

Zonation and Code of Conduct Review Anglers & Bait Diggers Meeting



Minutes

11am Wednesday 29th March 2017

Location: Anchor Inn, Cockwood

Attendees

Stephanie Clark, Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) - SC
Sama Euridge, South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership (SEDHRP) - SE
Rowena Garne, Devon County Council - RG
Martin Higgins - MH
Roger Scobie - RS
Paul Loveless - PL
Cliff Curd - CC
Alan Forbes - AF

Note: This meeting was more angling focussed; there was very little to no discussion of bait digging.

SC welcome and thanks. Introductions made.

SC gave overview of EEMP & South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership (SEDHRP). Conservation designations of Exe Estuary explained. Reasons given for proposed Voluntary Exclusion Zones (VEZs), accompanied by maps. Consultation with user groups currently underway with everyone invited to give views on proposed areas of VEZs. Summary:

- Very important estuary especially for wintering birds
- The site itself is protected locally, nationally and internationally
- Showing map of designations – SPA and SSSI
- SE – Important for habitats, birds as well as geology and archaeology
- Local authorities have a duty to protect and enhance the estuary, looking at an increase in development and a 10km span of influence on the estuary.
- Eelgrass is the main feeding ground for Brent Geese
- Eelgrass grows September when the birds start to migrate and feed, birds have moved on by the end of December
- Dawlish is an important high tide roost, and is important all year round. The lower area being most sensitive
- Maps displayed on the website are the starting point of the consultation

PL – Why are you doing it at all?

SC – SEDHRP have commissioned these zones as they need to prepare for potential increased use of estuary in future, due to planned increase in development, and promote sensitive areas to new users.

PL – Implication is that new users WILL impact the birds – speculation?

SE – We have a duty of care at Dawlish Warren as well as a duty to enhance the area.

SC – There will be no changes to byelaws or statutory zones during these proposals. Are you all aware of the Teignbridge District Council Guide for Sea Anglers and existing voluntary exclusion for anglers at Dawlish Warren?

Some agreement

PL – Needs to be a reason for pushing people out of areas they use.

SC – Initial proposal for Dawlish Warren VEZ – all states of the tide – all year.

- Last meeting the use of the wreck was brought up, possibly reviewing area to amend boundary to just south of Cockwood Steps allowing you to fish at the wreck.
- Also possibly reduce outer edge nearest the channel of the zone to allow water users in slightly for safety reasons.

PL – Two main concerns:

1. Use of wreck for angling
2. Leaving Cockwood Harbour, unlikely to stay out of original proposed VEZ, as come out and can turn towards Cockwood Steps.

Don't think the figures provided show that the bird population is under pressure.

SC – 5 year data shows a decline - but I understand from what you've sent that realistically it depends on how you look at the data.

PL – What is important? How does that matter? Compare with other estuaries? Why did the WeBS data (in presentation at the Winter Forum) show a 25 year period when he (Dave Smallshire) had only been collecting data for 15 years himself? It is subjective.

SE – WeBS counts only show counts for birds on the river at time of count – birds moved due to a number of reasons. Critical part of work – we must prepare for increase in use and increase in disturbance as it will have an impact. Changes in climate can favour some birds whilst have adverse effects on others. We have chosen the areas that are most important sites for feeding and roosting which cover less than 4% of the estuary.

MH – RSPB driven – alienates people from warren – the warren is our leisure centre!

PL – Feel like criminals when walking on warren.

SE – Unrest about RSBP / Rangers.

RS – One report said that people visit the warren every other day which just isn't true when you look at the number of people working and especially during winter, not as many people are using the estuary as they say.

SE – Birds can become accustomed to activity throughout September however when they initially reach the estuary some have probably never seen a human before let alone a powerboat, kite surfer etc. It is easy to become stuck in the figures.

PL – As long as we are allowed access to the wreck – won't be too opposed to zonation.

CC – I agree with the current suggestion that the zone is move down to Cockwood Steps.

MH – There aren't really any birds between Cockwood Steps and wreck anyway.

PL – There are at low tide but they hug the edge of the water.

CC – Since I have been on the estuary the lapwing population has significantly increased and we are overwhelmed with little egrets and herons. Used to have common snipe but that seems to have declined. Could be anything from farming to climate change though

AF – Snuck up on? Why can't there just be signs that say "don't go here when birds are breeding and feeding"?

CC – The amount of wildlife on the Exe is high including kingfishers, otters, water voles. Holiday makers leave rubbish which locals pick up as locals have a sense of ownership of the Exe and like to ensure area is kept pristine.

SE – Put sign up by railway saying go left not right.

PL – Just think you need to reflect on your process and how the consultation was done.

SC – The consultation has been extended to the 28th April.

RF – Are the boats moored in the area around Cockwood Steps going to be an issue?

SC – The boat moorings will be outside the area of zonation and therefore will not be affected.

SE – Water users were worried about safety issues. If your safety is at risk you obviously can go into the area of zonation. If there is a risk to health get to your nearest exit!

RS – Will it become statutory?

SE – No reason for it to happen – EEMP and SEDHRP don't want to go statutory which is the whole reason for these voluntary exclusion zones.

SC – Local buy in to VEZs helps to make them successful and avoid statutory measures.

PL – Must be evidenced based if you do go statutory.

SC – If statutory measures have to be taken they will be evidence based. Once the voluntary exclusion zones are in place there will be increased monitoring

SE – These specific areas have been chosen as voluntary exclusion zones because they have these designations which are not just handed out.

RS – I think you should turn the consultation on its head and go around to parish halls etc. and give presentations on what is here and why this is beautiful area with a diverse range of wildlife etc. and this is why it must be protected / best not to go here.

ACTION: More positive spin on consultation.

SC – I agree it does need a more positive spin to it.

SE – People need to be educated on the reason for doing this.

PL – Mitigation of area – so muddy they rarely get used anyway unless you know the right routes.

SC – Press release will be realised in next few days to local papers etc. and there will be a questionnaire for feedback.

PL – Needs widely promoting.

SE – Have been putting laminated signs up everywhere I can find.

RS – Maybe liaise with the parish newsletters? Likely to be too late to get into newsletters.

AF – Lack of mussels – hardly any now. Could be affecting birds.

PL – Possibly due to build-up of sediment.

SC – This is monitored by the Devon and Severn IFCA (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority)

SE – Next mussel survey 26th April, I was also shocked by the reduction in mussel numbers.

SC – To roundup, is everyone happy with current proposal to move zone down to allow access to wreck and steps?

Yes.

SC – **I would also like you to take a look at the codes of conduct once they have been updates and get your feedback, I will send this round via email.**

Conclusion – Agreement on zones providing that they are allowed access to the wreck and steps, are happy to avoid birds during sensitive times and are very aware of how the birds use the area. Would be opposed to initial proposal. They are happy to provide feedback for updated codes of conduct.