EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

Flooding & Water Quality Working Party

Notes of the Zoom meeting held at 2pm on Tuesday 5th August 2025

Present

Graham Deasy	GD	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward (Chairperson)
Pauline Stott	PS	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Mark Williamson	MW	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward
Steve Gazzard	SG	ETC Councillor, Withycombe Raleigh Ward
Tim Dumper	TD	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Tom Buxton-Smith	TBS	EDDC, Engineering Projects Manager
Sarah Sharpe	SS	SWW, Local Government Liaison Officer
Jenny Eamer	JE	SWW, Waste Water Service Operations Manager
Philip Morgan	PM	DCC, Neighbourhood Highway Engineer, Exeter Highway Team
Stuart Coles	SC	DCC, Neighbourhood Highways Officer
Chetna Jones	CJ	ETC Deputy Town Clerk
Lisa Greenway	LG	ETC, Note Taker

Apologies

Cherry Nicholas	CN	ETC Councillor, Brixington Ward
Jeff Trail	JT	DCC Councillor
Emma Sampson	ES	DCC, Highway Neighbourhood Officer
Jay Harris	JH	SWW, SWW, Regional Operations Manager
Hazel Tranchant	HT	SWW, Asset Manager
Thomas Aldridge	TA	DCC, Flood & Coastal Risk Management Officer

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1. To elect a chair

CJ welcomed everyone to the meeting and requested nominations for the election of the chair of this working party. TD nominated GD, and this was seconded by MW. No further nominations were received. Members were asked to vote, and GD was duly elected as chair.

2. Welcome, introduction and apologies

GD welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted.

3. To approve the notes from the meeting on the 29th of April 2025

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

4. Matters arising

TD raised the issue of jurisdiction over the culvert on footpath 14 behind Lyndhurst Avenue that runs parallel to Withycombe brook. The matter had been discussed at the previous meeting, with some uncertainty over whether DCC or EA holds responsibility. CJ clarified that the footpath, which is still shown as a right of way is not recognised by DCC however, Exmouth Town Council continues to maintain the area. GD agreed to raise this matter with JT in an upcoming meeting.

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5. **To note the letter sent to the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Angela Rayner, Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government and response**

Members noted the letter sent to the Rt Hon Angela Rayner, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, regarding the inclusion of South West Water as a statutory consultee in large-scale planning developments. CJ was thanked for drafting the letter. The response was discussed and, while comprehensive, was seen as lacking in firm timeframes. It was confirmed that current planning legislation does not require consultation with water companies, although it is strongly advised.

JE agreed to investigate whether South West Water had been consulted on the emerging Local Plan and would report back.

6. **To receive the invitation, terms of reference and timescale details of the South West Water Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan and to agree a representative from this working party for ratification at the next Town Council meeting**

Following clarification that full terms of reference and timelines had now been received, members were asked to nominate a representative to participate in the South West Water Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan. PS proposed GD for the role, which was seconded by MW. The appointment was unanimously agreed, subject to ratification at the next Full Council meeting.

Action: To recommend that the Town Council ratifies Councillor Graham Deasy as the Town Council representative when participating in the development of phase two of SWW Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan.

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

JE provided a detailed update on recent and planned works:

- The outfall diffuser works were nearing completion, with final connections scheduled for the following week, weather permitting
- Storm tank maintenance was underway, though minimal visible disruption was expected
- The new rising main connection was scheduled to begin the week of 18th August. Tankers would be used to manage flow during disconnection and reconnection and would be parked outside Maer Road car park to minimise public concern
- Power resilience upgrades at the pump station had been approved and were awaiting connection by Western Power
- Full operational flow capacity (700 litres per second) would not be used immediately; a gradual increase would take place following checks of the storm tanks and pump systems

SG raised concerns regarding public perception of tankers and requested clear public communication during the works. He also asked whether the graffiti at the Phear Park pumping station could be removed as this was noticed during the Exmouth in Bloom judging, JE agreed to refer this to the appropriate team.

GD asked whether the new pipeline included improved materials to reduce erosion from sediment, JE confirmed that newer materials were in use and that South West Water is exploring monitoring technologies that do not require flow interruption.

8. EA: Water Quality results and general updates

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

CJ reported that weekly bathing water results from EA are now being shared with Exmouth Town Council. The weekly report includes two beach sites and three Littleham brook sites in Exmouth and the results are usually one week behind. Recent test results have not raised concerns. However, an earlier issue in the Green Farm area had identified human waste contamination, which after further testing by EA and South West Water, this was traced to potential misconnections. Around 40 letters were issued to local residents asking them to check their drainage systems.

MW queried whether any water quality monitoring takes place at Exe Estuary, CJ confirmed that the estuary is not a designated bathing water site and is therefore not currently monitored by EA however she agreed to look into this and report back at the next meeting, but it is likely that it may need to be discussed by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership. PS noted that swimming occurs at Lympstone, and suggested testing should be considered in that area as well. Upon reviewing the EA data during the meeting, CJ confirmed there are no tests at Lympstone or Topsham, although monitoring does take place further afield at Axe Estuary near Axmouth Bridge, indicating that such monitoring is possible.

TD highlighted the national conversation around water quality in rivers and estuaries, particularly in the context of wild swimming. He referenced a recent report on water regulation, which suggests forming a new, unified regulator combining functions of Ofwat and EA. He stressed the importance of local water testing being in place ahead of any regulatory changes.

SG praised the quality of the seawater at Exmouth beach this year, noting it was exceptionally clear and clean. He thanked those involved in maintaining water quality standards.

9. EDDC: Update on Sea Wall and general updates

TBS confirmed that the sea wall construction work had been completed, and the wall was opened to the public prior to the Easter weekend, some minor remedial work followed. A retrospective planning application is due to be submitted for the existing structure, and a public consultation will be held in the New Year to consider cladding options. The appearance of the wall remains a matter of mixed public opinion.

Drainage issues remain unresolved in Manor Gardens and planned resurfacing of the footpaths has been delayed until drainage works are completed.

In relation to the Imperial Recreation Ground, TBS explained that parts of the revetment are showing signs of deterioration. The area is built on historic landfill, and while temporary repairs using concrete have proven effective for now, they are not sustainable in the long term. EDDC has registered this as a future project on the EA's funding programme and will seek support via DEFRA. It is anticipated that a longer-term project could commence within the next three years.

10. DCC: Flood risk general update

No DCC representatives were present at the meeting, but TA provided the following report:

DCC are currently considering proposals to improve surface water drainage in The Colony area of Exmouth, it's become clear through their work so far that to improve the standard of flood protection for the area will be reliant on SWW infrastructure.

Any improvement, therefore, will need to be undertaken hand in hand with SWW improving their infrastructure. Currently it's unclear if the business case can be made for this particularly with the proposed changes to grant aid funding for flood alleviation works that DEFRA are consulting on currently. DCC continue to work closely with SWW to attempt to identify a jointly beneficial solution that's affordable and achievable.

11. DCC: Highways general updates

SC reported limited new developments, noting that current drainage assessments are dependent on upcoming storms which will help reveal trouble spots. A new crew has recently started working with the mini jetter, a vehicle used for clearing blockages and carrying out camera surveys of drainage systems. He highlighted that managing drainage remains a continual challenge due to the age and condition of the drainage network and the wider environmental demands they face.

GD brought up an incident from around eight weeks ago involving a mysterious spillage on Maer Road, which resulted in a road closure and caused someone to fall off their bicycle due to the hazardous surface. The substance appeared to create a sheen on the road, and it was suspected that it may have come from a tanker. GD queried if the source had ever been identified. SC responded that Milestone Network attended the scene, closed the road for safety, but no source of the spill was ever found. There was no CCTV evidence, and the substance had evaporated by the time follow-up assessments could be made. JE added that South West Water had conducted multiple visits, reviewed the activities on nearby sites, and examined tankers operating in the area but found no evidence linking SWW to the spill. PM confirmed that although samples were taken, they did not produce conclusive results. Cleaning agents were tried on the day of the incident without success, and when the team returned the following day, the substance was no longer visible.

PS raised concerns about potholes in the area, particularly pointing out a severe one near the Imperial roundabout in Exmouth, which seems to be forming a sinkhole. She noted it had been repaired previously but had reappeared. SC confirmed that South West Water had investigated the issue and identified water entering their sewer network at that location, though they haven't determined the source. Leak testing on nearby mains showed no faults. A follow-up excavation is scheduled in the coming weeks to identify the cause.

PM encouraged members to use the DCC "Report a Problem" online tool. He explained that once a problem is logged, it gets marked with a red triangle symbol to indicate that work has been scheduled, allowing users to track progress.

CJ queried when the next round of DCC's three-yearly ad hoc ditch and gully clearing was due, suggesting that the next cycle might be imminent. PM clarified that Exmouth is on a three-year gully maintenance cycle. Rather than clearing every gully automatically, a system is used that involves visual inspections—sometimes just by a worker using a stick to test sump conditions. If a blockage is found, the gully is then scheduled for cleaning. This approach ensures only necessary cleaning is done, saving time and resources. He mentioned that while he receives weekly reports detailing which areas have already been cleared, future schedules are not included as work is dispatched on a weekly basis by the crews on the ground.

PM further added that in well-maintained urban areas, gullies generally do not require frequent clearing within that three-year period. As a final point, he mentioned that in some regions, volunteer groups support flood prevention efforts by keeping gullies clean through simple methods like brushing or manually checking for blockages.

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

GD informed members about South West Water's forum, *Let's Talk Water*, which he and CJ attend. The next session is scheduled for the 22nd of September and will feature three workshops focusing on the importance of community working, the challenges involved, and strategies to enhance collaboration between community groups and organisations.

13. AOB

No other business.

The meeting ended at 15:11

2025 meetings: 21st October 2025