

Dart Harbour Communities Group
 Minutes of Meeting held 7 PM Thursday 15th September 2022 in
 Totnes Guild Hall.

Present

Mike Pearey (MP)	Chairman
Ben Piper (BP)	Totnes
Becky Fry (BF)	Cornworthy
Doug Twigg (DT)	Dartmouth and Kingswear
Association	
Julian Distin (JD)	DH board representative
Nigel Mortimer (NM)	AONB
Graham Anderson.(GA)	Dittisham
Lynne Maurer (LM)	Kingswear
Chris Moore (CM)	Stoke Gabriel Boating Association
Emma Magee (EM)	Dart Catchment Officer, EA
Ben Mahon (BMAHM)	Assistant Harbour Master
Sue Pudduck (SEC)	Secretary

Apologies

Pam Thompson (PT)	Ashprington
Paul Britten (HM)	Harbourmaster
Sarah Dorsett (SD)	TQ6 Partnership.
Cllr Marion Adams (MA)	Totnes

Minutes from meeting held on Thursday March 31st 2022 were agreed.

Matters arising

Contact sheet ready for circulation.

SD has resigned from TQ6 Partnership, but the Partnership a keen to remain in DHCG.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action (Agenda item 4): TCs/PCs please discuss support for the new McKay/Birch Baltic Wharf plan.

Action (Agenda Item 7): NM & EM to Investigate Confidentiality clause with SWW on water quality data.

Action (Agenda item 7): SEC to send to TCs / PCs the SWW consultation document.

1. Introductions.

MP welcomed Emma Magee, the new Dart Catchment Officer for the Environment Agency, and Assistant Harbourmaster, Ben Mahon

2a. Dart Harbour Inspection Cruise

All agreed that the Dart Harbour & Navigation Authority (**DHNA**) June river inspection trip had been extremely successful. It created an excellent cross-Trust Port networking event and the opportunity to discuss all aspects of river management. The value of passaging all the way up to Totnes was recognised. There was a discussion regarding the frequency of such trips, though this is ultimately a DH Board decision.

The group agreed that more might be made in future of the opportunity for briefing on key river sites or developments during the trip, especially because the majority of key site owners and managers were on board!

Awareness of the DH Trust Port Stakeholder Groups was significantly raised, and there were a number of enquiries about how to become a member.

2b. MP reported on summer activities.

With the aim of sharing knowledge MP had hosted Ambios Ecology Interns at Hillside prior to the successful DHCG visit to the Sharpham Rewilding Project. As well as addressing biodiversity issues Ambios

provides research, education, work experience and employment opportunities.

MP passed around the “Gardening For Wildlife” pamphlet produced by Dittisham/ Ashprington/Blackawton

He also drew attention to the work of the Devon Hedge Group and their recent publication “New Devon Hedges: How to Make Them”, which seeks to go some way towards addressing adaption to climate change & biodiversity loss.

3. Report from DH (BM AHM)

Cruise ships. The last cruise ship of the year, “Maude”, came into Dartmouth on 14/9. At the time of this meeting HM was currently attending a conference in Spain which was marketing Dartmouth as a visitor port for larger vessels. The board are considering whether they will accept larger ships, which will require more work on the main stream buoys to take ships up to 240 m. There would be an increase in DH costs of around £30K per year to ensure buoys and pilot qualifications remain at the required standard to attract super yachts or larger cruise vessels. There was discussion about whether the season could be extended into the “shoulder months”, and concerns about impacts on air quality in the steep sided harbour and the impact on the views across the harbour. Cruise industry research shows that tourists from cruise ships are big spenders, but not necessarily in the port of disembarkation.

The pros and cons have yet to be fully discussed with Dartmouth & Kingswear Town Councils, and other local interested parties.

Totnes

DHNA hope to improve access to the Quay and facilities for yachtsmen. It was agreed that this would be an opportunity to increase tourism and boost the town’s economy.

Decarbonisation. DHNA could provide charging stations for electric engines which would help achieve their embryonic decarbonisation aspirations. The harbour Yacht Taxi is seen as an early opportunity

here. There are difficulties throughout the estuary about where to site the re-charging stations, including the insurance issues associated with electricity charging in close vicinity to fuelling facilities!

4. Report from Totnes TC (BP). Totnes remains very concerned about the proposed development at Baltic Wharf. There are reports of pressure being put onto some of the yard workforce to agree to the plans! An alternative plan is being worked on to try to retain the workshops that provide jobs and boating facilities at the top end of the Dart Estuary. This was felt by the group to be very important and the DHCG group encouraged DHNA to work pro-actively to try to retain this important industry for Totnes town. There was some question about whether the developers, Acorn, were still keen to take the current project forward. South Hams District Council has a growing recognition that maintaining industry at Baltic Wharf would provide long term employment for suppliers and contractors. HM has indicated his intention to support action to maintain the boat yard. The Free Port at Plymouth includes the S. Hams so that could strengthen the argument for retaining a viable working yard.

After checking confidentiality, BP circulated the alternative plan produced by John McKay and John Birch. They will be holding discussions with SHDC officers to find a way forward and would welcome the support of riparian Councils.

Action All: Discuss support for the new McKay/Birch plan with your Councils.

5. Reports from Parish Councils

Kingswear (LM)

Kingswear Sustainable Group is working hard to raise awareness of environmental issues. There are still problems about the way to manage peoples' expectations regarding wilding in the church yard.

Finally agreement has been reached to re-open Lighthouse Beach to the public, which will require some stability works. Residents have expressed their appreciation to all the people who have helped achieve this, including DHNA.

Dittisham (GA)

The 10 K swim was cancelled this year because of extreme bad weather. A new organisation ran it, and they plan to increase the numbers taking part. The group felt that there had to be an in-depth debrief of this year's event, especially if numbers are going to go up, to ensure everyone's interests are properly considered.

DHNA is working to establish where the sewage leaks are coming from.

Life rings have been installed. Because of the increase in kayakers and paddleboarders, it is hoped that the toilet facilities and showers will be re-instated on The Ham very soon.

Stoke Gabriel. (SGBA) (CM)

CM reported on the difficulty the club was having with their insurance company in getting cover for their electric motor charging points. With the help of the RYA, they think they finally have agreed a policy statement to cover the club-owned batteries being kept on site. This issue requires monitoring, as there will be an increasing number of battery motors that require insurance cover.

This group will keep a watching brief on insurance problems with electric charging points

CM raised the concern of seeing people digging for bait. NM reported that this activity is managed by Inshore Fisheries.

<https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/Enforcement-Legislation>

CM also reported on the growth of the Pacific Oyster population on the Stoke Gabriel foreshore areas and shared the reported concerns of sewage discharge into the river.

He raised another area of concern for many in the group, regarding the speeding of ribs, particularly up river in areas such as Bow Creek.

AHM BM was able to report that DH has increased the number of watches to try to address this problem.

Dartmouth & Kingswear Society (DT)

DT reported that the Dartmouth Neighbourhood Plan (NP) is reaching completion. The house above Lighthouse Beach had been offered for sale and it was ascertained that the beach included in the sale particulars was in fact Baker's Cove, not Lighthouse Beach. There had been an increase in the number of people reporting sickness after swimming in the river. This was felt to be in part due to greater public awareness of possible causes of sickness, partly that the reports included swimming above the weir, and perhaps most significantly due to the very low river water flow resulting from sustained dry conditions across the catchment.

There was a proposal for a new, light-weight pontoon adjacent to Coronation Park beside the Dartmouth Higher Ferry which would provide a temporary solution to separating the small craft users from the ferry.

Cornworthy (BF)

BF reported a busy year for Blackness Marina and on the river. With the recent financial down-turn the boatyard has seen a larger turnover of people giving up their boat storage but there was still a healthy number of replacement customers.

BF also expressed concern about people getting too close to wildlife, most notably seals. The group also discussed avian flu and its impact. See separate update from AHM BM

6. Report from AONB (NM)

AONB are working on the final production stage of the Construction Environmental Plan Production guide, (CEMP) advising developers on reducing and mitigating the environmental impact of their development from design stage to post-build maintenance. Guidance is voluntary but the production and approval of a CEMP may be

required as part of larger projects and a condition of planning before the construction work starts.

NM has been consulted on several Planning Applications where the development may have a direct or significant indirect impact on the estuaries.

<https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/Enforcement-Legislation> .

There will be a hybrid meeting of the Dart Estuary Forum on Wednesday 23rd November at 6pm in the Totnes Boating Assoc. HQ (or on line) invites and agenda will be mailed out one week before.

Pacific Oysters: there has been an increase in their population, particularly around Stoke Gabriel and Flat Owers. Oyster spat are planktonic and are attracted to other oysters so destroying the beds should slow down the increasing numbers.

A project is being drawn up to assess the health and condition of the Estuary's salt marshes with view to prescribing management interventions to conserve and enhance their blue carbon and biodiversity potential –the prescriptive plans may be offered to the relevant land owners with potential funding sources signposted.

Water quality talks will be on line.

7. Water Quality (EM & NM)

There have been water monitors placed throughout the tidal River Dart at the north end of Dartmouth Town Jetty, Baltic Wharf, Stoke Gabriel and Dittisham. These are part of the SWW River Dart and Tavy Inland Bathing Water Pilot project. The bathing waters Steering Group will be given access to water quality readings, although there (was) still some confusion about meeting Minutes confidentiality. (now clarified)

There are nine further identified sites along the River Dart, one within the estuary and the other potential sites within the freshwater river. Some monitoring locations are not necessarily bathing sites, but may help build knowledge of water quality. The monitors will be reading environmental data (pH, temperature, depth, in real time.

The project at this stage is only about setting up data collection and understanding the issues. SWW is not the appropriate entity to take the Bathing Water designations forward. This will be for others. Southwest Water is delivering this project with funding from Ofwat. To improve water quality the DHNA are investigating the requirement of holding tanks –it is presently only a requirement that all new vessels have the fixtures to have a holding tank installed. Going forward it will be a legal requirement for tripper boats and live-on-boards to have them installed. HM BM

It's important for all to better understand river quality and so the confidential clause will be investigated.

Action'd: Investigate Confidentiality clause. NM EM.

Update; SWW have replied that the meeting Minutes were labelled "confidential" by mistake and can be shared with DHCG.

EM reported that SW Water is consulting on water and drainage issues. The consultation finishes September. They are looking at natural solutions but would like feedback via the link;
<https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/about-us/what-we-do/dwmp/>
 This was later circulated and although the closing date is past, it is really important that group members draw the attention of their Councils to the proposals.

Action: SEC to send to TCs / PCs the SWW consultation document.

8. Report from DH Board member (JD)

Julian reported on the various policy documents. The DHNA he Board would shortly be publishing the Strategic Plan on the website. The consultation draft on the Moorings policy is now being led by the Harbourmaster, and all stakeholders will have the opportunity to comment and contribute.

It was agreed that the Harbourmaster is reaching out to the wider community and has made a good impression with both the customers and the workforce.

A new business manager called Tony Wheeler has just been appointed.

Dart Harbour has issued advice on how to report incidents of avian flu: report a single infected bird of prey, or 3 or more water birds, or 5 or more other birds. Do not touch. Report via the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77.

Date of Next meeting 8th Dec 2022

The Chairman thanked Ben Piper (Totnes) for providing the venue and hospitality.

Information received from AHM BM, after the meeting relating to Item 5 Operation Seabird in South West England is a national partnership initiative co-led by Police, RSPCA, and Marine Management Organisation (MMO). For Devon and Cornwall, it is being led by the Police and MMO. Operation Seabird aims to engage with the public, businesses, and watercraft users to raise awareness about the sensitivities of the coastline, and how simple changes in behaviour can reduce pressure on our unique marine and coastal wildlife.

The Grey seal pupping season began in September, much earlier than in previous years and we are seeing a large number of pups in Devon and Cornwall across beaches and coves. It is important that collectively we minimise the impacts of disturbance by human activities during this crucial pupping period.

Impacts on the mums and pups are often invisible and delayed, disturbance can result in underweight pups which have a much lower probability of survival. Pups essentially need to get fat and put on 40 kg if they are to survive off their fat reserves as they learn to feed (hunting techniques/what to eat).

We are encouraging everyone to keep their distance and give seals space, observe them using binoculars or zoom camera. It might also mean that people need to find alternative beaches to visit whilst the seals pup. It is also important that locations where seals are pupping are not advertised, to avoid increasing disturbance as people flock to see the pups.

If anyone is concerned about a live seal then do not hesitate to contact British Divers Marine Life Rescue who will send out a trained medic to assess the seal on 01825 765546. If you have seen or become aware of a seal being disturbed into the sea as a result of human activity or find a dead seal in your area then please let me know by telephone or email.

So on this note, I have just received reports that a Grey seal has pupped at Newfoundland Cove near Froward Point. It would be greatly appreciated if you and your team good keep an eye out for any disturbance across your area, including this cove.

It would also be appreciated if you could share some guidance amongst your marine stakeholders and/or on social media channels reminding everyone about giving seals space, how they should behave, and who to contact if they are concerned about a live seal.

I've provided some useful documents/links below, if you require further information or guidance then please let me know or contact sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk and sarahthesealproject@gmail.com.

<https://www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk/2022/08/pupping-season-is-here/>

James Thomas

Marine Officer | Brixham | South Team | Coastal Operations | Marine Management Organisation

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