

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

Notes and action points from the meeting of 22nd September in Wootton Fitzpaine.

Attending:

- **River Char (River Char Community Project, RCCP):** Andrew Carey
- **River Char (Lower Char Community Project, LCCP):** Dana Assinder
- **Winniford River (Winniford River Action Group, WRAG):** Lee Ramsden, Paul Ramsden
- **River Mangerton (River monitor):** Margaret Morgan-Grenville
- **River Asker (Riverfly Testing coordinator):** Howard Atkinson
- **River Asker (River Asker Project):** Geoff May
- **River Brit (Upper River):** Rosemary Rychnovsky
- **River Brit (Lower River):** Caroline Pearce
- **West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams (Catchment Officer):** Ian Rees
- **Litter Free Dorset:** Emma Teasdale
- Chris Loder MP
Harry Coutts (Constituency Assistant)
- **Wessex Water:** Andy Mears, Wastewater Engagement Manager

Apologies: **River Simene (Parish Councillor):** Steve Evans; **Winniford River (Winniford River Action Group, WRAG):** Peter Stapleton; **River Mangerton (River monitor):** Chuck Willmott

News from the Winniford:

- Paul and Lee gave a detailed report on *E. coli* testing on the Winniford and their engagement with Wessex Water. The overheads from their presentation [are on the CROWD webpage](#).
- They showed how bacterial testing can be used to pinpoint pollution sources and how it has allowed them to trace one source of bacterial contamination back to a leaking sewer pipe upstream. Wessex Water were notified and promptly repaired the leak, even though it wasn't theirs or their responsibility.
- We discussed the possibility of prosecution for such illegal discharges, which would be done via the EA. Most agreed that, where it was not deliberate or wilful, the key was to identify and eliminate sources of pollution.
- Asked about the *E. coli* spike at Pettycrate junction, Paul and Lee suggested several possible causes. Water quality testing again will help to identify the source of the pollution. But bacterial testing is expensive and this limits how much can be done and the duration of any testing programme.
- Ian noted that the EA is interested in the state of the Winniford and that **ACTION: Paul and Lee should feed back results to the EA as it might pick up on them.**

River testing in general:

- **For discussion in November:** Should all of us do similar testing on our own river and tributaries? Should pinpointing pollution hotspots and feeding this back to EA be a priority for CROWD?
- **Chemical testing for bacterial pollution.** A citizen scientist on the River Brit has been offered a demonstration lab. **ACTION: Ian to explore potential use amongst local river groups and report back to CROWD.**
- We discussed an example of community group action and subsequent government interest in the water quality of the **River Deben**. See the [Defra report on the R. Deben](#).
- **Ammonia testing.** Andy said that this is a useful adjunct to the CSI tests. It is a stable and reliable indicator of both human and animal effluent as well as byproduct of natural decay processes.

- Andy also noted the **Defra Consultation** on river water quality monitoring required by the Environment Act 2021. He said that 30,000 monitors will be required in the UK. The consultation reveals very high costs. **ACTION:** CROWD members to look at [the results of the consultation](#).

News from other rivers:

- Dana noted that South West Water had still not confirmed in writing its earlier agreement in principle to fund the clean-up of biobeads and nurdles at Charmouth in Spring 2024.

New Research:

- Howard summarised his two recent reports (both available on the CROWD webpage) on: 1) [Bathing water & beach safety](#) 2) [River phosphate and water quality](#). His report on beach safety highlights potential risks to human health in sand, shingle and sea debris (contamination may increase faster and be slower to dissipate than in the water). It's not clear which, if any, government agency is responsible for biohazards in the intertidal zone. Howard noted that Portugal is implementing sand monitoring for bacterial contamination to safeguard its tourist industry. There was discussion about Howard's proposals (see below).

ACTION: ALL to read Howard's [Bathing water & beach safety](#) report and decide in November whether:

a) to support his proposal that CROWD call on the Government to instruct the EA to extend its testing at designated bathing sites to include the intertidal zone.

b) to support his proposal to press for the Blue Flag System to be extended to include beach sand.

- In discussion about next steps, it was agreed: **ACTION:** Ian to talk to DCF about a pilot testing programme for contaminants in the intertidal zone.
- On river phosphate and water quality, Howard noted the distinction between phosphate and phosphorus. Andy said that sewage permits are issued for total phosphorus, and that the distinction can be confusing and misleading when it comes to water quality testing.
- It was agreed that water quality testing is a vital part of CROWD's work. Ian outlined how Riverfly testing is most useful to identify discrete pollution events whereas WRT CSI provides a baseline and records long-term trends. Both are valid approaches. We need to know who is doing what testing and where and compile this information into a CROWD resource, with an agreed and shared methodology. It was agreed that it would be useful to have a manual of best practice.
- The **Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative (CaSTCo)** model (listed on our webpage) was discussed. It is led by Simon Browning, The Rivers Trust. **ACTION:** Ian to invite Simon to present an overview of the CaSTCo model to CROWD, to coincide with his forthcoming visit to Bridport.
- **Agricultural pollution.** We discussed options for CROWD to work with FWAG through the Dorset Wild Rivers Project to pinpoint agricultural sources of pollution and get the EA involved on the Farming front. **ACTION:** Ian to discuss with FWAG.

News from Wessex Water:

- Reporting on our 'long list' of questions and other action points from May, Andy Mears said that a tracking document has been prepared and circulated to WW staff with our requests and he read extracts from it to the meeting. He noted that progress has been slow.
- **ACTION:** Andy Mears to share an electronic version of the tracking document with CROWD asap (he explained that this could not be before 15th November as he is busy until then).
- We discussed the **Chippenham rainwater separation** scheme. Andy said a report is due soon. Depending on the findings, a rainwater separation programme could be rolled out in the CROWD area. **ACTION:** Andy offered to share Chippenham findings with CROWD once the report is available.
- Andy discussed **Groundwater Infiltration** at Chideock and Seatown and **ACTION:** Andy offered to share a report on this subject when it's available.

- Help with obtaining **reliable water quality data** was and is CROWD's high priority request: Andy reported that WW can provide some test kits, and can arrange some laboratory analysis of samples. **ACTION: Andrew and Dana to discuss the logistics of this with AM.**
- **Charmouth Emergency overflow at Newlands Bridge PS.** Andy reported that a 6mm screen on the EO here may now be installed in October. Preparatory work to investigate rainwater separation at Newlands Holiday Park may now start this autumn. **ACTION: CROWD to ask for an update at our next meeting.**
- Allocation of priority funding for **CSO improvements** is constantly under review. WW's budget for improvements is £400 million. WW's CSO improvement target for 2025-30 started with 200 overflow improvements. This has been reduced to 130 (of its approx. 1,300 overflows). Andy said that half of these need a hydraulic improvement to meet EA21 targets. He also said that, within the WW region, 30 nature-based solutions are planned.
- **The maps** that CROWD had requested are available. **ACTION: Andy offered to email them to us.**
- **State of the Rivers Report:** **Action: Andy offered to send a follow-up note after the meeting.**
- **Quarterly reports:** Andy reported that these can be done, but progress has been very slow.
- Andy confirmed that, subject to final confirmation, improvements will take place by 2030 for the following CROWD area **CSOs**: Litton Cheney; Puncknowle; Charmouth sewage works; Chideock sewage works settlement tank; Seatown; Cerne Abbas.

News from Chris Loder MP:

- Chris reported that he and Andy Mears met WW's CEO, Colin Skellett, earlier in September. He reported a useful dialogue and that WW is doing a great deal of work in this field.
- Chris said Ofwat has changed the penalty regime for WASCs, and he feels the WASCs' regulators and government are pulling in the same direction to meet the new targets. He felt "the level of dialogue we have here is welcome and unusual." He didn't want targets to "drive perverse behaviour" – so we should be wary of being so target driven we don't do the best thing for the environment at large (e.g. if the only way to meet a mandated target is carbon hungry, Chris "would be happy to request flexibility around it".)
- Chris has challenged Defra on rainwater separation – he said it is mandated for new developments, but not always enacted. **ACTION: Andrew/Dana to ask Chris to push for Schedule 3 to be enacted.**
- Chris asked if recent BBC coverage [[BBC news report](#) and [Wessex Water's response](#)] on dry spills had been accurate. Andy suggested that the BBC chose their info to fit their brief and did not represent the complexity.
- Chris's meeting with EA in July has been postponed until late October. They will look at progress and key challenges, assess priorities and discuss funding issues. Chris asked for a list of CROWD issues that need to be escalated with EA. **ACTION: Andrew/Dana to email Chris that list.**
- Chris reported that he is supporting the improvements required for Church Cliff bathing water redesignation at Lyme Regis.

Other business:

- We did not have time to discuss the redrafted Aims and Focus for CROWD + Visibility and Publicity in Future and will cover this at the next Zoom meeting.
- Emma asked Chris about the single use plastics ban and said that Defra's information is unintelligible. **ACTION: Chris agreed to ask Defra colleagues to add clarity quickly.**
- **ACTION: Andrew/Dana to contact Andy in mid-October to prompt him for a meeting to discuss the further information requested from WW in recent months.**
- Next Zoom meeting – November 2023 (Doodle to choose dates sent 13th October)
- Next face-to-face meeting (including Chris Loder) Thursday 18th January 2024, 11-12.30, Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall.

13th October 2023