

Isle of Wight Beaver Introduction Project Steering Group
Minutes from Meeting 4th October 2023

Attendees:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/Organisation</i>
<i>Matthew Chatfield</i>	Independent Chair
<i>Nicola Wheeler</i>	Beaver Officer / HIWWT
<i>Jamie Marsh</i>	HIWWT
<i>Mark Simmons</i>	AONB Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer
<i>Colin Boswell</i>	CLA
<i>Caroline Knox</i>	East Yar Farmer Cluster
<i>Lucy Charman</i>	Country Landowners Association
<i>Carolyn Herbert</i>	Isle of Wight Council - Ecology
<i>Jennine Gardner</i>	Local Access Forum
<i>June Davison</i>	Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils
<i>Robyn Munt</i>	NFU
<i>Mike Greenslade</i>	National Trust

Apologies:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/Organisation</i>
<i>Katiana Saleiko</i>	Forestry England
<i>Mark Larter</i>	Natural England – Deputy Chair
<i>Keith Ballard</i>	RSPB
<i>Adam Cave</i>	Environment Agency
<i>James Brewer</i>	IOW Council - Planning
<i>Colin Pope</i>	Isle of Wight Natural History Society
<i>Carol Flux</i>	Island Rivers
<i>Mark Roberts</i>	Island Roads
<i>Darrel Clarke</i>	Isle of Wight Rights of Way
<i>Brendan Jones</i>	Southern Water
<i>James Attrill</i>	South Wight Farmer Cluster
<i>Lisa Banfield</i>	Wildheart Trust

Introductions and Welcome:

- **MC** welcomed all attendees and asked for apologies.
- **MC** welcomed Carolyn Herbert – new IOW Council Ecology Officer

Review of Previous Meeting's Minutes:

- **CK** sent through some amendments, incorporated into updated minutes.
- **JD** asked for her apologies/absence to be incorporated.
- **LG** was in attendance for Lisa Banfield
- No Matters arising.

Update from Statutory Agencies:

- No comment had been received from **AC**.
- **CH** – Interested to learn more about and get up to speed with the Beaver Project
- **ML** - Internal update from NE but not for wider dissemination or minuting.
- **MC** – summarised that the NE memo was no real change/update from previous meeting.

Update on Licence Application:

- **NW** reported that she had been continuing Izzie's work on the Ecological assessment which was almost complete with sections on Water Framework Directive related aspects to add in. She mentioned that the East Yar Catchment Management Plan was about to be revisited and updated by Island Rivers and the Ecological Assessment should therefore include the most up to date information.
- **NW** gave a short presentation which included an overview of the ecological assessment content (see attached).
- **NW** shared her findings that a broad- brush satellite image analysis of land-use in the floodplain (Zone 2) showed that of the 700ha of floodplain, approximately 590ha was semi-natural or natural habitat. The measurement had disallowed any areas that were cultivated, intensively grazed, campsites, fishing lakes, reservoirs etc.
- **CK** asked detail about above.
- **MS** noted that this is contiguous with his findings on soil analysis where only 12 fields were directly next to watercourses without any existing buffer strip.
- **NW** showed photos of the East Yar floodplain and the existing SINC (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) there, that were outside of HIWWT nature reserves, but which were drying out, becoming scrubbed over and unsuitable for priority species such as Water vole. She said that the arable areas were predominantly outside of the floodplain, but more understanding is required on whether beavers would travel up on to the plateau to forage on crops given abundant natural forage in the floodplain. **Action NW – ask Devon Wildlife Trust and others who have experience of wild living beavers in similar landscapes.**
- **CK** do beavers eat bramble? **NW** replied yes.
- **CK** are you looking at other factors including flood risk?
- **NW** introduced works that the National Trust in Purbeck have carried out for their licence application where they used/mapped a type of traffic light system for flagging areas of potential conflict including flooding, burrowing, crop foraging etc.
- **NW** explained that she would like to consult with riparian owners to ground-truth the aerial floodplain mapping and to develop a traffic-light system to identify likely conflicts.
- **CK** asked if HIWWT were including other catchments in the assessment?
- **JM** responded that HIWWT were awaiting guidance from NE on the licence requirements with regard to catchments.
- **LC** pointed out that hay meadows and grazing were essential for some farms and should be excluded from the floodplain figures.
- **CK** added that the same should apply to pony paddocks.
- **CK** added that fishing lakes are often reservoirs.

Future Direction of this Group:

- **MC** led the discussion explaining that due to there still being no national policy on wild living beavers and no decisions from DEFRA regarding licencing for wild beaver releases, the steering group was at risk of getting into a bit of a rut.

Although everyone saw use of the group as time well spent, he proposed that currently the group do not need to meet as often as it has done. He suggested that the steering group could look at developing working groups to discuss specific topics via email and in person discussion. These would be open to all members of the steering group to attend.

MC felt that it was important not to lose the focus of the steering group - which is whether beavers should be introduced onto the Island, what reasons have we got for introducing them, what reasons have we not got.

- Proposal – fewer steering group meetings (unless sudden change from government) – move to a working group that is more locally focused.
- **NW** suggested the following possible working group topics:
 - Rights Of Way in East Yar Catchment
 - Fishing lakes in East Yar Catchment
 - Reservoirs in East Yar Catchment
 - Identifying culverts and other hard infrastructure at risk in East Yar Catchment
 - Riparian landowner consultation
- **MS** suggested Finance mitigation payments/economics
- **LC** felt that the Management plan should add detail referencing how we are different due to being an Island. **Action NW** – to check the content of the Management plan.
- **MG** asked what the licence period would be, and **JM** responded that at present Natural England were indicating it would be 10 years.
- **NW** reported that the draft licence application relating to Purbeck had considered a phased wild release – with beavers kept within a naturally defined but unfenced area and whether this was something that could be possible here, with an East Yar licence followed by a rest of island release licence at a later date.
- **MG** felt that it was important to recognise the value of in-person meetings and that there was a balance to be struck between in-person vs email discussions to maintain the cohesive nature of group.
- **RM** said that there was a risk of creating more meetings with this route and that use of online meetings could be used to strike a balance. She said that it was important to remember that the purpose of the group is consultation.
- **NW** raised the topic of meeting riparian landowners to ground-truth some of the mapped floodplain land-use and suggested that a letter could be sent to as many as could be identified.
- **RM** said that care needs to be taken to promote the right conversations
- **CK** asked that HIWWT don't offer riparian landowners/farmers grants that don't exist.
- **CK** asked whether HIWWT would present the results?
- **NW** replied Yes.
- **MG** agreed that hearing the results was important.

- **MC** raised the point that it was wise not to raise expectations, that early consultation was causing issues with people enquiring, “are they here yet?”. He recommended that regarding publicity and consultation, two “bites of the cherry” might be possible, but not three.
- **MC** concluded that everyone seemed happy reducing frequency of meetings and moving toward more working groups. He suggested trialling of working groups to see how take up and engagement is.
- **NW** suggested that working group findings/discussions would feed back into the wider Steering Group which would meet less frequently.
- **MC** recommended that the Steering Group should meet again next April. If, however something changes such as DEFRA making a decision on wild release licences, then we can call an additional meeting.
- **ACTION NW** to send out minutes and appeal for feedback on topics for working group to pick up on and ask for volunteers for the working groups .

AOB

NW to send out ecological assessment for comment, once completed.