

**THE  
BIOREGIONAL  
LEARNING  
CENTRE**

# Making a River Charter

The process Bioregional Learning Centre led to make the  
first UK River Charter  
for the River Dart at Dartington in Devon

# A Charter is a contract

- In former days between the Crown, tenants of Crown land and commoners. It was about property (mainly land), the return on property, and how property was to be used and stewarded.
- Some property was held in common: the shore line between high and low tide is still common land in the UK
- Today's river charter is a contract between people and their river: it gives a role to civil society to steward water
- Moral rights are assigned to the river, people uphold those rights and work in partnership with government, for the river

# Charter of the Forest 1204 & 1217



# A Charter flips the relationship between people and water

- From consuming what we pay water companies for to stewarding water as a shared resource and taking responsibility for how much we use and what goes down the drain.
- It's not just about climate change, water scarcity and pollution. But it is about tackling those issues together.
- Fresh water is vital for life, in all its forms. For humans, it supports mental as well as physical health. Water is a common pool resource
- River banks are places of rivalry but also places of public access
- A Charter mediates competing interests at the level of shared values



# A River Charter enrolls stakeholders

(20 September 2018)



Local residents, farmers, Dartington estate workers, fishermen, ecologists, kayakers, South West Water, land managers, Dartington parish councilors. Together we discussed what the challenges were for the river and water on the estate, how we could do better and what kind of collaborations would be needed for that.



# The River Dart at Dartington in winter: rural challenges of climate change





# A River Charter enrolls Civil Society

(2 November 2018)



The Open House at Dartington:

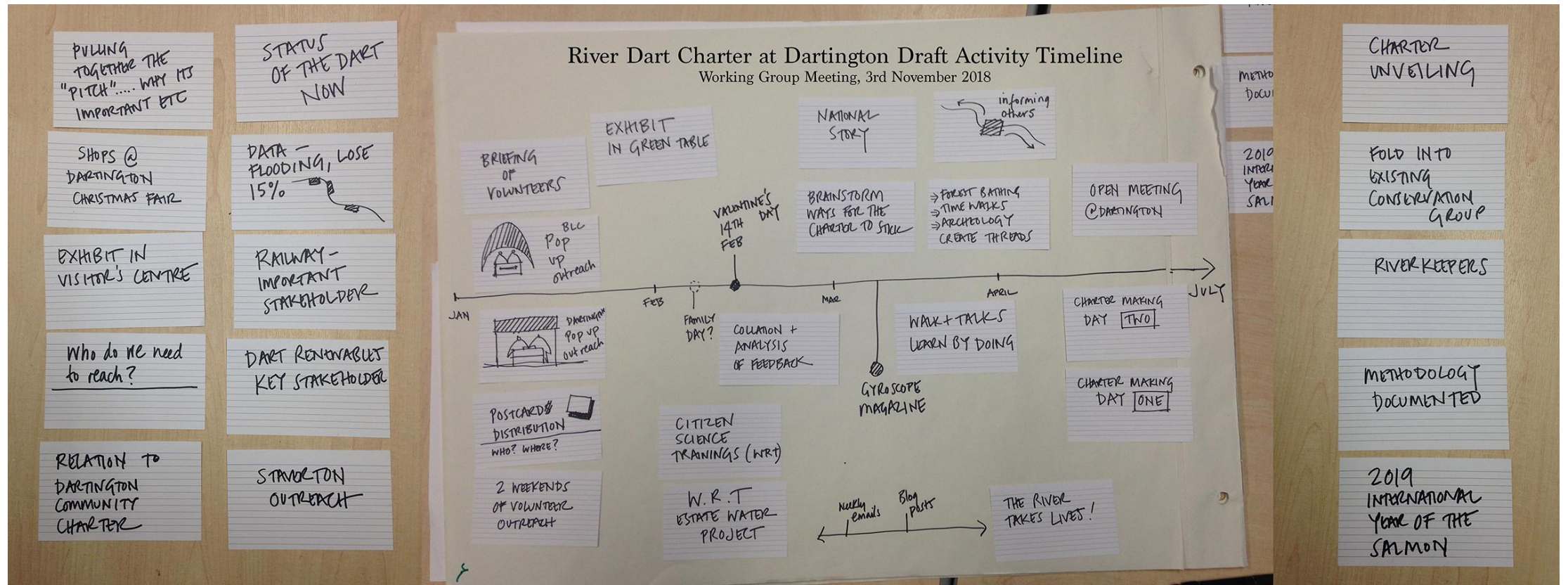
Presentations about the water issues on the Estate; the compromised water environment from an ecology and water security angle; what a charter is and what its potential could be for a river.

Asking 'What is important to you on the Dart?'

Naming and reviewing the Assets for citizens to protect.

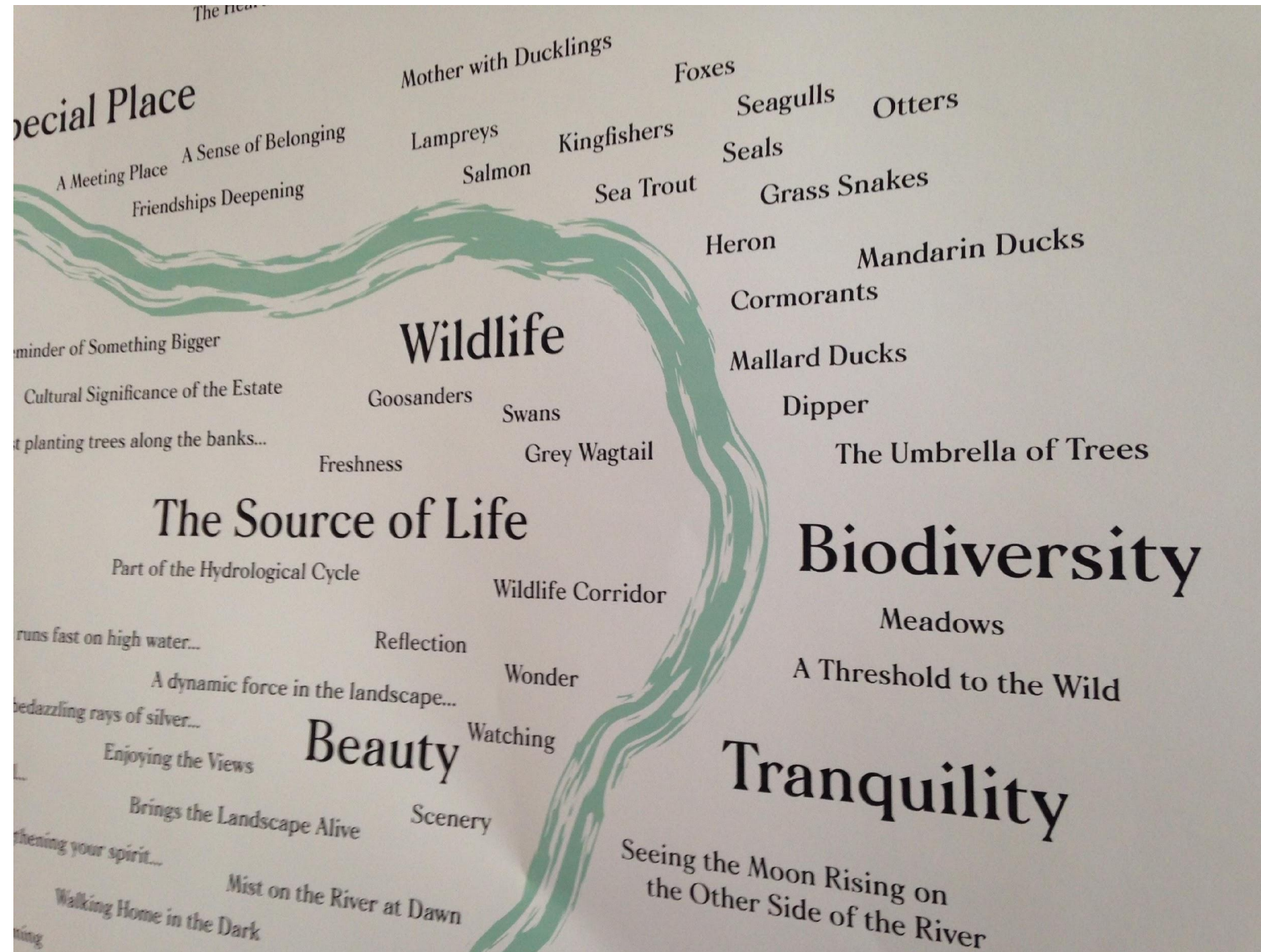
# We make a Timeline for the Charter work

(3 November 2018)





# Making visible the assets that were named



To gather the assets:

Survey postcards went to every resident in Dartington Parish

An interactive display was mounted in the Dartington Visitor Centre for 6 months

We went door to door on the housing estates

We set up an interactive display in the local secondary school called Lets Talk Dart

We manned pop-up stalls at local festivals

# The Charter-making day at Dartington

(15 June 2019)



**River Dart  
Charter  
Making  
Workshop**

[dartington.org/rivercharter](http://dartington.org/rivercharter)

**Help create the UK's first River Charter for the Dart at Dartington**

**Saturday 15th June, 10am-1pm**  
High Cross House, Dartington

Dartington  

Tea and cake

Informing the 50  
people who came:  
presentations

Reviewing the 1,200  
responses.

Sifting the Assets to  
reduce them to five, in  
World Cafe.

Agreeing the wording  
of the Charter.



# Launching the Charter at the Water Resilience Summit

(12 September 2019)



120 people came to a free event in Totnes Civic Hall, from across the South West.

Our partner, Westcountry Rivers Trust, hosted and organized the event.

27 speakers (ecologists, flood engineers, civil society leaders, South West Water, researchers....) spoke for 10 minutes each

160 questions were collected from the room



# RIVER DART CHARTER at Dartington

Water is a living entity that we all share and benefit from. While the banks and river bed of the River Dart are owned, the health of living water is a common pool resource entrusted to us all. The movement of water through its cycle of rain, rivers, seas and clouds is essential for the maintenance of all life.

We the people who live, work and play here, name ourselves as stewards of the water in our catchment. We therefore uphold the rights and responsibilities of the River Dart from Staverton Weir to Totnes Weir:

- To be alive and to thrive so that it can give life and enjoyment to all.
- To be clean and unpolluted so that it can enable biodiversity to flourish.
- To flow freely from source to sea so that it can be a vital part of a healthy eco-system.

Putting the River Dart first means considering these needs:

Nature's water cycle  
Home for aquatic animals  
Plantlife and trees  
Wildlife

as well as our water-related needs and desires, such as:

Agriculture  
Bathing  
Boating  
Car washing  
Cleaning  
Cooking  
Diluting  
Drinking water  
Farming  
Firefighting  
Fishing  
Gardening  
Growing food  
Health & wellbeing  
Heating



In this place of Dartington we especially value and name as our shared assets:

- The river's role as a wildlife corridor for otters, birds, especially kingfishers, and fish.
- Healthy water in sufficient quantity.
- Trees along the banks, particularly the oaks that give the Dart its name, and the stability of their roots.
- A cherished river that enhances our mental and physical wellbeing, provides tranquility, beauty and memories—now and for future generations.
- Respectful, agreed access along this sacred length of the river, from Staverton Weir to Totnes Weir, where we enjoy the water, both in, on and beside it.

Two River Keepers will represent the River Dart from Staverton Weir to Totnes Weir on behalf of the community: the Dartington Hall Trust's Conservation Warden and a volunteer from the community. Both are tasked with representing the Charter/River at the Estate Environment and Conservation Group.

To report an incident in this stretch of the river the Environment Agency should be contacted on their 24-hour incident hotline, 0800 80 70 60.

If the wellbeing of water in this place is infringed, or our assets harmed, or there is conflict around use of the water the Estate Environment and Conservation Group will be a place of resolution.

This River Dart Charter at Dartington is held by The Dartington Hall Trust. It was brought into being by Dartington's Estate Team, The Bioregional Learning Centre, members of the local community and visitors to the Dartington Hall Estate. Over 1,200 people contributed to its creation.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Hydroelectricity  
Ice making  
Industrial cooling  
Irrigation  
Kayaking  
Machinery operation  
Medical/dental  
Power washing  
Pressure cutting  
Purification  
Recreation  
Rinsing  
Showering  
Street cleaning  
Swimming  
Toilet Flushing  
Transport  
Washing



**THE DART**



# Since then.....

- The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers has been launched by the US Earth Law Centre putting the Charter for the River Dart at Dartington on the map.
- Bioregional Learning Centre is gathering support to extend the Charter to nine other communities both upstream and downstream.
- The Dartington Hall Trust has adopted the Charter but due to its financial difficulties has not yet put it to work.
- River Keepers, citizen science and a festival on the River Dart