

Yealmpton Environment Group

Notes of meeting 13th March 2024, Parish Room, Bakery Square

Present: Sheila Barton, Linda Durman, Tony Hawkins, Jane Pennington, Charles Weston-Baker

1. Apologies: Jen Fox, Sheila Melot

2. January meeting notes agreed.

3. Matters arising

Annual report; for information. Submitted to Parish Council at March meeting.

4. Budget

Chairman of Parish Council has confirmed that he prefers the term 'Parish Council grant' to 'Section 106'.
Proposals for 2024/5 budget to be reviewed at next meeting.

2024/5 budget: RYWQG request to riparian parish councils for £595.00 per parish, the annual running costs of water quality monitoring £120 and £475 per parish for River Fly Survey to survey aquatic invertebrate diversity = £595 total, approved at Yealmpton Parish Council meeting 11th March 2024.

Charles and Linda to meet the Parish Clerk next week on 21st re any specific audit requirements.

5. Active travel.

Gemma Bristow (Active Travel Officer, South Hams) met with Y2P during a Teams meeting so that she could explain the 29 priority cycling routes in South Hams routes proposed by the LCWIP consultants. Y2P subsequently submitted comments (attached). These comments may or may not be taken into account. A final proposal from the consultants will be subject to consultation in April/May (details to follow).

6. River Yealm water quality

Citizen Science Investigation (CSI) of water quality

- TH and JP presented findings from our first year's sampling to Saltram Rotary On 12 March 2024
- Our first annual "Dippers" report was circulated, including through RYWQG to all riparian PCs, on 07 March 2024, soon to be available on the YEM website, with associated Facebook announcements.

Continuous water monitor (CWM)

- An annual report of first year's findings has been commissioned from WRT for the end of March 2024.
- The pH probe is malfunctioning, about to be sent back to the suppliers under warranty.

Pollution response team

- Towards quantifying the bacteria *Escherichia coli* and other enterococci, YEM is collaborating with WRT, WATER and Friends of the Dart re trialling the MolEndo kit manufactured in Brixham as an alternative to the Aquagenx MPN kit.
- Advice is being sought re outdoors wildlife cameras approved by RYWQG to monitor our river in real time.
- JP convened a meeting on 07 March 2024 in response to an invitation from Rob Price of the EA (Catchment Coordinator - Tamar Management Catchment) to discuss the River Piall following recent ongoing evidence of kaolin-like pollution there. The meeting was attended by representatives from YEG, the RYWQG, YEM and Snowbee International. We were advised that (i) recent incidents on the Piall have been within limits for discharge licences held by China clay workings; (ii) it can take several years to prepare for any prosecution by the EA, such that we need to be patient with regard to any possible action in response to the serious incident of December 2022; (iii) the EA are aware

of enhanced phosphate, and will be paying requisite attention to possible sources in the near future; and (iv) the EA would welcome our help with more detailed monitoring of the Pfall.

Ecological impacts associated with water pollution

- TH met with PML on 5 March 2024 to discuss a project proposal to investigate hydrodynamic flow to, from and within our estuary, plus how pollutant inputs to our river are dispersed, impacting estuarine biogeochemistry.
- JP and TH have submitted an application through the RYWQG to each Parish Council for funds to pay for analyses of future RiverFly samples planned by local CSI volunteers.
- We continue to be engaged with monitoring, consultation and planning on behalf of the River Yealm District Association, River Yealm Harbour Authority and/or Newton and Noss Parish Council with respect to potential environmental remediation work outside the former AkzoNobel paint-testing laboratory.

Additional representations, collaborations and partnerships

- TH hosted a meeting with representatives from the River Exe on 10 February 2024, who kindly shared valuable experience of projects mapping: (i) soil type, agricultural practice and surface water drainage throughout our catchment, towards targeted mitigation; and (ii) motorway road runoff throughout our catchment, towards mitigating schemes that will help cleanse that runoff before it enters our river.
- To help inform future targeted mitigation, YEM is in discussion with the EA re a scoping study towards mapping soil type, agricultural practice and surface water drainage throughout our catchment,
- TH has convened a meeting with representatives from the River Ottery in Tamar Catchment on 21 March 2024, towards sharing knowledge and experiences.
- TH has been invited to advise Friends of the River Exe on the continuous water monitor at meeting on 22 March 2024, organised by WRT.
- Plans are being drawn up to act upon emerging areas of concern relating to water quality within our catchment, as have been identified from our first year's measures from the CSI. This will be done primarily through the River Yealm Catchment Co-ordination Partnership (RYCCP), chaired by the Environment Agency, working with the Westcountry Rivers Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Natural England, Yealm Estuary Management Group, South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, South West Water, South Hams District Council and others. By sharing our findings through this Partnership, we intend to help focus appropriate monitoring, regulation and remediation, drawing upon existing schemes and collaborative grant proposals.
- RYWQG is in ongoing dialogue with interested organisations regarding how SWW, other water companies and the Environment Agency are refusing to share flow data for combined sewage overflows, supported by the Information Commissioner, in what appears as concerted action to withhold quantitative information that would enable estimation of the true scale of pollution from CSO discharges nationwide. To date, one organisation has stated they will feature this case in communications and campaigning.

Yealm catchment plan

The first step towards a catchment plan will be a YEM open meeting on Saturday 16th March at YCA. This may lead to projects that:

- map soil type, agricultural practice and surface water drainage throughout our catchment, towards targeted mitigation; and
- map motorway road runoff throughout our catchment, towards mitigating schemes that will help cleanse that runoff before it enters our river.

7. Trees.

300 seeds collected locally on Tree seed Sunday have started to put down roots in our tree nursery at Kitley woodland and 17 of the 50 elm tree cuttings have taken. Planning consent still awaited for Veterans Outdoors joint working but applications for funding are going ahead.

Worston Mill planting of 1500 trees will take place 20th March 2024 with Plymouth & South Devon Community Forest, Parklife and volunteers. Ewells Wood planting of 5000 trees will take place in the autumn, with Plymouth & South Devon Community Forest.

Milizac and Stray Park orchards are doing well.

Additional tree/hedgerow planting will be planned for the autumn to improve screening from the sewage treatment plant from nearby tracks and footpaths.

8. Biodiversity

A level students from Ivybridge Community College have made four visits to Ruby's Wood for their project work so far.

Bird and bat surveys are planned during the months April to July.

The Yealmpton Tidy Village initiative led by the Parish Council intends to use herbicides 'when necessary'. Plans are in process for non-farming landowners to be invited to a meeting on 8th May with three talks on:

- species rich grassland
- support for changing practices
- grants available and help with applications.

This is primarily aimed at NFL's with riparian fields to the Yealm and the Erme, so that run off can be ameliorated. 30-40% of the Yealm catchment (land) is not farmed. There are many sources of advice and grant funding for farmed land.

9. Soil

We may stage a talk on soil for the community. Possibly a joint project with YAGA.

Linda noted that the recent talk on 'Springtails to Pauropods' was enlightening about soil invertebrates.

There do not seem to be accepted standards relating invertebrate presence or density to soil quality, in the same way there are for river water.

10. Invasive species

Himalayan Balsam growth along the river is a significant problem in some patches of land beside the river. It has been shown that this can be dealt with effectively by pulling the plants up by the roots in an organised and concerted manner from mid May to September. Charles and two experts plan to walk the length of the Yealm (12 miles) on 8, 9, and 10 April to map areas of concern for submission to a national database.

11. Mental health gain.

There have been many studies showing that outdoor activity working with nature, has a beneficial effect on mental health. We are interested to know whether this is true of the work of our volunteers in particular. Linda recommends use (where practical) of a short validated questionnaire to be tried so we have confidence claiming this benefit in grant applications. Jane agreed to consider an adaptation of the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale for use with some RiverFly volunteers.

10. Next meeting.

Wednesday 12th June 7—9pm Parish Room