



EXE ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

MANAGEMENT GROUP MINUTES

Sargent Room, Coaver Club, County Hall, Exeter

10am Tuesday 25th June 2013

Present:

Cllr Bernard Hughes, DCC (BH) (Chair)
Cllr Margaret Baldwin, ECC (MB)
Colin Poole, ETC (CP)
Richard Stones, RS Corp & Adventure (RS)
Aidan Winder, DCC (AW)

Cllr Ted Hockin, TDC (TH) (Vice Chair)
Cllr Andrew Cadbury, SPC (AC)
Graeme Smith, TDC (GS)
Louisa Knights, NE (LK)
Midge Kelly, Exe Estuary Officer (MK)

1. Welcome and Apologies for absence:

Apologies were noted from: Neil Downes, Forum Chair; Gavin Bloomfield, RSPB; Cllr Pat Graham, ETC; Lynn Trout, Forum Vice Chair; Pete Ball, EA; Tom Manning, NE; Roger Crane, ECC; Jane Lavick, LiCCo/EA; Sarah Clark, D&SIFCA & Steve Edmonds, EDDC.

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Margaret Baldwin, the new representative of Exeter City Council.

It was agreed that the Chairman could sign the minutes from the last meeting as a true record.

2. Congratulations to Bernard

BH thanked MK for including this item on the agenda and explained that he has recently had the honour of being elected as Chairman of Devon County Council. He gave partners the opportunity to invite him to attend events as DCC Chair if it would help their worthy causes.

3. IPENS – Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites – Louisa Knights, NE

Natura 2000 sites (N2K sites) are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), designated under the EU Birds Directive and Habitats Directive respectively. The Exe Estuary is a SPA for its populations of particular overwintering bird species, and Dawlish Warren is a SAC because of its dune habitat.

The IPENS project is a new strategic approach to managing the N2K Sites in England which will enable NE, the EA and other key partners to plan how to target their efforts in relation to the sites. It is a 2-year project supported by EU LIFE+ funding, and is intended to help NE and partners to tackle the more difficult issues and focus on the sites that are in an 'unfavourable' conservation condition (in relation to the particular wildlife feature that is the reason they are designated as SPAs or SACs). A key output of IPENS is an action plan, and many of the measures included in this are expected to be generic and applicable across several N2K sites. The IPENS project is intended not to duplicate existing work, but rather to pull it all together if necessary, and bring addressing of the issues raised a step closer. One way it will do this is by identifying the cost of measures needed and potential sources of funding. It will also identify knowledge gaps where further research is needed to identify the causes of the problems found.

Although all N2K sites will be covered eventually, the Exe Estuary and Dawlish Warren (combined) have been selected as a pilot estuarine site, on which NE will test its IPENS

approach. Consultation with key partners is seen as crucial to avoiding duplication, and NE have already been working with the EEMP, via MK. Because the Exe Estuary and Dawlish Warren is a pilot site, the respective IPENS action plan will be one of the first to be produced, and will be ready by the end of July 2013. The programme will be rolled out to other sites from October 2013, with the programme being completed at the end of 2014.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were covered:

Q – Doesn't this just duplicate work already done on the Exe, such as on bird disturbance? What is the aim – to bring in more laws?

A – The IPENS could influence legislation, but is intended primarily to focus the lead officers for the site within NE on the biggest issues on the Exe and identify funding to tackle these issues.

Q – What we really need is more action and less talking about the issues.

A – IPENS brings the action closer by looking at ways to take the measures forward, as well as producing an action plan.

Q – What do we as competent authorities need to do re the SPA and SAC?

A – On the Exe SPA the wildlife feature central to the SPA designation is the number of certain species of overwintering birds. Competent authorities have a legal duty to maintain the features that support important birdlife, and to work towards achieving 'favourable conservation status' for the site. Through IPENS and other means, NE is seeking to identify the measures that will have the greatest impact on the bird populations.

Q – What is the end point? Will the action plan go on to be formally adopted by local authorities (etc.)?

A – No, it will be a NE document and posted on NE's website. But NE hopes to secure the agreement of relevant partners to taking necessary measures. Relevant organisations will be highlighted as the relevant body to take the work forward.

Q – What about situations such as coastal management where there is conflict between proposals for reducing flood risk and improving the conservation status of the SPA / SAC?

A – There may be some issues where sector interests conflict. The pilot project will look at where NE needs to get feedback, who it needs to consult with and who are the key stakeholders with whom NE needs to communicate.

Q – Will the IPENS action plan feed into the EEMP management plan?

A – Yes. Links have already been identified, such as the zoning review proposed. IPENS actions will link into future EEMP management plan documents, as well as linking to fisheries, and highlighting evidence gaps where further studies are needed.

Q – What are the key issues identified for the Exe Estuary and Dawlish Warren through IPENS work to date?

A – Exe Estuary – Bird disturbance through the cumulative impact of small-scale recreational and fishing-related activities; Food availability and habitat loss; Coastal squeeze; The observed decline in 4 particular species of overwintering birds (oyster catcher, grey plover, lapwing and brent goose).

Dawlish Warren – visitor pressures (trampling and other physical damage, dog fouling, and wild fires); habitat management (e.g. management plan for golf course); and the as yet unknown impact of the planned removal of coastal defences.

ACTION: MK to invite NE representative to bring IPENS update to next Management Group meeting.

4. Natural / Sustainable Tourism Initiative – Richard Stones, Corporate and Adventure

RS has been commissioned by Exeter City Council in partnership with East Devon and Teignbridge District Councils to deliver a feasibility study on the value of developing a resilient nature tourism plan for the Exe Estuary and hinterland (which includes the Pebblebed Heaths, Exmouth, Ashclyst Forest, Haldon and Dawlish Warren). It is recognised that we need both economic growth and nature conservation. In future years, there will be more people visiting the area, contributing to the local economy whilst enjoying a range of experiences. In order to ensure that these people don't damage the nature that has attracted many of them here in the first place, a level of visitor management is needed. This management could include the provision of more opportunities for people to interact with and get to understand and appreciate wildlife, and perhaps could also include measures to protect wildlife by diverting visitors away from sensitive sites to less sensitive areas or towards less disruptive activities. Such measures would help to spread the economic benefits more evenly throughout the area.

The feasibility study is to be completed by the end of July, and will then be given to the 3 local authorities that commissioned it. The next step will be up to them – i.e. whether they wish to commission development of a nature tourism plan for the area.

ACTION: MK to include RS's contact details in minutes (see below).

Richard Stones, RS Corporate & Adventure Ltd, Queensgate House, 48 Queen Street, Exeter, EX4 3SR.

T: 07906 206103; E: richard@rsotwo.com; W: www.rsotwo.com

ACTION: MB to make enquiries within ECC re including the nature tourism initiative in a list of projects that ECC will look at in more detail – and contact RS as appropriate.

5. Budget Update – AW

AW presented the budget monitoring statements, and informed partners that DCC's Cabinet members have agreed the EEMP carry forward of funds from 2012/13 to 2013/14.

ACTION: MK to circulate future budget statements in Excel rather than PDF to enable partners to enlarge and read them!

ACTION: MK to distribute Excel format budget statement with these minutes.

6. Estuary Officer Update (circulated in advance)

MK went through some of the items on the list in more detail. The following points were raised:

Education - It might be possible for MK to work jointly with ECC Countryside Officers, e.g. in education provision.

ACTION: MK to investigate opportunities for collaborative delivery of education with ECC officers.

Newsletter - The latest version of Exe Press was very well-received and partners liked its readability.

Antisocial behaviour work – RC from ECC is making progress with ECC's legal team to enable the harbour patrol to have the powers it needs to take enforcement action. There have been issues with Stuart Line vessels cruising far up the estuary and getting tangled in moorings at Topsham. RC is looking into this issue.

7. LiCCo Update (briefing note from JL tabled)

The new aerial images of Dawlish Warren were much appreciated.

ACTION: MK to circulate JL's briefing electronically with these minutes for the benefit of non-attendees.

8. Outsourced items – AW / MK

AW explained that several pieces of work were being outsourced following Management Group approval using unallocated funds brought forward from last year. These include:

- Review of byelaws, codes of conduct, activity zoning and other controls / agreements and development of a draft framework for improving management of estuary recreation activities to minimise disturbance to wildlife and optimise safety.
- Review of moorings management
- Completion and publication of the State of the Exe report
- Reviewing and updating of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership's Access database

MK explained that these projects are already included in the agreed Action Plan for 2013/14, and that they are to be delivered through Temp Solutions agency staff. The recruitment process is in train.

GS was keen to ensure that the work of the EEMP did not duplicate or substitute the activities of Exeter City Council which has responsibilities as main harbour authority for the estuary, and that there was close working between the delivery officer and ECC. MK pointed out that early contact with the harbour authority was built into the project brief for the work.

ACTION: MK to send the project brief for outsourced items to GS for information.

9. Summer Forum arrangements - MK

Although at the last meeting, partners had expressed a preference for holding the forum in the Council Chamber at County Hall, this will unfortunately not be possible owing to the members' area being deep cleaned throughout August. MK has therefore booked the Coaver Club for the evening of Thursday 29th August to fit with venue availability and other commitments. She has been in touch with the venue managers who have assured her that all the equipment is to be thoroughly tested shortly in advance of an event involving the Chief Executive.

ACTION: All partners please to note date and venue of Forum in their diaries.

The theme for the evening will be a celebration of some of the special aspects of the Exe Estuary, including:

Its birds (Which birds are special? Why is the estuary so important for them? To what are they sensitive?)

Its heritage (How has the river / estuary influenced the development of the area around the estuary? The former importance of the estuary towns and villages as trade links with the rest of the world. The story of the canal. Wartime influences. Etc.)

As a tourist destination. (Trends in tourist numbers if available. What brings tourists to the area? Changes in the types of visitor experience and future outlook – Eco or Sustainable tourism?)

As a watersport destination (What makes the estuary so special for watersports? What is the future? View of Watersports provider and local sailing club?)

Partners approved the agenda in principle, but felt that it was a little too extensive. However, they agreed that MK should proceed with organising it along the lines set out, as the breadth may be constrained in practice by the limited availability of speakers, the date being during summer school holidays and close to a bank holiday.

10. Action Log from last meeting - AW

There is only one item outstanding – that of PG asking Suzanne Birkett from Exmouth Town Council to contact MK re updating of Exe Activities leaflet. MK explained that although this hasn't happened to date, leaflet updating will be ongoing for some time and there will be opportunities to speak with Suzanne in future.

11. Any other business

(a) JL had requested MK draw the attention of partners to a new online consultation by the Environment Agency regarding the Water Framework Directive. The consultation period runs from 23 June to 22 December 2013 and invites people's views on the significant issues affecting the water environment in the south west. The contact officer for this work is Amanda Booth (Communications) on Environment Agency ext 2242, and the weblink to the relevant page is given below:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/140090.aspx>

GS pointed out that it would be valuable if the EA could undertake more work on investigating the issues that affect local bathing water quality.

ACTION: MK to include item on next Working Group agenda, to work up a collective consultation response which can be brought to the next Management Group meeting.

(b) MK distributed a printed copy of the Action plan 2013/14 and Annual Review 2012/13 to each partner present (in the case of local authority partners, one of each document to elected member representative and to officer representative).

ACTION: MK to send Action Plan and Annual Review documents to other partner representatives by post.

12. Dates of meetings in 2013/14 financial year (subject to confirmation nearer the time):

Forthcoming Management Group Meetings:

9 October 2013 – Sargent Room, Coaver
23 January 2014 – Sargent Room
28 March 2014 – Sargent Room

Forthcoming Working Group Meetings:

2 October 2013 – Strategic Room, Lucombe House, County Hall
9 January 2014 – Sargent Room
13 March 2014 – Sargent Room

Date of next Management Group Meeting:

10am Wednesday 9th October 2013 – Sargent Room, Coaver Club, County Hall, Exeter

