

## Isle of Wight Beaver Project Steering Group

Minutes from Meeting 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### Attendees:

| <i>Name</i>              | <i>Role/Organisation</i>        |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Matthew Chatfield</i> | Independent Chair               |
| <i>Mark Larter</i>       | Deputy Chair / Natural England  |
| <i>Izzie Tween</i>       | Beaver Officer / HIWWT          |
| <i>Jamie Marsh</i>       | HIWWT                           |
| <i>Ian Boyd</i>          | ARC Consulting                  |
| <i>Nigel George</i>      | ARC Consulting                  |
| <i>Caroline Knox</i>     | East Yar Farmer Cluster         |
| <i>Adam Cave</i>         | Environment Agency              |
| <i>Carol Flux</i>        | Island Rivers                   |
| <i>Mark Roberts</i>      | Island Roads                    |
| <i>Grace Booth</i>       | Isle of Wight Council           |
| <i>Sue Hawley</i>        | Isle of Wight Estuaries Project |
| <i>Darrel Clarke</i>     | Isle of Wight Rights of Way     |
| <i>Robyn Munt</i>        | NFU                             |
| <i>Mike Greenslade</i>   | National Trust                  |
| <i>Richard Wilson</i>    | Newchurch Piscatorial Society   |
| <i>Keith Ballard</i>     | RSPB                            |
| <i>James Attrill</i>     | South Wight Farmer Cluster      |
| <i>Lisa Banfield</i>     | Wildheart Trust                 |

### Apologies:

| <i>Name</i>            | <i>Role/Organisation</i>                 |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>Mark Simmons</i>    | AONB Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer |
| <i>Cindy Betley</i>    | CLA                                      |
| <i>Leanne Sargeant</i> | Forestry England                         |
| <i>Colin Pope</i>      | Isle of Wight Natural History Society    |
| <i>Brendan Jones</i>   | Southern Water                           |

### Introductions and Welcome:

- MC led introductions of all attendees
- IT listed apologies of those not able to attend

### Review of Membership:

- AC suggested a broader membership of fishing interests/angling forums on the board beyond Newchurch Piscatorial Society, and flood risk actions groups/regional flood and coastal committee.

- *IT mentioned she had approached the Isle of Wight Angling Company to sit on the steering group, but given that their interests are largely coarse fishing in ponds, they felt they would be relatively unaffected by a beaver introduction and saw no need for further consultation or to have a role sitting on the steering group.*
  - *AC has contact details for Angling Trust and RFaCC and will forward onto IT*
- ML suggested inviting membership of experienced personnel from another beaver release project; more representation from research/academic side of beaver introduction e.g. one or more authors of the feasibility study; and representation on mammal ecology
  - *MC acknowledged these omissions, but mentioned that mammal ecology could be covered by IT as Beaver Officer*
  - *IT suggested inviting Jake Chant, NE National Beaver Officer (formerly River Otter Beaver Officer); beaver ecologists Roisin Campbell-Palmer or Derek Gow and/or University of Exeter hydrologists Alan Puttock or Richard Brazier; Richard Grogan IoW mammal recorder was approached to sit on the steering group but has delegated AONB representation to Mark Simmons and/or Lucy Temple.*
    - *IT has contacted feasibility study authors on membership of steering group, who have respectfully declined but have offered a guest appearance talk should this be welcome, as has Jake Chant, NE's National Beaver Officer.*
- IB suggested parish council membership to represent local residents' concerns
  - *IT has approached IoWALC for representation*
  - *JM confirmed June Davison will represent IoWALC*
- GB suggested IoW council spin off sub-group to form down the line, incorporating coastal, trees and land management interests, GB happy to coordinate.
- CK suggested incorporating Equine Society into membership through Local Access Forum
  - *DC has forwarded Jennine Gardiner's contact details to IT as secretary of LAF*
  - *IT has contacted Jennine.*
- CF mentioned Southern Water membership, SW have been invited but made their apologies for this meeting.
- ML suggested formation of sub/working groups based on ecological, economic, wider cultural interests.
  - *MC acknowledged steering group membership is large and unwieldy but is important to make membership as inclusive as possible. For now it was determined to keep the structure as is, but acknowledged that subgroups would be an effective way to progress work in the future if and when licence application progresses.*

## Review of Terms of Reference:

- RM raised concern that Terms of Reference are presumptive in looking beyond licence application into prospective beaver management, which is still hypothetical at this stage. RM suggested differentiation in ToR between early stages of steering group pre-licence

application submission to facilitate wider discussion, and future ToR post-decision on licence addressing moving forward with prospective beaver management.

- *IT highlighted statutory obligation to form steering group to support licence application prior to submission, and importance of bringing stakeholders to the table before licence submission at this early stage, but acknowledged chicken-and-egg situation given current hypothetical situation of beaver release, and the presumptive nature that this may present. IT welcomed the suggestion to make a distinction between pre and post licence submission ToR, and to revise language in ToR to present more hypothetical approach.*
- *RM raised concern from NFU membership that beaver release is a done deal, and that presumptive nature of ToR reinforces that impression. Given that the ToR will be publicly available RM suggested revising language to support transparency of process to reflect wider discussion.*
- *MC acknowledged varying role in steering group pre and post licensing decision and recommended altering ToR to address these different roles. MC resolved that current steering group may exist up to point that licence is granted, or is dissolved for any other reason, at which point the group can be reformulated with new ToR or disbanded given NE decision on licence.*
  - *IT to redraft ToR for review by steering group at next meeting.*

## Beaver Project Update:

- IT delivered timeline of project so far including feasibility study, Defra nationwide consultation, HIWWT consultation & door drop, beaver management strategy, baseline monitoring surveys, NE workshops on beaver licensing framework and open release licensing criteria and formation of steering group.
- CK asked whether our IoW beaver management strategy is being written blind given that NE has not yet released their nationwide beaver management strategy.
  - *IT has been using the River Otter beaver management strategy as a baseline, but also informed by IT having attended NE workshops on open release licensing criteria.*
  - *ML has been liaising with NE, RPA and Defra colleagues to get more steer on beaver licensing criteria, delivery of project, maintenance of landscape, environmental stewardship support etc. and will continue to update on progress at the national level, and can relay feedback on operational delivery and outcomes back to Defra.*
- GB interested to know outcomes of public door drop questionnaire
  - IT presented analysis of consultation data so far (currently unpublished, analysis not yet complete)
  - Key takeaways:
    - 4,883 respondents to questionnaire
    - 97% of respondents were island residents
    - 92% were in favour of beaver introduction across Britain
    - 89% in favour of beaver introduction onto IoW
    - 71% strongly positive view of beaver impact on biodiversity
    - 63% strongly positive view of beaver impact on flooding
    - 62% strongly positive view of beaver impact on water quality

- Thoughts on beaver impact on local economy more balanced. 49% strongly positive view of beaver impact on local economy. People less clear on dis/advantages here with 21% neutral views.
- 68% strongly positive view of beaver impact on people's ability to connect with nature.
- Only 52% felt that expressing their views would influence decision making
- DC drew attention to possible impact on public access and infrastructure such as the cycle track - interested to know assessment of risk, and how management and compensation may be funded.
  - *Feasibility study highlighted close proximity of cycle track to Newchurch Moors release site. Dam capacity models likelihood of damming in main river below confluence of upper Eastern Yar and Wroxall Stream as rare. However, beaver damming may be possible along the main river during periods of low flow and given abstraction. Any dams built could be managed through lowering, removal or flow management devices. A watching brief would be in place along key infrastructure and public access points to assess risk from dam building, tree felling and burrowing. The Trust would be financially responsible for management and mitigation throughout the licencing period (between 5 and 10 years), after which management of beavers would fall upon the landowner, with continued advice and support from HIWWT.*
- CK interested to know the weighting of consultation responses regarding proximity to watercourse and likelihood of being directly affected; and highlighted current lack of clarity on ELMS schemes for compensation to landowners.
  - *IT mentioned her intention to run a correlation coefficient on landowner proximity to a watercourse and their opinions on beaver release and impact.*
  - *IT also acknowledged that the downstream beneficiaries of beaver impact may not necessarily be the ones bearing the brunt of management and mitigation costs from allowing beaver activity on riparian land. Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund and ELMS schemes currently do and will offer financial support to landowners with beavers on their land under "Public money for public goods", but agreed that with these schemes being currently under development financial details on what payments could be expected to be made are currently lacking in places.*
  - *ML mentioned that imminent European Protected Species status may feed into environmental stewardship supplements for landowners.*
  - *JM reinforced HIWWT commitment in longer term with Beaver Officer in post to continue to deliver management and support for landowners, and encouraged NFU and CLA to continue to push Defra in delivering landowner support.*
- JA wondered if there were further plans to survey specific views of riparian landowners; and highlighted impermanence of government compensation schemes.
  - *IT consulting with private landowners, providing modelling data for private property and collecting written statements of opinions on beaver release and potential impact. Further specific riparian landowner questionnaire certainly a possibility.*
  - *JM encouraged CLA and NFU to bridge the gap between their membership and HIWWT to engage with riparian landowners. Presentations to East Yar Farmer Clusters and NFU did encourage landowners to get in touch if they wanted more information on private property impacts, though few have so far done so.*

- *ML reinforced importance of delivering modelling data to private landowners, key role of steering group to help with dissemination of this information to residents. Also reinforced length of time of countryside stewardship schemes over last 2-3 decades.*
- *IT gave information on government's intention to create a national beaver forum to provide collaboration for stakeholders and serve as a model for local steering group stakeholder collaboration*
- RW interested to know likely rate of beaver population expansion, loW carrying capacity, and long term requirement for population control
  - *IT highlighted that there is currently not modelling available to predict population expansion and territory sizes since populations across Europe and Britain are still expanding following the alleviation of hunting pressure, and as they do so, so do territories constrict. However, average territory size in certain countries in Europe with more stable beaver populations average 3km. loW territory size may well be smaller than this given our mild climate, long growing season and absence of deer, but taking 3km as an average, there could be 19 territories with sufficient suitable habitat on the Island.*
  - *IT elaborated on natural mortality causative agents including territorial disputes and salt sickness that can regulate population size, as well as active population management methods including live trapping and translocation. Translocation between catchments of genetically diverse beavers is likely to be a key component of NE's nationwide management strategy to support long term population health given that founder populations of escaped beavers in England are currently inbred.*
  - *RW noted that some local residents may not be aware that HIWWT is pursuing an open release, to which IT responded that outreach, education and engagement will continue to reinforce the Trust's aspiration for a wild unenclosed release of beavers.*

## Any Other Business

- RM keen to see wild release licensing criteria
  - *IT mentioned that NE's wild release licensing criteria is still under development, and any draft guidance they have currently issued is still confidential at this stage*
  - *ML drew attention to NE's Code and Guidance for Translocations and Reintroductions in Britain, IT confirmed that this document, based on IUCN guidelines forms the basis of Defra's licensing framework*
- RM also keen to clarify semantics of beaver "introduction" versus "reintroduction" with regard to project terminology
  - *IT clarified that although Vectis Archaeology have found evidence of beaver manipulated sticks on the Isle of Wight in the "nut layer" dating from 8,000 years ago, there is no official record of this within the literature to cite and so reference to this discovery is still anecdotal and off the record, thus references of project terminology as "introduction" as opposed to "reintroduction" reflect this.*
- ML asked for clarification on beavers' status as a native species

- *IT clarified that beavers are considered a native species with European Protected Status in Scotland but not yet in England, though we believe they will gain this status later this year when Defra release their nationwide management strategy.*

## Date, Format and Venue of Next Meeting

- Next meeting to be in person, with venues suggested including Quay Arts, Browns and Alverstone Village Hall.
- Meeting to take place in early September, at a quarterly interval, but with the proviso that a meeting would be called sooner should NE/Defra announce the release of their management strategy or further details on licensing.
- DC suggested a brief presentation on beaver at the next meeting to build a general understanding across all membership of the steering group.
- AC pushed for further development on consultation and the IoW beaver management strategy prior to the next meeting to continue to build the evidence base and inform discussions at future steering group meetings