whole catchment and does not simply concentrate on riverside farms.

- Capital Grant Scheme - over the past 3 yrs the CSF grant has been £15m (match funded by the farms).
- CSF continues to prioritise the SKE- focussing on shellfish beds, bathing waters and establishing good ecological condition within the estuary.
- Sewage sludge analysis is committed for this spring.
- Extensions to the catchment (Avon & Lower Dart)

Questions arising from LP's presentation:

Q - How will good ecological status be measured?

A - At present monitoring is qualitative using tick boxes and if one aspect fails, it all fails. CSFI has specific individual targets. WFD is different. The Phase 1 part of the scheme involved some good work and got Avon into the scheme.

Q - Are we not making much headway with farmers?

A (by NM) - Perhaps we could we have a link to a farmers' newsletter on AONB website. NM will look into it.

Q - Will Agricultural Resource Management (a rural development grant) apply in same area?

A - This is a new project with 70 pilot farms. Money is limited; therefore farmers are advised to apply ASAP.

<p>ACTION 3 : (NM) Will look into including a farmers' newsletter on the AONB website</p>
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8. South Devon AONB Estuaries, Sustainable Use & Enjoyment Projects; Marine Bill and Estuaries Access; & dSAC's - Nigel Mortimer

- **Management Plan** - Review of plan for 2009-2014 was agreed last year and the new plan will be printed early in 2010 and will be available on the website once finalised. The ACA could then create a link to the plan for conservation management and wildlife information for the Avon through the ACA website.
- **South Devon AONB Estuaries Sustainable Use & Enjoyment Projects**; NM is pursuing funding through the South Devon Coastal Local Action Group.
- **Environmental Slipway Signage** (featuring The Green Blue environmental sustainability strap line messages promoted by the Royal Yachting Association (YHA) to encourage responsible behaviour by boat users thegreenblue.org.uk) is being proposed using 3-piece boards with general information in the centre and detailed local information on wings (which will be cheaper to update). It is planned to include some nature conservation guidance on slipway signs (with a clear distinction between the RNLI's H&S signs). All signage will signpost people to further detailed website information.
- **Site Interpretation Boards** - For a number of popular viewpoints such as Cliff House gardens, NM proposed boards which would interpret the view of what people see when they look across the water; but also depicting the topography of the seabed and the waters above with their wildlife communities together with a level of information about some of the local management and conservation issues and how visitors might play their part.

- **Seagrass meadows** (nee 'eelgrass beds') - an awareness raising initiative is being put together in partnership with MarLin and University of Plymouth about the plight and need for the conservation of these important communities - it will use a variety of media from leaflets to discreet signboards. It will interpret their importance, for wildlife and commercial fishing (i.e. as vital egg laying and nursery sites); where they are, how to enjoy them and what to do if you cross them (e.g. use of oars, not engines).
- **South Devon AONB Coastal Wildlife book** - NM would like to see the collation of local underwater photographs by local divers, together with good topside landscape location photographs, into a book both as a way of raising awareness and reminding ourselves of the sheer diversity of colour, form and frequent 'bizarreness' of our local marine wildlife, communities and seascapes. It will also help celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AONB's designation and show why our coast is proposed to be so highly designated.
- NM asked for any written support for his funding application and a show of hands confirmed that the majority of people present supported this project.
- **Interactive estuaries website** - this is now being proposed to be considered at a national scale.
- **Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009** - following royal assent, this has now become law - NM encouraged everyone to engage with the ongoing consultations, e.g. marine plan areas, visit - defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/marine-plan/index.htm *The Act focuses on creating a new Marine Management Organisation, a new system of marine planning, a more efficient marine licensing system, a restructuring of inshore fisheries and the creation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).*
- **New Marine Management Organisation** - This is being set up for April 2010 (based in Newcastle), operating locally through existing Marine & Fisheries Agency offices.
- **Marine access** - amendments to CROW Act 2000. A route is being developed around the English coast (draft documentation available from NE). Once the Marine Act is in place, consultation will begin. It includes special considerations for estuary sensitivities with the option to use the first publicly accessible crossing point, rather than circumnavigate them. Interested members are advised to read and respond by visiting - naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/NE222
- **Finding Sanctuary** - Next week there will be an open meeting with Finding Sanctuary in Totnes re. MCZs. Within next two years FS project will be going through the process of proposing a network of Marine Conservation Zones in the SW through common consensus. Please engage and give info. visit - finding-sanctuary.org/page/get-involved
- **Draft inshore marine Special Areas of Conservation (SAC x2)** - Two of these (Poole Bay to Lyme Bay Reefs and Prawle Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone) include wildlife-rich rocky reef habitat within this area. Within 2 weeks the consultation process will designate as a 'possible SAC'; after 9 months it will be a 'candidate' SAC. For further information visit - naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/marine/sacconsultation/default.aspx *Update - now designated as a 'possible SAC' & conservation management measures are implemented.*

Comments following NM's presentation:

- Concerns were expressed regarding recreation in sensitive areas.

- Stuart Watts highlighted concerns over water quality in upper Avon (nitrates / phosphates). *Post meeting note of interest: DEFRA has been consulting on the reduction of phosphates within domestic laundry cleaning products (closes 21Jan10) - for further information visit - netregs.gov.uk/netregs/legislation/future/113704.aspx?dm_i=2WX,30NZ,6Z8XD,9HHU,1*

ACTION 4 : (NM) Circulate details of Finding Sanctuary meeting

ACTION 5: (All) Invitation to write to the LAG Project Officer in support of NM's application for funding for the underwater photography book.

9. South Devon AONB management plan and terrestrial aliens - Roger English

- **AONB Management Plan** - RE displayed the final management plan documentation, drawn up over 18 months (Part 1: Strategy and Part 2: Delivery Plan) and thanked the forum members for their contributions to the plan and encouraged everyone to contribute to its delivery. It is a statutory document for the AONB (2009 - 2014); published just ahead of the 50th anniversary of the AONB designation (RE pointed out that there is still time to get involved in celebratory projects for this). Many different organisations will be involved in its delivery. It is available on the AONB website.
- **50 year anniversary of AONB** - Heritage lottery money is available to help celebrate 50 year anniversary through a range of means.
- **Terrestrial aliens** - RE outlined the situation of Japanese Knotweed in S. Devon and the knotweed control project. The problem cannot be restricted to the AONB alone as sites often cross over boundaries or are influenced by areas outside. Small funds are available to help work with landowners. The Devon Biodiversity Records Centre holds records of known sites so new sites can be checked against this. Recording forms can be filled in on-line. Forum members can help to promote and increase coverage and a link to the knotweed forum website could be included on the ACA website.
- *Post meeting note of interest: notice has been given by DEFRA of an additional 63 non-native invasive species that will be added to schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on the 6th April 2010. This significantly increases the number of species for which it will be illegal under section 14 of the Act to "Introduce into the wild". This new list contains species of relevance to the AONB and its estuaries. See defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/management/non-native/documents/gov-response-schedule9%20.pdf for more information.*

ACTION 6: (SW) Link to knotweed forum website on ACA website

10. Estuary Management Plan progress and proposals for the next six months

10.1 Avon Harbour - Marsh Dawes

MD's apologies given. Nothing to report.

10.2 Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative - covered in Lizbe Pilbeam's presentation.

10.3 Environment Agency & South West Water - water quality issues

Peter Marsh reported:

- Good news - through monitoring, CEFAS has graded the Avon into 3 areas: two at C; one at B. All the oyster beds are now category B.

- Bad news - SWW are still having frequent bypasses on the sewage works and this affects business. Oyster farmers get notice of bypass but recreational users do not. At Bigbury/ Bantam there should be notification of potential hazard - flag system; especially at tourist time. ACA would like to implement a notification system e.g. on the website / biohazard notice / flag. New Bathing Waters Directives will require such a system. There is particular concern about recreational use of river.

Comments following PM's report:

- Georgina Lewis is the Environmental Health contact.
- Concern was expressed over giving a negative message to visitors.
- Sign/flag can only realistically be displayed on days when bypass notification is given.

ACTION 7: (NM) NM will take idea to Environmental Health and feed back to forum.

10.4 Devon Sea Fisheries - mariculture and fisheries

Additionally to Peter Marsh's report above - patrols by RIB and Drumbeat continue in the area - most of the illegal activity happens just outside the Avon's mouth where netters from Plymouth target sea bass. Lower than average level this summer but evening patrol activity has been kept up as a deterrent.

10.5 Significant Wildlife sightings / reports - Rod Bone et al.

Rod Bone has completed his wildfowl and wader counts for December 2008 - November 2009. Wader numbers are down; ospreys are staying here longer and a pair was sighted in September. Full details of this year's records will be put on the ACA website auneconservation.org.uk

Other comments:

Ryan Hooper - Hen harrier not on list. Gordon Waterhouse - Red data book plant, Dwarf Spike Rush has been found growing in the mud between high and low water, below the sea wall, just below the bridge at Aveton Gifford. July is a good time to look for it. GW will arrange a visit (date TBA).

ACTION 8: (GW) Contact forum members with a date to hunt for Dwarf Spike Rush

10.6 South Devon Coastal Local Action Group - Alan Stapleton

No report

11. Any other business

- Maya Plass - The Age of Stupid Tuesday 1st December. Free (but donations welcome).
- Cathy Heath - gave a plug for the South Devon Local Action Group, asking for project ideas that require funding.

12. Date for next meeting

NM will contact with date suggestions for a weekday, daytime meeting.

ACTION 9: (NM) Contact forum members with suggested date and time for the next meeting