

Isle of Wight Beaver Project Steering Group

Minutes from Meeting 12.03.25

Via Teams

Attendees:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/Organisation</i>
<i>Matthew Chatfield</i>	<i>Independent Chair</i>
<i>Mark Larter</i>	<i>Vice Chair – Conservation adviser Natural England</i>
<i>Nicola Wheeler</i>	<i>Beaver Officer / HIWWT</i>
<i>Jamie Marsh</i>	<i>Director of Nature Recover, Wilder Wight, Solent & Seas</i>
<i>Lucy Charman</i>	<i>Rural Adviser SE Region -Country Landowners Association</i>
<i>Keith Ballard</i>	<i>Site Manager Brading Marshes - RSPB</i>
<i>June Davison</i>	<i>Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils</i>
<i>Lily Gray</i>	<i>Wildheart Trust</i>
<i>Carolyn Herbert</i>	<i>Isle of Wight Council - Ecology</i>
<i>Jennine Gardner</i>	<i>Local Access Forum /PROW</i>
<i>James Attrill</i>	<i>Land agent BCM/Farmer Cluster</i>
<i>Ian Boyd</i>	<i>ARC Ecology</i>
<i>Mark Simmonds</i>	<i>Farm Adviser – National Landscape</i>

Apologies:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/Organisation</i>
<i>Colin Boswell</i>	<i>Chairman IOW CLA</i>
<i>Katiana Saleiko</i>	<i>Forestry England</i>
<i>Mike Greenslade</i>	<i>National Trust</i>
<i>Rebecca Long</i>	<i>Environment Agency</i>
<i>Colin Pope</i>	<i>Isle of Wight Natural History Society</i>
<i>Brendan Jones</i>	<i>Southern Water</i>
<i>Caroline Knox</i>	<i>East Yar Farmer Cluster /NFU</i>
<i>Seb Taylor</i>	<i>Island Rivers Catchment Partnership</i>
<i>James Attrill</i>	<i>BCM/S</i>
<i>Darrel Clarke</i>	<i>Isle of Wight Rights of Way Manager</i>
<i>Robyn Munt</i>	<i>National Farmers Union</i>

Introductions and Welcome:

- No new introductions.
- Minutes of previous meeting were checked as correct and there were no matters arising
- ML – NE announced on 28.2.25 that there is now a statutory process for re-introduction of beavers into the wild. They are leading on the application process which is initially the submission of an Expression of Interest and NE held their first webinar on this today.

- NW/LC confirmed that the first wild release had taken place in Purbeck on 5th March
- ML reported it was a pilot for the new processes and there was strong consent
- JM said that it was a well structured, evidenced and researched project that sets the benchmark for future projects
- NW summarised some of the main points from the webinar –
 - NE want wild releases to take place at a slow and measured pace
 - The EOI is a screening process to ensure that only well managed projects get through to the application stage
 - It asks questions based on the newly published wild release criteria
 - [Beavers: criteria for wild release - GOV.UK](#)
 - Once we have populated the form we will share with the SG
 - The EOI is an opportunity for us to receive feedback from NE licencing team on the work that we've done so far
 - Following submission they hope to give a response within 45 days that will either be an invitation to submit a full application, feedback/advice on what more is required or unlikely to be able to proceed at present.
- MC commented that the stakeholder engagement section seemed light
- LC commented that it reflected conversations at the National Forum and she was unconcerned as the EOI stage informs dialogue and the full application process covers this in more detail. We've had a lot of engagement with this group and EOI is a step in process.
- MC representing those voices who aren't here today – there are still unresolved issues and we've had a lot of opportunity to express those concerns
- LC I would mirror my (absent) colleagues concerns in terms of the absence of a national support mechanism or management strategy but not for the EOI process.
- ML asked for all the new guidance documents from NE to be circulated to the group **Action NW**
- LC asked if the 10year licence rather than 5 year was likely to impact on HIWWT plans
- JM documents will need to be revised to reflect this and the EOI will give us a steer as to whether it's viable. We will continue to develop the project, the engagement and consultation. This policy change may help uptake of consultation with previously difficult to reach audiences and give us a better idea of the concerns, the challenges and any potential mitigation. We are keen to try and develop a bespoke Isle of Wight package to facilitate payments for landowners within the floodplain environment and this could link to other projects such as The Beacon.

- ML the new CSS higher Tier scheme has been launched with very relevant supporting actions around wetlands and floodplains which gives the opportunity to share tangible incentives around beavers. They are specifically for making rivers and floodplains more resilient whilst recognising that there are implications for adjacent land management. Offered to run through the scope and scale at a follow-up meeting. **Action NW +ML to arrange**
- NW suggested that a sub-group was set up to explore funding from a variety of different sources – **All – contact NW if you would like to join**
- LC higher tier has opened for existing applicants rolling over (coming to end of existing agreements) but not for new applicants at present and with rumours around spending review cuts to agr-environment schemes, lets not jump the gun on that one.
- ML –SFI has good wetland options too. Part of my role is to support people who may be interested in making HT CSS applications and pipeline projects. We could explore with people what that could accomplish on their land if beavers were given the go-ahead. I can help with individual or groups of farmers to do that, if and when the group sees fit.
- NW some of the higher paying options require a feasibility plan and landowners are encouraged to consider joined up applications with neighbours. Perhaps this is something that the project can assist with.
- ML agreed that would be a good offering as NE can pay up to 100% of the cost and a plan didn't confer any commitment on owner/occupiers to go into a scheme.
- NW presented summary of outputs and actions from the independently facilitated riparian consultation workshop. (see attached). SG were asked to ensure that information presented in meetings was shared with their members/council or group that they represent and she offered to assist with articles for newsletters if required. **Action All**
- NW addressed a comment from CK who couldn't attend the meeting but had e-mailed it to the SG for consideration. It was part of the new policy criteria that asserts "Natural England will not consider projects if the negative effects cannot be avoided, mitigated or accepted. And if they far outweigh the expected positive effects." – NW explained that this was in essence the content of any licence application, that HIWWT would need to show that we had the mitigation techniques, licencing and resources in place. Natural England would decide when assessing a licence application whether the positives outweigh any negatives.
- ML – so the licence application has to address this and Natural England will assess with these criteria in mind?

- NW – We will put in an EOI and hopefully get some feedback. If NE ask us to put in an application then, after discussing this with the SG we will do so. At that point NE will either be satisfied that we have shown how we would manage a transition to co-existence and that benefits outweigh negatives and issue a licence, or ask us to do more work on certain areas to provide further information or refuse a licence.
- We can share the remaining documents (updated RA, updated feasibility, updated beaver management plan) with you as soon as we have updated the wording to reflect the change in policy and hopefully as a SG you will see that we've done our best to address concerns that have been raised here. Combined with more ground-truthing and on-site riparian consultations we will then be in a better position as a SG, to consider whether benefits outweigh dis-benefits.
- MC – well we know what CK concerns are because shes made them very clear. Its good that we will have opportunities to consider these questions before we get to the stage of addressing them fully.
- MC +NW - Discussion around the timing of the next meeting – before the submission of EOI deadline (2.5.25) so that the group can see what is being sent and have a chance to comment. It was acknowledged that this would be a tight turn-around as it would need to be approved internally at HIWWT too and NW would organise a date – target mid April. **Action NW**
- MC thanked everybody for their time.

Date of next meeting 23 April 2pm via Teams