

**Dart Harbour Communities Group
Minutes of Meeting held 7 PM Thursday 9th November. 2023 in
Kingswear Parish Hall.**

Present

Mike Pearey (MP)	Chairman
Paul Britten (HM)	Harbourmaster
Colin Thompson (CT)	Cornworthy
Doug Twigg (DT)	Dartmouth and Kingswear Association
Nigel Mortimer (NM)	AONB Estuaries Officer
Lynne Maurer (LM)	Kingswear
Len Grant (LG)	Stoke Gabriel.
Ged Yardy (GY)	Dartmouth
Teresa Yardy	Visitor
Richard Bond (RB)	Dittisham
Sue Pudduck (SEC)	Secretary

Apologies

Pam Thompson (PT)	Ashprington
Emma Magee (EM)	Dart Catchment Officer, EA
Ben Piper (BP)	Totnes
John Cummings (JC)	Totnes
Graham Anderson (GA)	Dittisham
Cllr David Wells (DW)	Dartmouth
Liz Mosely (LMo)	Dartmouth
Becky Fry (BF)	Blackness

Minutes from meeting held on Thursday 9th March 2023 were agreed.

Matters arising

Most PCs and TCs had discussed and fed back on the South West water (SWW) consultation document.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

ACTION (Item 4) Members are asked to raise awareness of the DH Communities Fund, and suggest possible projects or recipients to make use of it.

ACTION (Item 4): HM to send out information to Stoke Gabriel mooring owners about the reduced river access pending repair of the landslip area.

1. Introductions.

MP welcomed new members: Ged Yardy, (Dartmouth and SHDC): Richard Thompson, Dittisham: and notably Len Grant, the first Stoke Gabriel PC representative for several years.

2. Opening Statements Chair (MP).

With quite a few new members present MP gave a brief outline of the role of the DHCG. As a Trust Port, DH had to comply with government regulations regarding Stakeholder participation in the running of the port. As well as DHCG there are two other Accredited Advisory Stakeholder groups; the ADRUC (River User Clubs) and the Commercial Users group. In addition, there is the Dart Estuary Forum, whose main focus is environmental issues. The DHCG is principally made up of representatives of Parish and Town Councils along the river, Dart Harbour, and other organisations with a particular interest in the Harbour eg National Trust, AoNB, local associations.

3. Designated Bathing Waters. Hannah Pearson (HP) of “Friends of the Dart” (abbreviated FotD for these Minutes)

HP swims in the River Dart every day. After noticing that other bathers were getting ill, then succumbing herself, a social media search received 165 affirmative replies to illness in 12 hours! While various organisations have official responsibilities relating to our river water quality, it quickly became apparent to **HP** that none really know what pollutants are in the water, or what affect these have on both humans and wildlife. HP’s interest coincided with a growing wider interest in water quality issues, so she submitted an application for Designated Bathing Waters (DBW). This led to discussion at a stakeholder meeting with Southwest Water Community Interest Group (CIG), with over-use of Combined Storm Overflows (**CSOs**) a key issue, following which in April 23 the group met with the CEO of Southwest Water (SWW). **HP’s**

ambition is that the whole catchment is free from harmful bacteria. She hopes that a legally binding contract with South West Water can be achieved to deliver this.

This issue (nationally as well as the Dart) is now moving too quickly to summarise here: herewith points of note in brief:

- a. 98% of respondents to a river survey said the river was integral to their physical and mental wellbeing;
- b. Applications for 4 bathing sites (at Steamer Quay Totnes, Stoke Gabriel, Dittisham and Dartmouth Warfleet) were supported by over 7,000 signatures;
- c. **Testing** DHNA (through **HM**) is now testing below Totnes weir and publishing the bacteria data weekly on the web. The Environment Agency (EA) will continue to test its current site. At the date of this meeting FotD have three months of bacteria testing data which is now available on the website. Their testing will continue weekly until the end of December 2023 when they will transfer to fortnightly river long testing with consistent data sharing. **FotD** are in the process of negotiating a legally binding contract with SWW in order to confirm **CSO** updates at a reasonable rate to ensure river and community health.
- d. At Stoke Gabriel the testing site is right next to the water outfall. There are 5 pump out locations on Bow Creek. **CSO** measuring reports bacteria, not sewage. Long-term the data will provide a baseline which will be used to support on-going research.
- e. data is now also being accepted from "citizen science" testing at a number of locations around the estuary and tributaries (for example Sharpham reach & one now being established on the Washbourne);
- f. **HP's** FotD group is expanding (currently 5 staff & a number of volunteer water quality testers) so that it can progress more effectively. It is also moving towards achieving Charitable status.
- g. SWW has accepted the Designated Bathing Waters application which is now being evaluated.
- h. It is hoped to move testing to chemical profiling in future.
- i. On a strategic level, it is hoped that the Friends of the Dart experience can be used as a template for other rivers nationwide to follow;

- j. The group is working alongside Exeter University on antibiotic resistant bacteria, and looking at a nature based solutions, for which there is ring fenced funding.
- k. The final step is for an independent body (*possibly a University?*) to host the data as this would validate it and give the data “gold standard”. It’s important to continue to build relationships with other organisations. A lengthy Q&A session covered:

A lengthy Q@A session ensued. **DT** asked how much bacteria pollution is coming from farms: **HP** informed the group that Genetic water testing is now being developed so that, in future, pollution can be linked back to individual sources, and thus effective remedial action be taken.

HM briefed that “live on board” boats in the harbour will require a holding tank within 3 years. This will come in for the River Boats Co., over the next 10 years. These changes will be included in the Mooring Policy. At present there is only one pumping out station on the Dart.

The Dart Bathing Waters Project should also benefit Southwest Water, and help create a new culture of compliance. It is being funded *pro bono* by the Good Law Society and receiving help from a specialist firm, GLP Volunteers. There will be funding for a water technician.

There is now plenty of online information on the Dart Designated Bathing Waters campaign, which can be found putting “Hannah Pearson - Friends of the Dart” in your online search engine!

Our sincerest thanks to Hannah for her enthusiasm, determination, and time! DHCG will support where we can.

4 Reports

4.a Harbour Master

The moorings policy will be approved at the December DHNA meeting; It lays out how moorings will be managed. The idea is to prioritise local people on the waiting list, thus allowing much easier access to the river, reducing journey times and helping reduce the harbour carbon footprint. It will also reduce waiting times for locals. The policy will be released to stakeholders before the open

meeting. Dart Harbour have changed the harbour Bylaws to General Directions. These get approved by stakeholders and offences can be fined. Any suggestions for inclusion regarding environmental or general areas, to **HM**.

DH are currently writing a Port Master Plan to show the long-term plans for the port . E.g., it has been suggested to have less developed areas, such as Duncannon where moorings will not be laid. It will also outline plans for investment. Suggestions include creating a small pontoon at Totnes, a set of pontoons in the turning circle and electric charging for boats.

In response to a question about charging batteries for boats, **HM** stated that charging of batteries on own Moorings is okay. However, charging on public ones involve a small risk and this is still to be assessed.

Cruise Ships. The simulation has been successful. So far, no major issues have been identified, researching all the environmental issues is still under investigation. It's now proposed that mooring will be between two buoys (rather than one buoy and an anchor), as this removes the scarring areas. There was a concern about Junior Sailing at Kingswear, but it will be timed not to clash. Dart Harbour is waiting till all research is in before publishing their findings. Some environmental studies will be done, in-house, but DH is going externally for bats and birds, and any other areas where they don't have in-house expertise. **GY** (SHDC & DTC) advised that air pollution can be validated externally. He suggested that to validate the conclusions of the report by DHNA one of the independent certification bodies e.g. LR (Lloyds Register) or DNV(Det Norske Veritas) be asked to certify the report and claims.

Dart Harbour will charge £1 per head per cruise passenger. The money raised will be paid into a Community Fund. There is more information on the website about the community fund:

<https://www.dartharbour.org/about-dart-harbour/dart-harbour-community-fund/>

Action: Members are asked to suggest possible projects or recipients to make use of the Communities Find.

The sinking vessel is now stabilised. On the river there are 22 vessels with a potentially low environmental risk of sinking. Should they sink, Dart Harbour is encouraging the owners to sell up and get off the river. There are three or four of this number more at risk

but the General Directions will allow Dart Harbour to recover costs if a boat sinks. It was suggested that individual people could use bilge socks to absorb oil in the bilges. HM reported that the Booms are very effective at containing larger spillages.

Developments. The Double Steps pontoon is now finished. The Dartmouth slip is with SHDC planning. BRNC is working on Sand Quay building a small marina. The electric yacht taxi will be running by the end of the year.

Dart Harbour are making an improvement to the swim zone by Dartmouth Yacht club, making it larger with better signage and creating a bigger jumping area.

Dart Harbour is increasing the number of solar panelled CCTV cameras. This will allow better management of moorings allowing Dart Harbour to monitor out of hours, watch for theft, and give the ability to see and record speeding. **LG** reported that Stoke Gabriel has three cameras that don't work already set up and could Dart Harbour help with getting them working again.

Action; HM

Budget is on track and the customer satisfaction survey is coming in at the moment.

4b. AONB NM

NM has produced a guide for assessing the environmental impact of proposed developments. In the future all planning will need to consider environmental impact.

The Saltmarsh Project. Currently, surveying is being carried out to assess the condition of the saltmarshes. The report will then go to a specialist who will draw up plans for prescription, enhancement, reconstruction and preservation. There is funding available. There may be places where the group can look at the Saltmarsh up close.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-overview-of-progress>

4c Reports from members

DT briefly outlined the scope of the Dartmouth & Kingswear Society's remit; key topics which related to DHCG were the Cruise Ship consultation, where the Society considered that the community needed more information before decisions could be taken, and support for the recent work to improve water quality in the Dart.

LG Reported on a landslip at Stoke Gabriel. The café is now using the entry nearer the village. However, the café will be closed for three months and very limited parking will be available. There will be no road access to the water!

Action: HM to send out information to mooring owners.

LM updated on still unresolved issues at “Lighthouse Beach”. The ownership of the beach is unclear, A small success is that National Grid had inspected the cable that had been found, that it is not live! However, it held up Footpath repairs and access to beach for over 9 months.

RB Took part in the well supported Designated Bathing Waters swim held at Dittisham.

GY Drew the attention of the Group to the possibility of funding opportunities from,
<https://www.southhams.gov.uk/communities/community-grants-and-funding>.

9. Dates for future meetings

The following dates are proposed;

Thursday 21st March 2024

River trip in June. TBC

Thursday 7th Nov 2024

MP thanked Kingswear PC for hosting the meeting.