

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

FRIDAY 18TH OCTOBER 2024 MEETING

WOOTTON FITZPAINE VILLAGE HALL, WOOTTON FITZPAINE DT6 6ND

11:00AM-1:00PM

NOTES

- **River Winniford (Winniford River Action Group, WRAG):** Lee Ramsden, Paul Ramsden
- **River Char (River Char Community Project (RCCP):** Andrew Carey
River Char (Lower Char Community Project (LCCP): Dana Assinder
- **River Char (Riverfly Testing Coordinator):** John Kenward
- **River Mangerton and River Asker (River monitor):** Chuck Willmott
River Asker (Riverfly Testing Coordinator): Howard Atkinson
- **River Brit (Upper River):** Rosemary Rychnovsky
- **River Brit (Lower River):** Caroline Pearce
- **River Simene (Parish Councillor):** Bob Hamblett
- **West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams (Catchment Officer):** Ian Rees

- INTRODUCTION

APOLOGIES: Geoff May, Peter Stapleton, Margaret Morgan-Grenville, Emma Teasdale, Edward Morello, Andy Mears.

Andrew reported that Andy Mears was ill and Edward had a prior engagement but hoped to attend in future. Geoff has stood down as a Parish Councillor and will no longer be attending CROWD meetings. Bob was replacing Steve Evans as representative of the Simene.

Andrew also reported a very encouraging meeting with Edward the previous day, where our MP had been very well informed, interested and receptive.

- UPDATES -

- **NEWS FROM AND ABOUT WESSEX WATER – Andy Mears**

Thanks to Andy for his report. We went through it (confidential for now) noting the encouraging developments at Newlands. We look forward to hearing when it's started and completed. Also to seeing subsequent spills counts.

We noted the ironic possibility that diverting surface water from Newlands direct to the river could have the unintended consequence of increasing some pollution (metals/rubber from the car parks) whilst reducing the number of sewage spills. We will look out for this in our monitoring.

We noted again the spills data for 2023 and the vulnerability of WW assets to high rainfall. We wondered whether EA targets for SO spill frequencies would change to reflect higher rainfall.

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre would like to receive the same direct live notification of active spills as the Parish Council and Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) receive. **ACTION: Andy Mears: Is that possible?**

Paul had talked to SAS about their alerts after seeing that 4 spills lasting 4.5 hours on one day recently were not featured in the SAS alerts. He said that SAS say they need the raw spill data and had written to the Wessex Water's CEO in June requesting access. **ACTION: Andy Mears: Do you have any updates about providing SAS with the raw data?**

We noted that daily spills information disappears from the WW website after 24 hours. **ACTION: Andy Mears: Is it possible to have access to the daily back data?**

- **NEWS FROM CROWD**

- **RIVER BRIT STRATEGIC MONITORING PLAN (SMP) & NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT (NFM) – Ian Rees**

Ian updated us. Phase 1 (landowner engagement & installation of monitoring) is ongoing, and funding for Phase 2 (installation of measures) is confirmed. It should start in early 2025.

Exeter Univ. has been commissioned to analyse the SMP measurement data. Ian is working with Peter Stone (geomorphologist) to understand sediment entering the river.

Hydro International will install 31 digital monitoring points to measure flow and discharge (volume of water) on the river.

Existing EA monitoring gives them some baseline data. Rain gauges are being installed in the catchment. Devices (maybe 6) to monitor phosphates/temperature/turbidity will be installed downstream, with Citizen Science gathering this data upstream (15 volunteers signed up).

Planning Permission has been granted for the Pineapple lab. Work will be completed March 2025.

They have tasked Harry Gray (Wessex EA data specialist) to see how best the EA can use the SMP's Citizen Science data.

Rose asked whether there might be a shift in EA policy towards volunteer Citizen Science, so that the EA offers some training/support to make the data more useful. If the continuing reality is that there are insufficient EA staff to sufficiently monitor water quality (& lots of other ecological parameters), then the citizen scientists being used to replace them might reasonably expect support/training/co-ordination/funding from the EA. **ACTION: Andrew to pass this suggestion on to Edward.**

Ian noted that the National Trust have got similar funding to the Brit Catchment's £750k for the Swan Brook. He offered to invite a NT rep to speak to CROWD.

- **RIVER WINNIFORD – Paul Ramsden**

In June, an EA staff member with 2 people from the Wessex Stream Clean Team (who can instruct WW to sort out problems) came to test at 11 sites on the Winniford. Tests showed no trace of Ammonia and good levels of Dissolved Oxygen.

Paul showed us results from 2023 and 2024 measuring *E.coli* at 10 sites along the river. In 2023 average counts went from 1,400 upstream to 25,000 at the lagoon. In 2024 average numbers had fallen significantly to the south of the village, most impressively to 5,000 at the lagoon. The results seemed to reflect the impact of fixing the leaking sewer (see previous meeting notes), fixing a problem at Cain's Farm and WW lining its main sewer. (Water discharging from WW's Sewage Treatment Plant had a count of 10 – UV works!)

Paul reported that the support on another sewage pipe where it crossed the stream was crumbling. This all highlights the value of close inspection of our rivers (walking/photographing) to spot problems.

Phosphate levels on the Winniford increase tenfold during the summer (tourist influx – washing machines/shampoo/faeces/etc.). WW doesn't remove phosphorus at Chideock STP.

We don't yet know the impact on the lagoon (because of water gathering there) of SOs spilling upstream.

- **RIVER CHAR WATER TESTING– Howard Atkinson/John Kenward**

Howard ran through his report (on the CROWD website) and highlighted these key points:

the state of the River Char is “considerably” Poor (EA definition) according to both WW and CROWD bacteriological test results.

CROWD figures usually underestimate WW figures and they are seeking a (previously agreed) visit to WW's Salford Lab to compare test protocols and try to understand the divergence.

Howard was surprised that the bacterial load doesn't increase consistently going down the river.

There are licensed private discharges (not WW) upstream of Stockham Bridge and in Whitchurch which the group will investigate and hope to test.

When the river is twice as deep as usual, bacterial counts were over 10 times higher than usual.

E. coli is a more reliable indicator than enterococci and the group may drop tests for the latter.

Some *E. coli* could be in the river naturally, but most will be of human/animal origin. We should get DNA sequencing done before we make any firm public statement on the likely origins of the bacteria. (Perhaps above and below Whitchurch Canonorum.) **ACTION: Howard to investigate the cost of doing this analysis.** [Ian might be able to help with the cost.]

It was suggested that we look for a MSc/PhD/postgrad student/researcher at Exeter/Bristol/Southampton who might be interested in doing this work. Ian has contacts. **?ACTION: Ian – is this something you can ask about?**

Could we measure caffeine (a reliable indicator of human pollution)?

Fuller results will be announced at a public meeting in Wootton/Whitchurch before Christmas.

- **RIVER SIMENE – Bob Hamblett**

Bob ran through his report (on the CROWD website).

He also suggested that one riparian landowner might agree to undertake some work (cutting steps?) to make the River Simene accessible for testing. **ACTION: Bob to investigate.**

He highlighted the problem he had seen on the stream entering the Brit near the Bridport Recycling Centre.

Discussion of issues and missed opportunity for a wetland at Foundry Lea led to a question about who monitors the construction firm on meeting the conditions attached to planning permission. **ACTION: Ian to investigate.**

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- **FUTURE PLANS AND DIRECTIONS**

- DNA sequencing of *E. coli*. (see above)
- Invite EA's Harry Gray (see above) and NT manager of the Swan Brook NFM scheme (see above) to speak to CROWD in future.
- Greater community engagement – there was considerable discussion, with concern about the risks of appearing to preach to the public. Dana/Andrew had a proposal from the River Char on widening community engagement. Ian suggested asking reps from the Wye and Usk to talk to us. Also involving Dorset Wildlife Trust who have more experience and may be better placed than CROWD. This discussion was deferred to the next meeting.

- **NEXT MEETING**

31st January, 11am, Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall. **ACTION: Andrew to invite Edward Morello.**