EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

Flooding & Water Quality Working Party

Notes of the Zoom meeting held at 2pm on Tuesday 29th April 2025

Present

Graham Deasy	GD	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward (Chairperson)
Pauline Stott	PS	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Mark Williamson	MW	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward
Cherry Nicholas	CN	ETC Councillor, Brixington Ward
Steve Gazzard	SG	ETC Councillor, Withycombe Raleigh Ward
Tim Dumper	TD	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Jay Harris	JH	SWW, SWW, Regional Operations Manager
Tom Buxton-Smith	TBS	EDDC, Engineering Projects Manager
Sarah Sharpe	SS	SWW, Local Government Liaison Officer
Stuart Coles	SC	DCC, Neighbourhood Highways Officer
Chetna Jones	CJ	ETC Deputy Town Clerk
Lisa Greenway	LG	ETC, Note Taker

Apologies

Andrew Colman	AC	ETC Councillor, Brixington Ward
Ian Kirvan	IK	ETC Councillor, Brixington Ward
Thomas Aldridge	TA	DCC, Flood & Coastal Risk Management Officer
Leonora Hansen	LH	EA, Flood Risk Engagement Advisor
Hazel Tranchant	HT	SWW, Asset Manager

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1. Welcome, introduction and apologies

GD welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted.

2. To approve the notes from the meeting on the 14th of January 2025

PS proposed and MW seconded, and it was agreed the notes were an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

No matters arising.

It was agreed to postpone item 4 until a representative from South West Water was present to give an update.

5. EA: Maintenance schedule for Withycombe Brook, particularly overgrowth clearance and other general updates

No EA representatives were present at the meeting and no reports were received.

CJ reported that whilst the Town Maintenance Team were clearing a footpath (14) behind Lyndhurst Avenue that runs parallel to Withycombe brook, the culvert has significant overgrowth which is encroaching on to the footpath. This prompted the question whether the Environment Agency has any formal responsibility for maintaining this area, and if they have

a scheduled program to clear overgrowth, particularly in the not easy to access parts of the culvert.

TD provided historical context, explaining that the path in question, located in Halsdon Ward, has an official designation but is very narrow and runs directly behind resident's gardens. There was a previous attempt to have the path cleared around 5 to 10 years ago, which was met with resistance from some residents who were unhappy with increased access and preferred to keep the path less used.

SG added that Withycombe Brook has now been recognised as an ancient woodland due to the wide variety of species present in the area. This recognition adds an environmental dimension to the discussion, highlighting the ecological value of the area and the potential importance of careful management.

CJ responded by clarifying that while some portions of the brook may be the responsibility of private landowners, the main area of concern is the culvert section at Exeter Road junction, where there is no clear ownership visible. It is believed that this specific section is likely under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency. The importance of reaching out to them was emphasised for clarity and potential action, even if the entire length of the brook is not their responsibility.

6. EDDC: Update on the Sea Wall and general updates

TBS provided members with updates on various ongoing works and future plans. The tactile paving will be completed next week, finalising that section and allowing activities like Parkrun to resume. The seawall construction site is being cleared and moved to the car park area to handle remaining tasks, including a rock revetment at the slipway, set to begin shortly.

The Sideshore Mallow area is being seeded but will not be fully established in time for a scheduled May event however, there's a plan to reseed in September to ensure it is ready for the following year. Some Heras fencing will remain in place for safety.

On the seafront, Stuart Line Cruises has applied for planning permission for the Old Winch House which is currently vacant and EDDC temporary benches may be installed in the meantime.

Work is also beginning on drainage improvements in Manor Gardens, which will later be combined with resurfacing efforts targeted for autumn to avoid disruption from wet weather and seasonal growth.

At the Imperial Recreation Ground, temporary measures have been taken to stabilise the damaged landfill cover over winter. A more permanent and visually appealing solution is being developed, with hopes to implement it by autumn 2026 before overwintering birds return.

7. DCC: Flood risk general update

TA the DCC, Flood & Coastal Risk Management Officer was not present at the meeting and no report was received.

8. DCC: Surface water runoff from the highway and other Highways general updates

SC opened by mentioning the implementation of a new financial system that caused some initial internal issues but has now been resolved, allowing projects to proceed. He noted

around ten minor drainage jobs are currently with the contractor, aimed at resolving urban ponding problems in Exmouth, although the exact budget is still unclear due to PM being on leave.

GD inquired about delayed modelling work to assess town centre flooding on the roads, but no update has been received from TA, who is responsible for that work. CJ confirmed the delay and agreed to follow up for an update.

Concerns were raised about poor coordination between Highways resurfacing works on Maer Lane and planned drainage works by South West Water, which could lead to unnecessary disruption. TD sought clarification on which specific areas were being addressed for ponding, but SC clarified his focus is on existing highway drainage, while land drainage surface water issues fall under TA's remit.

PS queried the bumpy road conditions on Marine Way caused by joint crack fills. SC explained it's a preventative measure to stop water ingress. He also acknowledged potential surface failure and mentioned a contractor warranty may require rectification.

MW flagged a long-standing ponding issue on Douglas Avenue, worsened by a poorly functioning road drain, SC does not deal with this area but will report it to the relevant officer.

SG asked about progress on the design for a new bridge in Withycombe on Moorfield Road, SC confirmed the project is ongoing with recent drainage concerns being reviewed.

Members queried how water road runoff is managed. SC explained that most urban gullies connect to South West Water's sewer systems, while in rural areas, water typically discharges into local watercourses. He reassured members that gully sumps that capture debris and pollutants, are filtered and removed through regular scheduled cleaning, preventing contamination of natural water sources.

4. SWW: Update on recent overflows, upgrade work including proposed work for phase 2, pipeline out to Straight Point and other general updates

JH provided an update on the Maer Road pumping station and associated rising main replacement works. Phase one of the project, which involved planned replacement of the damaged rising mains was completed successfully prior to Christmas. The team is now progressing with phase two, which extends the rising main from the pumping station at Maer Road to connect to the newly replaced pipe in a field near the sewage treatment works at Maer Lane. This phase is on track for completion by the end of June. Contractors are currently on-site performing vegetation clearance, preparing the working strip, and installing fencing. They will soon begin trench excavation, pipe delivery, and welding to get the new infrastructure operational.

A concern was raised by GD regarding the temporary umbilical pipe setup at Maer Farm, where two pipes crossing a footpath are placed too closely together, creating a trip hazard for pedestrians. Previously, the pipes had been laid apart to allow easier crossing. JH said he would contact the project manager immediately after the meeting to rectify this issue.

JH further explained that current works at the Maer Road pumping station involve internal pipework and fittings to allow continued use of the umbilical system, The station is temporarily bypassing the rising mains while these internal upgrades are completed. This

work is scheduled to finish by the end of the week, at which point flows will return to the existing rising mains and the umbilical setup will be dismantled.

He also updated members on the new long outfall pipe out to sea near Sandy Bay. Although the pipe is in place, it is not yet operational because diffusers still need to be added at the seaward end. This task is complex and requires specialist marine equipment, a marine survey vessel is expected on-site today, and a jack-up barge is scheduled to arrive in Teignmouth harbour tomorrow, before being relocated to Exmouth next week to allow the installation of the diffusers. The new outfall pipe is critical to pump more flows from Maer Road to the sewage treatment works, ultimately helping to reduce the storm overflows from Maer Road and discharge out to sea at Straight Point instead.

JH emphasised that the current five-year investment period (AMP8) includes plans to upgrade and expand the Maer Lane treatment facility. These improvements are not only intended to meet short-term development pressures but are designed with a 25-year horizon in mind to accommodate long-term growth and environmental goals.

GD asked about the treatment plant's current capacity and mentioned conflicting figures suggesting it was operating at either 47% or 80% of capacity. JH clarified that while he did not have exact figures at hand, the works are currently operating within capacity and future upgrades would ensure sustainability in light of projected development and environmental demands.

The group discussed the impact of highway drainage entering the sewage system, particularly the pollutants such as rubber and oils from vehicles. JH noted that while this kind of runoff enters the combined sewer system and is separated and treated, he acknowledged the long-term impact on water quality and reiterated a commitment to pursuing "green-first" solutions to divert surface water away from the combined system and reduce strain on storm overflows.

JH invited members to a public drop-in session at Exmouth Library, scheduled for tonight from 5–7pm. Previous events were held during the day, limiting accessibility, so this session was arranged in the evening to encourage broader participation.

During the meeting with MP David Reed concerns were raised about the deprioritised plans to potentially recommission a historic second outfall pipe at Maer Rocks, JH confirmed this was the case, largely due to potential public opposition. The second outfall pipe was considered as a way to relieve manhole flooding on the Maer, not necessarily to address storm overflow issues directly. While the idea of using the second outfall remains under review, current focus is on improvements to the pumping station, which are expected to alleviate manhole flooding.

JH confirmed that cleaning of pipes coming down from Douglas Avenue and Cyprus Road had been carried out in preparation for the Easter weekend and more cleaning work is planned when it can be scheduled between work being carried out at the pumping station.

TD mentioned a prior site visit to the sewage treatment works, expressing concern that there was no advanced system in place for dealing with pollutants from road runoff, JH reiterated that coarse and fine screening are the only measures currently in place for such pollutants from road gullies.

TD queried recent work at the Hartopp Road pumping station and reported continuous tidal water leakage through manholes during high tide, JH was not aware of specific recent work but would investigate further, SC added that the only recorded work nearby was a repair to a dangerous fire hydrant in Halsdon Road.

CJ mentioned that South West Water had not responded to several points raised at a recent meeting hosted by MP David Reed, JH agreed to follow this up. CJ suggested a joint site visit between South West Water and Exmouth Town Council to view modelling work conducted at Hartopp Road pumping station, JH supported this and will make arrangements.

GD referenced the recent "Let's Talk Water" seminar, where stakeholders were invited to participate in the regional Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan. Members were asked if they would like to make a recommendation for Exmouth Town Council to submit an interest to join the partnership as a stakeholder to ensure Exmouth concerns are represented and assign a representative to attend on behalf of the Town Council. SG proposed, MW seconded this motion, with full agreement from attending members.

Members discussed the lack of statutory consultation requirements for water companies in the planning process. Members unanimously agreed that this omission poses a significant gap in infrastructure coordination, particularly in light of increasing development. MW proposed, TD seconded, that it is recommended to Exmouth Town Council that they write to the relevant government minister to advocate for water companies to be made statutory consultees in the planning process. This proposal was unanimously supported.

Actions; JH to arrange a site meeting at Halsdon Road Pumping Station to discuss concerns around tidal overflows.

Recommendations to the Town Council;

To recommend that ETC submits an interest to join the partnership as a stakeholder to ensure Exmouth concerns are represented and to assign a representative (to be agreed at the TC meeting) to attend on behalf of the Town Council.

To recommend that ETC writes to the relevant government minister to advocate for water companies to be made statutory consultees in the planning process.

9. ETC Councillors: Reports and questions to representatives of external organisations

MW raised concerns that the display on Queens Drive near the lifeboat station does not show any real time information about bathing water. CJ explained that the sign is only operational during the bathing season between May and September, although they are not aways reliable which EDDC are aware of. This issue can be added to the Waterfront working party agenda to discuss with the EDDC Beach Safety Officer on the 17th of June 2025.

Action: LG to add water quality signs on the next Waterfront working party agenda.

10. AOB

No other business.

11. 2025 meetings: 15th July 2025 & 14th October 2025

The meeting ended at 15:20