Exmouth Town Council
Town Hall, St Andrews Road
Exmouth, Devon, EX8 1AW
tel: 01395 276167
email: reception@exmouth.gov.uk
www.exmouth.gov.uk

# EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
## This meeting is open to the Public and Press

**Wednesday 12th October 2022**

**To: All Members of Exmouth Town Council**

Dear Councillors,

A Meeting of Exmouth Town Council, to which you are summoned, will be held in the Town Hall, First Floor, Exmouth, EX8 1AW on Monday 17th October 2022 at 6:30pm to consider the matters detailed on the agenda below.

Members of the press and public are welcome to observe the meeting and should register in advance by emailing townclerk@exmouth.gov.uk

By registering as an observer, members of the public will not automatically be permitted to speak; anybody wishing to address Members during the public speaking session will need to register separately with the Town Clerk.

Yours faithfully

Lisa Bowman
TOWN CLERK

# AGENDA

**1. Apologies for absence**

The meeting will adjourn for the Public Forum.

---

**Public Forum:**

- Public speaking is limited to a maximum of 3 minutes per person and to a total of 15 minutes
- Questions should be submitted one clear working day before the meeting to enable them to be answered more fully and precisely
- The Chairman will usually invite speakers in the order in which requests to speak were lodged. Only if time allows will further speaking from the floor be accepted

• Where several speakers wish to make similar points, the chairman has the right to request one spokesperson
• As the formal meeting stands adjourned for the Forum, questions or statements from the public are not recorded in the meeting minutes but in an appendix attached to those minutes. This will not be a verbatim report of the Forum, but will record the name of the speaker, brief synopsis of the topic or question and outline of any immediate response or copy of a written reply.

---

The meeting will reconvene.

2. **Council Meeting Minutes:**
   To confirm and sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Town Council meeting held on 3rd October 2022 (circulated)

3. **Matters arising from the Council Meeting minutes (for information only)**

4. **Declarations of Pecuniary Interest and Dispensations:**
   Members to declare any interests they may have on the agenda and agree any dispensations to stay

5. **To resolve that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of item(s) in Part II of the agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.**

6. **Q&A with Iain Vosper - Operations Director, South West Water.** Questions have been submitted in advance and are appended to this agenda.

**Date of next meeting: 14h November 2022**

**QUESTIONS FOR IAN VOSPER, SWW, GROUPED BY TOPIC:**

a) SWW Environmental Performance

Q1 of 16: Please will you confirm that SWW provided the following figures to the Environment Agency and that they are correct, viz. that there were a total of 62 sewage discharges over a combined total of 882 hours into Exmouth Bay during 2020 from the Combined Sewer Overflow (aka Combined Storm Overflow or CSO) situated on the Maer Nature Reserve, and a total of 74 untreated discharges from the same location into the bay across 1,128 hours during 2021?

Q2 of 16: SWW's permits for storm overflow discharges around Exmouth and into the River Exe allow for a maximum of 40 discharges per annum because of its bathing water status and the presence of commercial shellfish beds in the River Exe and its Exmouth channel that are "farmed" for human consumption. SWW's own figures (see Question 1) indicate that this permitted maximum discharge limit has been breached significantly during both 2020 and 2021. What consequences, if any, do you anticipate SWW facing from the regulator?

Q3 of 16: There are currently two types of pollution alert system. The first is a "prediction or forecast" of a likely pollution incident linked to weather conditions and is displayed on the LED sign by the Lifeboat Station. The second system is via the SWW Event Duration Monitor instrument which triggers by an "actual overflow" and is reported to the Surfers Against Sewage app. However, these systems do not work all year round (May to September) and are manually reported which may happen after 9am and so after many swimmers have already entered the water. When can SWW commit to upgrading the alerting of untreated discharge events from Maer Lane WWTW and Maer Road tanks by funding a real-time 24:7, direct link between their CSO on the Maer Nature Reserve and the existing pollution event status board on the beachfront? Please outline how best this can be achieved?

b) SWW Operational Performance

Q4 of 16 (Frank Cullis): On the 15th of August Exmouth had its first proper rainfall in ages. That night, the surfers against sewerage app, safer seas, reported a sewage alert for Maer Rock's warning not to swim in the sea. On the 17th, The BBC national 6 o'clock news reported on the raw sewerage still being discharged into the sea off Exmouth with a live report from our beach. So, my question to SWW is, do you understand the damage your company's dire record of discharging sewerage into the sea off Maer Rock's is doing to the town's reputation and vital tourism industry. The town council believes it reasonable for SWW to compensate Exmouth businesses impacted financially by future sewage discharges from Maer rocks and Phear Park. When can SWW commit to this policy?

Q5 of 16 (Mike Rosser) The Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) pollution alert for Exmouth beach on August 17th would have resulted from the Maer CSO discharging and prompting an automated message to SAS via the Beachwise system. Apparently, SWW have now stated that sewage was not discharged on that date. Both cannot be true. Can statements from SWW regarding sewage discharges be believed?

Q6 of 16: What steps are SWW prepared to make to work actively alongside EDDC to ensure that Exmouth maintains its Beach's Blue Flag status. Clearly, this can be threatened by repeated discharges of untreated sewage by SWW into Exmouth Bay, as seawater quality forms a key part of the criteria for achieving a Blue Flag. Aside from the recorded instances of overflow of untreated sewage from the Maer Road and Maer Lane facilities, SWW has suggested that increased pump capacity may be used to move sewage waters from Phear Park directly to the Maer Lane works, and from there be pumped out to sea via the Sandy Bay discharge pipe. This suggestion is alarming as it represents an operation practice that will result in willful discharge of untreated sewage that may have a detrimental impact on local bathing water quality and Exmouth's Blue Flag status. Please comment.

Q7 of 16: Whilst councillors understand the permitted need for sewer overflow discharges during times of storms or heavy rain, comparative analyses of these overflow events against the duration of local rainfall indicates that the holding tank at the Maer Nature Reserve overflows with onset of even the lightest rain, not just during storm deluges. What actions will SWW take to prevent this from happening?

Q8 of 16: There appears to be a design anomaly at the holding tank on the Maer Nature Reserve in that the flow rate into the tank can be greater than the hydraulic capacity of the single outlet pipe. This causes the manhole covers on the tank and also across the Maer nature reserve to "blow off" because of pressure build up within it, resulting in release of raw sewage onto the reserve. This happens several times every year. Possible solutions would be to increase the flow capacity of the outlet pipe, to increase the pump capacity so that the tank can be emptied faster, to enlarge the tank capacity to build in greater system resilience (residence time), or a combination of these. Will SWW commit to carrying out this work in order prevent on-land discharges and when can it be undertaken?

Q9 of 16: In a similar manner to the situation at the Maer Nature Reserve, as described in Question 6, the sewage management system at Phear Park and Hartopp also overflows regularly with a serious risk of sewage outflow into the Duck Pond area of the River Exe. This stretch of coastline forms part of a globally important area of overwintering waders and waterfowl. Will SWW also commit to upgrading the tank capacities at Phear Park and Hartopp to minimise risk to the wildlife habitat and when can this be done?

Q10 of 16: (Tim Dumper) What is going to happen to rectify the problem with the tidal backflow from the estuary, which comes up through the 2 manholes towards the bottom of Hartopp Road (near the pumping station) and when? This occurs at high tides when there is a Spring Tide - for instance it has happened in recent days. Residents' concerns are that in the end the whole local sewerage infrastructure could collapse. It has been a problem over several years.

Q11 of 16 (Mike Rosser): While being pleased to read that in May 2022 SWW completed work on a scheme to upgrade sections of the sewerage network in Dawlish, I would like to know when SWW will upgrade its infrastructure in Exmouth to ensure that the bathing water and environment – including the Maer Nature Reserve – is protected against sewage discharges, both now and for when there will be future development of the town? It is arguable that Exmouth currently has a worse sewage discharge problem than that at Dawlish prior to SWW actions.

Q12 of 16: The actual location of the sewage discharge outlet from SWW's Maer Road and Maer Lane facilities is uncertain. Some documents suggest that it occurs from the concrete pipe to the west of Maer Rocks (via Littleham Brook as per the permit) and other documents that it takes place from the metal pipe at the end of Maer Rocks. None suggest that it is any further out to sea than these locations, both of which are situated within 350m of the shore at high tide, and a much shorter distance than this at low tide. In addition, both locations are close to "family friendly" rock pool and shellfish areas. ETC propose that SWW commit to carrying out a tracer test, e.g. dye or some other marker, to ascertain exactly where sewage outflows from their Maer works takes place. When can this be done in the presence of one or more representatives of the council?

Q12 of 16: How feasible is it for SWW to use the CSO at Sandy Bay, rather than the one at Exmouth Beach, as their preferred discharge point for their Maer Lane works as it is 1.8km off shore rather than the Maer Rocks outlet which is between 100m and 350m from Exmouth beach? By when can this be put into practice?

c) Exmouth development

Q13 of 16: SWW has been accepting connections from new residential developments across Exmouth despite their sewer system demonstrably not being able to cope with the current loading (see Questions 4 and 6-8). More than 400 additional residential households have been added along Douglas Avenue alone within the past 10 years. When will SWW commit to incrementally expanding its sewer pumping and storm tank capacity in Exmouth so that it can cope operationally with each added new development, rather than simply dispersing new householder income streams in dividend payments to shareholders and senior management bonuses? Going on past data (see Question 1 & 2) unless something is done more connections to SWW's system going forward are likely to result in a greater number of untreated sewage discharges at Exmouth?

d) Sewage tankers

Q14 of 16: SWW's own figures indicate that more than 3,000 HGV journeys were made through Exmouth and Maer Lane during 2020 for sewage sludge imports and to provide operational support to the Maer Lane treatment works. This figure rose to more than 4,000 HGV movements through 2021 and higher frequency still in the first quarter of 2022. These HGV / Tanker movements have a considerable environmental impact on the town along their route, ranging from significant noise and air pollution, demonstrable road damage (that the local authority has had to remedy) to added risks to pedestrians and cyclists, in particular along Maer Lane where these HGVs touch the bushes on both sides of the road as they pass. Such issues are known to affect the mental health of residents along the routes of these heavy vehicles. What actions can SWW take to stop, or at least greatly reduce, these HGVs numbers and by when can these be achieved?

Q15 of 16: Given that SWW is unlikely to be able to stop their sewage tankering operation into and out of Maer Lane overnight, what is the company's expectation over the next 5 years for the number of these HGVs needing to access the Maer Lane site every month as support to their county-wide sewage treatment operations? Please provide the total number of HGV movements anticipated into and out of the Maer Lane works, to include sewage, sludge and treatment chemical transits, etc.

e) SWW plans for Maer Lane

Q16 of 16: Several SWW employees have stated off-the-record that there are plans to expand the Maer Lane treatment works. As SWW's own report states that the current site has adequate operational capacity to deal with predicted future local sewage loadings, the inference must be that any expansion of the site is solely to allow for more imports of raw sewage and sewage sludge from outside of the locality. Please comment on this

statement and provide an outline of SWW's future plans for their Exmouth sites over the next 10-years?