



SIDMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

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4 October 2023

To: All Members of the Environment Committee:
Councillors: Ian Barlow, Bernie Davis, Mike Goodman, Chris Lockyear, Rachel Perram, Kevin R Walker

Invited Representatives

For Information:
Other Members of the Council
Town Clerk

Dear Sir/Madam,

Meeting of the Environment Committee Monday 9 October at 6.30pm

You are called upon to attend the above meeting to be held at the Council Chamber, Woolcombe House, Woolcombe Lane, Sidmouth. It is proposed that the matters set out on the agenda below will be considered at the meeting and resolution or resolutions passed as the Council considers appropriate.

Members of the public are welcome to attend and speak at this meeting. The Chair of the Committee has the right and discretion to control questions to avoid disruption, repetition and to make best use of the meeting time. Individual contributions will be limited to a maximum period of three minutes.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher E Holland
Town Clerk

A G E N D A

- | | | <u>Page/s</u> |
|---|--|---------------|
| | <u>PART 'A'</u> | |
| 1 | Apologies
To receive any apologies for absence. | |
| 2 | Minutes
To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Working Group meeting held on Monday 24 April and 10 July 2023. | 3 - 5 |

3 **Declarations of Interest**

To receive any Members' declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

Note: You must also declare the nature of any personal or prejudicial interests in an item whenever it becomes apparent that you have an interest in the business being considered.

4 **Matters of Urgency and Report**

To consider any items that in the opinion of the Chair should be dealt with as matters of urgency because of special circumstances. (Note: such circumstances need to be recorded in the minutes)

5 **Exclusion of the Public**

To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the press) have been excluded. There is one item which the Town Clerk recommends should be dealt with in this way.

6 **Natural Environment**

6.1 To receive an update on the river Sid partnership from Charles Sinclair. Also to receive a report on the proliferation of Japanese Knotweed from Councillor Kevin Walker. It is recommended that a Working Group is set up to investigate its removal and preliminary budget requirements. Charles Sinclair (Biodiversity Group) invited to speak. **Please see report from Charles Sinclair, attached below. 10 11**

6.2 To receive an update on water quality and liaison with South West Water from Councillor Chris Lockyear.

6.3 To receive an update from Sidmouth Arboretum on the 14000 tree project and ten year tree survey costs for the 2024 treeconomics report. *Report to follow.*

7 **Built Environment**

7.1 To consider recommending to Council an increase in the 2024/25 Grass Cutting / Grounds maintenance budget requirement, to possibly include areas that the Town Council has not previously had responsibility for, if permissions and insurances for maintenance can be obtained – Councillor Ian Barlow.

7.2 To consider funding for an additional and larger, more robust Beach Toy Library. The current one would be relocated to Jacobs ladder. It is estimated that the cost for a larger library would be £400 – Councillor Rachel Perram.

7.3 Update on Sidmouth telephone box displays. The Next installations are in development and should be ready for the end of October. The team are currently planning for Christmas lights installations ready for the Christmas light switch on, on 18th Nov through to Feb half term as that will connect with Winter Lights Festival. All of the publicity is being shared with Visit Sidmouth, contributing to community wellbeing and visitor attractions. The Toy museum was very pleased with the exhibition and it helped to bring them to people's attention. An Easter exhibition also being planned.

Website link: <https://sidmouthart.org/projects/smart-projects/micro-museum-of-contemporary-art> - Councillor Ian Barlow.

8 **Engagement**

8.1 Caps project – Update from Councillor Chris Lockyear.

9 To confirm date of the next Environment Meeting as 12 February 24.

Forthcoming Council and Working Group meetings:

16 October Pre-budget

18 October Planning Working Group

01 November Planning Working Group

12 February Environment Meeting

SIDMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of Sidmouth Town Council's
Environment Committee held in the Council Chamber,
Woolcombe House, Woolcombe Lane, Sidmouth
on Monday 24 April 2023 at 6.30pm

Councillors present: Ian Barlow (Chair)
Chris Lockyear
Denise Bickley
Hilary Nelson
Marianne Rixson
Rachel Perram

Invited Reps: Catherine Causley (EDDC)
David Cook (Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce)
Diana East (Sidmouth Arboretum)
Ed Dolphin (Sidmouth Arboretum)
Jon Ball (Sidmouth Arboretum)

Apologies: Councillor Evans, Councillor Murdoch, Stephen Blakeway, Dave Bramley, Ian Gregory and Jeremy Woodward.

The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 7.35pm

PART 'A'

31 Minutes

The minutes of the Environment Committee meeting held on Monday 13 February 2023 were confirmed.

32 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of interest were made.

33 Matters of Urgency and Report

None reported.

34 Natural Environment:

34.1 Councillor Barlow gave an overview of the River Sid partnership project. It was noted that various donations including from a generous individual meant that the project was funded for the whole river project.

34.2 Councillor Lockyear gave an update regarding his dialog with South West Water and the ongoing water testing being carried out by volunteers. There was continuing concern over bacteria found at the Bedford Steps which was being investigated by South West Water's Misconnection team along with other parts of the valley.

Councillor Lockyear also gave an overview of South West Water's short and long term action plan and time scale for accelerated investment recently announced. Sidmouth and Falmouth were being prioritised with a budget of around 9.8 million for 2023/24 and 30 million up to 2030. The Chair thanked Councillor Lockyear, the Member of Parliament for East Devon, Simon Jupp and the many local volunteers assisting which had put pressure on South West Water and inevitably helped in securing such funding. There may be a need to change much pipework and the tank at the Ham, which would need to be carefully coordinated with all the other potential projects including the Beach Management Plan defences to ensure limited disruption.

- 34.3 Ed Dolphin gave an update to the Working Group on the project to plant 14,000 trees. He was pleased to report that the team are well ahead of schedule and had planted or facilitated the planting of more than 5,000 whips in the first planting season. Those planted on private land would contribute to local biodiversity and mitigate potential flooding by attenuating rainwater run off at the head of the valley. This beneficial aspect would be a particular focus of the project in the next two years. Mr Dolphin wished to ask the Council to match fund a grant application to the AONB Trust to help pay for the completion of the Queen's Canopy planting. The total cost was likely to be in the region of £2,000 split evenly between the two organisations. This would come out of the annual £5,000.

RECOMMENDED: That the funding sum of £1000 be approved for a grant to Sidmouth Arboretum to be taken from the Environment Committee budget, towards the completion of the Queen's canopy Project in the Sid Valley.

35 Built Environment

- 35.1 Councillor Barlow gave an update and confirmed he had received a quote for the cleaning of road signs from a local handy man at the cost of £50 per month. This could be reviewed in 6 months and would help keep the Town looking well kept. It was also suggested that the contractor be asked if he could report back about the metal signs that need repainting. The Town Clerk would also liaise with Councillor Stuart Hughes as Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways of Devon County Council.

RECOMMENDED: That a contractor be employed to clean Road Signs in the Sid Valley at the cost of £50 per month to come from the Environment Committee budget for an initial period of six months.

- 35.2 Councillor Chris Lockyear gave an update on the infrared camera survey saying they have had 22 people requesting surveys this spring as opposed to 90 people last year taking part in the survey. Catherine Causley advised that Devon County and East Devon District Council were working a trusted supplier database that would be able to help homeowners take the next step after the survey. Currently Energy Saving Devon offered a consultancy service. It was suggested that businesses would benefit from this greatly and a simple 1-2 page guide would be helpful

- 35.3 Councillor Barlow gave an update on the future plans for the Town Council owned market place telephone boxes. Sidmouth School of Art working with Sidmouth Coastal Community Hub had carried out meetings to explore the refit and were arranging further meetings to finalise plans to repair, repaint, fit with shelving, fixtures and fitting and lighting to repurpose the space to host two Micro Museums.

One box was planned to be a Micro Museum of Antiquities (old) and the other a Micro Museum of Contemporary Art (new). Both telephone boxes would retain iconic traditional red box colour and designs.

Initial exhibitions were being worked on for presentation in June 2023 these will be public exhibitions for the benefit of local residents and visitors. The ambition was then to create a series of exhibitions possibly led by other groups once the initial refit and test pilot has been achieved. Funding of £1000 had been requested to go towards the fund.

RECOMMENDED: That funding of £1000 be approved to be taken from the Environment Committee budget, to be used towards the project to create micro museums in the Council's two Market Place phone boxes.

36 Engagement

- 36.1 Climate Awareness Project Sidmouth (CAPS) was looking at encouraging residents to become more engaged in understanding their personal carbon footprint with a view to encouraging them to reduce it. A volunteer student from Exeter university would be assisting with the project. He would be examining survey results, social media and communications and hold sessions with younger people's groups to get a younger demographic to take part as to date it had been mainly people of 45 years plus that have been taking part in the survey.

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CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SIDMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of Sidmouth Town Council's
Environment Committee held in the Council Chamber,
Woolcombe House, Woolcombe Lane, Sidmouth
on Monday 10 July 2023 at 6.30pm

Councillors present: Ian Barlow (Chair)
Bernie Davis
Mike Goodman
Chris Lockyear
Rachel Perram
Kevin Walker

Invited Reps:
Ed Dolphin (Sidmouth Arboretum)
Jon Ball (Sidmouth Arboretum)
Jan Metcalf (Sid valley Biodiversity Group)
John Hammond (Ebb Tides Seaweed)
Denese Molyneux (Chamber of Commerce)
Alan Gadien

Apologies: Councillor Hillary Nelson, Catherine Causley, Dave Bramley

The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8pm

PART 'A'

31 Minutes

The correct minutes of the Environment Working Group meeting held on Monday 24 April 2023 were not attached to the meeting agenda and would be agreed at the next meeting.

32 Declarations of Interest

None reported.

33 Matters of Urgency and Report

None reported.

34 Natural Environment:

- 34.1** Councillor Lockyear on the beach management plan. It was under formal review. John Hammond also gave an initial brief about a suggested offshore Kelp Farm which could also be used for wave energy removal. He highlighted the key advantages of using a seaweed farm to assist the beach management plan. Installing a wave attenuation seaweed farm could dampen wave energy by 30-50%, protecting the coastline against erosion and stabilising the shoreline which could be a very good alternative to a splash wall. Other benefits included employment, environmental protection and greater species diversity and recruitment. The cost is predicted to be around £200,000 over 4 years.

- 34.2** Jan Metcalf from the Sid Valley Biodiversity group gave an overview of the River Sid Partnership project (*A summary is attached at the end of the minutes as Appendix 1*). Plans for the immediate future included improving river habitat; this would be directed by Ed Eley [WTT] with the help of local volunteers. There were around sixteen boulder weirs between Fortescue and School Weir. The riverbed upstream of a weir becomes featureless and the water flows without any turbulence. These areas were not very 'fish friendly'. The plan was to fell selected trees in overly shaded areas. Six sites have been identified potentially. This would create better habitats and increase variety of the river wildlife. A water quality report on two years plus of data was in the offing. Nine volunteers monitor in eleven locations, four locations on Sid, one on each of five tributaries but on two locations on Woolbrook, in addition to Bickwell Brook at Glen Golye, Japanese knotweed had reported. It was being treated professionally over five years at Sidford on land adjoining the river above Sidford Bridge. There were also large amounts below Sidford Bridge which required attention. It was pointed out that Japanese Knotweed was not something that the Town Council had the power to treat or act on as it was a landowner responsibility to liaise with the Environment Agency.
- 34.3 Councillor Chris Lockyear gave an update regarding his dialog with South West Water. They are hoping to complete works by March 2025. This included ground water infiltration and surface water separation. There was concern about the tank at The Ham needing replacing. Monitoring of the presence of E coli has actively started near Bickley Bridge.
- 35.4 Ed Dolphin gave an update to the Working Group on the project to plant 14,000 trees. This was going well, and they had planted 5500 trees/whips in the first year. There are approximately 800 whips on order to be planted from November to March. It hoped to have 4000 whips in the ground by next season, totalling 9000. Ed Dolphin also reported that the Ginkgo tree at The Knowle which was protected needs to be moved by developers McCarthy and Stone. The cost was estimated at £30,000. The tree had been ready to move for 4 years and would be discussed in a meeting with EDDC tree officers to where it shall be relocated.
- 36 Built Environment**
- 36.1 Councillor Ian Barlow gave a brief update on sign cleaning and confirmed that work had been started. The Chair had asked for photo updates.
- 36.2 Councillor Chris Lockyear gave an update on the infrared camera survey saying that there were no updates due to it being a Winter project.
- 36.3 Councillor Ian Barlow will be speaking to strategic planning about stipulating a B brick and bird box be fitted into all new housing in the Sid Valley as a necessity for the future.
- 37.4 Councillor Barlow gave an update on the future plans for the Town Council owned marketplace telephone boxes. The phone boxes now had electricity and windowpanes installed. They were working with the toy museum to have the first exhibit and are hoping to have them open in time for Sidmouth Folk Festival.

38 Sustainability

38.1 Councillor Chris Lockyear gave an update on the CAPS project. A survey was sent out via many groups within the town to get a better understanding of how residents were thinking about their carbon footprint. There were 260 responses. 72% being concerned about climate change. There was willingness to walk/cycle rather than drive and to change diet. Councillor Kevin Walker suggested a youth provision project to get a wider, more varied response.

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CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Japanese Knotweed in the Sid Valley –

notes for STC Environment Committee meeting on 9th Oct 2023.

What is JN and why it is a problem?

Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia (= Reynoutria) Japonica*) is a highly invasive plant that is colonising along the River Sid. As with Himalayan Balsam, Knotweed was brought to Britain in the 19th century by plant hunters to be adopted as a garden plant but inevitably escaped beyond its original boundaries.

In Britain only the female plants are present (i.e. the flowers are not pollinated, therefore are sterile) but propagates easily from fragments of roots and shoots.

Why is it a particular threat in the Sid Valley?

The plant is rapidly colonising along the Sid with plants as far downstream as land adjacent to Gilchrist Field. Further upstream there are significant growths with areas of land rapidly developing into a monoculture totally obliterating all the indigenous plants. In addition, should it spread to local infrastructure such as buildings it can create serious problems due to difficulty with its removal.

A survey was carried out in the Sid Valley in 2014 by the Devon Wildlife Trust to ascertain and map the extent of infestation along the Sid and this is an excerpt from that report.

Although much less common than Himalayan balsam, stands of the still more problematic Japanese knotweed were noted in some areas and these records will also be kept on file should it be decided to take action. It would be advantageous to tackle this issue as soon as possible as the difficulty of eradicating Japanese knotweed from the catchment is likely to increase exponentially with time. It is much more difficult to remove than Himalayan balsam and any action is likely to require professional assistance as well as close cooperation with landowners.

The current situation.

No action was taken then although the SVA volunteers seem to have kept it contained in the land they own.

Within the last year it is understood that mechanical removal is taking place at the redevelopment of the old laundry at Sidford and a trial has been started by Richard Eley using a combination of cutting and spraying.

As with Himalayan Balsam, it is illegal to allow the species to grow in the wild or for landowners to allow the plant to infest other properties as stipulated in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is a notifiable issue when selling property.

Methods of control

There are primarily three methods removal:-

- (i) excavation often requiring mechanical digging equipment as the roots of established plants can penetrate many feet below the ground. On plants which are newly established (i.e. the first year) the plant and roots can be pulled by hand.
- (ii) using chemicals (e.g. Glyphosate) which is allowed by water courses (subject to Environment Agency approval) using stem injection but not as a foliate spray. This process needs to be carried out around August each year and repeated for at least 3 years.

- (iii) Charles Sinclair has had experience of pulling established stands of JK by hand and claims success. He recommends reducing the dead stems at the end of the year to near ground level, then pulling off the new years growth at fortnightly intervals from mid April to the end of August. Pulled stems should be collected into dumpy bags to compost down. At the end of the first year the location should be marked so as to follow up in subsequent years. Occasional monitoring thereafter is necessary to ensure 100% removal.

Experience of local volunteers in reducing the threat of Himalayan Balsam in valley.

The Sid Bashers group was formed approx. 10 years ago with the objective of removing all traces of Balsam from the River Sid. However, the extent of the problem, the terrain involved, and the falling number of volunteers has meant that only a degree of containment has been possible, but this has resulted in significantly reducing its spread downstream of Fortescue footbridge.

Recommendation

- 1) That the Environment committee recommends to Council that a Working Group be set up to include Cllr Kevin Walker (plus at least one other councillor) to work with the Sid Vale Biodiversity Group , Sid Bashers and other related/useful community groups to investigate how best to eradicate Japanese knotweed from the catchment of the river Sid , working with landowners and other relevant statutory bodies.
- 2) To make available up to £1000 to enable the Working Group (above) to purchase equipment and training necessary to facilitate the investigation including but not limited to, the purchase of waders , training chemicals and other equipment deemed useful. Any purchases to be subject to the Council's usual financial regulations.