

Clun Catchment Partnership

Minutes of Meeting Wednesday 22 February 2012, Newcastle Community Centre

Present:

Ken Downward	Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative (hosted by Natural England)
Stuart Gamble	Environment Agency
Adam Shipp	Environment Agency
Colin Davies	Farmer, Upper Clun
Mervin Mullard	Farmer, Mainstone
Andrew Whiteman	Farmer, Lower Clun
Nicky Davies	Herefordshire Council (Biodiversity)
Nick Smith	Forestry Commission
Joy Greenall	Land, Life & Livelihoods
Joy Howells	Land, Life & Livelihoods
Rev.Nick Read	Land, Life & Livelihoods/ Bulmer Foundation
Prof. Robert Harris	Local resident (& contractor to Defra on catchment management)
Gill Meehan	Natural England
Jeff Edwards	Natural England
Tony Bostock	Severn Rivers Trust
Mike Morris	Severn Rivers Trust
Emma Buckingham	Severn Rivers Trust
Katherine Cherry	Severn Trent Water
Dan Wrench	Shropshire Council (Biodiversity)
Gemma Chapman	Shropshire Council (Flood Management)
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Cath Landles	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Robin Mager	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Leo Smith	Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group

1. Welcome and Apologies

Phil Holden as Chair for this meeting welcomed those present to the first meeting of the new group, noting the good level of attendance, and thanked people for coming. Apologies had been received from Chris Hogarth (Natural England).

2. Purpose and Terms of Reference

Phil said that a number of initiatives around the River Clun and its catchment had recently picked up and come together more, and the suggestion to form the Partnership had been made by several people. He said that there were many different initiatives in the area affecting the catchment, and there was a need for greater co-ordination. While there were different views, some organisations had statutory responsibilities which were unavoidable. The draft Terms of Reference were intended to provide some structure but there may be a need to adapt them to be flexible. He invited comments on the draft. Stuart suggested adding a sentence about Water Framework Directive responsibilities – **Action.** Jeff suggested similar in relation to the SAC and freshwater pearl mussel - **Action.** Adam questioned the focus on the Upper Clun, and it was agreed to omit this. Tony asked if CLA had been invited. Phil would follow this up through contacts - **Action.** Leo said that though the group had no direct powers to make decisions, he hoped it would have authority. Emma asked that links with the Teme Catchment Pilot project be mentioned. Subject to these amendments, the Terms of Reference were approved. The amended version would be published on the AONB website – **Action.**

3. Summary outline of current initiatives

It was agreed early on in this item that circulating short summaries of the various projects going on would be very helpful - **Action**. The notes below record key points raised and discussed.

a) AONB River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel project (SITA funded) Phil Holden
Phil said that Mike Kelly was leading this project. £119k had been secured from SITA over three years, matched by Defra AONB funding and Natural England. Site works on 7 sites totalling about 9km of riverbank would include riparian tree management, fencing, silt traps, ditch blocking and tree planting. Other items included a solar pump for a stock watering demonstration, water monitoring equipment, and awareness raising and community engagement activities. Additional complementary work funded by Natural England this Financial Year included tree works and fencing on one extra site, and support for community engagement and consultation.

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/>

Tony asked that a list of the sites be circulated - **Action**.

b) Broader Clun Catchment Management approach. Phil Holden

Phil said that Mike Kelly had done a good deal of research and drafting on a Catchment Management Plan for the Clun over the last year and a half. It was intended to carry out public engagement and consultation on this over the coming year, linking closely to the new Teme Catchment Pilot.

Through a graduate placement from Keele University, a study on waste water infrastructure (including domestic septic tanks) in the Upper Clun had been carried out by the AONB Partnership, and returns from a questionnaire had been quite good. It was clarified that this study had not yet been published on the AONB website as there was a query as to whether Severn Trent were happy for it to go public. Katherine thought it would be OK but agreed to check on this – **Action**.

Joy Howells talked about the small scale Scoping Study into a Community Catchment approach she carried out last spring through Resources for Change, which was commissioned by the AONB Partnership and funded by Shropshire Council. The report brought together a lot of background information.

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Scoping-Study-Clun-Community-Led-Catchment-Mgt-Init.pdf>

Leo said that Mike had requested volunteers to help with monitoring physical attributes of the river. The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group were doing a mailing soon and it would help to know more about what was wanted.

c) River Clun Restoration Strategy (Atkins consultants, funded by Natural England) Jeff Edwards

This process was being carried out by NE for all river SSSIs and SACs. Atkins had been commissioned, and the full draft Strategy should be publicly available very shortly. A consultation exercise was now under way with support from the AONB Partnership – a drop in session at Clun Memorial Hall on 5 March, and an evening session for owners on the lower and middle reaches of the Clun at Leintwardine. Jeff said one of the significant findings was that the Upper Clun and Folly Brook were thought to be unsuitable for translocating pearl mussels. It was clarified that in the Upper Clun, low water flows were the main issue. Stuart said that the situation in the region for low water levels in the coming year was looking worse than in 1976. The Clun was not yet on restrictions to abstraction, but this was likely.

Emma asked within the plan what scope there was for monitoring. Adam said that Ros Challis had set up more monitoring on the Clun, including ammonia, suspended

sediment and metaldehyde. It was clarified that sonde monitoring was still going at Clungunford and Leintwardine.

Jeff said that siltation was identified as a key issue and the Strategy aimed to open a discussion process around ideas such as creation of wetland areas to absorb silt, and additional woodland planting along buffers to reduce silt input to the river. There was nothing however at this stage about possible locations for these. Adam said if the Restoration Plan was focused on the lower and upper Clun, there may be a need to do further work on the middle reaches, and Jeff said that this had been identified in the report. Leo asked for a clear statement of what the objective of restoration was? Jeff said the report set this out, with stabilising the FWPM population being the key factor. Joy Greenall said that local knowledge should be valued alongside that of specialists, and felt that the translocation should not be ruled out at this stage. Bob Harris said it was important to be clear what the problem was – changes to farming practices were very different to wholesale changes in land use and the solutions were different. The question was raised why pearl mussels were not present now in the Upper Clun. This was not known, but may indicate another factor.

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/river-clun-restoration-strategy/>

d) Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative Ken Downward

Ken said the new grants were available from 1 March and he was keen to meet farmers and set up visits, he was attending a Farmers Den event shortly. A question was raised about priorities of the scheme – these were outlined on the grant website.

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/CSF5-28_tcm6-26184.pdf

Ken said that concreting was now more widely eligible, not just on areas of current broken concrete. However he said that on the steeper slopes of the Clun catchment (compared to other CSFI areas) there was potential to increase run-off and great care was needed.

Gemma said that areas of concrete over 5 sq m needed planning permission and guidance was available on the Shropshire Council website.

<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/environmentmaintenance.nsf/open/C79EE6B8A61CDB608025772E00482EE4>

Colin Davies commented that last year a large number of applicants were unsuccessful, despite what had been said about targeting the area. He felt farmers would reapply, but it had affected their view if the scheme.

e) Severn Rivers Trust Catchment pilot project Tony Bostock

Tony said that River Basin District Plans had fallen short of expectations and following some legal challenges, the government had allocated further money for 10 pilot catchment projects to be led by EA. They had also asked for Expressions of Interest from other bodies for up to 25 other pilots. The Severn Rivers Trust had put in for 6 of the 7 main Severn catchments. The Teme in particular had been selected as a priority. Funding had been awarded by Defra for the 2012 calendar year, but there was no set structure about how the Catchment Pilot was to be run. Previous plans including NRA Catchment Plans, Local Environment Agency Plans and Catchment Abstraction Management Plans were being looked at. A new steering group was being set up. A map would be prepared showing where everyone was working. There was an emphasis on multiple benefits, and a wish to link with community groups.

<http://severnriverstrust.com/>

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) was a key driver, and while the Clun was judged to meet good ecological status, there were some doubts over this, e.g. regarding fish, and the freshwater pearl mussel population.

Severn Rivers Trust are keen to do invertebrate monitoring in the lower Clun and get people involved with this. Tony was also keen to know if this stretch of the Clun was actively fished, and if not, whether there would be interest in the Trust's passport scheme.

Emma mentioned the recent announcement by Defra of a separate additional Catchment Restoration Fund, for which applications from charitable bodies were being invited. <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/136182.aspx>

Mervin said siltation was more of an issue in arable areas. It was noted however that in the lower reaches of the Clun there was a lot of cultivation, and also that stock access to the river, loss of trees especially from *Phytophthora*, and highways run-off also contribute silt. Bob said that ADAS were interested in 'sediment fingerprinting' to analyse where sediments came from. He also said that while these pilots had been set up, it wasn't all that clear what they were to do, and there was a big opportunity for local, community led groups.

f) Land, Life & Livelihoods Joy Greenall

The Land, Life & Livelihoods group had received LEADER funding this year, but the initiative was 6 years old, arising out of an earlier AONB project. The river had become very central in the initiative, which tried to look at different aspects of farming, wildlife and community in a linked way. A lot of events had been provided over several years, advice events for farmers, public events and education/ enjoyment events. LEADER funding provided for more of these over the next 2½ years, and the group had also got some additional Natural England funding and were in discussion with the Environment Agency.

g) End of the Clun Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme – Gill Meehan

Gill said that the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme was broader, with options that can address water quality, etc. She stressed that it was a voluntary scheme. The majority of farmers were likely to want to participate in the Entry Level Scheme (ELS) which was easy to get into. NE were trying to work proactively with holders of existing ESA agreements (153 expire in the Clun in 2013) to maximise uptake of the new scheme, especially Higher Level (HLS).

Adam asked whether there could be a focus on water quality in this area. Gill said they would be pushing this through HLS, and had the discretion to insist on it, but in ELS farmers could choose any options that fitted their holding. The relative incomes from ESA vs ELS/HLS were discussed. In general ELS was likely to provide less income than an ESA agreement, and HLS more, but it depended on the tiers within ESA.

Upland Entry Level Stewardship was also in place, replacing the Hill Farm Allowance.

Emma asked how specific targeting was to areas and whether fencing of rivers, etc was included. Gill said it was, but each proposal had to be looked at, there were sometimes complications such as the need for stock crossings.

Joy Greenall mentioned the Scoping Study on community catchment approach and that the idea of it had been to have a project defined for if money came available. She also said that while farmers didn't mind moving with new priorities, she felt that the 25 years of the ESA in protecting hedgerows should not be undervalued.

Phil summarised that Environmental Stewardship was a key delivery mechanism and that there were opportunities, but money was limited. Gill agreed, but said that if lots of local schemes were in the pipeline, there was a good chance of additional money being allocated to the area from the national pot.

h) Environment Agency update

Stuart explained that water had come up the agenda and had now been split from waste within the Agency. He led the Water Team for Worcestershire and South Shropshire. Water Framework Directive (WFD) targets were key, and EA would work with anybody

to help achieve these. They were however still a regulatory body and would use those powers where necessary. They were currently doing lots of work on data regarding the Clun's good ecological status. Concerns about data were being looked at. The poor condition of the SAC over-rode the WFD water quality issues.

Adam added that EA now has more carrots (funding) as well as sticks (regulation) and was keen to work with landowners. Ros Challis was working with Newcastle School on river flow and chemical monitoring. A feasibility study was being done on possible removal of a weir at Whitcott Keysett. Some money was available for fencing and EA were working with SRT on a cattle crossing. Funding was allocated for a solar pump, working with the AONB. Visits were being carried out to farmers in the upper Clun. There was a need for co-ordination of the many initiatives. Leo asked for definition of the WFD objectives -**Action**. Stuart mentioned that following an incident just before Christmas, EA were intending to run a session for contractors on the sensitivity of the river.

i) Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group Leo Smith

Leo said the group monitored breeding lapwing (which had disappeared from the area) and curlew (which had halved in numbers). Information had been provided to feed into HLS agreements and a list of sites proposed as Wildlife Sites had been put forward, on the basis of their value for waders, butterflies and plants. Dippers were also monitored, and were stable in the upper Clun, but declining in the lower Clun. Sedimentation of gravel beds and nutrient enrichment causing algal covering of gravels were thought to be key factors.

Other updates:

Nicky Davies said that **Herefordshire Council** were very keen to co-operate with projects and initiatives. The Clun SAC was located within Herefordshire.

Nick Smith reminded people of the **Forestry Commission** grant system for woodland management and woodland creation, which could help with buffering the river. There were grants for Woodland Management Plans and infrastructure to help manage woods. Up to £3,800/ha could be available. He also mentioned the Big Tree Plant scheme aimed at communities and the advice service available through Heartwoods. Phil added that advice and support in getting FC grants was also available through the AONB Woodlands Project through Brian Barker.

Katherine Cherry said that most of **Severn Trent's** work on catchment management was at a big scale, but they were interested in pesticides which appeared to be an issue in the lower Teme. As a company they were getting more involved in catchment approaches, with these increasingly favoured over further treatment of water.

Dan Wrench mentioned the **Shropshire Ecological Data Network** which had a lot of species data, but there was additional habitat mapping going on too. This could be a source of data for projects, but also new information generated should be added to the network.

Gemma said that **Shropshire Council** was the land drainage authority except where there was an Internal Drainage Board. Advice was the preferred approach, though the Council also had enforcement powers. From April, EA's consenting roles were moving to the Council except on main rivers (this includes the Clun below Clun bridge). Planning applications were also looked at and surface water management plans required with emphasis on sustainable drainage systems to treat and retain silt. From October a new separate consent for drainage would be required. The team also had a

role regarding Highways drainage and would look at locations where measures such as interceptors may be needed.

Time was limited for the remaining agenda items.

4. Landowner perspectives

Andrew Whiteman said that no management had been carried out on his stretch of the river and there were probably opportunities. Colin Davies felt that farming in the upper Clun had not changed that much and that if fish had gone this wasn't as a result of modern farming. He also felt that the decline in ground nesting birds had a lot to do with badgers, and agreed about problems with septic tanks. Mervin Mullard said regarding fish there were a lot of herons. He agreed that we had to all work together on these issues and that the carrot was better than the stick.

5. Community perspectives

Some of this had come through the Land, Life & Livelihoods update earlier. In absence of the invited local members from Shropshire and Herefordshire Councils who had been unable to attend, this item was passed over.

6. Next steps

It was agreed that bringing partners together and sharing information about current activity had been useful. It was proposed to circulate minutes of the meeting to Parish Councils. Jeff Edwards suggested drafting of a paper on the next steps.

Mike Morris mentioned a Defra initiative to form local action groups on non-native invasive species. SRT were interested in bidding for this and were keen to talk to anyone who might wish to be involved. Jeff Edwards felt that Himalayan Balsam was the key species of concern in the Clun.

7. Date of the next meeting

This was set for Weds 23 May 2012, 10am. Venue tbc, Aston on Clun suggested.

Abbreviations:

ADAS	an agricultural, environmental and rural consultancy firm
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CLA	Country Land & Business Association
CSFI	Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative
EA	Environment Agency
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
FC	Forestry Commission
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship
LEADER	Government/ EU rural development grant programme
LLL	Land, Life & Livelihoods initiative in the Clun Forest
NE	Natural England
NRA	National Rivers Authority (subsumed into Environment Agency)
SAC	Special Area of Conservation, European site designation
SITA	Landfill operator with Trust distributing grants
SRT	Severn Rivers Trust
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WFD	Water Framework Directive