

Severn Estuary Partnership

Communication & Engagement Strategy

2011-2014



Working together for a sustainable estuary.



1.0 Introduction

The Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP) is an independent, estuary-wide initiative coordinated by Local Authorities and statutory agencies, but involving all those involved in the management of the Estuary, from planners to port authorities, fishermen to farmers and people concerned about the future of the Estuary. It was set up in 1995 to promote the sustainable management of the Severn Estuary and its surroundings; enhancing and protecting the area for the benefit of the community, the environment and the economy.

Promoting the value of the Estuary and the work of the Severn Estuary Partnership to all partners and potential partners, as well as to a wider public audience, is vital to achieve both support for the Partnership and a better managed and sustainable estuary.

SEP's main services involve communication and engagement. The Partnership aims to improve communication and engagement between organisations, groups and individuals to work towards sustainable use and management of the Severn Estuary. This strategy is primarily concerned with raising the profile of the SEP, to enhance the membership base. It relates closely to existing activities outlined in the Strategic Business Plan 2011.

2.0 Background

The Severn Estuary Partnership has been operational for 15 years. During this time, considerable progress has been made in improving communication and offering opportunities for engagement between organisations and higher level groups, as highlighted by the Strategy for the Severn Estuary publication in 2001. Throughout the lifetime of SEP, communication has continued to play a vital role in gaining support and maintaining momentum for joint national, regional and local sustainable activities.

The size and nature of the Estuary, covering such different cultural and geographical areas, including England, Wales and 14 local authorities, makes it a challenge to reach out to local communities and the general public. Therefore since 2009 a sustained effort has been made to reach local communities through engagement with Town, Parish and Community Councils. Effective communication and engagement with this vast stakeholder group has the potential to reap large rewards in terms of vitality and support for the role of the Partnership in future years.

This communication strategy sets out the messages, audiences and actions that are required to underpin effective long term communication and engagement activities of the Severn Estuary Partnership.



Figure 1: Second Severn Crossing, © SEP

3.0 Purpose of the Communication and Engagement Strategy

To support delivery of the Severn Estuary Partnership Strategic Business Plan (including services) by ensuring focussed, efficient and effective communication and engagement over the period 2011-2014.

4.0 Objectives

1. To increase awareness of the Severn Estuary Partnership and its role in the sustainable management of the Estuary.
2. To increase the level of support and membership base for the Partnership through recognition of its role in the sustainable management of the estuary.
3. To promote the Estuary as a valuable resource for nature conservation, local business and as a place to live, work and enjoy.

5.0 Target Audiences

The Partnership's membership scheme breaks down the audience into five key areas, with several sub-types.

- a. Core Funding Partners:** National and Regional Bodies, Statutory Agencies, Advisory Bodies, Relevant Authorities, Port/Harbour Authority, Water Companies, Industry, Local Authorities, NGO's and Politicians. All these groups may fund/ aid the partnership in some way.
 - i. Local existing core funding partners and organisations
 - ii. Local potential/ lapsed core funding partners and organisations
 - iii. Regional and national organisations/ political representatives.
- b. Partners:**
 - i. International/ national charities with an interest in coastal marine management and specific interest in the use/ management of the Severn Estuary
 - ii. International, national or local businesses with an interest in the management or use of the Severn Estuary
 - iii. Consultancies associated with coastal or marine management with a vested interest in the Severn Estuary
 - iv. University or other research institutions with a vested interest in the use and management of the Severn Estuary.
- c. Local/ Regional Non-Commercial Groups:**
 - i. Non-commercial groups operating on or near the estuary and closely associated with the use or management of the estuary
 - ii. Non-commercial groups operating on or near the estuary but not closely associated with its use or management.
- d. Local Clubs or Parish, Town, Community Councils:**
 - i. Local groups closely associated with the use or management of the estuary
 - ii. Local groups living near the estuary but not closely associated with its use or management.
- e. Individual Members:**
 - i. Individuals closely associated with the use or management of the estuary
 - ii. Individuals living near the estuary not closely associated with its use or management
 - iii. Tourists, visitors and the general public at large

6.0 SEP's Evolution & Target Audiences

In the 1980's the Severn Tidal Power Group proposed the construction of the Severn Barrage. Projects of this magnitude presented significant difficulties for local planning authorities, particularly in the absence of a statutory planning framework. To overcome the problems of national and regional separation and to promote co-operation in the region, SCOSLA (the Standing Conference of Severnside Local Authorities) was created in 1983 to embrace the then seven county and ten district councils (now 16 constituent councils) situated on both sides of the Estuary.

In the mid 1990s, through preparation of the *Strategy for the Severn Estuary*, over 130 organisations collaborated, extending the network to include all major local and regional organisations with an interest in managing the estuary's resources. Over several years of stakeholder engagement the voluntary strategy document was published (SES, 2001) outlining estuary-related issues, recommending policies and actions to work towards sustainable development based on the principles of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM). Through this process SEP has developed a comprehensive stakeholder database of over 3000 individuals representing over 1000 organisations. The database is a key asset to the Partnership and helps to aid effective communication. It is therefore imperative that this resource is periodically reviewed and constantly updated.

Until 2006, SEP was mainly operating with target audience a. (core funding partners as outlined in Section 5), facilitating communication between organisations with management responsibilities or interests. From 2006 onwards, more emphasis has been put on involving a wider audience to promote awareness of the value of the Estuary. This was initiated in 2006 with the Severn Wonders Festival to celebrate the Estuary and partnership working, plus establishment of the Severn Estuary Forum – now firmly embedded as the annual conference for the Severn Estuary area, hosted by the Severn Estuary Partnership. The Forum's primary aim is to bring together audiences **a.** through to **e.** to encourage 'vertical' as well as 'horizontal' integration to support decision-making (based on ICZM principles). The work of the Partnership is guided by a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), comprising representatives from a cross-section of organisations with an interest in the Estuary. The JAC meetings are primarily focused on 'horizontal' integration between sectors (see overleaf). Recent JAC events have however seen a reduction in attendance due, in no small part, to increased pressures on Local Authorities and Statutory Agencies. It is therefore suggested that a review of the Joint Advisory Committee and Management Group is carried out to increase effective representation and usefulness of the JAC meeting and subsequently aiding partnership communication in a streamlined and efficient manner. This in turn will aid representation and reputation of the network as a useful and influential group.

The current remit of SEP is to focus primarily on its long-standing target audience **a.** whilst extending communication services to reach target audience **b.-e.** where opportunities and resources allow.

The development of the involvement of Audience b. will help SEP to broaden its engaged partners, helping to cement its representation as a 'one stop shop' for the sustainable management of the Estuary. The SEP Membership scheme has been designed to help include this audience and represent their views with the Joint Advisory Committee. The SEP Scientific Officer, is leading the partnerships engagement with all industries around the Estuary, through industry specific newsletters and one to one meetings where appropriate. The Partnership is also making a conscious effort to engage Audience B at national conferences and SEP specific events.

Local and regional non-commercial groups hold a plethora of knowledge and experience about the Estuary. SEP has been forthcoming in its engagement with some of these groups including the Bristol Channel Federation of Sea Anglers and the Bristol Channel Yachting Association, however further inclusion of local interest groups would strengthen the Partnership's network.

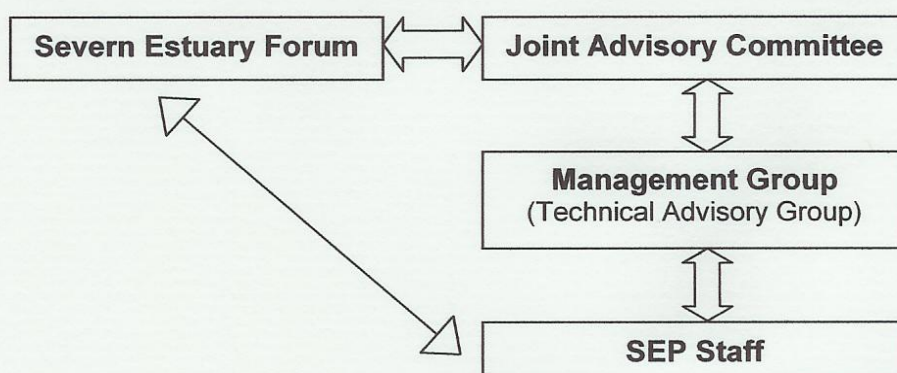
Two way communications with Community, Parish and Town Councils are extremely important in ensuring that there are strong links between the strategic objectives for the Estuary and the aspirations of local communities. To date there have been few resources directed towards involving the Community, Town and Parish Councils in estuary management. A letter sent by the SEP to all 300 such organisations around the estuary in 2009 revealed significant potential to become involved in SEP's activities. A number have already joined and plan to attend SEP events. It should be a target therefore to encourage

all such Councils to join as formal members of SEP. This work needs to be built on throughout the life time of this plan, with conscious communication and engagement events focused on these sectors.

A new focus from 2010 onwards for SEP will be the engagement of individuals, the general public and tourists. Reaching these audiences offers unique challenges but these are balanced by the potential for significant benefits, including potential revenue and passion for the local estuarine environment. In order to effectively communicate and engage with this audience, SEP will need to develop new communication and engagement mechanisms, which are explored later in this document.

Many organisations around the estuary still remain unaware of SEP and its role. More therefore needs to be done to identify and contact these organisations and explore opportunities for working together. In particular there is a need to show how SEP can help deliver the objectives and strategies of partner organisations more clearly; this would assist with bids for additional funding.

Figure 2.2 Basic organisational structure of the Severn Estuary Partnership



7.0 Key messages

Whilst each separate communication in our work has a specific message, there are a number of key messages that will be incorporated into all communications which will contribute to achieving the high level objectives. They are separated by which key audience they should address. It is important to recognise the difference between the Partnership itself, i.e. the network made up of all partners, and the Severn Estuary Partnership team, which is the staff and resources required to keep the network effective.

Audiences a. & b. Partners

1. The Severn Estuary Partnership provides a framework and network which is essential for the sustainable use and management of the estuary.
2. The Severn Estuary Partnership is a forward thinking open network, which promotes a holistic, estuary-wide perspective.
3. The Severn Estuary Partnership team is dynamic, efficient and unique networking initiative, promoting co-operation between local and regional stakeholders.
4. Investment of time and resources into the Partnership will reap much larger rewards in return in the longer term.

Audience c. d. & e. Non-commercial groups, clubs, local community, parish and town councils, interest/user groups and individuals

1. The Severn Estuary is essential for our current and future livelihood.
2. The Severn Estuary is a dynamic place which continues to change.
3. The Severn Estuary is an international area of natural beauty and distinctiveness.

8.0 Promoting and Publicising the Estuary

The Severn Estuary Gateway website is the only promotional tool covering the whole of the Estuary. To date, the website has concentrated primarily on organisational requirements, but there is a need to provide visitor, user and public information. There is also a growing demand from organisations around the Estuary to link their website to the Gateway site, most recently from Parish, Community and Town Councils and this interest is likely to grow as smaller organisations make more use of the internet. In January 2011, the site attracted increasing numbers of visitors (2102), 69% of these are new visits and 30% of users are regular visitors. In order to encourage this trend of repeat visits the information on the site needs to be updated frequently and this requires dedicated staff time.

While resources need to be directed at web based publicity to ensure that SEP's role and achievements are promoted, the importance of the printed word must also be recognised, especially at a community level. It is therefore recommended that the Partnership's newsletter, Severn Tidings takes on a specific public friendly, community focus and is produced on a biannual basis to provide a conduit for information and to maintain communications with non-statutory and non-commercial audiences.

These include the production of new promotional leaflets, both for the Estuary itself and for SEP, and the design of new display materials for use at shows and events. It may be necessary to source additional funding for these activities, either through sponsorship or through grant funding.

SEP has initiated or supported the production and installation of a number of display panels around the estuary and this approach needs to be encouraged through the production of a design guide to encourage other organisations to join in with the approach. A coherent strategy for interpretation needs to develop through the SEP's Communication and Engagement Strategy.

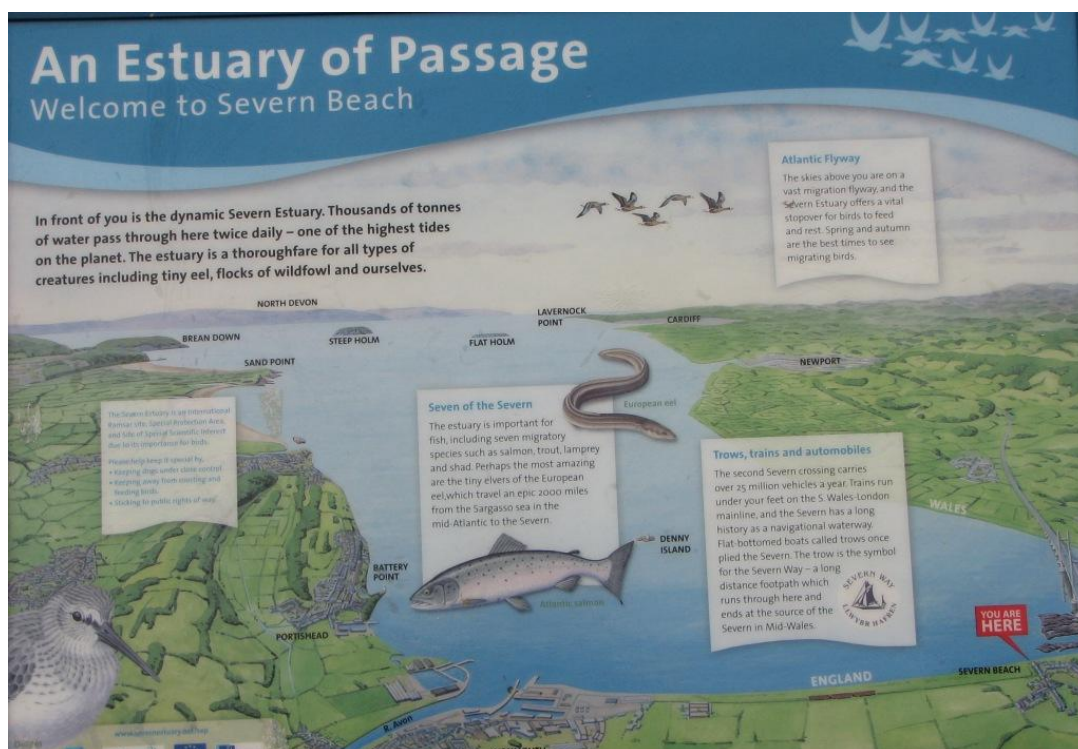


Figure 2: SEP Interpretation Panel © SEP

9.0 Ensuring Effective Communication between Organisations and Individuals

There are a number of ways in which SEP can ensure effective communication occurs between the various organisations active in the Estuary, but probably the most important aspect is that SEP exists and by its ongoing activities, provides an underlying support structure for communication across sectors and geographical areas. These ongoing activities include quarterly meetings of the SEP Management Group, biannual meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee and the Severn Estuary Forum meeting, which attracts a wide cross section of organisations and individuals and helps to maintain the momentum of the Partnership. The Secretariat role that SEP also undertakes helps with effective communications, as SEP is well placed to see possible linkages between the work of various organisations in the area.

To date, five Severn Estuary Fora have been held, the last in Bristol in October 2010. This event attracted over 100 delegates from a wide variety of organisations, together with a number of interested individuals and was judged to be very successful. Previous events were held in Gloucester in 2009, Penarth in 2008, and in Clevedon in 2007 and 2006. All have been well received and considered an important part of the organisations' activities. However, the Forum takes a great deal of planning and consumes a substantial amount of staff time, especially during the preceding three months. In 2010 the Staff Team circulated 3500 printed booking forms (alongside the Severn Tiding biannual newsletter, over 1,000 targeted emails and used numerous other avenues to publicise the event.

SEP can also effectively add capacity and provide an estuary-wide focus to neighbouring initiatives. One recent example of this is the formation of the Avonmouth and Severnside Green Businesses Forum, through Low Carbon South West, the existence of which will aid SEP's engagement with the industrial sector and enable SEP to get across the messages about sustainable estuary management to a receptive audience, who are already acting as ambassadors for SEP in the sector.

For consistency and branding purposes, all SEP documents should be written in Arial font size 11 where possible. All official communications should also be written on SEP headed paper.

When referring to the Severn Estuary or the Estuary (specifically the Severn) a capital E should be used.

10.0 Key communication tools and some actions to improve them:

Table 2. Communication Media

Communication Medium	Value	Key issues & techniques	Popularity & Effectiveness
Face to face / meetings	Personal and trusted meeting approach, able to tailor towards partner/potential partner and their strengths and interests. Often leads to direct outcomes	Image - SEP name badges with logos. SEP T-shirts for public events. Professional & friendly conduct. Comprehensive written meeting record Promote joint working Use partnership principles and Membership structure benefits	Popular amongst partners, members and potential members, although resource intensive. Can produce effective results and funding where appropriate
Email	Cheap, simplistic way of disseminating electronic information to a large audience base	Consistent signatures- same style, font (Arial 11), and logo attached All letters on headed template. Use Headed SEP Banner and footnote on all 'formal' emails (as html). Use Severn email account for official communications – further guidance regarding the Severn email account can be found in the SEP IT Handbook.	A popular media for disseminating information to a wide audience. Better suited to one way communication – not funding focused
Phone	Communicate on a personal level with 'key' partners – potential for wider phone conferences and 'virtual meetings' to relieve time and travel pressures	Telephone Record Book for all messages – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	A popular and relatively cheap mechanism for communicating personally to small numbers of people
Mail	Dissemination of printed materials to a wider public audience – audience without access to internet	Use headed notepaper & compliments slip. – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	A very popular media for dissemination 'public friendly' e.g. Severn Tidings – especially community focussed – suited to one way communication.
JAC	Good physical presence and chance for face to face contact with committed partner base. However can be resource intensive on Partnership and wider Partners	Display material (Pull-up banners, flyers and leaflets etc.), reaffirmation of purpose of partnership at start / close. – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	A popular meeting, Sandwiched by ASERA and SECG. Effective face to face communication with key stakeholders and partners. Opportunities for workshops and guidance as well as updates – Can help guide the Partnerships work
Talks / presentations – SEP	Good physical presence can reach a wide range of interested partners (depending on audience base). Can be resource intensive	Use branded template for PowerPoint presentations. Always use a theme for presentations/ talks. Plentiful use of images of the estuary and 'working together' circle. Use of SEP Patchwork quilt where appropriate. – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	Can attract interest in the Estuary and SEP from new audiences – to follow up with other communication techniques

Attending Events / shows / stalls / walks / Boat trips	Good physical presence can reach a wide range of interested parties (depending on audience base). Utilising other peoples events can reduce the necessary resources	Take posters / newsletters & other SEP & estuary publicity material Attend annual shows (with partners). Develop public friendly (family friendly) displays for shows / public events – encourage individual membership and engagement. – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	Can attract interest in the Estuary and SEP from new audiences – to follow up with other communication techniques – Field trips and boat trips very popular with many SEP members
Exhibitions / Outdoor panels / Display Stands / Posters	Information that can be publicly displayed at events and on display boards, as well as being disseminated for personal reference are more likely to get used.	SEP logo present with publicity materials. – See SEP Operational Manual for a full list of available material	Can attract interest and capture the public engagement in the Estuary and SEP from new audiences – to follow up with other communication techniques
Website	The SEP Gateway and partnership website can reach a wide audience and promote a wide array of communication and other outputs at a relatively low cost.	Aim for public friendly site with added depth beneath. Easy to navigate. Development of a Members area / document download centre Develop 'Estuary wide information' further – interactive map – tourism assets etc. – See SEP Operational Manual and SEP IT Handbook for further details.	A Popular way of reaching many audiences on many levels – generally suited to one way communication – information dissemination and profile raising
Use of Images and maps	Map based information is a format that many users are familiar with and relate to with interest. This can be achieved relatively easily if geographical information is stored on GIS. Good photographs of specific Estuary features or locations can be related to by all estuary users/visitors. These outputs can be distributed widely including, information centres, hotels, councils, online etc.	With recent developments in online photo archiving, all SEP images are being migrated to Flickr. As such a 'free to use' image policy should replace the existing policy. However, credit to SEP and encouragement of membership should be stated as a condition of use. – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	Popular way of disseminating information to capture the publics imagination
Newsletter –SEP	Valuable as a means of building and publicising the partnerships identity and updating a wide base of partners / members,	Aim for public friendly newsletter with specific community focus, incorporating lots of short articles, photos and diagram's. Consistent design style based on image produced Oct 05. – See SEP Operational Manual for further details.	Popular amongst all who receive Severn Tidings – Dissemination tool – but resource intensive
Newsletter – other (proposed)	Valuable means of building on other partners identity and member base. Good value for money and captive audience.	Draw up list of partners' newsletters. Seek opportunities for one piece in each once every two years.	Not implemented
Media – Radio, TV, Newspapers (proposed)	Wide reaching communication body. Difficult to predict and influence.	Aim for monthly estuary / SEP stories to gain regional press coverage	Not implemented, although SMP2 FRMS and Tidal Power stories have made local and national press.

Leaflets	Simple, professionally designed leaflets can be effective in installing a local sense of pride of the Estuary. Leaflets can incorporate other engagement techniques (e.g. photos and maps) and can point interested parties towards the website and Partnership events	Continue to develop in house leaflets for partners & members. Consistent design style based on Severn Estuary brand image produced Oct 05. – See SEP Operational Manual for a full list of available material and guidance on the production of new materials	Popular amongst targeted user groups – resource intensive
Delivering our messages by proxy through other organisations	A cost effective way of communicating our aims and objectives through other organisations with similar target audiences / aims and objects. Practice what we preach – the partnership approach	Very important method. Look for all opportunities to get our messages across.	Can reach different target audiences – under utilised?
SEP Roadshow events for Community, Parish and Town Councils (proposed)	A dedicated event, to dedicated community audience, drawing on relationships and resources of local parish, community and town Councils. Local Councils seen to be getting value for money – encourages membership – can lead to further engagement events and joint projects (e.g. community heritage bid etc.).	A series of touring events to promote and publicise the Severn Estuary and work of the Severn Estuary Partnership in numerous Community Parish and Town Council settings	Not Implemented
SEP SMS News feed (proposed)	Direct news and information to individuals mobile phones. Can target specific members – local residents and tourists. Resource intensive? – Apps such as the MCS app are being developed for smartphones.	Develop a SMS sign up service for Severn Estuary and Partnership related news (members service)	Not Implemented
Public focused Education projects (proposed)	Community focused education projects can engage all members of the community while focusing on raising awareness and knowledge, which will aid a sustainable approach to ‘bottom up’ estuary management	Develop a series of public focused education and engagement resources, such as activity books, ‘guided walk leaflets’ and information leaflets.	Not Implemented
Action Groups (proposed)	There are many different sectors that have a stake in the Estuary. Action Groups aim to reflect this diversity and should be established to facilitate joint working. Ensuring that all sectors are represented & heard is essential to open a broader debate. Each action group should meet several times a year depending on issues and projects that may develop as an outcome of a meeting.	Action groups could include; Severn Education, Recreation group, ASERA, SECG, Archaeology, Industry etc. Existing groups such as ASERA and SECG could be classed as an ‘Action Group’.	Not Implemented

11.0 Delivery:

Table 2: Existing and potential communication activities, organised by target audience.

Communication activity	Target Audiences				
	a. Core Funding Partners	b. Partner	c. Local / Regional Non Commercial Groups	d. Local Club or Parish, Town, Community Council	e. Individual Member
Face to face / meetings					
Email & SEP E-News					
Phone					
Mail					
Estuary Groups Day & JAC					
Talks at National conferences e.g. ICZM (e.g. Littoral, Oceanology, Coastal Futures etc.					
Severn Estuary Forum					
<i>Severn Estuary Day (potential) (Celebration public event – joint with SRT)?</i>					
Attending/organising Events / shows / stalls / walks/ exhibitions *					
Outdoor panels					
Website					
Severn Tidings Newsletter					
Media – Radio, TV, Newspapers					
Leaflets – SEP – Guidance Notes					
Leaflets/Newsletters - other					
Other printed material					
Delivering our messages by proxy through other organisations					
<i>SEP Roadshow events for Community, Parish and Town Councils (Potential)</i>					
<i>SEP SMS News feed (Potential)</i>					
<i>School focused Education projects (Potential)</i>					
<i>Action Groups (Potential)</i>					

Action Plan:

Action	Lead	Priority	Timescale	Notes
Development of SEP Contacts Database	Communication and Engagement Officers	High	Summer 2011	See separate Database Action Plan
Continued development of Severn Estuary Gateway and SEP websites	Communication Officer	High	Ongoing	www.severnestuary.net
Produce and distribute biannual Severn Tidings	Engagement Officer	High	Spring/Autumn	
Produce and distribute Monthly E-News	Communication Officer	High	Monthly	
Host Annual Severn Estuary Forum	Engagement Officer	High	Summer 2011	
Host Biannual Joint Estuaries Day and JAC Events	Engagement Officer	High	May 2011	
Train Staff in Media activities in order to raise profile of SEP	SEP Staff Team	Medium		
Develop relationships with Industries around Severn Estuary (e.g. LCSW)	Scientific Officer	Medium	Ongoing	
Continue to develop relationships with Town Parish and Community Councils around Estuary	Engagement Officer	Medium	Ongoing	
Explore further opportunities to engage with the public, including attendance at public shows and development of interpretation material (additional funding should be sought to support this approach)	Engagement Officer	Low		
Explore the plausibility of	Engagement Officer	Low	Summer 2011?	

hosting a public friendly Severn Estuary day (in possible conjunction with the SRT)				
Explore the future possibility of SMS updates for members (subscription system)	Communication Officer	Low		
Explore the opportunities to produce Severn Estuary related education material for a wide range of audiences. (Additional funding should be sought to support this activity)		Low		
Be aware of opportunities to present at international, national and local conference	SEP Staff Team	Low	Ongoing	
Development of sector specific Action Groups	Engagement Officer	Low	?	See Communication and Engagement Strategy 10.0

