Exmouth Town Council

Town Hall, St Andrews Road
Exmouth, Devon, EX8 1AW

tel: 01395 276167
email: reception@exmouth.gov.uk
www.exmouth.gov.uk

News

Exmouth Town Council Responds to Harbour Revision Order Consultation

18 November, 2025

At its Full Council meeting this week, Exmouth Town Council discussed Exeter City Council's Harbour Revision Order (HRO) consultation. The Council wishes to clarify its position and address concerns circulating on social media regarding the potential introduction of charges for non-motorised water sport users.

Why This Matters

The Harbour Revision Order is not about introducing charges; it is about ensuring Exeter City Council, as the Port Authority, complies with the Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC). This national standard was introduced following major maritime incidents, most notably the Sea Empress oil spill in 1996, which exposed serious shortcomings in port risk management and led to a comprehensive review of port safety. The PMSC was created to enhance safety for everyone who uses or works in the UK port marine environment, including those in marinas, boatyards, and other marine facilities.

The Code requires harbour authorities to have appropriate powers to mitigate risk, manage navigation, enforce safety, and protect the environment. Exeter City's current legislation dates back to Victorian times when the port served the wool trade. Modern compliance demands updated powers, including the ability to issue general directions and enforce standing safety measures—essential for preventing accidents and environmental harm.

Benefits of the Harbour Revision Order

The Town Council supports the principle of the HRO and recognises its benefits:

- Giving the Harbour Master authority to manage the estuary and canal effectively.
- Enabling enforcement against environmental damage, criminal activity, and antisocial behaviour.
- Aligning local governance with national safety standards under the PMSC.

Launch Charges

Councillors acknowledged concerns about the potential introduction of charges for non-motorised craft such as kayaks, paddleboards, and rowing boats. They highlighted the possible negative impact on tourism and visitors, as well as the risk of excluding local residents—particularly those on lower incomes—from accessing recreational water sports due to financial constraints.

The Town Council wishes to stress that it cares deeply about the estuary as a shared community asset—valued for its environmental importance, recreational opportunities, and contribution to local wellbeing. Any future decisions must balance safety, sustainability, and accessibility for all.

It is important to note that existing legislation already gives East Devon District Council and Exeter City Council the ability to levy reasonable charges for certain services and facilities, including slipways and pontoons. However, the existence of these powers does not mean they have been, or will be, exercised.

The Town Council understands that any proposal to introduce charges would require further public consultation. Additionally, any income generated under a Harbour Revision Order (HRO) is generally restricted to statutory purposes—specifically the management, maintenance, and improvement of the harbour or canal—and cannot be used for unrelated expenditure.

Next Steps

Councillors resolved to write to East Devon District Council, urging them to respond appropriately to the consultation, given their responsibility for beach management and many Exmouth slipways.

If you require any further information on the Town Council's response to the consultation, please contact Lisa Bowman, the Town Clerk, on 01395 276167 or by email at townclerk@exmouth.gov.uk

For more information on the Harbour Revision Order, please visit https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/port-of-exeter-harbour-revision-order

Ends.