



TAW TORRIDGE ESTUARY FORUM

Minutes of the AGM held on Mon. 15th January 2024 at
Fremington Parish Council Offices, Beechfield Centre at 7.00pm

Present:

Adrian Dowding	Westcountry Rivers Trust & Speaker
Mark Haworth-Booth	Westcountry Rivers Trust
Mark Cann	Braunton Parish Council
Graham Bell	Braunton Parish Council
Russell Walters	RMB Chivenor
Martyn Bennett	Bideford Harbour
Sandra Knight	Coastwise ND
Marie Butterfield	Natural England
Peter Hames	Northam T C
Ian Rowland	Torrige District Council
John Puddy	Steamship Freshspring Trust
Chris Northrop	Appledore Instow Ferry
Jonathan Miles	North Devon Yacht Club
Andy Cox	Bideford Amateur Rowing Club
Debbie Frazer	Devon Wildlife Trust
Chris Dee	BTO WeBS
Colin Frajbis	Westleigh P C
Tom Humphreys	Skern Lodge
Brad Parsons	Skern Lodge
Mike Tucker	Bideford Canoe Club
Mike Teare	Way of the Wharves
David Dixon	Barnstaple Gig Club
Tony Pratt	ND Yacht Club & Chair
Ian Crawford	Secretary

1. Welcome & Introductions: The chair welcomed everyone. Members old and new introduced themselves

Apologies for Absence: Ricky Knight, Ian Harrison, Chris Hassall, Jeff Needham, Sue Prosper, Chris Salisbury and Jim Bell

2. Annual Elections:

a) Officers
Chair - Tony Pratt
Vice- Chair - Jeff Needham
Secretary - Ian Crawford
Treasurer - Tony Pratt

All positions were proposed and seconded and accepted by the meeting. It was reported that Jeff Needham would assist the Treasurer.

b) Planning & Consultation Committee: The P&CC comprises the above listed Officers who are joined by Mark Haworth-Booth, Jim Bell (amended minute) and Chris Hassall (in his absence) retained as a consultant. Forum members wishing to join the committee should contact the Chair or Secretary

3. Annual Accounts for 2023: The accounts had been circulated and will be held over for approval to the April meeting pending establishment of the bank balance - proposed and seconded and agreed with one abstention. **Action - Agenda April**

4. Annual Subscriptions & Honoraria: It was agreed to waive subscriptions for another year. Likewise for the Chair & Secretary honoraria to be waived.

5. Guest Speaker - Adrian Dowding, Westcountry Rivers Trust:

Adrian is Devon River & Fisheries Manager at Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) which is an environmental not-for-profit charity covering Cornwall, Devon, and parts of Somerset and Dorset. The Trust has been running for 30 years and the main function is to protect and restore river ecology for the benefit of people, wildlife and the local economies. The work is led by the science with local input in the North Devon catchment from organisations including the North Devon Biosphere (NDBR), Environment Agency (EA), Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT), Natural England (NE) and Natural Landscape (previously AONB). A joined-up partnership approach is important to achieving river improvements which is facilitated through the North Devon Catchment Partnership.

360 square miles of catchment area make up the Taw and Torridge catchments of North Devon, the majority of which drains into the Taw Torridge Estuary bringing all the upstream influences to the estuary's shores.

Main issues affecting rivers are soil erosion, sediment and fertiliser or nutrients. Both Phosphates and Nitrates in excess are of concern with detriment to living organisms in the river.

Climate change has led to, and continues to provide, greater High flows and low flows leading to more flooding and drought. Late-harvest crops like maize can be detrimental to river health with increased risk of runoff from bare soil left exposed to winter weather. Droughts are increasingly stressing rivers.

Atlantic Salmon are now classified as endangered in Great Britain and the Trust has concentrated for the last 30 years on recovering the salmon population in the rivers. Salmon are good indicators of our river health as they are one of the most susceptible fish to deteriorating water quality and environmental change in our rivers.

Modelling is carried out to achieve an overview of overlapping areas and to assess what is happening in the rivers. This helps us target where to protect, and where to repair or restore. The EA provide statutory river water quality monitoring once a month but we'd like to see more continuous monitoring to assess water quality and enhance understanding of issues. The Trust now constantly monitors basic indicator parameters at four points (two in Taw, two in Torridge) called listening stations. The Biosphere is trialing the Smart Biosphere using AI to monitor water quality in the River Uمبر. It's hoped these emerging technologies will provide much more detail and evidence to support decision making.

Agriculture is a main contributor to river pollution in the Taw and Torridge with official data showing a large part of water quality issues being attributed to the agriculture sector. Various projects have been set up to work with farmers and reduce pollution, such as Upstream Thinking which is represented by Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) in the River Yeo (Barnstaple), and Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) run by NE to grant-aid farming business plans with environmental improvements.

A recent study in the river Axe showed that enforcement does improve river water quality - enforcement by the EA as the regulating authority. This is being taken forward on a larger scale and there is currently a focus on the Torridge where Farming Rules for Water Regulations (2018) are being monitored and enforced.

Other partnership initiatives taking place in the Taw and Torridge include:

- The Spawning Habitat Improvement Project (SHIP) where WRT (sponsored by the River Taw Fisheries and Conservation Assoc.) are cleaning gravels of silt and sediment to make spawning habitat available for migratory fish. This is compounded by wider habitat improvements such as shade management of the river corridor and farm stock exclusion from the watercourse.
- Taw Access over Weirs (TAW) project which has opened up 12 priority obstacles to aid better natural migration timings for fish such as salmon, European eel, lamprey, trout and shad. Migratory fish now have a clearer run on the Taw up to Dartmoor and Exmoor (via the Mole/Bray). The project continues to mitigate barriers in tributaries and is currently opening up the Barnstaple Yeo.
- Natural Flood Management and partly rewilding is being delivered through DWT's Culm Grassland project and the NDBR/Devon Council's Devon Resilience Innovation Project (DRIP).

- The Torridge River Restoration project is being led by DWT improving habitat in the Torridge.
- Woods 4 Water project is NDBR and WRT delivering water quality and quantity improvements through strategic tree planting.
- Shad (fish from the herring family) are returning to the Taw having been observed in the last two seasons. WRT are surveying for this species and hope to have a formal project before long looking at conserving this protected species.
- Citizen Science Investigations – Westcountry CSI – is a WRT initiative providing equipment for volunteers to measure the quality of the river and record findings. <https://wrt.org.uk/westcountry-csi/> Like the anglers Riverfly monitoring, this CSI can act as a valuable early warning system for authorities to investigate water quality decline.

There was much interest reflected by several Forum members asking questions. The Chair thanked Adrian for his informative presentation.

6. Minutes of Previous Meeting, October 16th 2023: Agreed for adoption.

7. Reports:

a) TTEF / P & C Committee. Report had been circulated. TP drew attention to White Cross wind farm planning application where NDC had invited withdrawal of the application on grounds of lack of disclosure on detail.

We are supporting development at Middle Dock Appledore. Discussion and speculation about the possible nearby location of a Hydrogen Plant took place inconclusively.

TDC are to pick up signage requirements to protect birds in the estuary.

b) N D Biosphere. No report

c) N D Coast National Landscape. No report

d) Port of Bideford. Martyn Bennet, deputy harbourmaster gave his first report. One barge in on quay since October 2023. There are plans to re-instate the fountains on the quayside. A Harbour Users Group meeting is planned for May.

e) Appledore Instow Ferry. The ferry schedule will run from 1st April. Meanwhile maintenance is being carried out. CN confirmed that fares will remain the same as last season. £2 for an adult crossing, £1 for kids and dogs (still) go free. Bicycles are charged at £2.

f) Website. CD reported some 12 membership organisation had sent in responses with information details for the Forum website. Forum members were reminded that outstanding proformas should be sent to CD by January 26th. He also invited ideas from Forum members for the website.

g) Way of the Wharves. Mike Teare gave his first report. The Heritage Harbour scheme is run by the Maritime Heritage Trust with National Historic Ships and Historic England. There are 9 heritage harbours around the coast of UK and 3 inland ports on canals. www.maritimeheritage.org.uk/uk-heritage-harbours
In the south west, along with Bideford and River Torridge Heritage Harbour in North Devon, there is Exeter and Bristol, all promoting the local maritime history. The scope of the Bideford and River Torridge Heritage Harbour is the historical navigable extent of the river - from Appledore at the mouth of the estuary through Bideford and upstream to the Rolle Canal, which terminates in Rosemoor Gardens, Torrington.

In addition to promoting the heritage that can be visited the heritage harbour will be creating and publishing an asset register to include floating heritage, port structures and buildings and specialist skills in maintaining heritage." www.barthh.org

h) Devon Wildlife Trust. DF gave a report on DWT activities. **White Cross wind farm** landfall application 77576 : Devon Wildlife Trust sent in an objection with 13 pages of notes addressing key points to application.

Horsey Island - Surveys have started of the area using drones with Lidar and Visual Spectrum to monitor development of the salt marshes and land changes

Marine - Devon Marine Strandings Network - For Live animals call British Divers Marine Life Rescue 01825 765546 or out of office hours 07887 433412

For dead animals : Devon Marine Strandings Network 07719 086531

strandings@devonwildlifetrust.org

Coastwise North Devon are doing regularly intertidal citizen science surveys as part of the Wildlife Trusts Shoresearch project at Westward Ho! beach , Hele Bay and Combesgate. (They are also doing INSHORE surveys looking at invasive species at Lee Bay and Westward Ho! beaches)

8. Matters Arising from Minutes of October 16th.

PH reported that surfers and paddle boarders at Skern are still disturbing birds.

9. Matters brought forward by the Chair. None

10. Agenda Items for Next Meeting. None

11. AOB.

- MH-B reported that NDC has appointed Cllr Peter Jones (Ind) as lead on water quality. Peter arranged for 30 volunteers to be trained last November at the Braunton Countryside Centre as water testers by Westcountry Rivers Trust. NDC have installed new signage at Braunton Burrows
- Bumble Bee Trust at 7pm January 23rd
- Natural England now have 3 Catchment Officers covering the Taw & Torridge

12. Future Meetings.

Mon. 15th April, 15th July, 21st October and January 20th 2025

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