



AUNE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

'Conserving the Devonshire Avon from source to sea'

NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2007

1. AGM

Please note that the AGM will be held in Bigbury Memorial Hall, StAnn's Chapel, Bigbury on Thursday 12th April at 7.00pm for a 7.30pm start - tea and coffee will be available. We shall be debating and voting on important constitutional matters (see below),

2. CHARITABLE STATUS

At our 2006 AGM, I reported that it was the Committee's intention to apply for charitable status for the ACA, largely so that we could take advantage of the financial benefits that would accrue. Subsequently, our application was denied based on HM Revenue & Customs' interpretation of our current constitution to mean that the ACA is a 'lobby group', set up to protect the interests of a particular group of individuals. Whatever the original situation, I believe the ACA has moved on and is now a fully fledged environmental conservation group whose activities genuinely attempt to confer a public benefit, without discrimination. That is certainly the only basis on which I am prepared to carry on as Chairman and the change will require the adoption of a new constitution by a majority vote at the next AGM.

The regulators' preferred option is that we should adopt one of the Charity Commission's so-called model Governing Documents for an environmental conservation charity. The most appropriate model is that of an Unincorporated Association, where the organisation:

- is to be relatively small in terms of assets;
- has a membership;
- is to be run by charity trustees who will be elected by members or appointed to hold office for fixed terms;
- wants to take account of the views of local residents and organisations through membership or as users;
- wishes to carry out its work wholly or partly through the voluntary effort and contributions of its members.

The model Governing Document is rather longer than our current Constitution (i.e. 14 pages vs two!), covering an array of procedural matters and describing the 'Powers' of Trustees, etc. Apart from the objectives (see below), it is not contentious. Indeed it is a model of probity as might be expected of an official Charity Commission document. With only minor modifications, it can be adapted to reflect our current procedures, membership and voting arrangements. Anybody wishing to peruse the entire document can either have it sent to them by e-mail, peruse it at the AGM or request a hard copy by contacting me; routine hard copy mailings to the entire membership would be prohibitively expensive, I'm afraid. The unadapted model may be viewed on the Charity Commission's website (www.charity-commission.gov.uk).

Under this model, the objectives of the ACA will need to be revised, as below, and approved at the AGM. The new objectives

- a) support the extended vision for the organisation that was outlined at the 2006 AGM and has since been refined in Committee as 'Conserving the Devonshire Avon from source to sea' and
- b) include mention of the AONB in order to support our claim that the river and its catchment have a recognised, independently assessed value worthy of conservation.

The original objectives are also listed below for comparison. Depending upon your individual viewpoint, you may see these changes as being insignificant or, on the contrary, as fundamentally objectionable; it is for you as members to decide whether to adopt the new constitution or not and vote accordingly at the AGM. If you are

not able to attend the AGM in person, please contact me by 1st April and I can arrange for you to be sent a ballot paper - either by e-mail or conventional mail. Postal votes from members registering in advance will need to be lodged with me by 9.00am on the day of the AGM.

CHARITABLE OBJECTIVES

The Aune Conservation Association (ACA) has as its objects the following:-

NEW

1. To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the river Avon in the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
2. To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the river Avon in the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

ORIGINAL

1. To preserve the essential character of the Avon Estuary, to protect its wildlife and quiet amenities.
2. To encourage the early and effective participation in any decision which may affect the Estuary, its environs and the interests of the resident community
3. To develop, through consultation, agreed policies as to the type and optimum level of activities on the Estuary and to represent these policies to the authorities.

3. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

For a variety of reasons, mainly retirement and/or poor health, our current Committee will need new members for the year 2007/8. This is a great opportunity for interested members to develop a stimulating role in the Association. Our range of conservation activities and the depth of involvement in important initiatives and environmental consultation processes is far greater now than when the ACA was first constituted. The membership is also larger and growing steadily, which requires extra administration. We have a website that needs periodic updating. Partly as a result of our association's activities, the Avon is becoming increasingly attractive as a unique and fascinating site for archeological, ecological, geological and hydrological research and student projects. We have an active and stimulating social programme. If you feel the urge to become involved in running our association and helping to develop any of these activities, please contact me. If we are successful in our application to become a charity we shall need a minimum of 3 Trustees (Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer) together with the conventional management committee, as now. Please think seriously about what skills and experience you might be able to offer to make our association even more successful in the future!

4. CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING INITIATIVE (CSFI)

As you may remember, this national initiative from DEFRA is concerned with minimising agricultural run-off into rivers in order to meet EU water standards. The ACA, together with other partners in the S. Devon AONB applied for Associate Project status on behalf of the Avon in order to ensure participation in the scheme. There have been 3 meetings of the Steering Group. Progress may be summarised as follows:

- The creation of a database of holdings/farms (97) specific to the project
- Mailing to all farms and holdings (97) in the catchment, including a DEFRA covering letter and a CSFI explanatory leaflet.
- Commencement of one-to-one farm visits in the Catchment (6)
- Initial awareness creation about the CSFI and the project's objectives to targeted groups within the Catchment (Avon Estuary Forum, Small Farms Association)
- Preliminary Soil Surveys conducted on two farms within the Catchment
- Financial assistance with fencing and cattle watering arrangements provided for proposed Demonstration Farm
- Full local launch planned at the South Hams Agricultural Forum, together with launch of schemes in neighbouring catchments (Kingsbridge/ Salcombe and Erme/ Yealm)

5. SILTATION RESEARCH

The concluding symposium in this programme of work to investigate the causes of siltation in the tidal part of the river will be held on Friday 1st June. John Crawford has arranged the following provisional programme:

- 11.00 Introduction by John Peters (ACA) and Roger English (AONB)
- 11.45 University of Plymouth: research into sediment sources, concentrating on the results obtained and their implications for reconstructing sediment history and accretion
- 12.45 Questions
- 13.15 Light buffet featuring local produce and, particularly, Avon oysters (our biological monitor of water quality). Coffee
- 13.45 Plymouth Marine Laboratories: measurement of the physical processes in the Avon and the use of a hydrological model to explore physical behaviour and hypotheses
- 14.45 Questions
- 15.15 Summing up: to what extent have we addressed the 'Ancient Wisdoms' circulated with the briefing papers in advance and what recommendations can be made to the Avon Estuary Forum ?
- 16.00 End

6. WATER ABSTRACTION

In October 2006, the Environment Agency (EA) published a Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS) Consultation Document prior to publication of the final CAMS which will set out the strategy for abstraction of water from rivers in the South Hams for the next 6 years. The ACA provided one of only 11 responses to this consultation process and pointed out a number of concerns and important inaccuracies e.g. that there is an existing oyster farm on the Avon but not on the Erme and the omission of the impact of the Aveton Gifford sewage works from the consultation. For a variety of reasons - including evidence included in the EA's own 'Salmon Action Plan (2003)' for the Avon - we believe the amount of water currently being taken out of the Avon for different purposes is causing an unacceptable environmental impact at periods of low flow. The EA has stated since that they will give due regard to the responses when finalising the CAMS. Although some of us may feel that this statement can be likened to the sound of 'one hand clapping', we feel that we have established an important basis for contesting any additional applications for abstraction licences on the river.

7. WATER QUALITY

Water quality in the river is affected by a number of factors related to agriculture that we are addressing directly through the CSFI. Another important factor is the discharge of human waste into the river from over-stretched sewage facilities which can cause serious contamination at times of peak holiday use, especially. During the past year, the EA has been required to issue enforcement orders to a couple of multiple use property owners to clean up their discharges into the river as a result of the water quality monitoring associated with the oyster farm; as river users of any form, we all owe those oysters a huge vote of thanks! We have also sought reassurance from SHDC about the possible environmental implications of the sewage arrangements in a planning application for a commercial property adjacent to the river.

We held a highly successful and very sociable clean-up of the river on New Year's Day. Many heads were cleared in addition to the Stakes Road and Tidal Road areas of the river. These clean-ups, either on foot or by boat, are now well established biannual ACA events.

8. SAFE NAVIGATION

It was rather disturbing to find out at the Avon Estuary Forum last November that, as a result of local lobbying, the Salcombe Harbourmaster is reviewing the policy of issuing a limited number of consents to water ski on the Avon. The peaceful equilibrium established amongst river users in recent years might be at risk. Discussions about how to deal with the situation are on-going between the different interests represented at the Avon Estuary Forum, including the ACA, the Avon Valley Ski Club and SHDC. The ACA will be representing environmental interests in this debate in line with the planned revisions to our Constitution.

9. ECOLOGY

We haven't made much progress with ecological interests since the last Newsletter except that Rod Bone has kindly made his monthly bird sightings on the Avon during 2006 available to our members via our website (www.aca.ave-ton-gifford.co.uk). The bird numbers are well worth a look and you can check your own identifications with the RSPB's help!

There is the prospect of more student projects on the Avon through association with the Marine Biology and Ecology Research Centre at Plymouth University. If you have any relevant ideas or pet theories you'd like to test out, let us know and we can pass them on.

On Sunday 1st April at 2.00pm, Jan and Kelvin Ellis have generously offered to lead ACA members on an ecology walk in the woods around their home, the old Loddiswell Station - a fantastic riverside location. We hope to see a variety of flora and fauna, especially spring flowers, followed by tea on the platform, weather permitting. There will be a 'bucket' collection to meet the costs of the event and any excess will contribute to Association funds for conservation purposes. Numbers will be restricted, inevitably, so if you are interested please let me know as soon as possible and you will be sent further details nearer the time.

10. SOCIAL & ENTERTAINMENT

We have two new venues planned for members' re-unions. Mike Garton-Sprenger has negotiated with the Church House Inn in Churchstow for an evening get-together on Wednesday 21st February and we hope to visit The Sloop in Bantham later in the year. Further details of these events will be published on our website or you can contact Mike (m.gartonsprenger@btopenworld.com or 01548 810920) to express interest and reserve a place, in advance.

John Crawford, despite ill health, has again arranged a series of fascinating summer lectures in Thurlestone Parish Hall that you may wish to note in your diaries. Last summer's series was really excellent and very popular. The always-entertaining Gordon Waterhouse and Brian Ashby will give the first lecture on "the Ecology of Bigbury Bay" (Monday, August 6th). John Peters has agreed to give a lecture on "The Siltation Research Project: News from the Final Symposium" and, unless you hear otherwise, this would be on Monday August 13th. For the third Monday (August 20th) John is hoping to get an archaeologist to talk about the Dark Ages in Bantham - speaker TBA.

With good wishes

Stuart Watts (Chairman) - sdmw2@btopenworld.com or 01548 810373