

Salcombe Harbour Board – 25 September 2007**ESTUARY AND AONB PARTNERSHIPS****Report of Head of Landscape & Leisure**

Statutory Powers: Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act)

Financial Implications: The Harbour Authority has budgeted £16k in 2007/08 for its contribution towards the Estuary Partnership at Salcombe. New arrangements outlined in the report will seek a revised contribution in 2008/09 towards costs of an AONB Estuaries Partnership.

Purpose

To inform members of the current situation with regards to the Estuary Partnerships in South Hams, but particularly the issue relating to the Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary and the need to establish a financially viable partnership linked to the AONB that can deliver the harbour's Environmental Management Plan.

Recommendations

That the Harbour Board resolves to support the proposal to establish an Estuary Partnership linked to the AONB and delegate authority to the Harbourmaster in consultation with the Chairman to agree the level of financial contribution

Background

1. The Harbour Board has been a leading member of the Salcombe Estuary Partnership for over ten years during which time it has contributed towards the employment of an Estuary Officer and establishment and delivery of the Environmental Management Plan with the Conservation Forum.
2. During the past two years pressure upon public sector budgets has meant that the Estuary Partnerships, which are voluntary arrangements, have come under particular pressure to the extent that their future is not viable in their current form. The Dart Estuary Environmental Management Partnership agreed to regretfully end its current structure on 31 August 2007. This has led to partners seeking a review of management arrangements for all estuaries in the South Hams.

Current Estuary Partnership Arrangements

3. A summary of the estuary management arrangements is attached at Appendix 1. All six estuaries are directly covered or linked to the South Devon AONB. There is a statutory requirement under the CROW Act to have regard to the protected landscape, through the production of an AONB Management Plan, and have management arrangements in place for its delivery.

Estuary Partnership Review - Options for Future Environmental Management

4. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses of options available for environmental management with the South Devon Estuaries is presented in Appendix 2. Partner consultation has favoured Option 4 with an Estuary Officer based within the AONB Unit.

Proposed Way Forward

5. Existing funding partners involved on all other estuaries are currently being consulted upon a draft budget for financial year 2008/09. It is recommended that the level of contribution be delegated to the Harbourmaster in association with the Chairman.
6. A revised job description and person specification has been established together with organisation structure for new working arrangements to be linked to the AONB Partnership.
7. If proposal for an Estuary Partnership linked to the AONB is adopted, the proposal would be to have a Memorandum of Agreement between the funding partners and the AONB for an agreed period of time, after which the arrangements would be reviewed.

The Estuary Officer

8. The post holder will be part of the South Devon AONB staff unit based at Totnes and will report to the AONB Manager.
9. The post holder will be employed by South Hams District Council, which acts as the host authority for the AONB Unit on behalf of the wider AONB Partnership.
10. The estuary officer will concentrate attention primarily on the Dart and Salcombe estuaries and to a lesser extent on the Avon and Yealm estuaries. The Erme estuary, being in the single ownership of a private estate and being generally remote and undeveloped, will require only a watching brief. The Tamar estuary complex including Plymouth Sound has a separate management arrangement and estuary officer.

Estuary community forums

11. The estuary officer will provide support for the effective operation of community conservation forums for the Dart, Salcombe and Avon estuaries and will support the Yealm estuary management group as required.

The steering group

12. A steering group will be established to provide an overview of estuary management in the AONB and to provide for accountability between the estuary officer and the respective funding agencies and key partner organisations. The steering group will act as a technical group to the AONB Partnership Committee. The steering group will appoint a chairman who will thereby also have a place on the AONB Partnership Committee. The steering group will meet twice a year (or more often if required) to monitor the work programme and progress of the estuary officer.

Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
Failure to deliver environmental management	Development of environmental objectives within Harbour Business Plan
Loss of existing management experience	Development of links to the AONB Unit
Lost Community support via Conservation Forum	Develop exit strategy and offer links via other community groups
Potential impact upon Harbour Business Plan	Identify impact on visitor numbers
Damage to the environmental qualities of the estuary	Monitor with existing environmental bodies

Conclusion

13. The continued pressure on public sector budgets has led to a review of existing estuary management across South Hams. In order to maintain an appropriate level of environmental management covering marine aspects within the estuary, the proposal to work through an AONB Estuary Partnership with other harbours and funding partners is considered the best option for the Board.

Ken Carter
Head of Landscape & leisure

Salcombe Harbour Board
25 September 2007

Ian Gibson
Harbourmaster

Background Documents:

Salcombe – Kingsbridge Estuary – Environmental Management Plan
South Devon AONB Management Plan

Summary of estuary partnerships and plans – South Devon AONB

	Estuary Management Plan	Estuary Conservation Officer	Management Forum	Steering Group	Terms of reference of Partnership/Forum	Funding Arrangements
Dart Estuary	Management Plan recently revised and completed. New Plan runs from 2006 – 2011.	Dart Estuary Environmental Management in Dartmouth. Finished 31st August 07 after 10 years. Estuary Officer was employed by SHDC. Line management through SHDC Head of Landscape and Leisure.	Dart Estuary Forum meets twice a year. Secretariat was provided by Estuary Officer.	Dart Estuary Steering Committee meets four times a year – comprising funding partners and community reps of the estuary forum. - Group agreed to end current working arrangement on 31 st August 2007 - new proposal being considered Sept 07	Revised and adopted with effect from. 1 st April 2004. Current Memorandum of Association runs to 1 st April 2007	Estuary officer and budget funded by SHDC, Dart Harbour Authority, Natural England, Duchy of Cornwall. Devon County Council, Devon Sea Fisheries Committee, Environment Agency, South West Water, the National Trust.
Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary	Management Plan recently revised and completed. New Plan runs from 2005 – 2010.	Yes – based at Salcombe Harbour Office. Employed by South Hams District Council. Line management through Salcombe Harbourmaster. Partner funding now limited.	Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum meets approx twice a year. Secretariat provided by Estuary officer.	Small informal steering group (Harbourmaster, Natural England, AONB officer) meets 2-3 times a year.	Terms of reference of the Forum currently being drafted.	Marine Conservation Officer and budget funded by SHDC, Salcombe Harbour Authority, Natural England, Duchy of Cornwall. Partner funding now limited.
Avon Estuary	Current Plan covers the period 2002 – 2007. To be reviewed 2007.	No. (But support for the conservation forum is provided by MCO).	Avon Estuary Conservation Forum meets twice a year.	No.	In need of revision and updating as part of management plan review 2007.	No funding agreement.

	Estuary Management Plan	Estuary Conservation Officer	Management Forum	Steering Group	Terms of reference of Partnership/Forum	Funding Arrangements
Erme Estuary	Current Plan covers the period 2003 – 2008.	No.	No management arrangements currently active. Needs a fundamental review or exit?	No.	Last adopted September 2003 In need of revision and updating Sept 2007 Original adopted Sept 98	No funding agreement.
Yealm Estuary	Management Plan currently being revised. New Plan to run from 2007 – 2012.	No.	Yealm Estuary Management Forum meets approx twice a year. Secretariat provided by Harbour Office.	No	Redrafted 2005 currently being adopted 07	No funding agreement.
Tamar Estuary (includes Plymouth Sound and Estuaries, Plym, Tamar, Tavy, Lynher and coast of Wembury)	Management Plan recently revised and completed. New Plan runs from 2006 – 2011.	Yes – based at Plymouth Civic Centre, employed by Plymouth City Council. Line management through Strategy Unit Manager at Plymouth City Council.	Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum meets four times a year. TECF are advised by Port of Plymouth Marine Liaison Committee (PPMLC), and Wembury VMCA Advisory Group)	No	Currently being revised ready for adoption.	Funding agreement recently renegotiated. Involves local authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, South West Water, MoD, Harbour Authorities.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE

In order to ensure that relevant organisations continue to be actively engaged in the delivery of estuary aspects of the AONB a number of options are to be considered along with their strengths and weaknesses.

Option 1 –Status-quo based at Harbours

Keep an officer upon the Dart and Salcombe, but funded and employed by each Harbour Authority.

Strengths

- Maintain scale and level of capacity
- Maintain local project delivery
- Coordination of actions delivered?
- Focus on harbours actions only?
- Conservation Forums supported
- Harbour users considered

Weaknesses

- User opposition (mooring fees increase to cover costs?)
- Lack of ‘political support’
- Loses Partnership approach
- Focus upon water based activity and harbour work only
- Wider environmental objectives lost
- Loss in added value through Partnership
- Funding opportunities missed?
- Weakening of link to AONB Partners

Option 2

**No officer with specific Estuary remit
AONB Unit provide minimal relevant cover**

Strengths

- AONB projects budget increased (subject to partner approval)
- Key ‘strategic’ projects only delivered across the AONB (relevant to each estuary)
- Forums encouraged to be self-sufficient

Weaknesses

- Loss of harbour engagement and other funding partners?
- Volunteer dependent - could be vulnerable leading to loss of community support/forum activities
- Resentment by community at lost capacity and support
- Structures lost for future (difficult to re-establish)
- Impact on the AONB units capacity to deliver current levels of work and priorities
- Loss of trust, connections, local buy-in built up with local stakeholders which is important when it comes to tackling issues, e.g. seagrass management plan at Salcombe

- Loss of educational work with local groups/schools and therefore capacity to raise awareness of estuary environment

Option 3

AONB Estuary Officer (new JD with ‘strategic role’) based within AONB Unit with remit for all six estuaries (supporting Tamar Officer by covering Yealm and Wembury coast)

Strengths

- Greater co-ordination of maritime issues across all Estuaries.
- Partners encouraged to continue to fund local estuary projects
- Support for Conservation Forum organisation and communication
- Harbour’s have dedicated contact and officer time where relevant
- Provide link between ‘terrestrial’ and maritime AONB. (Those organisations, e.g. District/County/Harbours/Duchy)
- Line management through AONB Unit
- Link to other AONB staff for support and delivery
- Reduced overheads/costs and one salary
- Co-ordination increased across all estuaries

Weaknesses

- Scale of local delivery reduced all estuaries with major impact on Dart and Salcombe
- Harbour Authorities more remote from the officer
- Possible reduced partner contributions to officer
- Possible reduced partner projects support
- Scale of operation weakens for Community Forums
- Local projects not delivered

Option 4

AONB Estuary Officer (new JD with ‘strategic role’) based within AONB Unit with remit for four estuaries. TECF Officer remit extended to Yealm.

Strengths

- Enables AONB Estuary Officer to focus on Dart / Salcombe / Avon and Erme
- Dedicated officer for Wembury coast and Yealm Plan.
- Links with TECF improved for SHDC / DCC
- Output of TECF made relevant to Yealm / SAC
- Wembury VMCA liaison improved

Weaknesses

- Dilutes TECF Officer remit on Tamar
- Capacity limitation on Yealm
- Local political concerns?
- Possible Yealm Harbour resistance?

Option 5

New post funded by SHDC/Dart Harbour Authority

- Focus upon Property and Asset Management issues not on environment Estuary/AONB
- Examine income generated and asset liability/management (Totnes & Dartmouth)
- Not considered appropriate at present time or alternative delivery required.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that the funding and roles of two experienced estuary officers now seems unsustainable. Partners need to consider the options for different ways of dealing with estuaries and take forward a new approach.

A more strategic level with one officer may provide a way to maintain the existing organisational structures and the benefits they deliver. This needs to be considered by existing funding partners within both AONB and Estuaries.

Should such a proposal be considered appropriate a new job description and budget could then be examined, these being established by reviewing current Estuary Officer and AONB staff positions.

Funding partners would need to have early input, to establish their requirements from such an approach, including how certain funding partners relate to the current AONB Partnership representation (e.g. Harbour Authorities, Duchy and The National Trust) and obtain value and accountability for the support they give.

The Way Forward

It is proposed that this paper be modified as appropriate and used to consult with all relevant organisations with a funding interest in estuaries and that following this, the Public Forums be consulted regarding their future roles and support.