

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

FRIDAY 31ST JANUARY 2025 MEETING

WOOTTON FITZPAINE VILLAGE HALL, WOOTTON FITZPAINE DT6 6ND

11:00AM-1:00PM

NOTES

APOLOGIES: Lee Ramsden, Paul Ramsden, Ian Rees, Howard Atkinson

UPDATES –

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

1. The engineering works at Newlands Holiday Park (to separate foul water and rainwater) are completed. Disappointingly there was a spill at Newlands SO after the works were finished, but WW is hoping that spill numbers will be significantly reduced. WW will be looking at other similar opportunities in the area.

[Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 has still not been fully implemented in England – it would require the separation of foul and rain water in all new buildings and developments.]

2. The online map of Wessex Water SOs [www.wessexwater.co.uk/coast-and-rivers-watch-map] and their spill status is live and working well. QA software is suppressing spikes and flatlines (false readings).

Responding to Rose, Andy hopes there will be news soon about expanding the historical data available for spills at each SO (beyond the last 24 hours).

Responding to Edward, **Andy [action]** promised to get information on the numbers and duration of missing spills data.

3. OFWAT has approved WW's plans [list is attached and [online here](#)] with £500m to be spent between April 2025 and April 2030 but has required WW to cut the cost of its phosphorus removal programme by £300m. WW could appeal.
4. Responding to Edward, Andy said Wessex Water expected customer bills to rise by around 21% [since confirmed as a total increase of £105.95 (20.8%) from 2024-25 to 2029-30].
5. Responding to Edward, Andy said that the works at Piddletrenthide marked as 'complete' on the 2025-30 SO Improvement Plan were ongoing works to seal sewer pipes against surface water ingress. These works will continue and they won't fully solve the spills problem at Piddletrenthide, so other works will be investigated.
6. Responding to Peter, Andy said that WW had not decided how to address the SO spills problem at 13060S (Mill Lane). However the company is hoping to fix the problem at 14413B (Seatown) using small-scale solutions rather than major new engineering. He also promised **Andy action** to tell us which WW plants in the area remove phosphorus.

- NEWS FROM CROWD

1. Caroline and Dana talked through the reports previously sent by Ian on the Brit Catchment Strategic Monitoring Plan and Natural Flood Management Plans:

Strategic Monitoring Plan:

- 12 citizen scientists have come together to steer the development of the Strategic Monitoring Plan for the wider Brit Catchment, including the Simene, Mangerton and Asker.
- The main concerns have been identified, and the links to potential impact: Agriculture/land management ~ The Water industry ~ Development ~ Other (invasive species, recreation and disturbance)
- DNL is pulling all this together in a plan which is currently in writing. *[Caroline explained that the plan relates to additional monitoring: what and where?]*
- They have been guided by Simon Browning of the National Rivers Trust.

Natural Flood Management Project:

- DNL has secured c.£650k funding from the Environment Agency for a Natural Flood Management Project on the wider Brit Catchment – funding runs until March 2027.
- Phase 1 is to install 33 flow monitoring points throughout the catchment to help us understand the movement of water through the catchment, and the impact our interventions have.
- Some sensors will also be able to monitor water quality parameters. Where this is not happening, 17 volunteers will undertake regular monitoring of water quality, sediment, and geomorphology.
- Part of the project is to reduce the movement of sediment through the catchment. 6,000 tonnes of sediment are lost each year; much of it has to be removed from behind EA flood defences and from West Bay Harbour (the EA spend £250,000 every 8 years on dredging to maintain flood defences).
- We're installing the monitoring equipment now and hope to begin installing NFM measures in April. *[Dana explained about the use of 'MoRPh Rivers' to capture detailed records of river physical habitats and generate assessment indicators for short lengths of river compatible with biological and water quality monitoring.]*

Management Plan:

- They are about to embark on the update of their statutory Management Plan, and will be seeking the thoughts of CROWD on how to incorporate aims for the water environment.

2. We noted Howard's reports on the Brit Catchment:

Riverfly Monitoring April-September 2024

- The number of sites monitored has increased relative to previous years and so provides a more comprehensive coverage of the Brit catchment.
- Collection of data based on eight pollution-sensitive Riverflies was more widespread than the more informative extended system scoring of 33 such animals.
- A wide range of ecological indicators based on the data collected in 2024 confirms the conclusion from previous years that the **Asker** and **Mangerton** have a high-water quality and support a wide range of invertebrates. The **Brit** has a somewhat lower quality level and the **Simene** has a relatively low water quality. These differences may reflect both underlying geology and patterns of land use.
- Evidence from data collected by the EA and more recently by monitors indicates a progressive increase in water quality of the Asker over 31 years.
- There was no evidence of any minor pollution events at the sites monitored in 2024.
- The final report is available on the CROWD website.

Brit catchment Water Vole progress report

Water vole habitat assessment

A scoring sheet for both habitat suitability and evidence of water vole presence has been developed and deployed until March 2025. 35 volunteers are scoring many short segments of the catchment. Each river has a coordinator to help assemble the information. It will be analysed for presentation at our spring meeting.

Detection of water vole presence

Water voles will feed on rafts and deposit their characteristic droppings. This is more sensitive way to detect the animal than observation. A second prototype raft has passed field testing without any river over-washing that would cause droppings to be swept away. The aim is to make and deploy 50-100 rafts from May to September 2025 when water voles are active. The habitat analysis (above) will inform selection of their locations.

Presence of mink in the catchment.

Seven mink monitoring rafts recording characteristic footprints of this predator in clay have been deployed by volunteers on the Asker, Mangerton and Simene over the winter. The data will be compiled for the Spring meeting. It is likely that mink is widespread throughout the catchment.

Spring 2025 meeting

This will be held in the second half of March or April for those actively involved in the project. It will review the results to date, define where to place the latrine rafts and consider the possibility of future mink eradication from the catchment rather than just monitoring their presence.

Finally we noted Howard's retirement from CROWD and the huge amount of work he has done for us and continues to do on the Asker and for his Weymouth constituents. We will send a formal thank you after the next meeting.

3. Bob reported on the River Simene:

- 45% of the Brit Catchment NFM Project sites (see above) are on the Simene
- He is disseminating information via Parish communication channels with a view to recruiting volunteers as a way of also increasing community resilience.
- The stream running from the Recycling Centre into the Brit has not yet been monitored.
- He is working on a plan to address flash flooding in Symondsburry and Eype.

4. Peter reported on the River Winniford:

- WRAG have a meeting w/c 3rd February to discuss future plans. He noted that they had found no phosphate in the upper reaches, however it was present below the Sewage Treatment Plant and caravan sites.

5. John reported on the River Char:

1. The Lower Char Community project has changed its name to the River Char Action Group (RCAG).
2. Plans are under way for the second Charmouth Dragon River Festival on 31st May. Sandra Reeve has invited all other Dorset rivers to create their own large River Mascot/Daemon and join the parade. (Details: Sandra Reeve ~ River Char Action Group ~ 07734138942 ~ imoveintolife@gmail.com)
3. RCAG is discussing a Charter for the River Char.
4. RCAG has arranged a visit to Wessex Water's Salford Laboratory at the end of February.
5. There is a community meeting on Friday 7th February at 7pm at Wootton Fitzpaine to launch the report into its river monitoring in 2024 – bacteriological, chemicals/metals and riverfly.

Key findings:

1. **Bacterial Contamination:** *E. coli* and enterococci levels frequently exceed safe thresholds – this poses significant health risks for recreational water users. [Howard Atkinson has also researched ways of telling whether *E. coli* is of human, avian or ruminant origin and we will explore this with Wessex Water.]
2. **Rainfall Impact:** Heavy rainfall events strongly correlate with increased bacterial contamination, suggesting problems with agricultural runoff, slurry tanks, and domestic & commercial septic systems.
3. **Chemical Pollution:** Phosphorus levels exceed accepted thresholds in over 60% of samples, indicating ongoing nutrient pollution issues. High levels of aluminium and iron were also observed, particularly after rainfall.
4. **Storm Overflows:** Wessex Water's storm overflows contribute to pollution during heavy rainfall in the lower stretch of the river, south of the A35.
5. **Riverfly Monitoring:** Baseline data for invertebrate life in the river has been established, providing a foundation for long-term health assessment.
6. In 2025 we will extending our bacterial monitoring programme to try to identify more precisely where and how pollution is entering the river.

6. Margaret reported on the Mangerton

- The Powerstock Flood Gauge updates twice a day at 4am and 4pm. This is only done twice a day as a power- saving measure. If the river goes above 1.26m then it will sound an alarm and the gauge will be updated manually. The main problem with this method is that at 1.26m farmland, gardens, and the road in West Milton flood and homes are nearby. The river rises and falls very quickly. It would help if the gauge could update in real time when there is a weather warning issued rather than waiting for the measure to reach the relevant alert gauge. Margaret is trying to get the EA to bring forward installation of a new flood gauge.

- **Edward Morello**

As well as his comments and questions to Andy, Edward:

1. Noted that he would like a fundamental restructuring of the water industry.
2. Asked to be kept updated on all river issues and said that multiple emails from constituents, though time-consuming, can be useful in lending weight and credibility to his work on any issue.
3. Mentioned a Pilot Project on salmon in the River Piddle.

- **NEXT MEETING AND AOB**

- Andy suggested, and we agreed, to invite someone from the Environment Agency to every meeting. **Andrew [action]** to contact Fiona White in the first place.
- We discussed the creation of a blueprint to help river groups starting on a river water quality monitoring programme. **Andrew [action]** to contact Simon Browning in the first place.
- We discussed and agreed the idea of a future presentation/report to set out some of the complexities of CROWD rivers (including geomorphology, types of farming, septic tank use, monitoring points, location of WW assets, etc.). Andy offered to support with maps and data. The hope would be to bring ourselves (including especially Edward) up to date with the situation on the ground in our area.

Next meeting: Friday 11th April, 11am – 1pm. Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall (**Andrew [action]**)