



MINUTES
DRiPS Annual General Meeting
25th October 2018
Castle Hotel, Eynsford

PRESENT President: William Alexander
 Stuart Merrylees Trevor Carman Malcolm Dunn
 Rod Shelton Stephen Crowley Graham Clark
 Alex Bates

1: WELCOME

The chairman expressed the committee's welcome to Margaret and Nicola Williams, William Alexander and Chris Gardner.

2: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Peter Waring, Mark Stephens, Tom Hart-Dyke, Jamie Riches, Mark Gallant, Nigel Britten

3: MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

All present had received copies of the minutes of the Society's Previous AGM.

These were accepted, in a show of hands, by the members as an accurate representation of that meeting.

4: MATTERS ARISING

Les Probert enquired whether any financial recompense had been received from Exxon Mobil for the oil leak incurred on land at Filston Farm as a result of criminal damage two years previously. The chairman responded that the police had been unable to trace those responsible and that, following careful monitoring of the site, as little or no pollution appeared to have occurred to the river since the event, no money had been received from the oil company. It was however agreed, with his daughter's approval, that Alan William's emails might be checked to ensure no further communication had taken place.

5: TRIBUTE TO ALAN WILLIAMS

The chairman presented a tribute to our recently deceased chairman, Alan Williams.

It included a description of how, following the drying up of parts of the river in the 60s and 70s and the National outcry which followed, DRiPS had been formed in 1985 to act as a voice for the river.

Alan's single-minded and determined chairmanship of the society was unquestionably the driving force that led to the creation of The Darent Action Plan and the reduction in abstraction from the aquifer by the water companies.

His great love of fishing and the close friendship he had with so many of the anglers and their associations, representing them on a National level, ensured he was held in such great esteem by so many in the angling world.

The chairman presented the meeting with a letter received from Mr. Jamie Richards of Thames Water, praising Alan as a generous person and great negotiator on behalf of the river.

6: TRIBUTE TO GUY HART DYKE

The chairman gave a warm tribute to Guy Hart Dyke of Lullingstone Castle who, as president of DRiPS for many years, had become deceased in the last year. His generosity and enthusiasm to maintain the health of the river ensured a continual interest in the business of the society and his presence would be greatly missed.

7: THANKS TO PAST COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The chairman described his own involvement with DRiPS for the past 18 years.

He voiced his thanks to the departing secretary and treasurer, Stephen Crowley. Stephen, an avid and experienced angler, had acted in this role for many years and worked closely with Alan in the Society's business. His intimate knowledge of the Darent as well as other Kent and Sussex rivers had proved an invaluable help to the Society over this time.

8: INVITATION TO BECOME PRESIDENT

The committee had invited William Alexander of Castle Farm to become our new president, a role which he had accepted.

William addressed the meeting, telling us of his early life as a lad at Castle Farm.

He recalled, during the hard winter of '63, walking on the river ice from his homestead mid-way between Shoreham and Lullingstone, right up to St. Catherine's Bridge at Eynsford; of how his home became an island during the floods of '68 (when eight bridges collapsed along the river, including Castle Farm's.)

He recognised the importance of the years ahead when the role of DRiPS to hold Thames Water and other authorities to account, was going to play an important role in fighting for the safety of our waterway. He was proud that he was president of a society which would play such a role in representing the best interests of the river which he loved.

9: VOTING IN A NEW COMMITTEE

Asking the meeting's indulgence and agreement, the chairman introduced the proposed members of the new committee en masse, rather than seeking individual votes. The names were read out and a brief resumee of each candidate given.

Proposed chairman: Stuart Merrylees:

Proposed Vice-chairman: Trevor Carman

Proposed Secretary and Treasurer: Rod Shelton

Proposed committee members: Malcolm Dunn: Stephen Crowley: Graham Clerk and Alex Bates.

With a unanimous vote of hands, all were accepted in these roles by the meeting.

There were no abstentions or alternative candidates proposed.

10: A SHORT HISTORY OF DRIPS

The chairman made a PowerPoint presentation summarising the history of DRiPS from 1985 to today.

A copy of his presentation may be seen on the DRiPS website at www.darent-drips.org.uk/

11: THE S.E. RIVERS TRUST (SERT) PRESENTATION

Our guest speaker, Dr. Chris Gardner gave a thought-provoking PowerPoint presentation which introduced his personal fascination with river fish and his early post-graduate research work into their habitats, movements and migration patterns.

How his research concluded with 3.1 million detections from his implanted fish antenna, requiring assimilation to form a clear definition of fish movement within a river/estuary environment.

As an aspiring anthropologist, how his own historical observations showed that a combination of environmental issues, when aggravated by climate change, had inevitably led to the collapse of rivers throughout the world.

He described the role of the SE Rivers Trust. How it comprised of 14, dedicated full-time staff, located within the SE region. The region had been divided into 12 separate catchment areas with a staff member allocated to each area, monitoring, advising and supporting the health of their rivers.

How SERT was 100% project funded, supported by a combination of authorities including, EA, WDF, local authorities and linked with European trusts. The Catchment-based Approach required that definite clear priorities were established for each river.

The quality of fresh-water rivers throughout the SE is declining. The number of water bodies meeting good or high status has been halved in the last 9 years. It is a worrying scenario. The quality of our rivers has rarely been so low.

The new 25-year Environment Plan will need us to hold the Government to account. The role of associations such as DRiPS will be ever more important.

How SERTS primary role was in recognising problems which beset our rivers and being able to act upon their alleviation. These problems could result from : modification of river courses; drops in water quality; preventing sewage overflows; the introduction of fine sediment (particularly from motorways); invasive species, the introduction of nutrients and heavy metals washed from roads, the potentials for both flooding and restricted flows.

Chris referred to the importance of the Darent Walks which he leads with DRiPS committee members and EA representatives. The team had already walked the course from Westerham to Otford and would continue in the New Year. The information gathered had already led to a wide number of proposals to improve the health of the river including the reduction of shade from overhanging trees and the build-up of fine sediment in side channels which, if corrected, might be opened up to spawning fish.

12: THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Stuart Merrylees opened his address by offering a sincere vote of thanks to Graham Clark for the production, over so many years, of the DRiPS *NewsFlow* newsletter. The recent production was, he felt, one of the most attractive and interesting.

Two committee meetings have been held since Alan's passing and four river inspection walks have now taken place.

He reported that the committee has recommended that we approach a respected and retired hydrologist to provide us with expert guidance in the period ahead. We were about to enter discussions with Thames Water where it would be useful to have the support and technical expertise of our own hydrologist.

With our support, a number of Darent parishes had now allotted local members of their communities to act as river wardens. The objective is to form a network of such 'feet on the ground' to provide us with information on problems perceived along local stretches of water. We hope to build on this facility in the coming year. Stuart drew attention to the enthusiastic work carried out by committee member, Malcolm Dunn, in Horton Kirby where his community groups regularly help clear invasive species. Particular thanks are due to Mark Gallant of NWKCP who leads and advises such community efforts.

Stuart also wished to thank his vice chairman, Trevor Carman, whose long experience on the management of the waterway, angling excellence and long involvement with DRiPS would prove an invaluable help in the future.

There is a Rivers Trust conference being held shortly in Bristol which the chairman and Chris Gardner will be attending and will report on in due course.

All water companies are required to submit their plans to the Government for the *Water Recourses Management Plan*. DRiPS has responded in writing to their initial proposals. We currently are not satisfied with their proposed amendments and have sought a meeting within two weeks with their senior personnel to discuss in greater detail.

13: TREASURER'S REPORT

Rod Shelton expressed a warm vote of thanks to his predecessor, Stephen Crowley, for the years of dedication he had shown in maintaining the accounts so thoroughly.

The Annual Accounts for the year 2017-18 had now been signed off by our scrutineer, Mr. Patrick Coleman, and read as follows:

Beginning on 1st October 2017, the Society held a credit balance in the bank of £5,996.28.

It received 39 subscriptions during the financial year.

After secretarial deductions the Society ended the year on 30th September 2018 with a credit bank balance of £6,300.69.

The Society held no other bank accounts, deposits or assets.

14: SECRETARY'S REPORT

Membership Fees: As members are already aware, membership fees have gone up this year. The previous fees had stood for 20 years and a decision was made by the committee in advance of the AGM so that all members could be notified in advance of the start of the financial year. The secretary wrote to every member and association to this effect. The meeting were asked to show, by a vote of hands, their approval of future annual fees being raised to £10 per individual member and £20 per association/club or council. The motion was passed unanimously.

DRiPS charity status

The Society has held charity status since its inception. However, on the advice of the Charities Commission, societies like ours with an annual turnover below £5,000 would not benefit from this status and we were advised to withdraw. In consequence the committee have agreed to resign their membership of the Charities Commission from henceforth.

15: FACING THE FUTURE

Rod Shelton made a PowerPoint presentation on the subject of the problems facing the Darent in the future. The major problem for the river in the future was a likely increase in abstraction from the chalk aquifer resulting from a significant, and unplanned, increase in house-building in N.W. Kent.

In their recent communication, Thames Water had sought to allay such fears indicating that they had fresh access to new water supplies from their wells at Horton Kirby. The Society question how much difference this will make.

The Aquifer, Storage and Recovery process (ASR) to which they would appear to refer is a) still in experimental phase and b) will not supply sufficient water, in our view, as a permanent continual and reliable source of supply. It would involve recovering water from the (lower) Greensand aquifer, which had been primed from the water company's own mains during times of glut. Rod explained the process.

With 9,800 new homes being built in Dartford and 13,400 homes in the Sevenoaks region over the next ten years, the total number of new families (23,200) would require an estimated 5 million additional litres of water every day. This is far in excess of the additional annual water available from the ASR process. If it is drawn from the chalk aquifer then the sources of water to maintain the Darent will simply dry up.

DRiPS will be urgently meeting with senior executives from Thames Water in the following weeks to discuss their proposals.

16: AOB

There were a number of questions from the floor relating to the ASR process which were answered by Chris Gardner and Rod Shelton. Naturally, the main question was what can Thames Water do? We shall await their answer.

A number of those present wished to thank The Castle Hotel for the quality of the fine finger-food that they had prepared – a view shared by all.

The meeting came to a close at 21.10.

