EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Flooding & Water Quality Working Party

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

Present

Graham Deasy	GD	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward (Chairperson)
Pauline Stott	PS	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Mark Williamson	MW	ETC Councillor, Littleham Ward
Sarah Sharpe	SS	SWW, Local Government Liaison Officer
Samantha Binarelli	SB	SWW, Project Manager
Stuart Coles	SC	DCC, Neighbourhood Highways Officer
Chetna Jones	CJ	ETC Deputy Town Clerk
Mark Devin	MD	ETC Deputy Town Clerk (observing)
Lisa Greenway	LG	ETC, Note Taker

Apologies

Ian Kirvan	IK	ETC Councillor, Brixington Ward
Tim Dumper	TD	ETC Councillor, Halsdon Ward
Steve Gazzard	SG	ETC Councillor, Withycombe Raleigh Ward
Thomas Aldridge	TA	DCC, Flood & Coastal Risk Management Officer
Tom Buxton-Smith	TBS	EDDC, Engineering Projects Manager
Hazel Tranchant	HT	SWW, Asset Manager
Jay Harris	JH	SWW, Regional Operations Manager
Jenny Eamer	JE	SWW, Waste Water Service Operations Manager

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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. MW nominated GD, and this was seconded by PS. 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 28th of April 2026

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

4. Matters arising

No matters arising.

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5. SWW: General updates

- **Update on Maer Lane Treatment site upgrade proposal**

GD requested an update on SWW's Maer Lane Treatment Site Upgrade Proposal noting that residents had observed significant excavation and investigative activity in the field adjacent to the existing treatment works, which is understood to be the location of the proposed extension.

The community had assumed the work was connected to the upgrade project rather than any issues with the recently completed pipeline installation. SB confirmed that there have been no problems with the new pipeline and advised that the activity currently taking place is geological investigation work associated with the proposed upgrade.

SS agreed to arrange for a more detailed progress update on the Maer Lane upgrade project to be shared with members.

SB explained that the necessary documentation has been submitted to the EA and is currently seeking approval through a Local Enforcement Position (LEP), which would allow SWW to begin using the new outfall before the full environmental permit is granted. The LEP is subject to a number of conditions that are currently being agreed with the EA. These conditions include the preparation and submission of both a contingency plan and a monitoring plan, which SWW has already completed and submitted. SB was optimistic that these documents would be approved by the end of the week, enabling the next stage of the process to begin. Once approval is secured, SWW intends to install monitoring equipment to meet the EA's requirements. This will either be the permanent automatic sampling equipment specified by the regulator or, if delivery times prevent this, a temporary monitoring arrangement that can operate until the permanent equipment arrives. The permanent autosampler is expected within the next few weeks. Following installation of the monitoring arrangements, SWW will carry out the diversion of flows to the new outfall. The physical diversion work itself is relatively straightforward and is expected to take approximately eight hours to complete. However, it will require suitable weather conditions, specifically a period of dry weather and available storage capacity in the storm tanks, as flows will need to be temporarily redirected into the storm tanks during the diversion operation.

CJ highlighted the importance of carefully managing public communications around these activities, noting that much of the work is expected to occur during the summer holiday period when visitor numbers are high and residents are particularly alert to any visible activity around the treatment works. The appearance of tanker movements and operational activity could easily lead to speculation or concern amongst the public. SB acknowledged this risk and confirmed that SWW intends to undertake proactive communications to explain the purpose of the works and ensure local residents understand what is happening. GD suggested that this communication should also include details of any tanker routes that may be used, given the long-standing concerns within the community about the capacity of the Maer Lane treatment works and the potential implications of increased wastewater flows following the installation of the new pipeline.

GD reiterated that concerns about treatment capacity have existed for many years and remain prominent within the local community. Residents are worried that while the new pipeline may improve the transfer of wastewater flows into the treatment works, the treatment plant itself may not always be able to cope with those increased volumes. This has led to fears that, in certain circumstances, greater volumes of wastewater could be discharged via the outfall because treatment capacity has not kept pace with incoming flows. SB explained that if the treatment works is unable to accommodate the increased flows, operations would revert to the original flow regime rather than continuing to operate at the higher flow rates. The new outfall would still be used because it benefits from an improved diffuser arrangement, but the operational limits would return to those previously in place. SB also noted that one of the EA's conditions within the LEP requires SWW to complete the wider treatment works upgrade by 2028, which should provide reassurance that the current interim arrangements are not intended to be permanent.

PS questioned whether SWW's infrastructure would be capable of coping with the significant number of housing developments proposed across the district and expressed concern that SWW is often not actively involved in the planning process and therefore does not always provide assurance that existing sewage infrastructure can support the scale of proposed development. SB explained that the design horizon for the Maer Lane upgrade extends to 2050 and that future housing growth has been considered. CJ reminded members that SWW is not a statutory consultee for planning applications and therefore is not always formally consulted on development proposals.

GD recalled that one of the early proposals that seems to have been abandoned had involved creating additional storage at Maer Lane to help manage peak flows but understood that the current approach now appears to focus on creating a new, parallel treatment facility that effectively mirrors the existing works and expands treatment capacity rather than storage capacity. SB is not sufficiently involved in the detailed design of the upgrade project to confirm whether additional storage has been removed from the plans but acknowledged the question and indicated that it could be addressed in a future project update.

CJ suggested that SWW may wish to consider giving a presentation at a future council meeting to help councillors and residents better understand the scope of the project, the proposed improvements, current progress and the long-term benefits of the investment programme. SB agreed that this would be valuable and agreed to raise the suggestion with colleagues responsible for the upgrade project.

SS reported that remedial works had recently been undertaken to reseal the manhole cover at Hartopp Road, however, she cautioned that it is currently too dry to fully assess whether the repair has been successful and that the effectiveness of the intervention will only become clear during periods of wetter weather when the system experiences greater pressures.

CJ provided details of observation by TD as he continues to monitor the area.TD reported that tidal overflows are still occurring during high spring tides, and wondered what action has been taken to address the issue. TD has also observed what he considers to be increased activity at the opposite end of Hartopp Road, particularly during the most recent spring tides. SS explained that activations can occur during exceptionally high spring tides and that these events are not necessarily classified as sewage spills. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to obtain photographic or video evidence to better understand exactly what is being observed. CJ agreed to contact TD and ask whether evidence could be collected during future spring tide events. SS asked whether any sewer-related debris had been observed during the reported overflows, as this information would assist investigations. CJ suggested that SWW staff attend the site during known periods of high spring tides to observe conditions directly rather than relying on residents who are unfamiliar with the set up. SS agreed that this would be a sensible approach and confirmed that she would discuss the matter with operational teams and explore the possibility of arranging monitoring visits during future high tide events.

6. EA: General updates

- **EA Consultation on SWW permit application**
- **To note the 2023/24 burst rising mains in Maer Valley investigations have been completed and the EA has concluded that prosecution is the right outcome for Exmouth. Proceedings have been issued in Exeter Magistrates Court, and a court date has been set as 10:00 on 14th October 2026**

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

CJ reported that SWW has submitted a permit application to the Environment Agency seeking permanent approval to use the new outfall pipe, as the current arrangement is covered only by a temporary Local Environment Permit (LEP). It was explained that the temporary permission is subject to numerous strict conditions imposed by the Environment Agency while the permanent application is under consideration. These conditions include requirements relating to the quality of any discharge from the outfall, with the understanding that completely untreated sewage cannot be released through the new outfall pipe and that any discharge must meet specified treatment and settlement standards.

The EA's public consultation on the permit application is scheduled to commence on the 4th of August, however, recognising that the consultation period coincides with the summer school holidays, the EA anticipates extending the consultation window to allow more residents and stakeholders to participate once people return from holiday. It is expected that the majority of public responses will be submitted during September. A provisional date of the 10th of September has been identified for a public drop-in session at which representatives from the EA will provide information about the permit application, explain how the outfall would operate, and answer questions from residents. The decision to delay the event until September was to ensure as many people were able to participate.

It was emphasised that the Town Council's involvement in promoting public engagement should not be interpreted as support for SWW's application. The Town Council's position is that residents should have access to clear and accurate information so they can reach their own informed conclusions regarding the proposal. Facilitating discussions and ensuring that consultation opportunities are accessible to the community is viewed as an important part of the Council's role. Councillors also wish to ensure that they themselves are fully informed before reaching any formal position on the application.

The Flooding & Water Quality Working Party, which has delegated authority to respond on behalf of the Town Council, will meet after the drop-in event in September to agree a response to the consultation prior to the deadline of 22nd September. Councillors that are not members of the working party will be given the opportunity to respond to the consultation as individuals as well as contribute to the Town Council response by emailing the Deputy Town Clerk and Chair of the Working Party.

CJ reported a damaged ACO drainage channel located adjacent to the Country House Inn, near the bridge crossing Bapton Brook. Reports received from residents indicate that part of the drain has deteriorated, leaving a substantial hole that could present a safety risk to pedestrians. Considerable efforts have been made to establish ownership and maintenance responsibility for the asset. Initial enquiries confirmed that EDDC is not responsible for the drain. DCC Highways also advised that the asset does not form part of its network, a position that was subsequently verified through examination of their mapping records. Further investigation included a title deed search, which confirmed that the owners of the Country House Inn are not responsible for the drain. The search indicated that the land on which the drain is situated might be owned by the EA.

SS advised that she would be willing to investigate the matter further if provided with photographs and location details, including mapping information. SS explained that although the drain may be located on EA land, ownership of the land does not necessarily determine responsibility for the asset itself. It remains possible that the drainage infrastructure could be owned or maintained by another organisation, including SWW. SS will make internal enquiries and establish which organisation is responsible before determining what remedial action may be required.

7. EDDC: General updates

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

CJ reported that TBS had sent his apologies as he had moved into a different role. Prior to this, they had been discussing the floodgates, particularly maintenance and training. TBS had arranged surveys of all the floodgates and provided copies of the reports relating to Morton Crescent. Volunteers have been updated on progress. Before leaving the role, TBS and CJ had agreed to organise training in November alongside EDDC and Streetscene, although it is currently unclear whether this will still go ahead. A survey identified remedial work that needed to be completed, which TBS had planned to arrange, CJ has since been informed that Pete Blyth will be taking this work forward.

MW asked who would be responsible for the floodgates following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). GD advised that no decision has yet been made, as significant detail remains to be worked through over the next 18 months.

8. DCC: Flood risk general update

No DCC representative was present at the meeting, TA sent the following report:

“Any DCC led surface water improvements in the colonies area of Exmouth continue to be on hold as we wait for SWW to provide us with an update on their proposals for the same location. It’s vital that we continue to work with SWW as the location requires the use of their infrastructure to pump water out beyond the existing coastal defences.

We do appreciate that this update has been similar for quite a number of meetings, and hope to provide a more positive update in the future. “

9. DCC: Highways – flooding and drainage general update

SC reported that, due to the recent lack of significant rainfall, there was little to update. Several small drainage schemes have been approved and are currently undergoing jetting and CCTV investigations. These locations have been identified as areas where rainwater collects and remains on the highway for more than 24 hours, which is not acceptable from a highway maintenance perspective. The investigation results will help determine the underlying causes and inform any necessary remedial works.

GD noted that he had attended a meeting of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership, where water quality in the Exe Estuary was discussed. Although no specific actions were raised, road runoff was highlighted as a contributing factor to water quality issues. This is likely to become a longer-term consideration for Highways, particularly in relation to identifying ways to mitigate runoff entering the estuary, with the issue being more significant in areas further upstream than around Exmouth itself.

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

GD noted that residents are raising concerns and seeking reassurance about water supplies, ongoing drought conditions and the impact of increased tourist numbers during the summer season and asked what information could be shared locally. SS explained that SWW is already issuing public messaging encouraging water conservation and mindful usage due to the prolonged hot and dry weather, which is placing pressure on resources nationally. SS

will share any communications from SWW and work with Exmouth Town Council to provide information that members could distribute more widely.

PS queried the status of reservoirs, noting concerns about low levels at Wimbleball Reservoir on Exmoor. In response, SS advised that reservoir level information is available on the SWW website and circulated the relevant link to members.

11. AOB

No other business.

The meeting ended at 14:38

2026 meetings: 27th October 2026