

**Minutes of 12th Water Basin Management Forum 1st March 2006
Minstead Training Centre**

Present:

Dr Alan Drinkwater Chairman

Partners

Bruce Rothnie	Forestry Commission
Grace Ford	FC Forum Secretary
Kevin Penfold	Forestry Commission
Simon Weymouth	Forestry Commission
Emma Parry	Work Placement Student
Jonathan Mycock	Hampshire County Council
Issy Whatmore	Hampshire County Council
Maxine Elliott	Environment Agency
Carrie Temple	RSPB
Doug England	The National Trust
Phil Marshall	The National Trust

Members

Richard Stride	Commoners Defence Association
Billy Howells	Commoners Defence Association
Terry Langford	Southampton University
Peter Frost	Amenity Verderer
Joan Chessell	Brockenhurst Manor Fly Fishing
Jenni Tubbs	New Forest Association
John Durnell	Hampshire & IOW Wildlife Trust
John Thackrey	Ramblers Association
Dr David Sear	Southampton University

Apologies Received: Jane Smith, Mike Abraham, Harry Oram, Richard Burke, Neil Sanderson and Chris Elliott.

Minutes of the last meeting held on the 9th November 2005 were agreed.

Plans

1) New Forest Wetland Management Plan Outcomes

Jane Smith has finalised a draft 10 year Wetland Management Plan (2006-2016). The structure is very comprehensive and divided into the following five parts:

- Pt 1 Background data
- Pt 2 Historic setting
- Pt 3 Catchment characteristics
- Pt 4 Practitioners Guide on Future Works/Restoration Techniques/Works Achieved
- Pt 5 Case Studies of Project Examples & Cost Menus

BR invited all forum members to make comment on the draft plan. If necessary Jane Smith will be available for people to visit her at Queens House to view and discuss the document in more detail. Members who requested a copy of the Management Plan would have a draft forwarded onto them.



2) Summary of feedback & amendments- Forum Discussions

The Forum were asked to feedback their comments of the future works maps and thoughts on areas highlighted in blue and green for priority, circulated with the summary paper of the New Forest Wetland Management Plan.

Peter Frost asked if any consideration had been given to land in private ownership on the forest and not under management of the FC.

Simon Weymouth confirmed that English Nature engage with other landowners on the forest through their SSSI site management statements. They require the same standard of condition between the landowner as would be placed on the FC.

Had the principles of the Water Framework Directive been incorporated?

BR confirmed that these principles are laid out within the management plan but are addressed more specifically through the Environment Agency Catchment Abstraction Management Plans (CAM's) which are covered within a regional context for the New Forest, South West and Sussex regions.

Terry Langford requested for the management plan to identify but not alter '**characteristic pristine forest streams**'. He recommended that a geomorph survey would help to establish the exact locations where unique stream features such as sinuosity should be retained (as seen on the Highlands Water). .

John Durnell is happy that streams within Inclosures are worked in tandem with the FC's working blocks programme, but how would the restoration of streams outside of the Inclosure boundaries be programmed?

Kevin Penfold confirmed that the FC did have a requirement to put SSSI habitats back to favourable condition by 2010. Therefore, the Forestry Commission will be directing core funds towards these priority habitats but areas outside Inclosures would be dependent upon future funding.

Peter Frost mentioned that the Forest Design Plan process is incorporating aspects of river restoration, including the removal of streamside conifers, so it seems to provide a logical process if the two programmes work together, particularly as the costing of these works are now known.

Terry Langford felt that it would not be necessary to restore all channels since some have shown to 'self-correct'. Maxine Elliott referred to the 1996 River Corridor Survey Report of which the geomorph baseline survey data did prove this to be correct.

John Thackray aired concerns that the project has made a single focus towards 'favourable status' and whilst these conservation works have brought value to the forest habitats these environmental objectives do not always bring benefit to recreational users. He would like some recommendations placed within the final report that describe how users have benefited from the restoration works.





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Peter Frost denied John's claims and felt that access on foot is the 'best ever' in the New Forest and that yes; some areas have become wetter as a result of Life 3 works but this has actually enabled the forest to maintain 'wilderness sites'. From a positive viewpoint these works have improved access with the installation of the Irish Ford at Ferny Knapp. However, visitors also need to recognise that the New Forest is a (RAMSAR) site therefore to assume these characteristics it will portray wetland habitats. Terry Langford felt that 'wilderness areas' should be retained and measures implemented to prevent use of inappropriate equipment being used in sensitive areas.

John Durnell suggested producing a Best Practice Guide in recognition of the recreational uses and interests of all sites. Maxine Elliott suggested that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) prepared for the project does cover the 'best practice' philosophy. This takes a transparent view of the project objectives and the derived impacts which hope to benefit nature conservation without causing negative changes.

Phil Marshall felt that if access is restricted then this could be viewed as 'diminishing the value of the works' if they are not able to be observed either.

From a commoning perspective Richard Stride and Billy Howells are content with access provision along tracks and passageways. It may be that some Life 3 works will deflect people to other areas.

3) Invite statement of support

BR asked individual members if they would be happy to provide a short statement of support about the work of the project and the principles of future restoration work outlined in the management plans. This would provide a longer-term legacy of the Forum's involvement in the project. Members were asked to provide these statements by the end of April.

4) Next Steps 'How partners proceed with future works'

Many of the Life 3 project achievements are a direct result of the 'consultation' process held with the Water Basin Forum stakeholders. The FC have appreciated the dialogue with stakeholders and wishes to continue this process with the WBMF through an annual meeting and site tour to view sites post restoration. Simon Weymouth would continue to lead on further consultations and site visits to explain further work planned after the project.

Views on this process were supported by all the Forum. Peter Frost described the achievements of the FC/EA as the "most exciting" thing since the FDP. Terry Langford also supported this claim saying that it had been an "excellent consultation process".

Jenni Tubbs raised concerns on how future consultations would take place without funding and whether a group of people could collate a funding bid to support the next phase as pointed out - it is harder to deliver a plan without a dedicated team.

BR mentioned that the FC are pursuing Heritage Lottery Funding and if successful this money will be used to identify how we can 'deliver' further habitat restoration work but related to a more holistic view of social and economic interests and particularly how commoning could be made sustainable. Terry Langford proposed that the UK government should be playing a role and





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proposed that the newly formed New Forest National Park Authority might have a future interest to fund this.

In conclusion Alan Drinkwater asked the WBMF members to make comments on any other areas that should be marked as priority on Jane Smith's work plan maps. The forum were also asked to provide a Statement of Support for the Wetland Management Plan. It is proposed to include this with the final copy which will be received by the EU.

Action: All Members & Project Partners to submit comments to Jane during April. .

John Thackray expressed his thanks on behalf of the Ramblers Association for the walks led by Maxine and Simon to Life 3 sites which had 'improved understanding' and was supportive of this process continuing. JT requested some slide images of post restoration works to give a positive contrast with the pre-restoration state for his slide shows and talks to fellow rambler groups.

Work Programmes

Environment Agency

ME reported that the EA would be returning to all four sites this summer to carry out remedial works. Commencing with works on Highland Water from the 15th May proposed works will comprise:

- at the lower end: placing larger aggregate in the stream to protect the revetment and prevent 'undermining'.
- at the Ford crossing point on the Open Forest: Adding smaller fines just below the flume to help lock the larger aggregates together and reduce mobility of the material.

The EA then plan to progress onto the Blackensford a week later (proposed start date 22nd May). ME reported that the system has held up well this winter, the only exception being the eastern tributary on the Open Forest near the footbridge where plans are to raise the bed level, probably with the use of more formal structure (eg log weirs). Also within the Inclosure on two Ford crossing point approaches, there has been some collapse of material. This will be re-compacted. Further down-stream (below the archaeological site) some of the river flow is by-passing the new channel by flowing through a herringbone drain into the channelised course. This will be rectified.

Dames Slough only requires some minor in-fills at clay plugs. The majority of works (likely to be in the order of 6-8 weeks) will then focus on Rhinefield. Main works will concentrate on the downstream overspill weir, down-stream of the "snail" meander. A double channel will be left open as modelling work has indicated total in-fill would flood the road (Rhinefield Ornamental Drive). This section will be raised by approx 300mm throughout down-stream to the confluence, and beyond the confluence the bed levels will be tapered to match existing bed levels (some 260m down-stream of the bridge).

Surveys/Monitoring

The EA teams will be completing invertebrate surveys and analysing data and will have reports published by end of June / early July this year. The fish surveys will be carried out at the same time as original survey in May. The physical topographical cross sections of the new planform will



be digitised and all the geomorph/topo surveys, which were being researched by Southampton University PhD students, will be finalised by the end of June. ME has put forward some proposals with her Area Management team within the EA to extend the hydrological works so that the data set can be improved.

Jonathan Mycock asked what national interest EA's restoration works had generated. ME explained that there has been a lot of interest generated internally, with visits from wider Agency team (eg the water resources and biodiversity teams from Environment Agency Head Office). This has been largely in response to internal PR work, particularly use of the Intranet & internal magazines, to publicise the project.

Terry Langford believes that longer term monitoring would be 'valuable' for the restored areas. David Sear recommended continuing a partnership approach to monitoring as this would bring strong international interest, he is already aware of an emerging interest in River Restoration projects from the following countries: USA, Europe and Scotland. Jenni Tubbs made a suggestion for a 'research team' to be developed which the National Park Authority could be involved with.

Richard Stride would like the Commoners Defence Association to be informed about the exact works to be carried out in Blackensford. In response to Billy Howells question with the exception of Rhinefield where a clay plug washed through remaining sites had withstood the wet winter rainfall. Peter Frost asked if the survey work would annotate any changes to the vegetation patterns within Inclosures where grazing is dependent. The original baseline geomorph surveys did include some vegetation data, but the EA's objectives to the bid are the water issues rather than vegetation habitats. Simon Weymouth did inform the forum that the Hampshire Bio Survey Assessment took place in Highlands Water and Blackensford and Tim Holzer conducted this. But it was agreed that there would be huge variations now in Dames Slough. Peter Frost asked if any complaints had been received about the deer pens and the over engineered snail meander? ME agreed that the "snail meander" could have been done better, but the EA expects that the system will adjust in time and natural gravel deposits will sort the process.

Forestry Commission

The A&O holly pollards have been carried out over the winter. The FC have commissioned an entomologist Dr Jonty Denton to commission a report into the grazing regimes for Wootton and Holmsley as these areas are also renowned for a species of purple bordered fritillary.

Whitemoor and Bratley Arch Mire Restoration Plans

The intentions for both sites are to recover areas from old drainage systems, which have led to the degradation of the mire and wet heath with appearance of returning grassland. Jenni Tubbs is not opposed to the works at Whitemoor but wondered if some areas would be self-restoring in time, so are the work proposals really necessary? Simon Weymouth agreed in principle, but because these sites were placed in the original Life 3 bid the FC has a commitment to carry out these works.

Action : SW to arrange a site visit for WBMF members.



Bratley

These works will remedy the reduced water table. Simon Weymouth referred to Area 4 which has become unfavourable from a stock crossing point causing erosion to the peat but this could also be classed as a natural feature so there is an argument for leaving it out of the plan.

Peter Frost is concerned that by re-aligning the fences at Wootton the BAP species and botanical interests may disappear, if grazed by commoning stock. John Durnell mentioned that if grazing was permitted this would be important for preventing succession to woodland and would retain the acid grassland.

Future works involve

- monitoring of photographic imagery,
- GIS mapping against the original project objectives
- Re-classifying habitats – Jane Smith and Emma Parry to carry out through mapping and photographic imagery.

Peter Frost asked why thin strips of conifer have been left standing in Highlands Water and Sluffers as from a visual perspective the trees screen out the restoration works. FC explained that this was in-keeping with the Forest Design Plans but also through retention of some trees it helps to minimise the amount of bracken management required which FC favours as there is a limited budget to deal with its re-growth.

National Trust

Doug England updated the Forum on work site achievements; all the Coppicing at Dockens has been completed along the 1.2km stretch. At Newlands Plantation 17ha of conifer plantation is now removed. Overall three core habitats have been targeted: 8ha mire, Riverine/bog woodland and 15km stream corridor. The NT hopes to carry out survey monitoring every three years. Peter Frost remarked that the progress has been “superb”. DE confirmed that the Life 3 interpretation boards would stay on site for a period of time after the project. The site has been heralded as “the most important site of nature conservation owned by the National Trust”. The remaining conifers would be felled in conjunction with the timings of the FDP and although there will be some logistical problems for access the NT do favour removal. Peter Frost felt that this was a good example of ‘enhancement’ from a previous ‘blot on the landscape’.

Consultation/Information

BR proposed a final site tour this year on 9th May 2006- please keep this date free in your diary, details to follow.

End of Project Events

The signing off event for the Life 3 project will be held at New Park Manor Hotel on Friday 2nd June 2006 in attendance will be representatives from each of the partner organisations including

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guest speakers. This group will join the public event at 2pm in Blackwater Arboretum and Forum members would be most welcome to come and give assistance with Guided Public Walks between 11.30am-1pm and be present for a formal 'Thank You' from Chris Packham. The Forum were advised on the content of the proposed Technical Conference to be held on the 13/14th June. A full programme would be published in two weeks time and this event will be free for delegates to attend. David Sear would supply Southampton University's interpretation boards of Highlands Water to have on display at this event.

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Communications Events

The Hampshire Water Festival will be held in Romsey this year. The fifth Project newsletter will be published shortly and a final version is to be published in July. A layman's non-technical booklet will also be produced. The project video will be completed in May. Issy hopes to publish an article about the Life project in British Wildlife Magazine. A future host for the Life 3 website needs to be decided.

The Chartered Institute Water Environmental Management (CIWEM) Living World Wetlands Event in 2006 is now fully subscribed. The partnership did submit an application for the Living Wetlands Award this year but this was not successful, another application will be put forward for next year. A discussion about where documentation relating to the project could be stored or archived for future records was held. David Sear and Terry Langford are intending to produce a technical journal about the Life 3 project. Jenni Tubbs felt that data could be stored at the New Forest Museum reference Library or the Hampshire Records Office in Winchester. The EU contract requires all data to be kept for a period of 6 years after the project; the website might be a suitable medium although it would require someone to host the site in future suggestions for the National Park Authority were made. Terry Langford also advised that the University have plenty of storage space for archives and it could be worth storing material in digital and electronic formats. .

Life 3 Achievements

Jonathan Mycock outlined the areas which the Life 3 project has set out to achieve.

The overall objective of the Life 3 project has been to restore 600ha of habitat and bring regeneration, integration and develop sustainable restoration of wetland habitats. From information submitted in the 3rd Progress report to the EU last November the following actions had been achieved: (see presentation slide).

Works Remaining

All practical works need to be completed by July this year. The bid does allow for some 'contingency time' if time runs out.

- Surveying of work sites
- Wetland Management Plan
- Site Condition Assessments to be signed off by English Nature that agree to habitats showing favourable as opposed to unfavourable status as a result of Life 3 works.
- Communications Team has to submit a layman's report.
- Technical and Financial report to be submitted by end of November to EC.





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Benefits of Life 3

- Exhibited good practice of partnership working, bringing in the Environment Agency.
- Establishment of Water Basin Management Forum
- Practical river restoration techniques have been tested.
- 10 Year Implementation plan for future works
- Continuation under the Rural Pathfinder
- £2.9 budget has benefited the local economy
- Potential flood alleviation scheme

Stephen Trotter- 'Sustainability & Development Officer' National Park Authority
Inspired by Life 3 work and will take away points on areas where the NPA can support or secure money for future education. The Authority intends to listen to the Commoning community and future sustainability on grazing issues. Planning

Meeting Closure

Alan Drinkwater thanked all the members for their 'enthusiasm and participation' in the project and although this marked the last formal meeting, the annual review would allow for future consultation and involvement.

