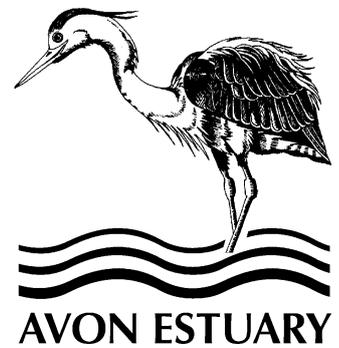


Avon Estuary Forum



Notes of the meeting held on
17th October 2017 at Thurlestone Parish Hall

Notes in italics show post meeting updates and inclusions

1. **Cllr John Coates welcomed everyone to the meeting.**
2. **Introductions and apologies for absence**

Those present:

John Coates JC	AEF (Chair)
Dan Cresswell DCr	D&S IFCA
Dave Curno DCu	RYA
Craig Dunton CD	Bat Conservation Trust
Felicity Furlong FF	ACA & local resident
Paul Furlong PF	ACA & local resident
Tony Goddard TG	Thurlestone PC
Kelly Hobson KH	D&S IFCA
Elizabeth Huntley EH	SHDC
Rosie Lear RL	WRT
Jean Marsh JM	ACA & local resident

Peter Marsh PM	ACA & local resident
Nigel Mortimer NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Judy Pearce JP	SHDC & Thurlestone NP
Rob Price RP	EA
Christine Singfield CS	NE
Fiona van Es FvE	AEF (Minutes)
Sally Watts SaW	ACA & local resident
Stuart Watts SW	ACA & local resident
Malcolm Wood MW	RYA
Pippa Woods PW	ACA

Initials (in bold) are used to attribute contributions to the meeting.

Acronyms used in these minutes include:

ACA	Aune Conservation Association
AEF	Avon Estuary Forum
AG	Aveton Gifford
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AVSC	Aune Valley Ski Club
BE	Bantham Estate
DEFRA	Department for Food, Environment & Rural Affairs
D&S IFCA	Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority
DoC	Duchy of Cornwall
EA	Environment Agency
KNHS	Kingsbridge Natural History Society
MCZ	Marine Conservation Zone
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NE	Natural England
PC	Parish Council
RDP	Rural Development Programme
RYA	Royal Yachting Association
SDCP	South Devon Catchments Partnership
SHDC	South Hams District Council
SWW	South West Water
WRT	Westcountry Rivers Trust

Apologies for absence were received from: Jackie Gage (Devon Wildlife Trust), Lynne Kenderdine (DWT), Ros Brousson (AG PC), Gordon Waterhouse (KNHS), Adam Guy (University of Plymouth), Marilyn Hall, Beshlie Pool (South Devon & Channel Shellfishermen), John Horne (AVSC).

3. **Approval of 16th May 2017 AEF meeting notes** - The minutes were approved with no amendments

4. **Matters arising** – covered below in **NM**'s presentation.

JC: AG PC has now taken over Timber's car park and the green sward behind the Fisherman's Rest. No changes are anticipated.

5. **Election of new Chair and Vice-chair for Avon Estuary Forum**

NM introduced nominees for Vice Chair. **EH** and **JP** both nominated. **EH** withdrew in order to support **JP**'s nomination.

JP duly elected as Vice Chair and JC re-elected as Chair.

6. **'Tackling invasive species through community action'** – Dr Matt Ashley (NE) was not able to attend so summary of his work covered later in **NM**'s presentation.

7. **Grey long-eared bat species recovery project – Craig Dunton, Bat Conservation Trust**

See 'AEF notes 17-10-17 – Grey long-eared bat talk' attached.

Key points of **CD**'s presentation:

- Started on the Avon Valley project in 2014: a landscape scale project.
- Employed by Bat Conservation Trust and started project in July 2017. Part of 'Back from the Brink' series of projects (HLF funded until 2020 - £4.6m) One of 19 projects throughout England, targeting the most threatened habitats & species. Other 'Back from the Brink' organisations include NE, Buglife, RSPB, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife.
- Bats important as a bio-indicator: healthy bats \approx healthy landscape. Ecosystem services result from good management for bats.
- Grey long-eared bat very similar to brown long-eared bat but differs in habitat requirements: more of a coastal species, possibly roosting in sea caves. One of UK's rarest mammals.
- Basic requirements - roosting sites, foraging areas (mainly species-rich meadows and riparian habitat) and landscape connectivity (e.g. hedgerows, watercourses, etc.)
- Decline thought to be mainly due to habitat loss: loss of species-rich grassland, field margins, hedgerows, habitat matrix; also pesticide use. There is also concern that barn conversions and building improvements may reduce potential roost sites.
- Species is at the northernmost edge of EU range with 8 maternity roosts in England: 4 in Devon with one in the South Hams. Total population estimated at 1000 bats.
- Project is focussed on 4 roosts in England – 3 in Devon, 1 in Dorset. South Hams roost is the most fragile as it is less well connected.
- The aim is to work with landowners and land managers to improve habitat quality and connectivity.
- Grey long-eared bats are difficult to identify other than through DNA analysis (droppings) and misidentification may lead to inappropriate mitigation measures e.g. installation of bat boxes – fine for brown long-eared bats but no evidence of use by grey long-eared bats.
- Countryside Stewardship options could help improve habitat – **CD** is working with farmers to encourage uptake.
- The aims of the project are:
 - Habitat mapping
 - Engage with landowners
 - Secure better monitoring of roosts
 - Engage with the community to encourage interest in bats and other wildlife
 - Train volunteers to monitor roosts.



Discussion following CD's presentation:

- **SW:** Where is the focus in the South Hams?
- **CD:** Loddiswell. In terms of sustenance, South Efford Marsh
- **DC:** Do they echolocate around the same frequency as the brown long-eared bat?
- **CD:** Yes, but very difficult to separate unless they are very clean recordings.
- **JC:** Is there evidence that they use the road bat bridges on the A38 Dobwalls bypass?

- **CD:** Not sure - may be sensitive to light. Pipistrelles may use.
- **JC:** How can we get involved?
- **CD:** There will be volunteer opportunities and training to use bat detectors.
- **PF:** Do they have natural predators?
- **CD:** Barn owls and domestic cats. Cats can climb and if a roost access point is found, repeatedly target the access point over several nights until a roost is wiped out. **NB if a cat brings home several bats, try to identify where the cat is going and take steps to restrict cat's access to that point.**

8. Estuaries Officer's interactive report & update - Nigel Mortimer, South Devon AONB Estuaries Partnership

- **South Devon Estuaries management plan 2016-2019:** complete but as a text-only version at present http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/uploads/files/Estuaries/SDEMP_Text_version.pdf [2MB] . Full colour, illustrated & map'd version is being produced.

- Adam Davison has been appointed as AONB Project Officer and tasked with formally reviewing the AONB management plan 2014-2019. This is an important statutory document, now subject to consultation - has 110 actions in the delivery plan.

- **AONB Planning guidance:** now published. Available printed for £10 or download for free - http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/uploads/files/AONB_Planning_Guidance_version_1.pdf [6MB]



- **Biosecurity plans:** A biosecurity plan is now in place for 4 of our estuaries with an emphasis on prevention rather than cure as established species are very difficult to control. The Avon estuary biosecurity plan has been agreed by BE and the DoC and is available for download from AONB website -



[http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/uploads/files/Estuaries/avon/Avon_Estuary_Biosecurity_Plan - Bantham Estate.pdf](http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/uploads/files/Estuaries/avon/Avon_Estuary_Biosecurity_Plan_-_Bantham_Estate.pdf) [1MB]. One alien

already recorded is common cord grass, however this is a pioneer of salt marsh so is not always considered undesirable. Species of most concern (and not yet here) include carpet sea squirt and Chinese mitten crab. Prevention measures include 'CHECK-CLEAN-DRY' (Swoosh event have signed up to this), vigilance and reporting. Pacific oysters are forming reefs in some areas and causing problems for people (sharp shells causing injuries), especially in the Yealm where

some control is being undertaken. *[All 5 South Devon Estuary BioSecurity plans have now been published]*

- Dr Matt Ashley is applying for funding to carry out survey work and winter control. Oyster survey plans include looking out for other invasive alien species. *[NE were successful with their funding bid to establish local BioSecurity Citizen Science groups – see 'AEF notes 17-10-17 – Pacific Oyster talk' attached from a Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum meeting]*
- **South Devon Catchments Partnership:** **RL** (WRT) SDCP has been tasked by DEFRA to use funding from RDP for a catchment-based approach to improve water quality and is currently considering 8-10 submitted projects. Now in next phase to determine criteria for funding. RDP funding has released pressure on capital fund, allowing this to be directed towards water-related activities which aim to make rivers more diverse and resilient, e.g. fish passes. For more information, visit the SDCP website: <http://wrt.org.uk/project/south-devon/>. **RP** (EA) is the new catchment co-ordinator with experience from Lincs and South Hants. **RP's** remit includes 16 different functions from regulation to advice, working with other partners where there is a common problem, looking to find a common solution. There will be a new funding program in April next year.
 - **NM:** Hopefully the SHRImp project can be re-energised.
 - **SW:** Will there be EU funding?
 - **RP:** RDP England funding is for £200m. In terms of criteria, it is more flexible so can hopefully be used to address more issues. Currently looking for opportunities to take advantage of this funding with bids submitted in Dec, results confirmed in February 2018 and allocated in April.

- **PM:** Whilst involved in oyster farming on the Avon, we carried out independent tests on water quality. Pollution incidents were generally blamed on farmers but neither of the local sewage works took out phosphates and there was often no notification when a bypass discharge went into the river. With funding, the effectiveness of the sewage works could be monitored. SWW have a lot to answer for - the 'Clean Sweep' was ineffective and their processes do not work when under pressure.
 - **JC:** AG residents were never informed of discharge problems and as a parish councillor, found SWW unresponsive. This should be a priority.
 - **RP:** As SDCP, different tools are available, including periodic review (5yr) where stakeholders are consulted as to where investment should be made, including where there is point source pollution. The RDP funding will look at resilience of water body e.g. through evidence gathering.
 - **PM:** SWW is a profit-making organisation. We need pollution 'policemen' to monitor bypasses. Timing of samples needs to be organised effectively, e.g. take from sewage works discharge pipes in summer and in bad weather. Users of river (e.g. Swoosh) needs precise measuring at key times.
 - **RL:** There is a scheme where a kit can be obtained and samples taken when required.
 - **JP:** There are similar sewage overflows at South Milton going into reed beds.
 - **DCu:** There are over 800 'combined sewage overflows' (CSO). Developments are told that there is spare capacity at sewage works.
 - **RP:** With new developments the waters are kept separate. SWW is not unique – other water authorities have problems too. The EU Bathing Waters Directive is a tool we can use.
 - **DCu:** Report any pollution incident to the EA not SWW as it will be logged and recorded.
 - **RP:** EA Hotline - 0800 807060. All calls are treated seriously and can help to build up evidence for prosecution.
 - **NM:** There was good attendance from SWW when these forums started. We need to encourage their attendance.

ACTION 1: (NM/JC) Encourage SWW attendance at next Avon Estuary forum.

- **SW marine plans:** Neil Gray sent apologies. Initial part is complete; now looking at objectives. Plan based on high level marine objectives (5 of them) and will be very specific. Workshops with stakeholders will be held early next year – currently ensuring identity of main stakeholder groups.
- **MPAs & MCZs:** Report from **CS** - Tranche 3 in first half of 2018 - Avon, upper Dart and Erme put forward as recommended MCZs.
- **Avon estuary sign in Timbers car park:** replaced left hand leaf of sign damaged by lorry.

Devon & Severn IFCA
Avon estuary fisheries byelaws

No fixed nets.
Fishing for bass or any fish using sandeels from a boat within the Avon estuary between 30th April and 1st January is not permitted.
From 1st January—30th June 2017 fishing for bass is catch and release only.
From 1st July—31st December 2017 only 1 bass may be retained per angler per day.
These measures apply all year to all recreational fishers using any capture method from the shore and from boats.

Within the D&S IFCA District (including the Avon estuary) permits¹ are required for:

- The use of crab and lobster pots
- Diving for shellfish

Minimum take sizes²:

- Bass 42cm (allowed from 1st July—31st Dec 2017)
- Scallops 100mm
- Edible crab - male 160mm, female 150mm
- Lobster 90mm

To view current byelaws, apply for permits to fish or view how to measure fish and shellfish, please visit: www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk Contact: office@devonandsevernifca.gov.uk
Tel: 01803 854648 or 07740 175479 (out of hours telephone)

¹The permits contain restrictions of use
²There are additional minimum take sizes for other species

- **Inshore fishing:** Report from **DCr** - netting permit consultation is underway. IFCA signs have been carefully amended with revised bass regulations. There have been incidents of fish dumping (John Horne reported an incident on Burgh island). Any incidents; take notes and report to MMO Brixham 01803 853 383. If out of hours, report to IFCA out of hours number: 07740 175479 [**NB Please always report – team may not always be seen to respond but reporting helps build the wider picture and may show trends**]
- **NM:** Is sand eel netted for bait included in the netting permit?

- **DCr:** Think it is exempt.

- **Portugese man o' war strandings:** Many washed up locally – the sting is nasty but only dangerous if there is an underlying medical condition. Also look out for By-the-wind sailors. Please report anything interesting washed up by storms to **NM** (who can disseminate information.)

9. Bantam Estate sand dune conservation works
Ryan Hooper (BE) not able to be present.

BE has received advice on sand dune management to prevent further scrubbing up. This may involve cutting, encouraging trampling, etc.; it may appear quite catastrophic but is considered important by NE to conserve the dunes and discourage their succession to scrub.

- **PM:** Christmas trees used a few years ago to stabilise the dunes.
- **NM:** Tried the same approach in Scotland.
- **JP:** In Brittany this summer, the dunes were open to walk through and were not smothered with bracken and bramble.
- **NM:** There needs to be balance.
- **PM:** If people see diggers, it will create adverse publicity - PR work needed.
- **TG:** We need a formal presentation from BE.

ACTION 2: (NM) Contact Ryan Hooper and request a formal presentation on the proposed sand dune restoration work for the next forum.

10. Avon Estuary Forum 'round table session'

- **PF:** An abandoned boat on an area of mud flat has a 36-40' long mooring line attached with a tree caught up in the mooring lines. It is on a relic of a little marsh (now owned by BE) on fundus so have contacted DoC. Boat owner is not responding. It is a highly visible eyesore and potential hazard if the mooring pulls up or the when the tree decays.
 - **JC:** There is a local farmer who may be able to help. Will raise with AG PC.
 - **PM:** Could Marsh Dawes help along with Nicholas Johnson?
 - **JC:** Is there a register of moorings?
 - **PF:** No mooring fee had been paid so boat is illegally parked. There is an emerging problem with abandoned boats.
 - **TC:** Boats moored at the Bantham end are regulated.
 - **PF:** Management of moorings above this area is leased out: to Eric White at the top end and to Lady Grey (her son) in the middle but there is difficulty enforcing.
 - **DCu:** The RYA has advice for clubs about dealing with abandoned boats. Will email details.
 - **MW:** This is a problem locally, especially with fibreglass boats. Even if ownership can be proven, it is a long process.
 - **SW:** DoC also has a procedure through the Land Steward for eastern side of the Duchy.

ACTION 3: (JC) Raise issue of abandoned boat and potential channel hazard at next AG PC meeting.

ACTION 4: (DCu) Email details of RYA advice on dealing with abandoned boats to NM.

- **CD:** Please get in touch with contact details for any landowners in the grey long-eared bat survey area. Email cdunton@bats.org.uk ; mobile 07807 215270
- **SW:** In the AG Neighbourhood Plan, South Efford Marsh is listed as a SSSI - is this accurate?
 - **JC:** No.
 - **SW:** Will inform Neighbourhood Plan committee.

ACTION 5: (SW) Inform AG Neighbourhood Plan committee that South Efford Marsh is not an SSSI.

- **RL:** Email Rosie Lear - rosie@wrt.org.uk or visit <http://wrt.org.uk/project/become-a-citizen-scientist> if interested in undertaking citizen science work.
- **JC:** Swoosh event feedback?
 - **JP:** 3rd year of the event and there were no problems.
 - **SW:** It was twice as big this year.
 - **JP:** Next year the tides will be difficult so there is only one session planned.
- **JC:** Tribal Clash event?
 - **SW:** This went well.
 - **EH:** The music was very loud and there were lots of complaints from residents.
 - **JP:** It rained very heavily on the Sunday and there was concern in the parish however it was well organised. At Bantham the noise level was OK but it travelled!

NM: (Report from John Horne via e-mail, AVSC) 'There is nothing to report regarding the AVSC . All has gone smoothly this year with no reports of any hiccups.

We continue to look for good causes to support locally and some ideas have come to light. The absence of the speed buoys at Challaborough and Bigbury is regrettable and we are looking to see if we can finance their re-installation next year. The Harbour Master is looking at the situation. Also we are exploring the idea of a paddle board/kayak lane at the ski run to better define the ski area. Finally, I have been asked to mention the continued presence of the pair trawlers close in at Bigbury Bay. Little has been caught this year by the angling club and it is felt that almost all marine life is being wiped out. There is a further concern in that a large quantity of discard fish were dumped outside the island two week ago. Now sure how to take this forward but something needs to be done.'

- **JC:** AVSC makes money and occasionally has a surplus which must be spent on local environment. Maya Plass has been funded in past.
- **SW: Is there an update on Adam Guy's project?**
 - **JC:** He was due to attend but cancelled as he is writing up. Hope he will come next time.
- **PM:** Observed a lot of trawlers off Bigbury during the summer. Informed by Devon Sea Fisheries that they were after cuttlefish.

11. Any other business - none

12. Next meeting – **NM** to arrange for May 2018.

ACTION 6: (NM) Arrange date and venue for spring Avon forum.

Tuesday 15th May – 7pm meeting start – Thurlestone Parish Hall