

The Newsletter of Dart Estuary Environmental Management

Tidelines

Spring 2006

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Green energy scheme unfolds
Dart Seal Watch 2006

Special Dart Forum Meeting

How serious is the threat of global warming to the River Dart and its estuary?

Find out more at the next Dart Forum meeting.

Details on page 4 of this issue.



View from the editor...

FRONT COVER PHOTO: DEEM: SEAL ON PONTOON IN THE DART ESTUARY

“Joined up thinking” is a phrase that slips easily off the tongue, but joined up governance in practice is a lot harder to achieve. In the world of governance of coasts and estuaries there is currently much activity directed towards joining the many disparate strands of legislation that control our use of the seas, so that decisions on detail can be made in the context of the whole.

The long awaited UK Marine Bill is out for consultation with a deadline for response of 23 June 2006. For anyone out there having difficulty sleeping at night the 300 plus page document can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/current.htm. Seriously, mind-numbing though some of these extensive government consultation documents can be, the issues are quite profound.

This type of legislation comes along once in a generation, if at all, and will have a profound effect on the future of the seas surrounding the United Kingdom. For an island state, that should be an important matter.

Getting all the different parties to work together towards a common goal of sustainable use of the estuary is the stock-in-trade of DEEM. Estuary partnerships such as our have been lauded by the government as models of good practice in stakeholder governance. How this will

translate into practical support in the context of the Marine Bill will be revealed over the next twelve months.

Whatever the outcome of the Marine Bill and similar legislation, such as the Water Framework Directive, DEEM needs to adapt to the circumstances. One of the challenges facing the Dart Estuary is that in the pecking order of designations of importance, the River Dart is barely on the list. Despite its natural beauty, which is self evident to anyone who journeys through it, the Dart Estuary is not designated for its conservation importance.

Consequently, we have to overcome the mind-set that if it isn't designated, it isn't of any value. Recently the Dart Estuary risked losing out on valuable government financial assistance to address the problem of diffuse pollution from agricultural sources. This is an issue that DEEM itself raised as important, through local research studies back in 2000. However, by the time the message had percolated to national level in 2006, the resulting funding risks being focussed on “more important” river catchments.

However, there is still an opportunity of attracting funds. Funds without which the Dart Estuary cannot be securely safeguarded. The means of achieving that is by demonstrating the commitment of



the local community, the membership of the Dart Forum, that we can work together to produce the sort of successes that are described in the updates in this newsletter. As the partnership is shown to bring about positive action, it can build upon its successes and be seen as a worthy investment for the future of the Dart.

Next Dart Forum Meeting

Thursday 18 May
at the Flavel Centre,
Dartmouth at
1900 hours see page 4

Watching them, watching us!

Seals are a welcome and common sight in and around the Dart estuary but we should not take their presence for granted. The seal in question is the grey seal (*Halichoerus Grypus*) and it is the largest mammal -by weight- breeding on land in the British Isles. The small population in South Devon is at the geographical limit of breeding sites along the English Channel.

The presence of seals locally is dependent on two important sites, where the animals haul out of the water to perform their elaborate social and courtship behaviour. Those sites are the Mew Stone on the eastern side of the entrance to Dart Harbour and Pear Tree Point, just to the west of Start Point. Disturbance of the seals at these sensitive sites risks displacing them from the area altogether, perhaps permanently. Concern was raised a few years ago at the level of intrusive human activity at these sites and the possible injurious impacts it was having. Renowned seal expert, Stephen Westcott, was commissioned in 2000 to carry out a survey over the busy tourist season of July and August.

It was always the intention to revisit this area after approximately five years to see if there had been any improvement in seal numbers. This summer Stephen will be back looking at the Dart and the surrounding area observing seal behaviour. This time Stephen will have a small team of volunteer observers from the charity *Earthwatch* to help him in his task. This time he will also have

help from a lecturer from Bournemouth University, the public (coastpath walkers, tripper boat passengers, fishermen etc) will be surveyed to gauge their attitudes towards seals. This will help underpin recommendations that may be made by the survey.

We hope to carry an article in the Autumn edition of *Tidelines* to report on the findings.



New quay for the Sharpham gateway

You have to look a long way back through the history of the Dart Estuary to discover when a new quay was built on the river. Apart from the Embankment at Dartmouth and Baltic Wharf at Totnes, at either end of the river, improvements to facilities have largely fallen by the wayside.

In the last issue of *Tidelines*, we announced the ambition of taking the bold step of re-instating Sharpham North Quay. We can now proudly announce that the task has been completed (see picture). Over the winter, contractors (Torbay Stone Walling) have been working hard in often cold and difficult conditions.

What remained of the old quay was dismantled, almost completely and then re-assembled piece-by-piece. Together with the stone that was recovered from the river, washed and cleaned; it was possible to reconstruct the quay using almost entirely the original materials. Additionally, timber fendering was placed around the quay and incorporated into walls to create a structure that is even more robust than the original.

At the same time, the opportunity was taken to improve the slipway and install

a “launch-and-recovery” cradle for a safety boat. The safety boat will be used in support of the canoeing activities that operate under the auspices of Sharpham Outdoors – an outreach programme for young people. The cradle had to be custom-made for the safety boat. This was the preferred solution to the establishment of a mooring in a stretch of the river that has been traditionally mooring free and where the navigation channel is restricted.

A major incentive to re-establish the quay at this location was to provide a means of access for the public to visit the Sharpham Vineyard and Cheese factory during their opening season. That, in turn, required the restoration of a path to the quay. This task was also completed by

contractors (R.J Everitt) working over the winter in challenging conditions. There is now a new “gateway” to Sharpham, which gives visitors new and beautiful views of the river, enroute to the Vineyard.

An official opening is planned for the early summer but the quay is already operational. Members of the public, as well as ferry operators, are invited to make use of the quay, which we hope will soon become an established feature of the river. Remember, if you are planning to visit the winery it is wise to check opening times (tel: 01803 732203), as well as your tide tables! Watch out in the Autumn *Tidelines*, for an update on the quayside improvements at Greenway Quay.

Below: Sharpham (New) North Quay awaits its first visitors



Green energy from the marshes - an update

In the previous edition of *Tidelines* we outlined the argument for considering a solution to the erosion at the Hole-in-the-Wall, which incorporated the benefits of tidal power generation. Over the winter, specialists in this type of technology (HydroGeneration Ltd), have been examining the technical feasibility of such a proposal.

Below: An example of one of the possible options for tidal power generations at the “Hole-in-the-Wall”

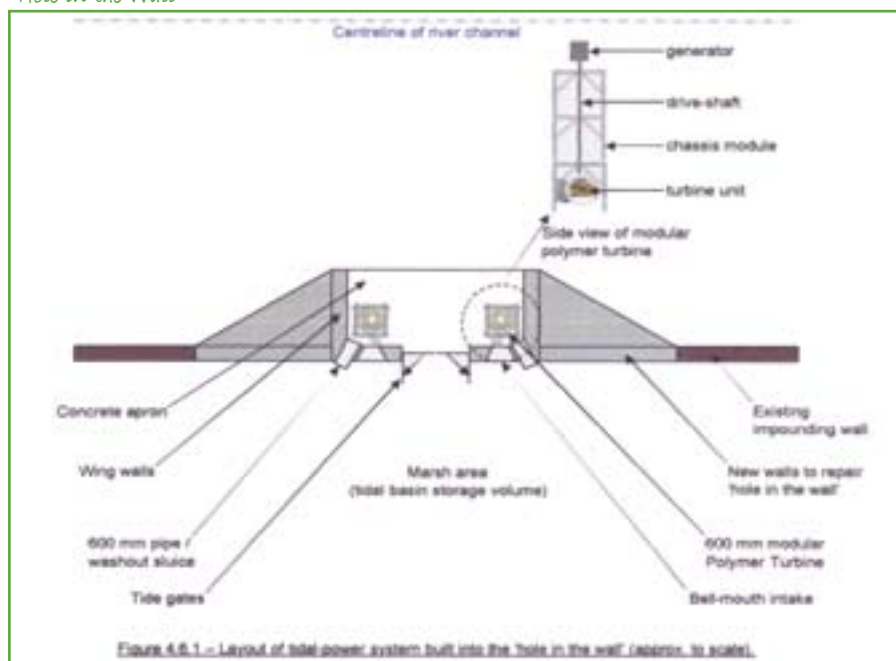
Phase 1 of these studies was completed in February. The first stage looked at the potential power output available, its value, options for power units, issues of distribution and grid connection and an initial review of the impacts and licensing requirements. The report concluded that the scheme could supply the power requirements of

approximately 15 households. This is the level of “small community” needs that was envisaged and Phase 2 will look at ways of possibly enhancing this figure.

Not surprisingly, the costs of installation at this site are significant. The location of the turbine was related to the breach repairs at the Hole-in-the-Wall, for technical as well as financial reasons. This makes the scheme difficult to justify in electrical cost-benefit terms alone. However, the demonstration value of this type of technology at this location was considered to be hugely important.

Phase 2 studies will look in more detail at the engineering parameters, particularly turbine design. The second phase will also develop the scope of Environmental Impact Assessment required, in consultation with the Environment Agency. Finally, more refined costings will be developed.

We are very pleased to report that the local utility company EDF (Electricite de France) has agreed to support the Phase 2 studies through their Green Energy Fund. The involvement of a major utilities plc in the feasibility stage of this project is welcomed as serious endorsement of our ambitions. Phase 2 studies are currently underway and due to report at the end of May 2006.



Dart Estuary People

Julian Burn - Wooden Boatbuilder and Teacher

What is your job on the estuary?

I am a professional wooden boatbuilder and teacher. Anyone can come to my workshop and build the boat they want with my help & tuition, or I build the boat to order. We launch most boats on the Dart; Totnes has a fine public slip and it's a grand place for the launch party!

I do the Volunteer River Patrol and Otter Spotting for Devon Wildlife Trust.

Why is the Dart a special place for you?

I greatly enjoy sailing and sculling with my wife our 16' 'færing'. The Dart is special to us for its wonderful views, changing every moment as the woods close in below Totnes. Sharpham shyly peeps at us until, round the bend, it's proudly face to face; then soon the joy of Point Field's glorious sweep. Later the bustle of Dartmouth is upon us, its very particular ferries to be unimpeded, before the Castles prompt thoughts of setting out on a Crusade or Pilgrimage. Sculling, especially in winter, is as rewarding as sailing. The river is quiet, while the voluptuousness of the hills and black silhouettes of the oaks are such a treat for the eye.



What is your vision for the future of the Dart estuary?

I'm very excited. The recently completed restoration of Sharpham North Quay is a superb example of sensitively increasing access for everyone. I would love to be part of a Rubbish Patrol to clear all the non-degradable junk from the banks. Who will take up the challenge?

My dearest wish is gradually to see the river freed of human-generated noise. There are times in the winter now when just the birds and lapping of water give us the peace we go on the river to find. I look forward, with the wildlife, to when it is quiet in the summer too, through the use of electric propulsion alongside sail, oar and paddle.

Left: Julian enjoying some time on the river

Next Dart Forum Meeting

Everyone has heard of global warming but how serious is the threat?

Come and join us at the next Dart Forum meeting at the Flavel Centre in Dartmouth to find out the facts and what it all might mean for Devon and the Dart Estuary.

The meeting will be a joint one with the Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority Non-Beneficiary Users' Group and is sponsored by the Dart Cycleau Project.

Our guest speakers will include Ian Bateman, Climate Change Officer from Devon County Council and Phil Dyke from the National Trust Climate Change Team.

The meeting will be held on Thursday 18 May at 1900 hours at the Flavel Centre, Dartmouth.

A complimentary glass of wine and hot local seafood is included - admission is by free ticket from either the Flavel Centre or from Erica at the DEEM Office on 01803 835801.

Please send any contributions for the next issue of Tidelines to Erica at DEEM before 1 October 2006.

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