

Environment Policy Development Group

26 January 2005

YEALM ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

Head of Landscape and Leisure

Statutory Powers: Various effecting Environment and Estuary Management.

Financial Implications:

Nominal costs for printing and promotion of the plan, within existing resources and in partnership with members of the Yealm Management Group.

Staff time, particularly for Landscape and Recreation, to attend and support the Yealm Management Group. Any particular revenue or capital projects will be subject to future reports for approval.

Purpose

The Yealm Estuary Management Plan was first produced in 1998 with an intention to review after five years. This report now seeks to:

- Appraise members of work underway to review the Yealm Estuary Management Plan.
- Provide a brief summary of progress since the production of the last Estuary Management Plan.
- Enable members to consider the level of involvement and to define any respective role the Council wishes to have, in the:
 - Production of a new more streamlined and locally focussed 5 year action plan;
 - Implementation of the action programme through the Yealm Management Group.

The following Council priorities are contributed to by the Yealm Estuary Management Plan review process:

- CP3. Maintain the district's distinctive environment whilst enabling access and sensitive development
- CP4. Maintain a clean environment

The following Council Commitments are contributed to by the Yealm Estuary Management Plan review process:

- Sustainability
- Community involvement and community vibrancy
- Effective partnership
- Communication, consultation and openness

Recommendations

That the Environment Policy Development Group makes recommendations to the Executive on the issues to be considered in the delivery of the District Council's core objectives in the drafting of an up-dated 5 year local action programme for the Yealm.

Background/The Issues

1. The Yealm Estuary is a key asset of the South Hams area and its appearance, health and vibrancy, together with that of the surrounding countryside and settlements, assists the estuary in playing an important role as a fishery, recreation, tourist and local community resource in this particular part of the district.
2. The first and now expired Estuary Management Plan, relates principally to the water areas of the Yealm Estuary, including the estuary fundus, foreshore, nearby settlements. It also addresses the wider river catchment in order that interlinked terrestrial and marine issues are covered.
3. The Council has no water based assets within the Yealm Estuary, though it does have a range of legal interests in foreshore access points, open spaces, toilet blocks and other facilities either immediately adjacent to, or within the environs of the estuary. The Council as Planning Authority has a considerable influence over current and future development decisions that effects the Estuary.

South Devon AONB Management Plan

3. Since the first Yealm Estuary Management Plan was produced in 1998, a statutory Management Plan has been developed for the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) with publication of the final document in May of 2004. The production process for this plan involved extensive consultation over a wide range of issues and consequently provides a sound, over-arching strategic and policy context for the protected landscape area, which includes the Yealm Estuary.
4. The 'Part 1: Strategy' document of the current AONB management plan 2004-2009 under the topic of Coasts and Estuaries makes reference to a range of relevant issues and challenges.
5. A particular priority for action is A/CE8 "Continue to promote and support estuary management initiatives and conservation groups and seek local delivery of AONB policies through estuary management plans." Estuary Management Partnerships such as that of the Yealm Estuary Management Forum guided by a local action document in the form of an estuary management plan, are crucial to achieving significant progress. Action A/CE8a within the AONB Management Plan Part 2 Action Programme is detailed as: "Review and re-publish local management plans for the five estuaries of the AONB and seek resources for their implementation." The review and publishing of new estuary management plans for the Yealm and Dart are fundamental delivery mechanisms for this.

Yealm EMP Review

7. Estuary Management Plans have been used to great effect in coastal areas of England and Wales as an important tool, drawing together a range of organisations and local community interests in support of common aims under a shared vision. From an initial assessment by the Yealm Estuary Management Forum, progress against the 30 actions listed in the last plan has been mixed, though all but 4 actions have been progressed in some way. A summary chart of progress is included as Appendix A. Least progress has been

made on those actions that were included in a speculative form and relied on funding or additional resources being made available.

8. The Estuary Management Plan review will follow the following process:
 - Assessment and evaluation of progress against previous Yealm Estuary Management Plan
 - Identification of unresolved, relevant issues: proposals for new Estuary Management Plan process
 - Assessment and evaluation of links to other plans and strategies (particularly South Devon AONB and Plymouth Sound & Estuaries SAC)
 - Interviews and discussions with key stakeholders
 - Public open day and evening with exhibition on Yealm Estuary action progress, AONB Plan displays, River Yealm Harbour Authority and a community mapping exercise to collate issues, views and concerns.
 - Drafting of the new Yealm Estuary Management Plan (this to take the form of a Local Action Plan document complete with context section clearly detailing the links to the AONB and other relevant plans, an action programme for regular review, and a separate reference volume of facts and figures)
 - Approval and adoption of the Local Action Plan by stakeholders and partners
9. The plan would continue to be a non-statutory document setting out priorities for local action and detailing the partnerships involved, relevant milestones and targets, financial sources and other resource needs.
10. The general feedback from the Yealm Estuary Management Forum has suggested that the estuary is not facing any one issue of critical concern. Partner organisations are also suggesting that the range of issues requiring local action is perhaps limited and whilst community concern over the future of the estuary remains high there do not appear to be urgent issues to be resolved. It is therefore anticipated that the consultation exercise for this review will be less intensive than for the first Yealm Estuary Management Plan, and that it will also draw on the results of other recent consultations.

Yealm Plan – Key Issues (Appendix B)

11. A summary of the current issues affecting the Yealm Estuary can be found in Appendix B to this report and Members' views are sought on, the range of issues, any particular local priorities and Council objectives.
12. It is anticipated that this next edition of the Yealm Estuary Management Plan, whilst ensuring clear links are made to policies and actions in the AONB Plan and other relevant statutory plans, will focus on those locally relevant issues and challenges not adequately covered elsewhere. The review process will need to fully explore the degree to which any issues beyond the immediate estuary area are covered within the South Devon AONB management plan and other documents.

Risk Assessment

13. There are no inherent risks associated with the review, adoption and implementation of the Yealm Estuary Management Plan.

Human Rights Act

14. There are no significant Human Rights Act implications.

Conclusion

15. The existing Yealm Estuary Management Plan has expired and a new plan is now required that is pertinent to current issues and challenges facing the estuary and its environs. The recent production of the statutory South Devon AONB Management Plan provides a useful framework within which to sit a more locally focussed and targeted action programme. A review of progress against actions in the first plan is underway along with discussions with key stakeholders and an assessment of links to other plans and strategies.
16. Members have an opportunity to review the Council role and involvement in the Yealm Estuary and to provide an input to this process at an early stage. This is particularly relevant to the management plan review process and to the Yealm Estuary Management Group. A summary of current issues is attached in Appendix A for your information and your views are sought on both range and priorities.

Roger English
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Environment PDG
26 January 2005

Ken Carter
Head of Landscape & Leisure

Background Documents:

Former Yealm Estuary Management Plan (1998)
Plymouth Sound & Estuaries European Marine Site Management Scheme 2001
South Devon AONB Management Plan 2004-2009 (2004)

Appendix B

Yealm Estuary Management Plan Review – Summary of Issues

The following is a summary of current and outstanding issues relating to the Yealm Estuary that have been made known at this stage. Any views from members on these or additional items would be welcomed together with an idea of particular priorities.

Management Co-ordination

- Review of the terms of reference for the Yealm Estuary Management Forum.
- Increasing the transparency of the Yealm Estuary Management Forum.
- Improvement in sharing of available information on the estuary.
- Use of the new Harbour Office facility.

Landscape Conservation

- Increased control needed over private slipway design and their impact on the intertidal area.
- Information and awareness raising of the importance of the estuary's key landscape features

Coastal Defence

- Increased control needed over the design and materials used in the defence of private waterside land.

Nature Conservation

- Extent and condition of the eel grass *zostera marina* beds.
- Extent and condition of species and habitat features of nature conservation importance.
- Information and awareness raising of the importance of the estuary's key nature conservation features
- The relationship of the Yealm Estuary to the Wembury Voluntary Marine Conservation Area and Plymouth Sound as a Special Area of Conservation and European Marine site.
- Forthcoming review of the Special Area of Conservation proposed to start in April 2005.

Fisheries Management & Marine Related Crime

- Impact of water quality on the viability of the shellfishery.
- Co-ordinated support needed to maintain and enhance a commercially viable shellfishery.
- Sporadic bouts of marine crime.
- Increased siltation rates in the upper reaches of the estuary.

Recreation and Access

- Condition and quality of steps from the road down to the new Harbour Office
- Sustainability of the ferry service.
- Limited foot access to large areas of the estuary complex.
- Impact of the proposed Sustrans cycleway route.
- Potential impact of the proposed Sherford development.
- Ad hoc parking and capacity during the busy summer season.
- Supporting the maintenance of quiet areas and awareness of foreshore access restrictions / rights.

Moorings

- No plans to change the existing policy.

Historic Environment

- Perceived to be a monitoring issue only.
- Raise awareness of the estuary's history.

Water Quality

- Remains a significant issue.
- Little confidence in positive action being taken by key agencies.
- Particular concerns over the priority given to sewerage infrastructure upgrades.
- Potential impact of the proposed Sherford development.

Marine Litter

- An ongoing issue that is regularly addressed by the annual spring clean up.
- Limited mechanisms in place to deal with summer and autumn litter accumulation.

Oil Spill Contingency Planning

- Concerns over the efficiency of current booming plans.