

STEART FORUM
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2018
AT HILL HOUSE CHRISTIAN CENTRE

1. PRESENT:

Barry Leathwood (Chairman), Dick Best, Phil Brewin, Andy Darch, Phil Edwards, Andrew Guilding, Susan Jones, Alys Lambert, Colin Leppard, John Sivyver, and Aly Prowse (Admin).
The Chairman welcomed Colin Passmore to his first meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from John Chaplin, Simon Clarke, Vanessa Dare, Richard Foyle, Anne Hayes, Alys Laver, Sarah Littler, Steve Mewes, Julie Pay and Mark Ward.

3. APPROVE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 13.6.18:

The minutes of the meeting held on 13.6.18 were approved.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING:

a) Minute 4.1 - Great Crested Newts (GCN)

i A.Lambert said the NE survey results have still not been received. However, P.Brewin said the eDNA testing had been done with negative results. P.Brewin said there are practical things that can be done and we should think broadly about the GCN on the Peninsula, the population as a whole and what would be most productive; this could include pond management, receiving ponds, fencing etc to improve the habitat.

C.Leppard said the most logical thing to do is to encourage GCN in suitable habitat already in existence. A.Lambert suggested another meeting should be held with NE, EA (including Kevin House), WWT and P.Brewin. **Action: A.Lambert**

ii C.Passmore expressed his dismay that £250k had been spent on creating ponds and then the GCN were not put in them. P.Brewin stated that this was because some of them were diseased. C.Leppard suggested we now need to look forward but ensure we learn the lessons of the past and make improvements within the licensing procedures.

b) Minute 6 - WWT Steart Marshes Strategic Policy

In the absence of A.Laver, this action is ongoing. **Action: A.Laver**

c) Minute 9 - Country Wall EA Inspection Programme

i A.Lambert reported that this was last inspected in March 2018. The EA is not maintaining the defences but it is keeping the situation under review. There is an agreement that in emergency circumstances, the EA and The Bristol Port Company (TBPC) would act as necessary.

ii C.Passmore said the situation is a matter of serious concern as the defences to the west end of Country Wall are extremely weak. This was echoed by A.Guilding and he is disappointed by the EA's position. It is A.Lambert's understanding that the defences are not protecting any property. C.Passmore said there are 2 properties at Marsh Farm and in addition, stock and all of Lower Otterhampton are at risk. He is concerned that the responsibility of Country Wall is falling between the two agencies whilst awaiting TBPC Scheme to proceed. WWT would also be vulnerable to flooding if the defences are breached and J.Sivyver mentioned the impact to the Somerset Coastal Path. It was agreed that a letter will be sent to J.Chaplin from the Forum expressing the deep concerns and views of the stakeholders. **Action: A.Prowse.** In addition, A.Guilding will again speak with TBPC's Agent. **Action: A.Guilding.**

- d) Minute 10 – Availability of the Annual Monitoring Report 2016/17
A.Lambert said there will not be a report for 2016/17. Some aspects are continuing from the 2015/16 report such as ground water monitoring.
- e) Minute 11 – Highways signage at Steart and Otterhampton
- i Highways are hoping to erect the outstanding signage at the end of October/November 2018.
 - ii J.Sivyer is unhappy that some of the passing places between the WWT main car park and the Hinkley Point road have deteriorated badly. It would appear that none of the agencies will take responsibility for repairs, which had not been identified when the scheme was proposed. D.Best advised that the EA refurbished the existing passing places and created some new ones. He suggested that the EA should carry out some further works. A.Lambert said it is highly unlikely that the EA would undertake this. C.Passmore asked if the onus should be on WWT as it is the Scheme that is creating all the traffic. J.Sivyer said once again, we have another serious issue affecting local residents where it would appear we are unable to hold those responsible to account.
 - iii A.Prowse said it will be important to address these issues, particularly ongoing maintenance if/when TBPC Scheme goes ahead; access and maintenance of the roads should be a planning consideration. Nb the planning application will most likely be from West Somerset Council.
 - iv C.Passmore asked if there are any safety improvements planned for Biffens Corner. A.Prowse advised that the parish council has been pursuing this with SCC for some time. There will be some additional signage erected and it is hoped that the 50mph speed limit will have an impact. Previous conversations with the homeowner on the corner have not been fruitful, but A.Prowse will approach him again to ask if he may reconsider. **Action: A.Prowse**
- f) Minute 12 – “Slow Somerset”. Steart Residents’ Group (SRG) to arrange a meeting to discuss. The SRG has invited Otterhampton residents to the meeting as they perhaps are most affected by all the traffic to and from WWT Steart Marshes. The meeting is likely to be held in mid-December.

5. WATER MANAGEMENT AT STEART PENINSULA:

1. Water level data
P.Brewin said work is now complete on the network of the 4 loggers across the peninsula that are recording data which is pertinent to the Parrett Drainage Board’s operation. The work was funded by the EA as a planning condition. Based on the output, the Drainage Board is building a knowledge of the optimum high/low levels to set the alarms. The water levels are measured every 15 minutes. The Drainage Board will work in conjunction with WWT to make the correct operational decisions regarding the water levels.
2. Steart borehole project proposal
 - i P.Brewin outlined the borehole proposal, an isolated system that aims to restore the wet ditch (rhyne) system of the northern end of the Steart peninsula that became disrupted after the creation of the WWT Steart Marshes in 2014. Water flow into the wet ditch system is reduced to rainfall only. A small sub group from the Forum will drive the project forward.
 - ii A funding application for £8k to fund a feasibility study has been submitted to the Somerset Catchment Grant Scheme 2018. The feasibility study will include exploring the optimal location for a borehole and the likely availability of groundwater at various depths and its quality; for example, if only able to find salt water, the project would not be viable. The objectives of the borehole

include the restoration of freshwater coastal grazing marsh; to reverse the deterioration in the wildlife value of freshwater wetland habitats and restore 64ha of SSSI to favourable condition; improved stock management via fencing and higher summer water levels; higher summer water levels and improved water quality will restore wetland habitat quality and help sustain functional ditch ecosystems. A more sustained flow from the ditch system will also wash silt from the outfall thus help prevent the outfall from becoming blocked (which needs to be dug out 3 times per year). This will provide a modest benefit to flood risk management.

- iii Phil said the project scored well against the criteria and we should hear shortly if we are successful. Once the feasibility study has been completed we will be able to assess the possibilities, practicalities and hopefully be able to develop the project further with our partners. P.Edwards said P.Brewin had worked very hard on this project and proposed a formal vote of thanks. A meeting of the sub group will be arranged soon. P.Brewin would also like to have a walk around the area to better understand the geography.

6. STAKEHOLDER UPDATES:

Susan Jones said progress on the Stolford flood defence scheme had been halted due to a procurement issue. The projected finish date is now November 2018. She said the Natural England information panel has been removed and hopes that it will be reinstated once the works are complete.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

There was no other business

8. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING:

The date and time of the next meeting will be on Wednesday 12 December 2018, 2.30pm - 4.30pm at Hill House Christian Centre.

The meeting ended at 4.25pm