

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

FRIDAY 27TH FEBRUARY 2026 MEETING

WOOTTON FITZPAINE VILLAGE HALL, WOOTTON FITZPAINE DT6 6ND – 11:00AM-1:00PM

NOTES

Apologies: Margaret Morgan-Grenville, Dana Assinder, Edward Morello, Emma Teasdale

Attending:

- **River Winniford (Winniford River Action Group):** Lee Ramsden, Paul Ramsden
- **River Char (River Char Action Group):** Andrew Carey, John Kenward
- **River Mangerton and River Asker (River monitor):** Chuck Willmott
- **River Axe (Little Axe Group, Broadwindsor):** Sheila Hawkins
- **River Bride:** Deborah Legge
- **River Brit (Upper River):** Rosemary Rychnovsky
- **River Brit (Lower River):** Caroline Pearce
- **River Simene (Parish Councillor):** Bob Hamblett
- **W. Dorset Rivers Coastal Streams (Catchment Officer) and River Bride:** Ian Rees
- **Wessex Water** – Julian Okoye
- **Environment Agency** – Yasmin Guler

• BRIT CATCHMENT NFM PROJECT UPDATE – Ian Rees

Ian reminded us that [the £654,000 Brit Catchment NFM project](#) is entering its third and final year. The Brit Valley Project should be in place to take over when this 3-year NFM project finishes in March 2027. Inshallah.

Among its achievements already:

- 2.5 hectares of flood plain reconnection
- 35 NFM interventions
- 16km of leaky dams
- 2 settlement ponds
- Hydrometric equipment has been installed at 30 sites to collect water data.

Learning from the leaky dams (they use DWT as contractors):

- where the floodwater re-enters the river below the dams, considerable erosion can sometimes occur.
- surveys needed to see which dams survived the winter storms

Asked for advice on starting similar volunteer schemes in neighbouring catchments, Ian said:

- His project's monitoring and learning will act as a proxy for all local rivers
- It's important to identify whether the work is to be done on what is classified as a 'main river'
- Ian can help with liaison with Andy Proberts at DC for permissions
- The river starts in the fields – tackle fields (ponds, ditches, ploughing, etc) before starting on leaky dams.
- Peter Stone is compiling a report on high-risk stretches of the Brit, Char, Winniford and Bride. **Action: Ian** – see if Peter's report is shareable.

[FWAG's Dorset Rural Runoff Project](#) is in its second phase, identifying opportunities to reduce rural run-off, soil erosion and flood risk. It can provide support to communities and work with farmers on drainage investigations and nature-based solutions. Locally it's working in Chideock, Skilling and Beaminster.

• WESSEX WATER – Julian Okoye

- Asked about the **School SuDS project**, Julian said it's funded 50:50 by WW and the Government. **Action: Julian** – check whether Beaminster School is on the prioritised list. Other funding is available through the [WW Environment Fund](#).

- **Lead pipes:** [details on website](#). WW can arrange for a sample to be taken. If lead found, WW will replace its own lead pipes and, where possible, customers' external pipes (but not internal pipes). WW also has an ongoing general programme to replace lead pipes. If all lead could be removed, WW wouldn't need to add phosphate to drinking water.
- **Educating general public about use of water during storms.** The ratio of domestic use to roof water is 100:1, so not a priority. Debbie Legge would like the messaging to be made clearer by WW. But community groups can help spread the message. WW also looking to shift behaviour about water usage more generally but not linked to time shifting during high rain events.
- Julian reminded us that Wessex Water has been awarded £2 million to develop the national [Rainwater Management Platform](#)
- **Powerstock/Puncknowle WRPs.** WW will arrange a tour if we can find a group of people to go.
Action: Bob – contact people who might want to go on the Powerstock tour and gather numbers
Action: Debbie – contact people who might want to go on the Puncknowle tour. **Complete** – 10 people found.
Action: Julian – to send details of future details of Round the Bend tours.
- **Newlands Bridge:** There were 2 short spikes in January and 1 in February that may have led to brief spills at Newlands Bridge. Data will be on the WW website soon.
- **Chicksbridge CSO** – **Action: Andrew** – send Julian the follow-up questions about the CSO.

• ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – Yasmin Guler

- Yasmin has been doing analysis and reporting within the EA over the past four years: River Habitat, , macrophyte and invertebrate surveys, bathing water studies. She also looks at partner organisations' data.
- She is the lead for citizen science in Wessex. EA is catching up to make sure they can use the data in the best way possible.
- Recently attended a conference of regional leads and will be working on establishing systems that ensure the best data is collected for the right reasons, and used by the EA to help with their work.
- Yasmin is happy to be a point of contact.
- EA have a document called '[Supporting citizen science; Technically Advisory Framework](#)'. Yasmin would welcome feedback on this document. It's a good introduction to developing a catchment plan.
- Yasmin would welcome local river groups making contact with the EA with their plans, to make sure the groups have the right systems in place.
- There is currently no one way of ingesting data that's generated. Cartographer and RiverHub are the best two ways for the EA. And Yasmin recommends the [CaSTCo website](#) and advice.
- **Action: Ian** – to send details of his Brit Catchment SMP to Yasmin.
- Blueprint (aka Hello Lampost) is an AI app that asks questions of you to get a better understanding of recreational usage of water, and some high level observational data (via photos). [Details and link to join are here.](#)
- **Action: Yasmin** – to put Sheila [<mailto:m11esgh528@gmail.com>] in touch with the East Devedon Citizen Science lead.
- The latest WFD classifications will be updated and published later this year. Yasmin is happy to share draft classifications with anyone in CROWD who wants them.

FULL versions of all the following river group reports are [online](#)

• RIVER WINNIFORD – Paul Ramsden

- Paul gave a recap of the late-December fuel pollution incident in North Chideock. Yasmin apologised for EA's response (phone caller was told the EA would not respond because the Winniford is not a main river). She suggested that we always provide an email address so that a reference number is generated.
- Yasmin is happy to be emailed photos and reference number so that she can follow things up.
- Julian recommended a 'mystery shopper' exercise to test the system.

- **LITTLE AXE – Sheila Hawkins**

- The group now has seven testing points and is gathering baseline data using West Country Rivers Trust CSI.
- Testing for Phosphate / Temp / Turbidity
- The [Triple Axe 'Rivers Run Through Us'](#) should be able to offer support in future.

- **UPPER BRIT – Rose Rychnovsky**

- Pupils are now testing water at four sites to compare and contrast. Tests are invertebrate-focused.
- Have had the risk assessment passed, which has always been tricky.

- **LOWER BRIT – Caroline Pearce**

- Not as many flooding incidents as in past years, despite the rain
- No pollution incidents, but both Brit and Simene very turbid.

- **RIVER BRIDE – Debbie Legge and Ian Rees**

- The [West Bay East Beach consultation](#) is under way. **Action: All** – please complete the form. Closes 23rd March. Will find out the result on the 6th May
- The [Action for Water Justice Freshwater Pollution Guide](#) is useful for legal techniques for dealing with water contamination. Worth a quick flick through.
- Progress is being made on the Bride with a group formed and monitoring planned for the future.

- **RIVER ASKER – Chuck Willmott**

- Chuck is keen for the Asker project and Himalayan Balsam control to continue
- Upstream of the old mill at New Street Lane a landslip has caused a lovely pond, would be nice to keep.
- A trail camera at the old mill captures difference in colour. Would be a good location for sediment sampling.
- Dippers are gathering moss and starting the nesting process.

- **RIVER CHAR – John Kenward/Andrew Carey**

- The new River Char Community Report and Technical Report are both available in print [and online](#). They were launched at a public meeting on 24th February with around 70 attendees. Some headlines:
- RCAG *E. coli* test results now match very closely the results produced by Wessex Water.
- Plans to monitor daily at the lagoon during the bathing season and make results public within 24 hours, using Petrifilm or Fluidion. Important that WW / EA are aware this is happening, as this may lead to further impacts for them. WW may be able to help identify sources of pollution, so that more robust pushback can be made. Microbial Source Tracking could be possible. EA can't do that, as not a designated bathing water.
- Group is testing at Charmouth East Beach with one notable and alarming *E. coli* result recently. Yasmin said she is happy to take data from the group's analysis.
- Andrew mentioned very early plans for a Dorset-wide version of CROWD.

- **RIVER SIMENE – Bob Hamblett**

Without Dana's usual call for us to share recent notable sightings and times in nature, it was left to Chuck's dippers (above) and Bob with a poem of his to remind us of the many ways of being with and valuing our rivers.

- **AOB**

Date of next meeting: 12th June at Wootton Fitzpaine, 11am. **Action: All – add to diary.**