



EXE ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

MANAGEMENT GROUP MINUTES

Large Meeting Room, 9th Floor Renslade House (C/o Natural England), Exeter

10am Wednesday 27th March 2013

Present:

Cllr Bernard Hughes, DCC (BH) (Chair)
Tom Manning, NE (TM)
Cllr Pat Graham, ETC (PG)
Durwyn Liley, Footprint Ecology (DL)
Richard Tugwell, EA (RT)
Neil Downes, Forum Chair (ND)

Natasha Cole, DCC (NC) - Minutes
Cllr Andrew Cadbury, SPC (AC)
Lynn Trout, Forum Vice chair (LT)
Mary Rush, TDC (MR)
Aidan Winder, DCC (AW)
Midge Kelly, Exe Estuary Officer (MK)

1. Welcome and Apologies for absence:

Apologies were noted from: Gavin Bloomfield, RSPB; Cllr Michael Howe, EDDC; Colin Poole, ETC; Graeme Smith, TDC; Richard Tugwell, EA; and Jane Lavick, LiCCo/EA.

The Chairman welcomed everyone and it was agreed that he could sign the minutes from the last meeting as a true record.

2. Disturbance of Exe Estuary overwintering birds by recreational activities – presentation by Durwyn Liley, Footprint Ecology

BH explained that DL had been invited to the meeting to enable a discussion on the disturbance studies that he has been involved with and to respond to some of the points raised at the last Management Group meeting in the course of a presentation by John Goss-Custard (J G-C) (who concluded, in essence, that the current level of bird disturbance by recreational activities on the Exe Estuary is not a concern).

DL presented PowerPoint slides to the meeting and explained that the disturbance study commissioned by the EEMP and funded by the EA focused on disturbance to birds caused by water sports. However, additional funding from NE had supported an extension of the study's scope to consider disturbance due to shore-based recreational activities. These studies were not intended to address future disturbance associated with planned housing developments in the vicinity of the estuary, although complementary studies commissioned by TDC, EDDC and ECC when taken together with the original disturbance study do provide a basis for consideration of development impacts. The following link supplied by MR to TDC's website enables the full suite of study documents to be viewed: <http://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?ArticleID=15162> The relevant documents are on the first subpage 'Why is Habitat Mitigation Needed', but MR recommends partners look through all the pages to get the full picture.

DL described the methodology and sources of information used in the original study, including use of GPS units by jet skiers and windsurfers, and summarised the findings. He pointed out that the Exe Estuary is a relatively small estuary (compared with the Humber Estuary etc.) with only a small proportion being relatively free from recreational activities. The 9 vantage points used for observation account for about one third of the entire intertidal area and robust statistical techniques have been used to extrapolate the findings to the whole estuary. At 6 of the 9 areas, the number of birds was found to be inversely related to the number of people observed – i.e. the more people, the fewer birds.

In the discussion that accompanied and followed DL's talk, several points were raised:

Q. J G-C's critique of the disturbance study concludes there is no evidence that mitigation of disturbance is, or will be, required following the additional development proposed. But under the EU Habitats Directive, the converse applies, and onus is on [developers] proving through Appropriate Assessment that there will be no adverse effect on bird populations.

Q. How long do the disturbance effects last?

A. The birds may return to areas after a disturbance incident, but they will re-distribute according to levels of activities. If there is a high risk of being disturbed they will just avoid these altogether – an effect analogous to habitat loss – almost as if parts of the estuary had been 'concreted over'.

Q. J G-C argues that there are plenty of places within the estuary for birds to move to when disturbed.

A. The whole of the estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), so it is not possible to 'write off' parts of it and allow disturbance to happen in these parts.

Q. Birds can compensate for daytime disturbance through night feeding.

A. Studies of Poole Harbour indicate that areas with high daytime disturbance are also avoided at night. Night time feed rate is lower than daytime – the birds feed less well.

Q. Climate change is already a factor likely to be contributing to a redistribution of overwintering birds around the country, with fewer of some species coming to the Exe. So how do we know that factors on the Exe are bringing about changes in populations of different species, and does it matter?

A. Whilst some species are certainly short-stopping at sites further north of the Exe during the run of relatively mild winters we have been having, the variations in weather/jet stream etc. mean that we could easily have a run of harsh winters that would mean more birds coming to the Exe. It is therefore important that the estuary can accommodate the full number of birds specified for the SPA. The effect of climate change on bird distribution is complex, likely to vary with species, and probably isn't yet fully understood.

Q. Disturbance is a problem for the Exe that is likely to increase, as more people locate to the SW. How should we be addressing it?

A. Probably looking to raise awareness combined with voluntary codes of conduct agreed by all the recreational user groups addressing safety as well as disturbance. Zonation is another possible tool and has already started to be used around Exmouth. Experiences of zoning at Poole Harbour may be of interest (where NE has drawn up map of sensitive areas which has been passed to user groups) – though Poole Harbour is far larger than the Exe estuary. Permit schemes can work too. Rules and regs should probably be used as last resort. Whatever tools are used, their efficacy must be monitored and the disturbance impacts understood.

AW pointed out that the EEMP has a responsibility in relation to the scheme of management of the estuary. If mitigation measures are required, the EEMP will need to get involved in their delivery.

ACTION: MK to include link to TDC webpage of complementary studies and reports for Partners to understand the full disturbance picture which provide justification for the Community Infrastructure Levy.

2. Budget update 2012/13 (circulated in advance) – AW

The overall message is that we are on track with our spending targets, and will see as predicted a useful contingency fund of approx. £11K to help manage the estuary. Exact figure won't be known until the outturn figures have been calculated at the end of the year.

4. Exe Estuary Officer's Report – MK

Circulated in advance.

Forum – BH said he thinks Forum went well – well attended with the right people present in both the audience and as facilitators/speaker. Good ideas were raised and taken away for consideration by the discussion group facilitators – e.g. re the level of parking provision for users of the Exe Estuary Trail.

5. LiCCo update – Jane Lavick, EA/LiCCo

Jane was unable to attend the meeting so if possible a briefing note will go out with the minutes.

ACTION: MK to ask JL for update briefing note to be circulated with these minutes.

6. Draft Action Plan 2013/14

Focus was on the timeframe as it lists all the projects. There seems more days needed than Estuary Officer time available. It has been suggested we take advantage of the relatively healthy budget (assuming that contributions are received from all Partners for 2013/14) to make resources available for outsourcing some projects. Need more information about costings.

LT queried whether it was a little early to carry out reviews of navigation byelaws and zoning, but MR commented that the 3 local planning authorities had proposed this work for the EEMP as providing background information that would be helpful to inform the planning of any measures proposed to offset future disturbance.

ACTION: MK to bring more detailed costing to next meeting for those projects proposed to be outsourced.

7. Review of Exe Activities leaflet – proposals arising from meeting with people from Liquid Motion and River Exe Café – MK

MK reported that the 3 people with whom she met consider the distinction between the Exe Activities and Exe Explorer leaflets to be blurred and were keen that the two should be combined. They would like to see a map of estuary-related recreational activities on one side, with a similar map showing the location of refreshment stops on the reverse. They would also like to see snappier graphics and fewer words.

The Exe Explorer leaflet is the most popular of the Exe leaflet family, and Partners expressed a preference to keep the Exe Explorer leaflet separate from the Exe Activities leaflet.

Rather than list every café, pub or restaurant in Exmouth and Topsham it was suggested that the leaflet should just include a cover-all phrase such as 'there are many places to eat close to the trail at E and T'.

ACTION: MK to approach ND for information on places to eat within 0.5km of the trail at Lympstone, rather than Lympstone Parish Council.

ACTION: MK to write to Parish Councils around the estuary asking for contact details of convenient refreshment stops within 0.5km of the trail.

ACTION: MK to invite refreshment businesses to make an unspecified financial contribution to the cost of the leaflet if they want their details to be listed.

ACTION: PG to ask Suzanne Birkett of Exmouth Town Council / Tourism Forum to contact MK to discuss leaflet.

8. Action Log from last meeting - AW

No matters outstanding.

MK reported that the form of a summer event for 2013 was discussed at the last Working Group meeting and the preferred option was for a summer forum along the lines of the popular winter forum, subject to agenda items being agreed and appropriate presenters secured. Management Group Partners discussed possible venues and agreed that taking account of car parking, venue cost, microphones etc, the Council Chamber at County Hall is the most suitable.

9. Any Other Business

(a) **Pig Unit Proposal** - AC reported that there is a proposal for a 32,000 place pig finishing unit above Starcross, with pig slurry being stored for 6 months prior to being applied as organic fertilizer to Powderham Estate land. Concerns have been expressed about potential leaching into watercourses and, ultimately, the estuary, with resultant nutrient enrichment and pollution. The current position is that a period for individuals and organisations to comment on the scope of the environmental impact assessment that will be required to accompany the planning application has recently closed.

ACTION: MK to write to EA asking for their view of the effluent / drainage issues associated with the proposal and how these could be mitigated (and email response directly to EEMP partners).

ACTION: TM to find out Natural England's views of the proposal and share them with EEMP partners (pass to MK for emailing out).

(b) **EEMP Chairman** – BH informed the group that in view of the impending election, this may be the last Management Group meeting he chairs. He took the opportunity to thank Aidan and Midge and whole succession of estuary officers for their work in managing the EEMP. He said he has a particular interest in this committee and the Avocet Line Forum, both of which have been very successful. He thanked everyone for the tremendous amount of work being done and the support from the group. He also thanked Natural England for hosting this meeting.

(c) **Exeter City Council representation** – [Note following meeting]. MK has received emails requesting information about the EEMP from Exeter City Council's Member Services team. ECC hope to appoint an Elected Member to the EEMP at the next Executive Meeting on 9th April 2013.

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

Forthcoming Management Group Meetings:

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

Forthcoming Working Group Meetings:

11 June 2013 – Strategic Room, Lucombe
2 October 2013 – Strategic Room
9 January 2014 – Sargent Room
13 March 2014 – Sargent Room

Date of next Management Group Meeting:

10am Tuesday 25th June 2013 – Sargent Room, Coaver Club, County Hall, Exeter

