Exmouth Town Council

Town Hall, St Andrews Road
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EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Notes from Tree Forum 1st April 2026

Present

Councillor Olly Davey	OD	Exmouth Town Council (Chair)
Councillor Maddy Chapman	MC	Exmouth Town Council and East Devon District Council
Councillor Tim Dumper	TD	Exmouth Town Council and East Devon District Council
Councillor Louise Venables	LV	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Graham Deasy	GD	Exmouth Town Council
Zoey Cooper	ZC	Exmouth Town Council
Carl Harrison	CH	East Devon District Council
Simon Pardoe	SP	Tree Warden
Jan Gannaway	JG	Exmouth Wildlife Group
Heath Nickells	HN	Exmouth Wildlife Group

Apologies

Alistair Jeans	AJ	East Devon District Council
Lisa Bowman	LB	Exmouth Town Council
Therese Goodwin	TG	East Devon District Council
Will Dommett	WD	East Devon District Council

Summary

The Tree Forum focused on updates and discussions regarding tree-planting initiatives, hedgerow protection, and community tree projects in East Devon. CH provided an update on the tree hedgerow and wildlife strategy, highlighting efforts to increase tree canopy cover through Tree Champions and wardens, while noting challenges with hedgerow protection and the need for clearer responsibility across departments.

The group discussed the status of the Rotary centenary trees project at St. John's, with plans to plant approximately 150 trees in the autumn, and JG shared progress on a community tree nursery initiative at Pound Lane allotments.

Members raised concerns about the protection of trees planted in new developments, with MC highlighting issues with trees being removed after the required five-year protection period, and TD raising concerns about landlords' approaches to vegetation management on EDDC estates.

The meeting also covered updates on Tiny Forest projects, including successful planting at Brixington and potential new sites.

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1. **Chair Councillor Olly Davey (OD) welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted from Councillor Nick Hookway, Will Dommett, Therese Goodwin and Alistair Jeans.**

2. **THaWS: CH provided an update on THaWS (Tree, Hedgerow and Wildlife Strategy) which led to a larger discussion about tree planting and protection. In summary, there is ongoing work to recruit Tree Champions. Invitations have been sent to all current tree wardens to confirm participation.**

   A potential new **Tree Nursery** at **Phear Park** is under discussion.
   - Early talks with stakeholders; location and permissions being explored.
   - Local volunteers are keen to be involved.
   - Meeting scheduled with the Tree Council to explore support for nursery setup.
   - Existing nursery at Broadclyst:
     - Previously run by Devon Wildlife Trust (Saving Devon's Treescapes project).
     - Funding uncertain but may continue.
   - Separate informal nursery initiative underway in Exmouth (community-led). More on this later.

   Tree Planting & Partnerships
   - Plan to contact the Deaf Academy regarding tree planting opportunities.

   Staffing Update
   - One Tree Officer (Stuart Baker) has left.
   - Recruitment underway (closing mid-May).
   - Team currently short-staffed but managing the workload.

   Measuring Tree Canopy Cover
   - Likely to be measured through repeat surveys (e.g. by Treeconomics).
   - Future surveys may use improved technology (higher resolution data).
   - No confirmed timeline or methodology yet.
   - Noted that planting trees now will have a limited short-term impact on canopy cover (long-term metric). Protecting existing tree canopy is therefore essential.

   Hedgerow Protection
   - Increasing involvement from the Tree Team, but responsibilities are unclear.
   - Current approach:
     - Planning team handles hedgerow removal notices.
     - Tree team supports by assessing ecological importance (species surveys).
   - Issue identified:
     - Lack of clear ownership between Planning and Tree Teams.
   - Action:
     - Escalate need for clearer responsibility to ensure strategy delivery.

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Tree Champion vs Tree Warden Roles

- Tree Council still uses “Tree Warden” designation.
- Locally, “Tree Champions” are:
  - Volunteers focused on identifying land for tree planting.
  - Acting as connectors with landowners.
- Key points:
  - Champions are not expected to plant trees themselves.
  - Role is to identify opportunities and signpost resources (e.g. Woodland Trust schemes).
  - Volunteers can assist with planting via existing networks.
- All volunteers are now registered through the “3 Rings” system (ensures insurance coverage).

Volunteer Activity & Expectations

- Tree Wardens:
  - Act as “eyes and ears” in local areas.
  - Report tree health/issues and potential threats.
- Role is:
  - Entirely voluntary and flexible.
  - No obligation to participate in activities.
- Volunteer base:
  - ~300 registered, but only a small core actively participates.

Key Issues / Actions Identified

- Clarify:
  - Measurement approach and timeline for canopy cover.
  - Roles/responsibilities for hedgerow protection.
  - Distinction between Tree Champions and Tree Wardens.
- Follow up:
  - Tree Council meeting outcomes (nursery support).
  - Community orchard progress.
  - Volunteer engagement and confirmations.
- Explore:
  - Collaboration with existing Exmouth nursery initiative.

Tree Warden / Volunteer Coordination

- Discussion with the Tree Council about organising a regional tree warden meet-up (none held locally for several years).
- Previous events often too far away to attend.
- Action: CH to explore hosting a more local event with Tree Council support.

Three Rings System (Volunteer Platform)

- Volunteers can log in and view directory.
- Uncertainty about ability to directly contact other Tree Champions via the system.

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- Some existing members (e.g. wardens) may not be correctly categorised as “Tree Champions.”
- Action: Clarify functionality and access (CH to follow up with Amelia).

Tree Canopy Strategy – Key Discussion

- Concern raised that:
  - Planting saplings does not offset short-term canopy loss.
  - Loss of mature trees leads to net canopy reduction over strategy period.
- General agreement:
  - Protecting mature trees should be a priority.
- Linked concern:
  - Biodiversity Net Gain may replace established ecosystems with immature ones that take years to develop.

Trees on New Developments

Key Issues

- Developers required to plant trees, but:
  - Responsibility typically ends after 5 years.
  - Many trees are removed, die, or are not maintained after this period.
- Evidence shared:
  - In some areas, large numbers of planted trees have disappeared.
  - Survey example: ~50% of trees in one development not planted or surviving after 5 years.

Challenges Identified

- No legal protection for most trees after 5 years.
- Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs):
  - Difficult to apply broadly on new developments.
  - Easier before land ownership is transferred (pre-conveyancing).
  - Complex and resource-heavy for large developments.
- Monitoring limitations:
  - Insufficient council resources to enforce or track compliance.
- Responsibility often passes to:
  - Management companies or residents after development completion.

Potential Solutions Discussed

- Extend maintenance/protection period beyond 5 years:
  - Would require full council policy change.
- Learn from other councils (e.g. Bristol) with stronger conditions.
- Apply TPOs:
  - Pre-emptively (before development completion), where possible.
  - Reactively where there is immediate threat to specific trees.
- Improve reporting:

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    - Encourage local volunteers to act as “eyes on the ground.”
- Consider stronger planning conditions or new mechanisms for protection.

Local Concerns (Brixington & Surrounding Areas)

- Significant loss of trees from past developments.
- Examples of:
    - Entire streets losing planted trees.
    - Lack of enforcement even when trees were required.
- Concern that:
    - Continued loss undermines canopy goals.
    - Future developments (e.g. Littleham) risk further canopy decline.
- Suggestion:
    - Raise issue at planning or full council level for policy change.

Tree Protection & Enforcement

- TPOs can be applied where there is **clear and immediate risk**.
- Broader application limited by:
    - Legal criteria
    - Administrative burden
- Enforcement challenges:
    - Fines go to central government, not council.
    - Reduces incentive/resources for enforcement action.

3. **Update on Rotary’s centenary trees at St John’s. ZC provided the following update:**

- Site identified and approved in principle.
- Resident engagement underway:
    - Leaflets distributed.
    - Door-knocking planned to gather support and discuss watering access.
- Early feedback from residents positive.
- Next steps:
    - Build volunteer team.
    - Prepare site and source trees.
- Planting scheduled for autumn**.**
- Target: ~100 trees (but will plant ~150).

Community Involvement (Rotary Project)

- Exploring:
    - Use of residents’ outdoor taps.
    - Installation of water butts for tree watering.
- Potential involvement from:
    - Local schools (e.g. Bassett’s Farm).

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4. **Update on the Tiny Forests (Councillor Olly Davey, Exmouth Town Council)**
    - Community-led tree nursery at Pound Lane allotments:
        - Growing trees from seed and cuttings.
        - Aims to:
            - Support Tiny Forest replacements.
            - Replant lost street trees.
    - Site provided free by allotment association.
    - Volunteer support now increasing.
    - Nursery aims to grow a mix of native and ornamental trees/shrubs:
        - Not restricted to native species only.
    - Current stock includes hardy native species (e.g. hawthorn, spindle).
    - Ongoing work:
        - Experimenting with cuttings.
        - Open to growing trees from locally collected seed (with proper data on origin).
    - Setup:
        - Trees grown in pots and trenches (to stabilise).
        - Plans for staking and structured growth system.
    - Potential to expand:
        - Additional allotment space may become available if project succeeds.
        - Use of recycled/donated materials encouraged.

Tiny Forests – Progress & Expansion

- Existing Tiny Forests (e.g. Brixington and Carter Avenue):
    - Performing well with ~95% survival rate.
    - Regular maintenance (weeding, watering, grass suppression).
    - Strong local volunteer engagement via WhatsApp groups.
- New site exploration:
    - Discussions with developers (e.g. Littleham/Bloor Homes) for inclusion as mitigation.
    - Additional site identified in Littleham (currently on hold).
- Overall:
    - Positive biodiversity impact observed.
    - Ongoing monitoring and maintenance planned.

Funding & Resources

- Previous tree supply from Devon County Council has ended.
- Funding gaps identified for:
    - Future Tiny Forests
    - Community tree nursery costs (materials, compost, etc.)
- Actions:
    - Awaiting response from Tree Council on funding/support.
    - Exploring alternative funding sources and grants.
    - Potential support via council contacts.

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Additional Tree Supply (Saplings)

- Small number of saplings currently in a private garden (Mayor Graham Deasy)
  - Not urgent to relocate.
  - Likely Woodland Trust origin (to be confirmed).
- Considerations:
  - Identify species and provenance.
  - Move in autumn if needed (to reduce transplant risk).
  - Possible future uses:
    - Street tree replacement (avenues)
    - Nursery integration
    - Community planting projects

5. Update from the members of the group regarding tree planting planned this winter and an opportunity for members of the group to raise concerns / ask questions / present specific issues or topics.

Churchyard & Yew Tree Project

- Visit to Littleham churchyard (eco-managed site):
  - Strong partnership forming with local stakeholders.
- Activities:
  - Survey and measurement of yew trees.
  - Educational materials created for public display.
  - Ivy management carried out (cut at base, not removed).
- Outcome:
  - Positive engagement and learning opportunity.
  - Potential for further collaborative conservation work.

Tree & Habitat Management Concerns (EDDC Housing)

- Concern raised:
  - Council housing/landlord function removing vegetation from tenant gardens.
  - Impacts on biodiversity (loss of habitats for birds/insects).
- Issues:
  - Enforcement of “tidiness” vs wildlife value.
  - Lack of alignment with tree/biodiversity strategy.
- Action:
  - Raise internally within the council.
  - Ensure housing teams are aware of environmental policies/strategy.

Biodiversity Observations

- Tiny Forests showing clear biodiversity gains:
  - Wildlife monitoring recording new species.
- General point:

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- Less “tidy” environments often better for wildlife.

Community Engagement Initiatives

- Tenant Garden Competition (2026) launched:
  - Multiple categories including eco garden, veg plots, young gardener.
  - Encourages biodiversity-friendly gardening across district.
- Positive sign of wider engagement in environmental stewardship.

Tree Protection & Local Issues

- Large tree (liquid amber) saved from felling (subsidence case rejected).
- New planting:
  - Additional liquid amber planted locally.
- Concern:
  - Historic tree loss in some areas (e.g. near rugby ground).
- Heritage trees:
  - Remaining horse chestnuts from 1937 planting identified.
  - Suggested action:
    - Improve care and consider protection.

6. The next meeting will be September 30th, online 2-4pm