Exmouth Town Council

Town Hall, St Andrews Road
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EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

Notes from Tree Forum 22nd October 2025

Present

Councillor Olly Davey	OD	Exmouth Town Council (Chair)
Councillor Mike Rosser	MR	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Maddy Chapman	MC	Exmouth Town Council and East Devon District Council
Zoey Cooper	ZC	Exmouth Town Council
Nathan Dunster	ND	East Devon District Council
Alistair Jeans	AJ	East Devon District Council
Carl Harrison	CH	East Devon District Council
Simon Pardoe	SP	Tree Warden
Lucy Buckingham	LB	National Trust
Jan Gannaway	JG	Exmouth Wildlife Group

Apologies

Councillor Tim Dumper	TD	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Louise Venables	LV	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Bowman	LB	Exmouth Town Council
Jonathan Fisher	JF	National Trust

1. Chair Councillor Olly Davey (OD) **welcomed** everyone to the meeting and **apologies** were noted. Apologies from Councillor Tim Dumper (TD) were noted along with a question regarding the likely effect of the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill on our ability to protect our trees and hedgerows.

2. **THaWS**: Alistair Jeans (AJ) could not respond TD's question, but provided an update on THaWS (Tree, Hedgerow and Wildlife Strategy). East Devon's tree strategy has been in development for over a year and was formally adopted in April. There are 27 actions and nine priorities. Since agreeing the strategy, two unforeseen circumstances are impacting the strategy rollout:

    a. Local Government Restructure and uncertainty or roles and responsibilities of EDDC resources and personnel going forward
    b. Funding cuts and cost-saving measures, prohibiting the hire of a dedicated officer to manage the strategy rollout

    The nine priority actions are:

    - Tree stock management (StreetScene)
    - Mapping areas for nature regeneration (Countryside Team)
    - Improving inter-departmental communication and cooperation
    - Greater coordination with Housing Team where there is a lot of potential to improve tree cover

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- Community involvement and “Tree Champion” scheme
- Establishment of Community Tree Nurseries
- Tree canopy and equity assessment mapping (utilising the Woodland Trust Tree Equity Map) to consider: tree cover, air quality, deprivation etc. Goal is to identify areas to both plant and protect trees.
- Trees and development – create and update the supplementary planning guidance and Tree Protection Policy. And review existing TPOs (some go back to the 1950s!).
- Risk management guidance

AD elaborated on the **Tree Champion Scheme**, launching in a couple of weeks, which will support the strategic goal to grow tree canopy cover (from 22% to 30% in East Devon). The aim of the scheme is to get communities involved who have local knowledge of areas with potential for tree planting AND knowledge of current tree planting projects.

EDDC would like to map and share this data to help facilitate local initiatives. “Community” can be:

- Tree wardens
- Town and Parish Councils
- Clubs
- Local nature/wildlife groups
- Friends and families
- Farmers and other private landowners

AJ elaborated on **Community Tree Nurseries** and recommended a Tree Council webinar (you can find it here: https://youtu.be/vbqUMi9JQak?si=ptTh0YN_ElxWtqVO). Requirements: land, water supply and volunteers and some basic equipment. He asked if there was ETC or StreetScene land that could be used.

Zoey Cooper (ZC) asked AJ which areas of the strategy would be most affected by LGR and budget cuts. AJ responded that this would depend on the team’s day-to-day workload, which is affected by the number of planning applications, but anticipated that report-writing and preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) would be most adversely affected.

The group agreed that Exmouth would like to be involved in the Tree Champion Scheme and welcomed further information, as soon as it becomes available.

Councillor Maddy Chapman (MC) asked AJ how trees planted by developers and protected for five years only, can be protected (and allowed to thrive) for longer. She also asked whether developers could plant more mature trees, with longer protection. AJ responded that this has been identified as a major problem and to counter this they are trying to TPO whole landscape schemes. However, the developers put in multiple variations to the landscape scheme, sometimes right up until the houses are built and residents have moved in. So the TPO on the landscape scheme has to be served to all house owners – who often object to it. It’s a problem that requires more officer support and enforcement capability.

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MC had concerns about the length of time taken for replacement trees to be planted. Nathan Dunster (StreetScene) is going to look into the specific issues that MC raised. They are also short on resources, but he reassured MC that there is a list they are working through and they will be planting throughout the winter.

Councillor Mike Rosser (MR) asked about the fruit trees that had been planted, for example in Garratt Close (Exmouth), which hadn't been attended to for a couple of years. Also, the 200 or so trees planted behind the Knapps Cross Community Centre. ND said he would look into this, and reach out to Paul Fealey (Horticultural Technical Officer, StreetScene) as they are on StreetScene land and Paul might have more information.

Simon Pardoe (SP) expanded on the Wild Exmouth project (about three years ago), led by Anne-marie Culhane, to plant fruit trees in various locations. Read more here: Hartstongue - Wild Exmouth - Tree and Orchard Trail. He mentioned that some of the land planted with fruit trees is National Trust – and referenced a lot of oaks as well, currently at Lower Halsdon near the estuary, expressing concerns for their longevity.

Lucy Buckingham (LB) confirmed that the multi-use path and Lower Halsdon Farm land are being managed by the East Devon Countryside Team. There are no mowing rotas. Some of the oak saplings might be removed to benefit the veteran tree or relocated when they reach 5-6ft. Vision-planning for the farm is currently underway, with new tenants arriving in 2026, and tree cover will be increased wherever possible.

Jan Gannaway (JG) mentioned she has a small allotment with potential to be a tree nursery (she is growing seeds in her garden).
Action: OD said he will raise this with the Allotment Association (who manage the allotments in Exmouth) and suggest unused plots or pieces of unused land.
Action: ZC will start to gather volunteers for a Community Nursery.

3. MR raised concerns over the difficulty he'd experienced when trying to make an application for a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), via EDDC's website. The relevant application form is difficult to find, the EDDC phoneline was not answered, the Chat Facility pointed MR to a general tree enquiry form, to which he eventually got a response via email with x2 documents that were not relevant to his request. His experience illustrates the need for an accessible process for members of the public to request assessments for Tree Preservation Orders. AJ suggested that in future he email the team at: trees@eastdevon.gov.uk. Carl Harrison (CH) will look into this, and upload details to the EDDC website on how to register for an application for a TPO.

   JG reported on a good news story where she was able to intercept a very old oak being felled by calling EDDC, and a Tree Officer was available to come out immediately to save the oak.

   There was a short discussion on what warrants a TPO and CH confirmed it's not simply the maturity or size of a tree, but the "Amenity Value" of it, which is not easy to measure.

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4. OD provided an update on the progress of Tiny Forests in Exmouth. There are currently two Tiny Forests in Exmouth, which are flourishing, with brilliant signage to explain their role and benefits. There are tentative plans for a third – although this could be problematic without support from StreetScene who have generously supplied mulch, compost and helped with planting watering. However, Tiny Forests nicely meet the THaWs strategy requirements for planting on EDDC and private land. Heath Nickells is currently in discussion with the developers of a proposed site in Exmouth that would benefit from a Tiny Forest. Tiny Forests are a fantastic learning resource, with several Exmouth schools getting involved with planting and maintaining them.

5. Regarding TD's question about the likely effect of the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill, OD responded to say that he'd looked on the Government website and it's currently non-specific. The government talks about removing barriers to planning, but with no real detail. They appear to view local councils as an obstacle, when in reality the opposite is true. Local councils want to produce quality housing schemes and usually suggest better landscaping than the developers initially propose. However, it is worrying that the government sees local councils as an obstacle and hopefully trees and hedgerows won't become casualties of the new bill.

6. OD asked if anyone in the group had any tree planting planned for the winter, the group having already heard from the National Trust and plans for a third Tiny Forest. OD will be putting in more hazels. CH mentioned the Tree Champion scheme again and urged people to let him and the team know of any tree planting in Exmouth so they can start to map and/or keep a database to help achieve the 8% increase in canopy cover (via the trees@eastdevon.gov.uk). SP asked if CH was aware of Sidmouth Arboretum's plans to plant more trees. It was agreed that tree preservation is as important, if not more in the short term, than planting new trees. OD asked what the 8% increase looks like in terms of volume of trees … CH says it's tricky to say as obviously tree cover increases as trees mature, as well as with planting new trees.

7. AOB: SP asked if we'd made any progress with keeping the forum updated between meetings. *Action: ZC will try again to maintain communication via the Tree Forum group set up in Sharepoint and create a shared document in this space.* SP asked if Bob Stevenson's replacement would be attending future Tree Forums. CC confirmed there is currently an apprentice called Euan Pollington who may be taking on the role. *Action: ZC to make contact with Euan.*

8. The meeting closed at 15.45.

9. The next meeting will be April 2026. Date tbc.