

Climate & Ecological Emergency Forum

18 July 2023, 6.30-8pm
Guildhall, Totnes and via Zoom

Present

JH — Cllr J Hodgson
TC — Cllr T Cooper
MH — Maiken Hutchings (TTC Sustainability Officer, notes)
RO — Totnes Trust
LW — Bigbury Net Zero (online)
KS — Totnes resident (online)
WH — Totnes supporting Fairtrade (online)
JF — Transition Town Totnes (online from 7pm)

Apologies from: FB

Recommendations

The group **RECOMMENDED** that TTC formally support the FoD requests.

The Forum **RECOMMENDED** that TTC allocate £2,500 from the Climate Change budget towards the Energy Wise Show

Actions

- (Action carried across) MH to liaise with RO on getting something (a little description/report) on the Colebrook Leat project that can go to TTC Planning Committee to say whether they would object to this project.
- MH to incorporate suggestions into the ToRs and present second iteration at the next Forum meeting
- MH to speak to JH about progressing the Friends of the Dart requests to Full Council.
- ALL to share Friends of the Dart information as widely as possible
- MH to feed meeting decisions back to Hannah at FoD
- MH to liaise with JH on getting the Climate Change budget recommendation to Full Council in September.
- MH to include the links for the Impact data and slides in the mailing list email.
- MH to add SH emissions data parish collaboration to the agenda for the next CEEF meeting

1. Welcome & who is here

2. Notes and actions from previous meetings

MH updated on the actions. She apologised for the delay in getting the notes out from the last meeting; this was partly due to issues with the Mailchimp account. She highlighted that one action from the previous meeting needed to be carried forward and that she would liaise with RO on this.

3. Draft Terms of Reference

MH had drafted up some Terms of Reference now that the group is a Forum rather than a Working Group. The group ran through these and made suggestions for additions and amendments.

A discussion was had about how engage with a wider group of people. Various suggestions were raised, such as having a specific engagement drive and improving communications, having a speaker at each meeting, 'advertising' in the Totnes Directory and at the Climate Hub, etc.

ACTION: MH to incorporate suggestions into the ToRs and present second iteration at the next Forum meeting

4. Friends of the Dart – call for support

Friends of the Dart (FoD) are looking for council support on a couple of their projects. MH read out the information provided by FoD regarding their key asks around the Bathing Water Designation and Community Designated River Health projects – this information and an FoD FAQ can be found in the appendix.

The group was very positive about the work that FoD are doing and expressed a desire to support as much as possible. Several people highlighted the incredible work and progress to date by Hannah and the FoD team.

FoD letter of support template:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MyOJ5g0NELB1L886aRGem6QfwZleA08N/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=109293550772264730415&rtpof=true&sd=true

FoD newsletter template:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GBmKyfWDI1MCoK_3DdlWRgrKNvQwQ2ne/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=109293550772264730415&rtpof=true&sd=true

The group **RECOMMENDED** that TTC formally support the FoD requests.

JH suggested that the FoD requests be sent through to Full Council to consider officially supporting, rather than it go to all Cllrs individually.

ACTION: MH to speak to JH about progressing the Friends of the Dart requests to Full Council.

ACTION: ALL to share as widely as possible.

ACTION: MH to feed decisions back to Hannah

5. Transition Town Totnes - Energy Wise funding discussion

Transition Town Totnes had applied to the TTC Community Grant to fund an Energy Wise Show but sadly were not successful as the budget was oversubscribed by approximately £65,000. They were encouraged to apply for an allocation from the TTC Climate Change budget, which the CEEF makes recommendations on.

JF from Transition Town Totnes (TTT) explained the Energy Wise project.

- The first Energy Wise Show was last year. There were speakers, stalls, space for interaction. 200-300 people turned up during the day, and this was after only 6 weeks to set up. TTT want a much longer lead time this year, and also to increase business presence, e.g., companies doing solar, heat pumps, etc.
- The show would be in November 2023

The aim of the show is to make practical support and advice on energy use, waste, and renewables, as accessible to as many people in need as possible in Totnes and nearby parishes. This is in response to the rising energy bills and cost of living crisis in the UK, and aimed primarily at those in financial hardship. The objectives of the event are to help the community:

- reduce its electricity costs;
- reduce its electricity waste;
- reduce its dependency on fossil fuel sourced electricity;
- shift to using renewable energy;
- reduce its spiraling costs of living.

The event will consist of stalls, interactive displays & talks all focused on energy & helping people with their cost of living. TTT will be working with several local energy groups (South Devon Community Energy, TRESOC, Energy Local Totnes, LEAP, Regen, the National Energy Action charity), Caring Town Totnes, Citizens Advice Bureau & various organisations & businesses who are able to provide a diverse range of advice on energy related support. To publicise the event they will be using the Post Office's leaflet delivery service so that everyone who lives in Totnes will receive direct information about the event

TTT are looking to fundraise **£2456** to cover the costs of the project.

The Forum discussed the project and voiced general support for it. It was unanimously agreed to recommend that TTC allocate £2,500 from the budget. JH stated that she would be happy to give some of her Devon County Council Cllr budget towards it, offering £500.

ACTION: JF / TTT to apply for £500 through the DCC website

The Forum **RECOMMENDED** that TTC allocate £2,500 from the Climate Change budget towards the Energy Wise Show.

It was suggested that this recommendation should go directly to Full Council due the Energy Wise Show being in November.

ACTION: MH to liaise with JH on getting the Climate Change budget recommendation to Full Council in September.

6. South Hams District emissions

JH has asked LW whether she would be willing to present some data that she had collated on the South Hams emissions, using the Impact calculator.

The PowerPoint slides are available here:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1F1MfycMvkJmTiXB5tlkmYoriw0hK5cSG/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=109293550772264730415&rtpof=true&sd=true

The spreadsheet data can be found here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1L_-jmSI2YvIhZCIQ0499MIleO5247-ZA/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=109293550772264730415&rtpof=true&sd=true

ACTION: MH to include the links for the Impact data and slides in the mailing list email.

The group discussed the various slides and how this could be used. A suggestion was made to have a special meeting / workshop with other neighbouring parishes to discuss how we can use this information to collaborate to take action. This could possibly be facilitated via the Sustainable South Hams group.

ACTION: MH to add SH emissions data parish collaboration to the agenda for the next CEEF meeting

LW was thanked for her work on developing these parish profiles of carbon footprints and very helpful presentation to explain how to use the Impact Tool.

7. AOB

JH gave a brief update on developments at South Hams District Council.

- Sustainable South Hams (SSH) are now working in close partnership with SHDC, having received funding to continue their work.
- Cllr McKay – portfolio holder for climate change – is setting up a climate change panel
- JH is working with the SSH composting team to progress setting up community composting sites across the district.

End of meeting 20:05

Appendix

Friends of the Dart council support request

Friends of the Dart is asking District, Town & Parish Councils to gather letters of support from both Councils & their constituents to join our growing evidence of support for a reduction of sewage being discharged into the River Dart and their other related campaigns.

The **2 main requests** we want Council help with.

1. Show support for Bathing Water Designation (Dartington, Totnes steamer quay, Dittisham Stoke Gabriel and Dartmouth). If successful, a drastic reduction of sewage spills at these places will be required. They are asking that Cllrs who support sign a letter of support (have provided a template)
2. They are establishing a river-long campaign: the COMMUNITY DESIGNATED RIVER HEALTH PROJECT and they would like help sharing information about this.

The project aims for a reduction to 1-2 spills (CSOs) per sewage outlet (the same water quality as Bathing Water Status) along the entire length of the Dart. This takes the form of a timeline of resolution of CSOs and an agreement with South West water to update infrastructure, both of which will be backed up by a legally binding document of accountability.

I enclose two TEMPLATES which we would like you to send to Councillors please so that we can gather letters of support for both campaigns from Councillors & from their constituents.

1. The first letter is for individual councillors to complete to show their support for a bathing water application. Please ask councillors to fill in the template letter & tick the sites that they agree with before returning it to us at hello@friendsofthedart.org

2. The second is a newsletters or mail-shot template that Councillors will send out to constituents

The householders who receive the newsletters are asked to support us by completing the survey. We would like local businesses to write a letter of support using the template and return it to us at hello@friendsofthedart.org

We are looking to fund FOD in a sustainable way and welcome any input that the council can provide. Note we will be operating a year round and river long testing programme and hosting the data in a way that makes it easily accessible to the community.



Who are we?

Friends of the Dart is a grassroots community group. We exist as an advocate for the River Dart & for our community. We believe that effective collaboration, connection & information is key in remedying water quality & ecology issues on the river, & that the same mind-set that created these issues over many years is not the one that can solve them. As a community we are coming together in collaboration with government organisations, corporations, academics and NGOs to ensure that we collectively move towards long term sustainable health for our rivers with tangible & notable outcomes that enrich & revitalise both the river & our community's connection to nature.

Why was FOD set up?

Friends of The Dart began with a group of friends coming together after people became ill from swimming in the river. We asked ourselves what is in the water? The group has rapidly gained momentum and we have been joined by a whole host of river lovers including, swimmers, landowners, farmers, kayakers, canoeists, athletes and runners, boaters, picnickers, ecologists, anglers and walkers. We are a growing movement that includes local businesses, clubs and schools.

What is FoD doing?

1/Community River Health Designation, CRHD is a new model that involves collaboratively creating a timeline for the resolution of river pollutants, initially resolving Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs). Our aim is for these spills to be at bathing water standards (1-2 spills per year per wastewater treatment plant) for the whole river. Data from 2022 with 90% of event duration monitors in operation shows 1584 spills over 9709 hours into the river Dart (source: Department for Environment, Food and rural affairs. <https://environment.data.gov.uk/dataset/21e15f12-0df8-4bfc-b763-45226c16a8ac>).

Community River Health Designation accounts for sensitive ecology in parts of the Dart, as well as sections of the river where more human activity takes place - We expect to have achieved significant results over the next two years, we will then offer this model to other rivers and river partners. In order to evidence both the need for

change and the changes in water quality we have established a community survey and water quality testing programme.

2/ Friends of the Dart water quality testing programme.

By testing for bacteria along the length of the river we are gaining information to share with our community and to evidence both the need for change and the changes as they happen.

We are testing for E-coli, enterococcus, total coliforms and phosphate in the river water. Bacteria samples are analysed in a lab and are of a comparable standard to sampling done by the Environment agency and water company. We are currently taking weekly samples from 10 locations on the Dart.

Phase two of our testing programme will begin year-round testing from source to sea at multiple sites.

Results will be posted on our website, on our FB page and several key locations and businesses in the local area.

It is important to note that these pollutants are by no means the whole picture in terms of pollution entering the water course. We are working to bring data being gathered by other stakeholders together and make it publicly available.

3/ River User Survey.

We are looking at the interconnection between water quality and river ecology health and the physical and mental health of our communities in relationship with the river. Our survey has been designed and is being analysed by professional researchers who we are grateful to have in our volunteer team.

This will give us a wide-ranging view of all those who are Friends of our River Dart.

- Who interacts with the river – eg. swimmers, canoeists, anglers, bird-watchers, walkers, etc.
- People's relationship with the river Dart
- How the river influences the lives of our community
- How often people interact with the river
- What is our community's experience of pollution & the ecology of the river

This survey will help us to work towards our community water quality designation to revitalise both the river & our community's connection to nature.

4/ Building local community hubs

Each village & town along the Dart has / will have a hub that replicates all the FOD activities. Our community engagement team liaises with schools, businesses, & clubs and councils.

5/ Inspiring, informing and engaging our community

We are hosting a series of in person events with inspiring river and ecology experts, establishing connection with the river ecology, and inspiring care and positive engagement.

6/ Building a core team

We are building a team of experts to ensure that our objectives are achieved – We couldn't work without our amazing volunteers in the following teams – Lead team, administration, community engagement, press, communications, research & data analysis, legal, events, public health & ecology.

7/ Creating a model for other rivers and community groups

Once our initial phase is achieved on the Dart we will offer this new collaborative model to other rivers, building a **Friends of The Rivers** network of communities, Water companies and other partners.

8/ Water contact log

As a part of evidencing the need for improved water quality, we need you to tell us when you or others have contact with the river water or you observe others getting wet, we are relying on you to help us to collect the numbers of dippers, swimmers, paddlers, canoeists, sailors etc.

We will put bathing water designation applications in via the DEFRA system for multiple spots along the river where the ecology isn't compromised by visitors. Although a useful tool to highlight issues there are limitations to bathing water designation in that large numbers are needed at one site and it doesn't include a legal requirement to remedy any issues.

You can support us by completing the count on our web site and sending the link to everyone you know who loves the river.

9/ Working in Partnership with Exeter University

We will be supporting and participating in research by Exeter University looking at antibiotic resistant bacteria in swimmers and river water.

[How is FOD set up?](#)

FOD is a community group with a constitution and members. We are currently transferring to a community-interest-company (CIC)

[How does FOD account for money donated?](#)

To date we have operated on a completely voluntary and unfunded basis. We are now inviting funding and sponsorship to enable us to achieve our goals and create long term positive impact for our rivers and communities. Our phase one bacteria testing programme is supported by Surfers against Sewage.

Other Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is the river polluted?

Pollution enters the water course from many different sources, CSO spills, agricultural run-off, run-off from roads and pollution from industry. We are working towards clear and available information on what is in our water and positive steps to resolve these issues.

2. Is it safe to swim in the river?

The choice to swim should be based on many factors, your swimming ability, health and consideration of river conditions and safe access.

FOD will be posting data on sewage spills on its web site, FB page, in shop windows etc. We hope to add a fuller picture of chemical pollution and also make this publicly available. Because our testing is done in a lab, data will be three days old once it reaches you. You should always make a considered personal choice before entering the water taking into account any visible pollution, smell to the water or algae present.

3. What is a CSO?

A CSO is a combined sewage overflow –

Sewage overflows are meant to act as an emergency relief valve for our sewerage system to stop sewage backing up into our homes. Legislation states they should only be used in 'exceptional circumstances'. Despite this, hundreds of thousands of discharges are happening every year. On the Dart River alone there were nearly 10,000 hours of CSO spills in 2022.

England has a combined sewage system made up of hundreds of thousands of kilometres of sewers, built by the Victorians. This means that clean rainwater and wastewater from toilets, roofs, bathrooms and kitchens are conveyed in the same pipe to sewage treatment works. Run off from increasingly concreted areas, roads and from fields with low absorption ability increasingly adds to this volume.

During heavy rainfall the capacity of the water treatment plant can be exceeded, which means possible inundation of sewage works and the potential to back up into buildings, homes, roads and open spaces. CSOs were developed as overflow valves to reduce the risk of sewage backing up during heavy rainfall.

Combined sewer overflows are currently a necessary part of the existing sewerage system, preventing sewage from flooding homes and businesses. The existing infrastructure needs to be upgraded to stop this from happening.

4. Why do they overflow?

A 'spill' or overflow occurs when excess water runs into the waste water system after e.g. heavy rainfall or when an increase in use of sewage systems occurs due to new housing, runs off roads & fields into the sewage system

5. Where are they taking place on The Dart?

They are taking place at 23 sites from Holne to Dartmouth. The highest hours of overflows are at Scoriton / Holne, Buckfastleigh, Totnes, Cornworthy and Dartmouth (source Environment Agency).

6. Where is FoD testing?

Friends of the Dart has recruited teams of volunteers to test and monitor water quality up and down the river. Testing is taking place at two sites in each of these locations, Dartington, Totnes, Stoke Gabriel, Bidwell Brook and Dartmouth. Phase two will see the addition of Ashburton, Buckfastleigh, Staverton and Dittisham to these.

7. What are the results of FoD water testing so far?

We are working towards an efficient and clear system to share this data. It will be available as soon as possible. Phase 1 testing runs until the end of September.

8. What can I do personally to reduce river pollution?

- Save water from your roof by collecting it in water butts or tanks to use on your garden
- Reduce your water consumption – have a shower, not a bath, re-direct your grey water to your own soak away or butts rather than overloading the sewage system
- Consider carefully what you put down the waste pipes – wet wipes, fat, hygiene products, household chemicals all go into the sewage system, some overflow into the river
- Consider what you put into your bodies – pharmaceutical drugs, hormones also go into the sewage system & into the river

10. How do I report a pollution incident?

If you see a pollution incident you can report it to the environment agency on 0344 346 2020

What can I do to support Friends of The River Dart?

1. Please **JOIN Friends of the Dart**. Our membership gives us strength in negotiating for change. We can do amazing things when we come together and the river needs you.

Individuals, please join us as a friend & if you are a local business, organisation or school, email at hello@friendsofthedart.org to find out how you can join the campaign.

2. Complete our **user survey and log your water contact**.

You can find this on our website, send it out to all your local family & friends, or business/school/club members/ staff/ pupils/ customers.

3. **Please keep updated** –join the Facebook page, Instagram Friends of the River Dart, or check our web site www.friendsofthedart.org where you can also add your email to our mailing list. We will be sending newsletters

4. **Come to our events** The programmes will be on our web site & we will send out EventBrite invitations.

5. **To offer your skills, please** contact hello@friendsofthedart.org

6. **Please donate** via our web site www.friendsofthedart.org