

## **Zonation and Code of Conduct Review Dog Walkers Meeting**



### **Minutes**

**2pm Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017**  
**Location: Exminster Victory Hall**

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#### **Attendees**

Stephanie Clark, Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) - SC  
Neil Harris, SEDHRP Manager - NH  
Sama Euridge, SEDHRP Habitat Mitigation Officer (HMO) - SE  
Julie Owen, SEDHRP Dog Project Officer - JO  
Nathan Robinson, East Devon District Council Countryside Ranger - NR  
Phil Chambers, Dawlish Warren Ranger - PC  
Rowena Garne, Devon County Council - RG  
Hilary Winter, Devon Countryside Access Forum - HW  
Steve Aplin - SA

SC welcome and thanks. Introductions made. HW explained her interest in dog walking through the Devon Countryside Access Forum. SA stated that he doesn't own a dog.

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:

- Two zones proposed, Exmouth and Dawlish Warren.
- Both already designated sites by various designations including RAMSAR, Local Nature Reserve, etc.
- Zones aim to protect the features of the estuary such as the wintering birds.
- Many birds use the area as high tide roosts.
- Eelgrass beds cover the area and provide food for special species such as Brent Geese.

#### **Dawlish Warren Discussion**

(During this discussion several maps were used including a map detailing the current dog ban areas on the Warren).

**SC** – Explains map which details measures currently in place including the orange area which is the current dog ban area (through byelaw). The VEZ in Dawlish Warren is not looking to change the dog walking areas.

**NH** – Also to note is the securing of a new countryside park which will be opening in summer used to encourage dog walkers and therefore ensuring there are other places for dog walkers to go. 27 hectares.

**SA** – Dog walkers choose to be beside the sea not inland therefore this park might not make as much of an impact as you would like.

**NH** – Understand that but it does mean there will be provisions for dog walkers nearby.

**HW** – How long has the dog ban been put in place?

**PC** – The dog walking ban has been in place since 2002, has a higher level of acceptance now than at the beginning, however the locals do have a higher level of association with walking on the warren than visitors.

**SC** – EEMP has been commissioned by SEDHRP to undertake the zonation of both the Warren and Exmouth. It is designed to prepare for the future and look at the 10km zone of influence and how that will impact on the estuary, not just at this moment in time but in the future.

- Promoted as a sensitive area for all users not just dog walkers due to the high number of high tide roosts. This means the area is important at all states of the tide and therefore the zone incorporates this.

**HW** – No access? Even without a dog?

**SC** – Yes, all users.

**HW** – Is the area concerned all mud?

**PC** – There are definitely softer patches, angler and bait diggers do operate. The yellow area (on the VEZ map) is covered by high water and therefore extremely muddy.

**SA** – Natural England on board?

**NH** – The zone will be promoted through Natural England and Natural England will promote the coastal access via the Exe Estuary Trail and the ferry.

**SA** – Various users will not be happy with a blanket ban.

**SC** – This is a voluntary measure, we are working with different user groups. Have already met several user groups for their opinion on the zones.

**SA** – Assuming you mean you've consulted clubs not individuals?

**SC** – There are still four weeks left of the consultation process. There will be a press release and questionnaire to encourage further participation.

**SA** – Where will this be advertised?

**SC** – Local newspapers, website, email, local councils will advertise, etc.

**SA** – People don't read local newspapers, won't reach people.

**SE** – Have also been handing out leaflets and putting information up on parish council notice boards. For this consultation have also been going into local dog walking businesses to advertise.

**SA** – Still won't reach everyone.

**SC** – Asked for suggestions on how to reach other people.

**SA** – No suggestions.

**SA** – Lots of independent users – particularly if working won't be looking for this information.

**NH** – That's why we have HMOs and are procuring a boat.

**SA** – A lot of people just normally go out onto the estuary and do what they want – independent people outside of clubs.

**SC** – These are not areas that have been plucked out of the air – if people are causing a detrimental effect to these areas, they could be prosecuted now due to designations in place. The majority of users are in agreement in principle, as these are not heavily used areas.

**HW** – Why is it a voluntary zone? More irresponsible users are likely to break the zones codes of conduct.

**NH** – We have agreed the zones with as many users as possible. We will monitor the effectiveness of the zones.

**SA** – If you do this are you likely to go statutory in the near future?

**NH** – We will only go down the statutory route if people don't adhere to the voluntary zone.

**SA** – Have there been any discussions about going statutory within the councils, etc.?

**NH** – No.

**SA** – Voluntary gives the perception that it is being imposed and so "shouldn't" becomes "can't".

**SC** – The idea of the consultation is to get everyone's views and compromise so that we don't have to go down the statutory route.

**NH** – Housing requirements – the houses need to go somewhere – legal obligation to mitigate impact – SEDHRP's role is to provide protection ahead of any impacts.

**PC** – Favourable condition – health of bird population – legal requirement for authorities.

## Exmouth Discussion

**SC** – Exmouth has been through consultation since December (same as Dawlish Warren). This zone has been based on the existing kite surfer's voluntary exclusion zone which was adopted 8 years ago (2009). During this time the kite surfers have helped to raise awareness through their clubs as well as on the water. A line of buoys go out every winter and the kite surfers keep to the left of this line.

For ease of reference for dog walkers, we have drawn the zone so that there is still access to the slipway but you should stay to the left of the slipway at all states of the tide from September to December.

**NR** – The reason for the all states of the tide approach is that the main food source which is eelgrass for wading birds is fed on as the tide recedes, however there are some birds who will feed in deeper water, and most birds like a shallow column of water around the eelgrass to hold it up. Furthermore there are small high tide roosting sites in this area which are crucial for the birds.

**SC** – We (EEMP) often hold clean-up events in Exmouth but stay away from this area due to the sensitivity disturbance could cause, and the fact that it is very muddy and not safe to walk across.

**SA** – If you say to a water user don't go "over here". Why would they want to carry their kit further?

**SC** – We are making certain allowances for certain users and there will be continued access from slipway.

**SA** – There are parking issues it is too far to walk with all that kit down to the slipway if the slipway parking is full.

**NR** – During winter months the car parking is less of an issue.

**SA** – Long way to carry a boat if the parking is pushed.

**NR** – During the winter months I'd question whether the parking is pushed – possibly during September but we are looking at a potential mid-September compromise which would on be 2 weeks of September in that case.

**HW** – Excluding walkers?

**SC** – Yes.

**SA** – People will still use the zone due to the access issue from the car park. Buffer zone? Car park area access allowances?

**NH** – Sea wall defence is being put in place 1-1.5 metre sea wall which will cut off access to car park anyway.

**NR** – Want a voluntary scheme that everyone will adopt to give most chance of success.

**SA** – That isn't reasonable.

**NR** – If we withdraw the zone to allow a corridor for access from the car park then we are pushing people closer to the bird life. The issue is that the birds are having to

expend energy on a resource that they have flown hundreds of miles to get to and now are having to expend more energy flying from people and disturbance.

**SA** – Could have a 5-10 metre buffer.

**SC** – Having one zone for all users makes it easy to interpret.

**SA** – Different disruption – deal with important bits not just blanket ban.

**SC** – We are taking into account user input where boundaries are.

**NR** – Issue with the line being moved north is you are instantly into a sensitive area if you stray too far.

**SC** – Not as straightforward as agreeing with feedback and ideas, have to take into account importance of area as well.

**NR** – Different user groups do have different levels of disturbance but you can't create a map for everyone – it would be too confusing. The inclusion of that area (southern) is most logical.

**HW** – Leisure activities do have an economic side to them – need to keep up economy and tourism of area.

**SC** – Agree with this and this will be taken into account. Want to encourage activities in less sensitive areas.

**SC (to SA)** – What activities do you partake in?

**SA** – SUP (paddle boarding), kayak, canoeing, sailing, scuba, swimming – lower area all activities

**SA** – Areas where eelgrass is doesn't equal the area allocated for the VEZ.

**NR** – The zone needs a buffer – this is important to prevent disturbance right next to eelgrass.

**SE** – There is the code of conduct – so the map will be the same for everyone but the code of conduct will go into detail about specific users. We won't have to make the zones mandatory if they are working.

**HW** – Is the town considering provision for dog walkers?

**NR** – There is off-lead access on the Imperial Recreation Ground. There is also on-lead access on mudflats and to left of slipway – which is hectares of land.

**NH** – Looking for alternative sites in and around Exmouth – in relation to new development.

**HW** – How heavily is the area used by dog walkers?

**SE** – Very heavily – have been diverting people with dogs during October onwards and if you ask and educate people they are often happy to move or change route.

**SC** – This is about getting the best zones that can be easily promoted for all users and easily understood on the ground. Push to raise awareness of zones.

**NR (to SA)** – If you could get access to the car parking by the slipway would you choose to go off there or not?

**SA** – Always more pleasant to go off of concrete – easier to have a clean kayak.

**NR** – We don't want to put a zone in that people are going to ignore.

**HW** – How would it be marked?

**SC** – Marked out by buoys for water-based users.

**SE** – Duck Pond area which is heavily used for water sports will have buoys to mark it out.

**SC** – There will be a general public meeting 20<sup>th</sup> April which will give a firmer idea. It will be held at County Hall.

**HW** – Will the maps change?

**SE** – Yes but probably not for dog walkers.

**SA** – Surveys available?

**NH** – The Exe Disturbance Study and WeBS survey results.

**END OF MEETING**