**REPORT ON THE TOWANS PARTNERSHIP FOR GGPC. MEETING TO BE HELD AT GWITHIAN CHURCH HALL ON 13TH APRIL 2015.**

**BACKGROUND**

The Partnership is composed of a group of people who have an interest in and/or a responsibility for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the Hayle to Godrevy Towans which is the second largest sand dune system in Cornwall.

It meets quarterly at Hayle Town Council Offices and has representatives from public and private landowners, local government officers, Police, Cllrs from Cornwall Council and Town/Parish Councils, voluntary and statutory conservation organisations, tourist business and local communities. Attendance is between 15-25 people and although it is has no management powers it does have an advisory role and can make recommendations and invite representatives from other agencies to attend and debate local issues.

Matters discussed can be grouped under the following headings.

* Protection and conservation of the wildlife and habitats
* Coastal erosion, beach management and bathing water quality
* Recreation/tourism and the impact of anti-social behaviour

**REPORT FOR 2014**

**Towans Ranger**

The most significant and important development was the appointment in October 2013 of Martin Rule as the Towans Project Office to undertake a feasibility study in relation to the appointment of a Towans Ranger. The need for such an appointment had been discussed in the Partnership for a number of years but the grant from Gwinear-Gwithian Sustainable Community Fund, via Cornwall Community Fund, financial support form Hayle Town Council and Gwinear-Gwithian Parish Council and the support from Cornwall Wildlife Trust made this a reality.

Martin’s report was published in September 2014 with a clear recommendation regarding the need for a Towans Ranger. An initial approach to the over-subscribed Esmee Fairburn Foundation was not successful in securing long term funding. However, with pledges from National Trust, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, St Ives Bay Holiday Park Hayle and Gwinear-Gwithian Councils, Martin Rule will be able to work one day a week for the next 10 months. His focus will be on practical issues as well as the research of long term funding. His biggest success has been the establishment of the Friends of the Towans and he already has over 20 volunteers to work on conservation and litter removal. It was disappointing that the application to GGSCF in February for tools for this group was ignored and that we were asked to reapply for information boards and guided walks. We have sought clarification about why our application does not fully meet the criteria?

**Protection and conservation of wildlife**

There was concern from local people about barbed wire fencing on Mexico Towans due to ponies grazing as part of the NE Agri-environment scheme. A visit was arranged with members of the Partnership and local councillors. No concerns have been registered since this visit

There was a report provided by a member of the Partnership in support of extending the SSSI designation which covers most of the Towans to include a small section of Gwithian Towans and all of St Gothian Sands. This was accepted by NE to be included in the national review of all SSSIs.

Cornwall Council who have an agreement with the Hocking Trust to manage Gwithian Towans decided not to enter a new HLS agreement because of budget uncertainties. Although some scrub management will take place there will be no pony grazing.

The Partnership discussed and approved a report submitted to Gwinear—Gwithian Neighbourhood Planning Committee. The Partnership’s report emphasised the importance of retaining the equivalent of policy TM5.

**Coastal erosion, beach management and bathing water quality**

The collapse of Peter’s point steps in early 2014 has been discussed at a number of meetings with exchange of emails with the Parish Council and with Cornwall Council in view of the latter’s decision not to replace the steps because of major financial and geological implications . The main problem posed has been the lack of access for dog walkers to the dog friendly beach at Upton and safety of the public at high tide. The representative from Cornwall Council did not wish to attend the partnership meeting but Kevin Brader, Senior Environmental Health Officer, has attended three meetings in 2014 to discuss the possibility of amending the dog orders. The parish council initially did not agree it was their responsibility to amend orders but in the middle of the debate new legislation “the Public Space Protection Order” came into force with the County Council solely responsible for varying orders. It was hoped that Gwithian would be prioritised in relation to looking at alternative options for access to dog friendly beaches but this is unlikely as orders will have to be reviewed as a whole throughout Cornwall over the next few years. This will be discussed again at the next Partnership meeting.

The issue of dog owners ignoring the present ban on Gwithian beaches has been discussed at the meetings and the dog wardens have attended the meeting on two occasions. Members of the Partnership did a joint visit to Gwithian beach with the dog wardens. There was an increase in fines in 2014 but the bans are still mainly ignored.

There have been 11 Combined Sewage Overflows (CSO) between May and August 2014 following heavy rain polluting the Red River and the beach at Gwithian. The issues raised by the CSOs have been disc used at all the meetings. Letters have been exchanged with SWW and a representative from the Environment Agency has attended two meetings. There have been lengthy exchanges at the meetings with a range of suggestions. However, the fact that the beach has officially met the excellent quality status has meant there has been an impasse. However, the Partnership recommended that there should be independent testing especially when discolouration is visible. The EA have agreed to have a special meeting at their offices with Partnership representatives to discuss this proposal.

There has been one meeting of the Beach Management Advisory Group. The Statistics provided by the RNLI show that Gwithian had the highest number of incidents in Penwith with 42 rescues.

**Recreation/tourism and the impact of anti-social behaviour**

Dog fouling has been a recurrent issue on the Partnership agenda. Kevin Brader distributed report cards which members of the public could complete and police also agreed that if car registration numbers could be obtained then they would follow this up. The Partnership discussed some schemes in different parts of the country called the Green Dog Walkers Campaign where members of the public took on an educational rather than enforcement approach. This would appear to have been met with some success but it could only happen if Cornwall Council or Town/Parish councils took a lead role.

Litter continues to come up on the agenda and there was one very successful litter pick on Upton Towans in January 2015.

Partnership members attended a multi-agency meeting in November with the police relating to concerns expressed by Upton residents and other members of the public about sexual activity on Upton Towans. Representatives from the gay community attended the meeting and agreed to monitor the situation on a low key basis. This will need to be kept under review.

There were reports of “off road bikes” riding across the Towans at different times of the year. It was acknowledged they present a real safety issue as well as noise pollution. The police do respond to 101 calls but the problem has not been so significant to put in patrols. This does depend on members of the public phoning the police.

**Future of the Towans Partnership.**

There have been a number of discussions about whether the Partnership would be more effective if it became a Trust. This would also allow the Partnership to access to more funding bodies. There were different views about whether this should happen but no real desire to take this more formal step . The meetings are well attended and the minutes reflect very lively debates. There is also excellent administrative support from Cornwall Council and good attendance from council officers. It was agreed that if the Friends of the Towans became more established, there might be more people form the local community who could become interested in taking on specific roles which could form the basis of a Trust in the future.

Dick Goodere

Chair Towans Partnership

4th April 2015