

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

Notes and action points from the meeting of 23rd June 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 (in lieu of Peter Stapleton)
- **River Mangerton (River monitor):** Chuck Willmott, Margaret Morgan-Grenville
- **River Asker (Riverfly Testing coordinator):** Howard Atkinson
- **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
Seth Dellow (Constituency Assistant)
- **Environment Agency** – Jim Flory
- **Wessex Water:** Andy Mears, Wastewater Engagement Manager

Apologies: **River Simene (Parish Councillor):** Steve Evans; **Winniford River (Winniford River Action Group, WRAG):** Peter Stapleton; **River Asker (River Asker Project):** Geoff May

News and Updates:

- **Lee Ramsden:** River Winniford: has been declared a rapid response catchment. Testing underway for bacterial contamination. The recent WRAG Report ([online here](#)) shows alarming results. Need to establish source of the contamination. **ACTION: WRAG to follow up with Wessex Water.**
- **Ian Rees** is working with John Philips, Environment Agency, on sediment loading in the Brit, primarily to relieve flooding by stopping clogged flood defences. They will be expanding this work to the Char and Winniford. Most sediment loading is related to land use / agricultural practice.
- **Dana Assinder:** Lower Char Community Project held its Charmouth Dragon River Festival on 27th May with parade, stalls and significant community engagement from the Primary School, Scouts, Beavers Heritage Coast Centre and others. [Campaign here](#) and [Festival details here](#).

Chris Loder:

- Has had several meetings with SWW focusing on the River Lim and Church Beach. *E.coli* findings in the Lim are much higher than expected, but not all necessarily due to human sewage.
- Mentioned the parliamentary debate on clean water, meetings with EA in Sydling St Nicholas, in Puddletown to discuss nutrient neutrality, and with Chideock PC to discuss River Winniford.
- Keen to learn of any specific blockers (from community, WW, EA) that need escalating.

Andy Mears, Wessex Water

- Upgraded screen at Newlands Bridge, Charmouth is due for completion August / Sept.
- Looking at formal CROWD requests from April meeting, will follow this up via email.
- No SP spills since early May. But Caroline reported two alerts in Bridport **ACTION: AM has investigated.**
- 2025-2030 Investment Plan – provides for 150 SO upgrades in the Wessex Water region at a cost of £0.5bn and phosphate reduction at a cost of £1.2bn. Figures not confirmed – due late autumn 2023.

Session with Jim Flory, Environment Agency:

Jim is the Area Environment Manager. He is specifically responsible for environmental monitoring (inc. fisheries, biodiversity, geomorphology, etc.) in the CROWD area. He is a freshwater ecologist. He is also a lead on bathing water quality. He introduced the work of the EA and [his responses](#) to [our questions](#).

Introductory Questions

Answering Howard's questions about EA status, funding and powers to investigate, **Jim** said:

- EA is a non-departmental government body (not civil service), sponsored by Defra. Its statutory role is environmental regulation (water, air, land), improving/investigating issues in each area.
- Funding is the only constraint. For example, EA is using citizen science: because EA has finite resources. What EA does is based on intelligence gathered by it and others (e.g., Riverfly Monitors). Citizen Science is useful and important. It's helpful if someone is leading on coordinating this.
- EA has two main funding sources: 1) Grant in aid (government funding) and 2) Permit charges. EA is fundamentally a regulator. So holders of permits, e.g. WW, must provide evidence that they are complying. EA audits this. EA will provide guidance on what needs to be investigated.

Bathing water monitoring

Answering Dana & Lee's questions about monitoring the river pools near the mouths of the Char and Winniford (which are widely used for swimming and paddling), **Jim** said:

- EA has a statutory duty to monitor water quality at designated bathing sites. Designation is driven by local people and local authorities and overseen by Defra. (Only one freshwater bathing site in the area – Henleaze in Bristol). EA measures E. coli and Enterococci. Using WHO guidance, they have identified these as good indicator organisms and thresholds for illness, but not necessarily through these direct sources. They are used as a proxy for viruses.

Pressed on the problem with the river pools (they are not classified as bathing water but are both immediately next to a bathing beach rated "excellent", so the public assume they are safe), **Jim** said:

- There is no current mechanism for a combined bathing water designation to include both freshwater and marine elements.

Asked whether EA had a duty of care to the public regardless of regulations and what to do if we became aware of a specific health issue, **Jim** said:

- EA is the regulator, not a health authority. Responsibility for public health issues lies with the Health Protection Agency or DC's Environmental Health Dept. EA doesn't do bacteriological monitoring in rivers because it's not linked to environmental health. You can have a good environment and high bacterial loading.
- In the event of a public health issue, we should talk to the local authority & landowner. It is the landowner's responsibility to ensure public health.

Asked how monitoring at bathing water sites is fed back to health authorities and what action is triggered by a high reading, **Jim** said:

- Classification is made over four years' worth of data. Info is available to everyone on [Swimfo](#), which reports issues at any site. Pollution risk forecasting identifies factors that result in increased levels of bacteria: e.g., tide, temp. The 'beach controller' is sent a pollution warning, and a sign should be erected. The 'beach controller' has to be signed up to receive alerts. Not all beaches have Pollution Risk Forecasting and they need to be signed up to receive alerts. **[ACTION: CROWD members to check that beaches in their area are signed up.]**

Lee said the historic sampling point at Seatown beach is now in the wrong place as people swim at other locations. Would it be possible to take multiple sets of samples? **Jim** replied:

- EA doesn't have the funding to further explore bathing waters that are rated excellent. If people are using the beach differently, then look at redesignation – this is usually via 'beach controller' and Defra. But Jim offered to have a discussion and look at sampling further east (not continuously, but perhaps once or twice). **[ACTION: Jim Flory to advise whether samples can be taken further east]**
- 20 samples are taken per bathing season; randomised over time of day and tidal state. For sites that have been historically excellent, only 10 samples are taken.

Asked whether the additional funding given to EA the last government review could be used to test along the length of a river to identify pollution sources, **Jim** said:

- Additional funding is ring fenced for ecological monitoring. To get specific answers is a big piece of work. Doesn't make sense to do one-off surveys, so suddenly becomes much more complicated. Jim offered to look at opportunities for investigating agricultural inputs. [ACTION: Jim Flory.]

Pressed on whether EA and WW would consider identifying pollution sources along a river (to help identify suitable remedial action), **Jim** said:

- Riverfly monitoring & other citizen science is helpful to fill gaps and provide insight. But it is possible that EA could test for environmental (not bacteriological) quality.
- **Andy Mears** said: "Don't rule out" WW helping. [ACTION: Andrew to propose that CROWD, with CL support, campaigns for length-of-river pollution testing to identify pollution types and sources and target future action.]

Ian asked for need help to make sense of the EA data that's available – and what's missing – so that we can formulate a monitoring strategy.

- **Jim** offered to arrange a meeting between Ian and other interested CROWD members, and EA experts to go through the available data. [ACTION: Jim Flory has suggested possible dates.]

Asked about CaSTCO and catchment pilot schemes, **Jim** said:

- EA is supportive.

Asked if there is anything EA / WW would like to ask Chris Loder to champion,

- **Jim** said: No. But environmental monitoring has decreased, not just related to sewage. 160k samples p.a. (2013) is down to 80k now. EA would like to increase this, and it requires funding.
- **Andy Mears** said: Bathing water designation process: 'designate, identify problems, then solve them' is daft. It should be 'identify problems, solve them, designate'. WW directors are talking to Defra about this. The first river bathing site failed straight away. A huge programme of works was needed to fix it. The ambition to have 100 new bathing waters will need massive investment.
- WW is also trialling water butt schemes to separate rainwater at source and would like government to give incentives to homeowners to support this.

Chris Loder responded: The Isle of Wight has had great success with water butts and WW should be extending such schemes actively. They can clearly be self-financing so should be funded by WW. CL would also like to meet Colin Skellett regularly in the same way that he has met the SWW CEO.

Asked about EA funding from issuing bathing site designations and permits, **Jim** said:

- Each bathing site designation does generate more funding for monitoring but there is no risk of EA issuing permits as a way of generating extra funding.

Other business:

- Next full meeting (with Chris Loder) Friday 22nd September, 11-12.30., Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall.

12th July 2023