

Lower Otter Restoration Project

Liaison Group meeting

Tuesday 1 March 2022 – 1.30pm to 3.00pm

Meeting notes and actions

Attendees: Cllr Tom Wright (chair), Bridget Beer (notes), Mike Williams EA, Dan Boswell EA, Sam Bridgewater CDE, Kate Ponting CDE, Tony Bracey Kier, Richard Bell Frogmore Road, Haylor Lass OVA, Geoff Porter OVA, Cllr Derek Wensley, Cllr Geoff Jung, Cllr John Hiles, Mayor Roger Sherriff, Alison Slade NE, Megan Rimmer EA, Sam Scriven Jurassic, Darren Davis Kier, Cllr Alan Dent, James Chubb EDDC, Sarah Holland EA guest, Gareth Townsend NE, Fiona Anderson EA guest, Stacey Fairbrother EA guest, Jo Reeves EA guest, Jayne Johnson Kier, Bernard Biel Kier, and Charlie Smith EA

Apologies: Peter Burgess DWT, Helen Booker RSPB, Nick Pyne tenant, Cllr Christine Channon, Cllr Jessica Bailey, Bill Roper BSCC, Sam Jeffcoat DCC, Mark Rice EA, Clare James CDE, Kendal Archer CDE, Lorna Sherriff SW Coast Path, Chris Woodruff AONB and Jim Pyne tenant

Welcome

Tom welcomed everyone to the meeting on St David's Day noting there had been less public comment about LORP recently while the project had cleared the site.

Construction site progress

Kier's project manager Darren Davis gave an overview of the current site work, including a step by step explanation of the how the concrete piling for the bridge piers is being carried out (see pic at end of notes), and what will happen next on site. In response to a question from James Chubb relating to breeding birds it was clarified that the only vegetation left is 30cm height with this left only where there was a danger of the area supporting hibernating dormice. A second stage cut of the remaining 30cm long vegetation to ground level will be made in April/May and the team continues to take the utmost care to reduce impacts on wildlife.

Presentation attached for information.

Wildlife and trees

Sam Bridgewater outlined the careful and considered approach the LORP team is taking in respect of wildlife 'It is not possible to have a site where more care could be taken.' He confirmed that the felled black poplar tree is being propagated for replanting in the Otter Valley. The galingale and divided sedge will be moved to another location next week.

In response to Alison Slade's query Sam confirmed that the relevant species records are being kept. Presentation attached.

Mike Williams confirmed that the compensatory planting and landscaping will follow as per the planning approval.

Western Footpath update

Megan Rimmer outlined the planning amendment submission due to be made in early April for the Western Footpath. Presentation attached.

Tom is keen to celebrate this route when it is complete as it will be welcomed by local residents. **ACTION: Megan/Bridget** to discuss with Tom nearer the time.

Small craft on tidal waters

CDE is seeking legal advice and input from EDDC re minimising the risk that future public access at the site will adversely affect the new inter-tidal habitat and wading birds expected to use it. Access by foot and with dogs was noted, as was the potential legal right of navigation in tidal waters. Recreational access by small craft currently occurs in the existing Otter Estuary SSSI although the available footprint is small.

Tom flagged concerns about kite surfers although suggestions of a barrier at the embankment breach are not considered possible due to risks of blocking, stress on the structure and additional maintenance. OVA also voiced its concern via Geoff P.

Sam confirmed LORP intends to keep the landscape as natural as possible and hopes the issue can be managed with local byelaws and declaration of the area as a Local Nature Reserve, as well as by 'designing out access', through signage and through a dedicated ranger.

Geoff Jung expressed his support of the LNR approach.

ACTION: Sam to confirm when the ranger will start (question from Alison Slade) and to continue discussions with EDDC.

LORP scheme maintenance

Tom thanked Dan for a very clear explanation of the various roles and responsibilities of the organisations and landowner. Dan's presentation attached.

Richard Bell also thanked Dan for the very clear and helpful information, although he expressed his concerns about whether there was enough budget for those responsibilities.

Richard then flagged his worry that the footpath along the River Otter will be damaged by erosion without riparian owner (CDE) action.

Geoff Jung asked whether riparian responsibilities exist in tidal waters. **Response provided post-meeting –** Yes they do, it does not matter whether the water is tidal or not. CDE owns the beach and the estuary.

Sam confirmed that the long-term future and maintenance of the footpaths adjacent to the River Otter (most not along an embankment) is an issue that does need much greater discussion and awareness from the public. Expectations do need to be

managed over the coming years/decades. However, LORP will not be able to fix this, and never could. Care needs to be taken not to conflate two separate issues: 1 the best way to look after rivers for habitat and wildlife, and 2 maintaining access along a footpath.

Haylor Lass echoed Sam's response on behalf of the Otter Valley Association.

Education and engagement

Kate Ponting provided a run through of the great work she is leading with local schools and other groups, plus responses to public and attending local council meetings to raise awareness of LORP and its overarching Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts work. Group members are encouraged to make requests for LORP site walks and talks via Kate. Presentation attached.

Tom recognised that PR is vital, and Geoff J said PACCo/LORP/Pebblebed Heaths Trust and CDE all get mixed up, although the BBC Countryfile programme was brilliant PR (and for Otterton Mill!)

Q&As

Questions and answers flowed during the meeting. A final question came from Richard Bell requesting an EA report for the Oct 21 flood, outstanding from the last Liaison Group meeting. **ACTION: Bridget** to chase up the report for Richard.

John Hiles requested LORP attendance at Otterton Village Open Day 19 March. **ACTION: Bridget** to respond.

Summary and close

Tom thanked all the speakers for their very clear presentations and responses to questions during the very interesting meeting. Next meeting date and venue to follow.

