EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Flooding & Water Quality Working Party

Notes of the Zoom meeting held at 2pm on Tuesday 28th April 2026

Present

Graham Deasy	GD	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward (Chairperson)
Pauline Stott	PS	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Tim Dumper	TD	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Steve Gazzard	SG	ETC Councillor, Withycombe Raleigh Ward
Mark Williamson	MW	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward
Tom Buxton-Smith	TBS	EDDC, Engineering Projects Manager
Hazel Tranchant	HT	SWW, Asset Manager
Jenny Eamer	JE	SWW, Waste Water Service Operations 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

Cherry Nicholas	CN	ETC Councillor, Brixington Ward

---

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 27th of January 2026**

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

3. **Matters arising**

   No matters arising.

4. **To discuss the delays in the permit application process and to write on behalf of the working party to the CEOs of both SWW and EA urging them to make this a priority ahead of the imminent busy tourism season**

   Members discussed the growing frustration over the prolonged delay in securing the EA's permit for the Sandy Bay outfall pipeline. GD stressed the urgency of the situation, noting that the pipeline although physically installed cannot be used until the EA approves the new permit. With the tourist and bathing season approaching, he suggested that the working party should write to the CEOs of both SWW and the EA to express concern about the lack of progress. He highlighted that the permit process has already been ongoing for many months and appears to be taking an "inordinate" amount of time.

   HT provided a detailed update on the permit application explaining that SWW is working closely with the EA to supply additional information, particularly relating to the potential impact of the outfall on newly designated shellfish waters at Sandy Bay and Lyme Bay West. These designations were made after SWW had already proposed its strategy, meaning new

requirements have been imposed mid-process. The EA has requested further hydrodynamic modelling to assess how the outfall plume might behave in these areas. HT reminded members that earlier modelling had shown minimal impact on Budleigh Salterton, but the new modelling must now cover the expanded shellfish zones. SWW and the EA are meeting weekly to explore whether a temporary local enforcement position could be agreed to allow the pipeline to be used ahead of the bathing season. The EA is currently checking whether such an arrangement would be acceptable at a national level.

GD asked whether an LEP would be a temporary measure, and HT confirmed that it would. GD then reiterated the councillors' concern that, without the pipeline in use, CSO's may continue to spill into bathing waters during the summer, as they have in previous years. HT agreed that the new outfall would significantly reduce, and potentially eliminate, many of these spills, as well as reduce flooding on the Maer. SWW has urged the EA to consider the limited harvesting activity in the affected shellfish waters, arguing that the potential impact on bathing waters should carry greater weight than theoretical impacts on areas where shellfish are not currently harvested.

TD questioned what progress had been made since similar discussions three months earlier. HT explained that the EA's regulatory scrutiny has increased significantly, leading to multiple rounds of Requests for Further Information. SWW has already responded to three RFIs, each within the required five-day window. However, the most recent RFI, issued on the 24th of March 2026, requires new hydrodynamic modelling that cannot be completed within five days. SWW has informed the EA that the modelling will not be ready until the 29th of May 2026.

TD noted that public pressure on the EA has intensified, which may explain the increased regulatory caution and asked whether the weekly meetings were helping both sides work through the outstanding issues more efficiently. HT confirmed that the meetings are constructive and focused on resolving the situation as quickly as possible.

CJ referred to the EA's dedicated Exmouth webpage, which has been providing public updates on the permit process and noted that the EA's latest update confirms SWW's commitment to supplying the required information by the 29th of May. HT advised that SWW are on track to meet that deadline.

GD queried what would happen once the information is submitted. HT explained that the next steps depend entirely on the modelling results. If the modelling shows no impact or demonstrates that shellfish standards are already being met, the EA could issue the permit relatively quickly. If not, further discussions will be needed to determine whether any predicted impacts are acceptable. CJ added that the EA will carry out a consultation before making a final decision, and HT confirmed that once the permit is considered "duly made," the consultation process will begin.

SG expressed support for the EA's increased scrutiny but asked whether, without the permit, any storm event could still cause spills at Maer Road. HT confirmed that this remains the case: without permission to use the new outfall, SWW must continue to reduce pumping at Maer Road when storm tanks are full, which can lead to spills during summer storms. SG suggested that SWW issue a press release ahead of the bank holiday weekend, especially

given the forecast of bad weather, to ensure transparency about the situation. SS agreed to discuss this with HT after the meeting.

GD asked members whether they supported drafting a letter to the CEOs of SWW and the EA. HT suggested that the letter might not need to go directly to CEOs, as it would likely be handled by relevant leads such as Helen Dobby at SWW and Clarissa Newell at the EA. However, GD maintained his preference for addressing senior leadership.

A formal proposal by SG, seconded by MW, was unanimously agreed with SG suggesting copying in MP David Reed.

.

5. SWW: General updates

HT explained that the design phase for the treatment works improvements is still underway, discussions with the EA have taken place regarding the available process options, and once an option is selected, a pre-application will be submitted to the EA.

Investigations continue within the catchment to address infiltration and inflow issues, particularly in relation to reducing CSO activity at Hartopp Road and Exeter Road. These investigations are progressing, but a concern resurfaced about the recurring leakage from a manhole at Hartopp Road during high spring tides. HT noted that the operations manager, who had previously been managing the issue and had arranged for contractors to reseal the manholes, has since left the organisation. As a result, HT has not yet been able to confirm whether the sealing work was completed.

JE, who has just taken over responsibility for this matter, confirmed that she has already contacted the relevant team and will follow up to ensure the work is either confirmed as complete or progressed promptly. TD expressed frustration that the issue appears to have stalled following the previous operations manager's departure and emphasised the potential seriousness of the situation. TD recalled that similar early signs preceded significant flooding around 14 or 15 years ago and warned that continued leakage during high spring tides could eventually cause substantial damage if left unresolved. HT responded by clarifying that the historic flooding incident was caused by the failure of bolts on the watertight manhole covers, a construction issue that was rectified shortly afterwards with the installation of proper bolts. HT believes the current problem is one of leakage rather than structural failure and does not expect a repeat of the previous event. TD, however, maintained that the pattern of leakage is similar to what occurred before and argued that the pressure from high spring tides could still compromise the structure over time and pointed out visible wear on the road surface as evidence of ongoing stress.

HT agreed to work closely with JE to ensure the matter is picked up quickly and that any outstanding work is expedited. GD queried whether contractors would be checking not only the seals but also the bolts and other components that had previously caused problems. HT explained that the manhole is not a standard structure, but a reinforced concrete unit designed specifically to retain water. The lid is made of glass-reinforced plastic, designed to bolt down securely, and inspections would include checking the integrity of the bolts and ensuring the plate is undamaged. JE reported that she had received confirmation that the operational team would be attending the site as soon as possible to assess the condition of the covers and determine whether any further work is required. GD requested that any updates be shared so councillors can pass the information on to residents.

TD reiterated that the leakage only occurs during high tides associated with full moons and spring tides, HT noted that the covers cannot be lifted during such conditions.

CJ raised a question from TD's email circulated prior to the meeting about the purpose and outcome of the previous survey. HT explained that the survey related to connectivity checks carried out in preparation for potential surface water separation works at Hartopp Road and confirmed that although markings had been made on roads and pavements during the survey, all the information is recorded digitally on mapping systems.

6. EA: General updates

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

CJ confirmed that no water quality testing is currently taking place, and no new updates have been received from the EA beyond the classifications released just recently.

MW raised concerns that the real-time information display near the lifeboat station has disappeared. After reading the detailed explanatory board about Exmouth's estuarial environment, agricultural runoff risks, and the presence of raw sewage in the estuary, he was struck by the absence of any clear indication of whether it was safe to swim. MW emphasised that visitors will be asking the same question, yet there is no real-time information available along that stretch of beach.

CJ explained that the electronic system previously used for real-time messaging never functioned properly and was not genuinely real-time. It was removed because it caused more confusion than clarity. CJ added that Blue Flag criteria now require extensive information to be displayed, which is why the board contains so much detail, and that it should include links to online sources such as SwimFo or Water Fit Live. MW responded that the only link he could find was to exmouthbeachwaterquality.gov.uk. CJ reiterated that although no testing is happening now, people can still check data from SWW and the EA, though these are not truly real-time because results often arrive after an incident has passed. CJ mentioned that Surfers Against Sewage collates sewage overflow data, though discrepancies can occur because different organisations collect information at different times.

HT added further context, explaining that neither SWW nor the EA can ever guarantee water quality because conditions change constantly. The EA issues pollution risk forecasts, while SWW provides spill data and marks beaches amber when appropriate, using a specific methodology that they are now sharing with Surfers Against Sewage. HT noted that SWW keeps amber alerts in place for only twelve hours, whereas Surfers Against Sewage keeps them for forty-eight, which contributes to public confusion. Work is ongoing through Water UK to determine how long alerts should remain active, though the outcome of that work is still unclear.

SG stressed that clear signage is essential to avoid a repeat of last year's serious incident and argued that tourists are unlikely to download an app but will read a board if it directs them to the right websites. PS, chair of the Waterfront Working Party, reminded the group that the previous board was ineffective because the information was out of date and not real-time, and that a single board is insufficient for a two-mile beach.

GD suggested that even if real-time information is not possible, the boards could at least include references to the relevant websites or QR codes linking to the correct sites.

CJ explained that some councils have begun doing their own water testing and publishing results, but they are using different equipment and inconsistent methods, meaning the results are only used by the EA as part of the citizen science program as data to help with future forecasting rather than real-time water quality. Exmouth Town Council has therefore not signed up to carrying out any testing. CJ noted that even where councils test in multiple locations, results can vary significantly, as seen in Sidmouth, where one area tested fine while another did not. Without standardised methods and EA acceptance, local testing would not provide reliable or actionable real-time information. CJ emphasised that the town council wants to find a workable solution but has not yet identified one.

CJ suggested raising the request formally at the next Waterfront Working Party meeting on the 16th of June, where Peter Blythe could be consulted directly. GD felt that waiting until June was too long and asked whether PB could be contacted sooner about the feasibility of adding a QR code to the existing board. CJ agreed to email him in the meantime but said the issue should still be placed on the Waterfront working party agenda so it is formally recorded and discussed.

7. EDDC: General updates

TBS advised that Manor Gardens remains a lower priority at the moment, largely because the recent dry weather has prevented any new issues from arising. Resurfacing work is scheduled to begin shortly at both the Foxholes and Phear Park car parks. The slipway at the Old Lifeboat Station, which was damaged during one of last winter's storms, has received a temporary repair expected to last through the summer. The section of seawall that had been struck by machinery has also now been repaired.

TBS carried out a full inspection on all the floodgates, reporting that several operational defects were found, including numerous missing padlocks and covers. TBS has requested replacements and arranged for the gate manufacturers to conduct an annual functionality inspection, which will help establish ongoing maintenance needs. In addition, the floodgates have now been added to the asset inspection register, meaning they will receive routine annual checks by the asset inspector. These checks will focus on general condition, while the manufacturer's inspection will address serviceability and mechanical performance.

TBS recently met the new managers of The Grand Hotel (Best Western), who expressed a desire to be involved in the operation of the floodgates near their premises. They currently have two gates but do not know who is responsible for opening or closing them. TBS has already brought them up to date, but further coordination is needed. CJ added context, explaining that the hotel had previously left garden furniture obstructing the gates, preventing them from being opened but stated that if the hotel wants the gates kept permanently shut, that can be formally noted, but they must understand that call-outs to close gates can occur at any time. Hotel staff may not always be present or familiar with the procedures, so the hotel needs to be aware of the practical implications.

CJ reminded TBS that volunteers at Morton Crescent had previously raised concerns that they found the padlocks difficult to manage and did not feel they were necessary. CJ requested wording from TBS to explain why the padlocks now need to be reinstated so the reasoning can be passed on to the volunteers. TBS agreed to provide this explanation.

SG reported that many of the gate grooves were filled with sand, which could cause problems when the gates need to be closed and asked whether there were plans to clear them. TBS responded that the grooves are normally cleared before winter, when the gates are more likely to be used. Clearing them now would be of limited value because summer

storms are rare and the grooves would quickly fill with sand again. TBS explained that the current approach is to ensure they are sufficiently cleaned ahead of the winter season, with only minimal clearing required before any actual gate closures.

8. DCC: Flood risk general update

No DCC representative was present at the meeting, and no report was received.

9. DCC: Highways general update

SC explained that many contractors had recently been diverted to pothole-repair work, which has significantly disrupted the planned drainage schemes across East Devon and the Exmouth area. This reallocation of resources has slowed progress on addressing several known drainage issues, though he expressed hope that normal operations would resume soon.

CJ raised concerns received from residents about the condition of the gullies on Foxholes, noting that although this matter does not fall directly under SC's remit, the gutters there are heavily blocked and overgrown. CJ added that Exmouth Town Council had attempted some weed clearance but found it difficult, and residents were particularly worried about the steep bend where blocked gullies could cause water to rush dangerously downhill. SC agreed to pass these concerns to the correct department to check whether any maintenance work was planned. CJ mentioned that residents had been encouraged to report specific gullies through the DCC website, though it was unclear whether they had done so. SC highlighted that tools such as what3words can help pinpoint exact locations for reporting, while acknowledging that not everyone is comfortable with digital systems.

GD brought up a social-media post about the environmental impact of using plastic-based materials for yellow line markings, particularly the risk of microplastics entering watercourses as the material breaks down. SC responded by explaining that the council now uses a long-lasting lining material called MMA, introduced in recent years, and although he was not aware of it containing plastic, he suggested GD look into the composition of MMA to confirm its environmental profile.

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

No other business

11. AOB

No other business.

The meeting ended at 15:06

2026 meetings: 28th July 2026
27th October 2026