



AUNE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

'Conserving the Devonshire Avon from source to sea'

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 28th May 2015, 7.00 pm., at The Fisherman's Rest, Aveton Gifford

1. Welcome

Those present; Jonno Barratt, Rosie Barrett, Ros Brousson (RB; Sec/Treasurer), Pat Cassidy (PC; committee, retiring), John Chalmers (South Hams Soc.), Mary Clark, Peter Cook, Michael Cooper (MC; committee), Mike Garton Sprenger, John Graham, Ryan Hooper, Jane Mahood, John Mahood, Jean Marsh, Peter Marsh (PM; committee), Vivienne Napper (Chair, South Hams Soc.) David Owlett, Suzy Owlett, Christopher Piercy, Rosemary Piercy, Penny Schroeter, John Tucker, Eric White (EW; committee), Stuart Watts (SW: Chair), Ros Brousson (Treas/Sec).

Apologies had been received from; Richard Boynton, Anne & John Bracey, Rowland Cole, Jim & Ann Fowler, Don & Mary Gaskins, Maya Plass, Bill & Sheila Starey, Chrissie Wright.

2. Minutes of AGM 2014

These had been circulated prior to the meeting and had been already acted upon by the committee. They were accepted as a true record, and signed.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Water quality

Various concerns had arisen: agricultural run off; sewage spills (in particular Jubilee St, Aveton Gifford - AG); AG sewage treatment works bypasses after rainfall; and the Oyster Farm (always an accurate monitor for quality) was graded category C in the summer months (could grow, but not harvest) and in the winter category B (could only harvest 1 bed of 3). The AONB Estuaries Officer, Nigel Mortimer, had convened an extraordinary meeting of the Avon Estuary Forum in November 2014 to address these issues.

SWW had work in hand to reduce the volume of water in the sewage system by separating and diverting rainwater; this should address the sewage leaks and, possibly, the extent of treatment works bypasses. AG parish council was assured that sufficient money had been allocated in their budget, and the work would be completed in the 2015.

The risk to public health to users of the upper estuary from the bypasses, consisting of unfiltered raw sewage, remains. No alerting service is in place.

PM expressed concern that new housing being built in Loddiswell would not exceed the capacity of the Loddiswell treatment works and cause yet more overflows to contaminate the river.

3.2 Bantham Estate

Since the last AGM the Bantham Estate had changed ownership. The ACA hoped to have a beneficial liaison with the new owner, Nicholas Johnston, and management. Towards that end, Ryan Hooper (Bantham Estate Manager) had agreed to stand for election to the ACA committee (see 6, below).

3.3 Stepping Stones at Dukes Mill Creek

Work had been done to place the stones further away from the overhanging tree, and walkers were now able to use them again when following the public footpath through the mud.

4. Chairman's Report

SW stated, as in previous years, that much goes on 'behind the scenes' towards the conservation of river and estuary but he was aware that the social programme for members may have slipped somewhat. Partly, this is a result of the lack lustre response of members to organised events.

4.1 Meetings

The ACA had been represented at the routine meetings of the Avon Estuary Forum (AEF) and the well-attended, special AEF that had been convened at Follaton House in November 2014 to discuss sewage-related problems at AG. Minutes of these meetings are available on the South Devon AONB website.

Since our last AGM, there have been several meetings of the Devon Avon Group (DAG) & South Hams Rivers Improvement Project (SHRIMP) - DAG was started in Nov 2011 and chaired by the ACA in response to an Environment Agency invitation to help meet EU Water Framework Directive targets for the Avon by 2015. SHRIMP was formed by the Westcountry Rivers Trust shortly afterwards with funding from DEFRA's Catchment Restoration Fund Closely linked to CRF (funding finished on 31st March 2015). Notes of the meetings of both these groups are available on the ACA website.

SHRIMP funding ended at end of March but work is unfinished. Some important work on removing barriers to fish migration was completed and first ever release of water from Avon Dam was made in mid-April - a 'trial' water release, with perfect timing, was made from Avon Dam of 0.75cumecs or 65ML/d between 2pm Wed 15th April - 9pm Sat 18th April during a naturally dry spell of weather when the river was low and at a time of natural smolt migration. These so-called 'trial' releases will continue but more needs to be done on other aspects of the SHRIMP work e.g. electrofishing, gravel augmentation for fish spawning beds and river bank & land management. DAG will carry on as an important pressure group. Next DAG meeting on 1st June but future interaction with the South Devon Catchment Partnership (jointly organised by WRT and the AONB) will be crucial although the emphasis is initially shifting to nutrient control in waters of Salcombe/Kingsbridge estuary and Slapton Ley. Phosphate reduction in the Avon may be able to piggy-back on this work. Depending upon future funding, more direct work may be possible on the Avon.

4.2 Other

i) South Efford - Contact has been made by email with the new Land Steward of the Duchy of Cornwall (Chris Gregory) about Mr Blewitt's river-polluting activities at Little Marsh (AG Bridge End) and, in person, at the recent AEF with his deputy Tom Stratton.

ii) No action is planned by Bantham Harbourmaster to restore the 'white spot' navigational aid at the estuary mouth.

iii) The patrol boat will continue and the ACA will contribute our usual £250 towards operational costs.

iv) New signs have been posted by SHDC near Duke's Mill Creek (a popular, circular, dog walk) in response to our request to minimise dog fouling.

v) Beach cleans - the Tidal Road was cleaned on 10th May by a small band of ACA volunteers and the regular Cockleridge programme will be set up on several weekend mornings in June - Oct., possibly with a BYO picnic)

vi) A walk will be arranged in Loddiswell Woods, September

vii) An ACA BBQ is planned for Friday 10th July, 6.00pm, Folly Hill.

viii) There will probably be an Oyster Shack meal arranged at the end of November.

ix) 'Swan Man' (Richard Crafer) continues to provide regular updates on sightings, speeding on Tidal Road, etc. in addition to his assorted 'nuisance' activities.

x) There will be an open water swim from AG to Bantham organised by the Outdoor Swimming Society 0930 on 5th July, starting at 0930. Boat users should take note.

5. Accounts for 2014, and Treasurer's Report.

RB presented the accounts for Jan 1st to Dec 31st 2014.

The Insurance premium remained the same for the 3rd year running for a policy through TCV which provides cover for volunteer groups.

The major expenditure during the year had been to fund the 'Learn-to-Sea' after school project run by Maya Plass. Thirteen children from AG primary school had used the wildlife reserve at South Efford Marsh for 8 sessions, covering birds, mammals, fish and water life, invertebrates, insects and plants. At the end of the course they had given 2 presentations to ACA members and visitors, parents and school members.

The project had cost £2706.21; this included equipment for the project (binoculars, microscope, insect/mammal traps, etc), and both teaching and administration time. The equipment bought for this project remains the property of the ACA, and is now available for use by other interested groups or individuals by arrangement with Maya.

RB presented the figures to the meeting for acceptance; PM proposed and Jonno Barrett seconded; accepted by the meeting.

6. Retirement and Election of Committee Members

SW paid tribute to John Peters who had died during the last year; his experience and knowledge had been an invaluable help to the ACA during his long period of membership and he would be greatly missed.

Pat Cassidy had also tendered her resignation, and SW thanked her for all her help and experience over many years of membership and for her committee work, especially around her Tidal Road interests.

The remaining members; Michael Cooper, Peter Marsh, Bill Starey, Eric White, Stuart Watts and Ros Brousson would all stand down but were prepared to stand again. It was proposed and unanimously accepted that they should be re-elected en bloc. SW, on behalf of the rest of the committee, proposed that Mary Clark and Ryan Hooper be elected as new members, and this was unanimously accepted.

7. Open Forum.

7.1 Poaching

A discussion followed about the recent return of poachers on the river. In the previous week netters had been disturbed leaving nets in a dinghy stolen from Milburga's Oratory, and moored in the narrow channel upriver from the lime kiln. This was reported, and Devon & Severn IFCA attended. Since early 2014 when illegal fishing on the Avon was frequent and blatant, and huge numbers of fish were being caught, the various authorities involved had tightened up their procedures and responsibilities. There had been a period when all poaching appeared to have stopped, but this latest incident indicated that it might start up again. Reporting to the effective authorities had not proved easy in the past, but newer telephone numbers were available on the ACA website.

7.2 Social Events

Rosemary Piercy offered suggestions for ways in which to contact members and organise social events so that there would be a bigger take-up by members. A discussion followed with no clear resolution of the problem of poor attendance.

7.3 Future housing developments.

PC raised the subject of future housing developments, and queried whether enough consideration was given to the sewerage infrastructure and run off of new developments, e.g., the new estate at Loddiswell. Jonno Barrett stated that recent experience had shown that, after stringent budgets cuts, there were fewer planning officers, and less money available for agencies like the EA and SWW for monitoring purposes; therefore, it was not being done. It was agreed that the ACA could play a more important part in raising the profile of these issues where the river or estuary might be threatened and, in collaboration with the South Hams Society, could monitor the plans for these developments and put pressure on the authorities to address them.

SW declared the meeting closed at 8.15, and welcomed the speakers Craig Dunton, and Lynn Kenderdine who were to talk about the Avon Valley project. This pilot project is a collaboration between Devon Wildlife Trust, South Devon Nature Trust, and Think Nature which had been running over the past 4 years seeking to protect and increase wildlife and plant diversity.