



Exe Estuary Forum 2013 Feedback Report



Thursday 29th August 2013
Coaver Club, County Hall,
Exeter

Summary

The 2013 Exe Estuary Summer Forum was a great success with 52 people attending to hear presentations on some of what makes the Exe Estuary so special. Including:

- Special Birds
- Special Heritage
- Water sports
- Regional Tourism

The programme included a period for discussion, enabling attendees to divide into three groups according to their particular interests to put questions or make observations to the people with responsibility for managing the relevant aspect of the estuary. The discussion groups were on heritage, tourism and water sports.

The presentation slides will be uploaded to the Exe Estuary website under Events > Forum when technical editing problems have been overcome (www.exe-estuary.org.uk)

Feedback

52 people attended the Exe Estuary Forum with 11 of those completing a feedback questionnaire, the results of which can be seen below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The conference was worth attending	55%	45%		
Everything was well organised	36%	64%		
The presentations were interesting	36%	64%		
The themes covered were relevant to me	10%	90%		
The venue was suitable	36%	64%		
I would like to attend the Forum again in the future	70%	30%		
The Forum is a key opportunity for me to learn more about the Exe Estuary, get involved and have my views heard	45%	45%	10%	
I value the work of the Exe Estuary Partnership	70%	20%	10%	

Notes of the question and answer session and the three discussion groups are included below, along with comments made on the feedback forms and one comment received by email after the forum. This report will be included on the agenda of the next meeting of the Management Group of the Exe Estuary Partnership for consideration and response as appropriate.

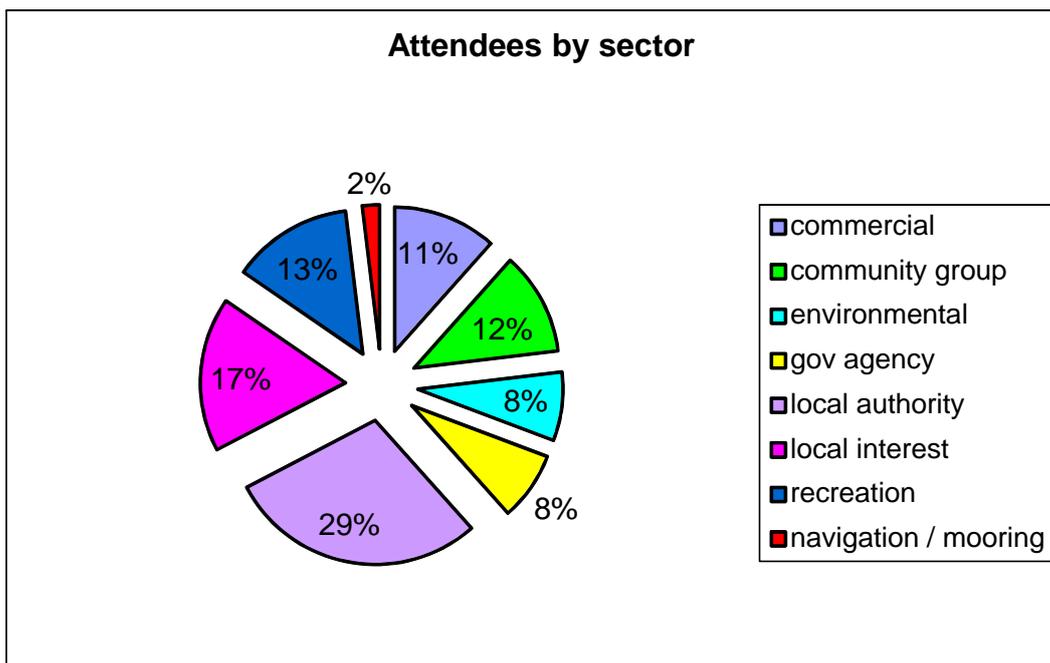
The scoring on the 11 feedback forms shown in the table above show a very high level of satisfaction with the Forum itself, with 100% of feedback indicating that that the Forum was worth attending, that everything was well organised, that the presentations were interesting, that the themes were relevant, the venue was suitable, and that they would like to come again. All but one person who left feedback also indicated that the Forum is a key opportunity for getting involved and having views heard, and that they value the work of the Exe Estuary Partnership.

General comments received through these feedback forms are listed at the end of this report. The feedback and comments will be used to develop the Forum in the future, taking onboard ideas for improvements and integrating them into the very successful current format of this annual event.

Sectoral Balance

The sectoral representation of the attendees was analysed to investigate the balance of interests represented at the Forum. The attendees have been grouped according to sector. For example, 'Environmental' covers conservation charities and other wildlife interest groups (though Natural England officers are included in the 'government agency' group). Individuals who did not state at the time of booking that they represented a particular organisation have been categorised as 'local interest'.

The largest group of attendees by some margin is that of 'local authority', which includes officer and elected representatives from county, district, town and parish councils. Elected members from 7 councils attended (Devon, East Devon, Teignbridge, Dawlish, Starcross, Exminster and Powderham).



Notes from Q and A session:

1. Andrew Cadbury, Starcross PC - Are Canada Geese numbers going up as I see flocks of them on the golf course at Starcross ?

Peter Exley, RSPB -Yes they are around the Exe. They can be perceived as a pest, but they are beautiful birds and can be many people's first interaction with nature.

2. Neil Hurlock, Exeter Ski Club – The lack of a slipway in the Exe over the last 2 seasons has been driving people to Teignmouth to launch boats. East Devon DC have not been engaging properly. The slipway loss was supposed to be temporary but it has lasted too long. It is deplorable that we have now been contacted by the EDDC CEO saying he does not wish to engage with us on this issue. Because there is nowhere to launch from or to leave sailing dinghies for visitors Exmouth is losing visitors and tourist revenue. Only canoes/kayaks, paddle boarders can access the water in Exmouth.
3. Jane Evans, Exeter Canoe Club – Access at Exmouth is not easy and it's hard to get any craft on wheels into the Exe. Decent access to the water is needed.
4. Jennifer Rowland, Powderham Parish Meeting, who used to work for Exeter City Council Tourism – in my former role it was embarrassing to have to send people to Dartmouth or Teignmouth to launch boats. The area's local economy is missing out on visitors because of this. SW Tourism don't exist anymore but Heart of the South West LEP now promote the area and should be able to update the tourism statistics provided in Midge's presentation and could perhaps champion the issue of a decent slipway and the impact on the towns economy.
5. Tim Todd? – I'm selling my boat because I can't get access to the water at Exmouth easily. It's too heavy to drag a boat over the shore
6. ???? – There was talk of assessing what impact sailing has on the birds, has this been done yet?

Neil Downes – yes the disturbance study was published last year and is available online

7. Lynn Trout – Walkers and dog walkers cause more disturbance than boats. What impact is climate change having on bird numbers in the Exe though, has this been factored in to the study?

Peter Exley – as more studies are done we are increasing our understanding of how different species of birds are being and will be affected. Some species in the future won't need to fly as far south as the Exe in winter, because of milder winters further north, so we'll see their numbers drop. We know that Dunlin numbers are already dropping in the Exe, but it's a complicated issue.

8. Derek Smith, Exmouth Historical society – There's a rich artistic and cultural heritage in Exmouth and more could be done to commemorate the famous painters who painted the Exe Estuary in the 1800s, such as Francis Danby. Artists came for the spectacular sunsets and promoting the artistic heritage, as in St Ives and Constable Country could attract new visitors. Paintings of the area could be used in branding the area or as waymarkers along the Heritage Trail to help people understand the historic landscape.
9. David Vaughan, Teignmouth Harbour Commission – is the Forum going to write a letter to the local authorities around the Exe asking for improved river access and to encourage better consultation as this issue is having a deeply negative impact on tourism.

Midge Kelly, EEMP – there is an update in the latest version of Exe Press from Ian Harrison, who is the consultant employed to progress the slipway issue, but there seems to be insufficient funding for the preferred option, as this is the more expensive of the two options.

Notes from Discussion Groups:

A. Heritage – with Bill Horner, County Archaeologist

- Bill is looking for any local opportunities to commemorate WWI – Mamhead Forest was used to supply logs for timber props in trenches, logs rolled down to Starcross.
- LIDAR (images from above) done by the Environment Agency shows the patterns of historic tidal creeks on reclaimed/drained land at Exminster Marshes and in the Clyst valley. These original patterns could be mimicked by the proposed habitat recreation.
- Any towns or villages around the Exe that are keen to create their own local history trails should let Midge know about their plans as there are opportunities to mention and link to these in the updated Exe Explorer leaflet, when the next version is produced. This covers the whole Exe Trail but could provide a way in to more local initiatives.
- Derek Smith suggested that information on the artistic heritage of the Exe could be included on interpretation boards or as waymarkers around the Exe Trail. Another member of the Exmouth local History Group, April Marjoram is collecting and cataloguing paintings around the Exe. Jane Lavick is meeting April to view the painting collection and to discuss how the images may be used to show historic coastal change as part of the LiCCo project. The Exe Trail interpretation boards are provided by Devon County Council but there may be opportunities to promote local history as and when these are updated, as Midge Kelly and Jane have been assessing the condition and content of these.

- Jane also commented on the Devon Area Historic Coastal Floods study which is in the process of being finalised. This shows significant recorded flood events around the Exe, contains extracts from historic local papers and also identifies old maps of the area, showing coastal change. This will be made available on the Living with a Changing Coast (LiCCo) project website shortly, www.licco.eu
- Jane discussed some Exe Estuary schools resources which are being put together by an Exmouth based educational consultant for the LiCCo project. It is hoped that these will cover heritage, including aspects such as past trade from the area, land drainage, development of the coast and settlements on Dawlish Warren.

B. Tourism – with Midge Kelly, Exe Estuary Partnership

Although longer-staying visitors are better for sustainability and the economy, the trend is towards shorter breaks. More weekenders.

Huge recent increase in camping and eventers.

People from the E of England are put off coming to the SW by the M25 and other road routes.

To extend the summer season, we need to reschedule school holidays so that different regions have holidays at different times.

EDDC and ECC doing a good job at providing year round tourism opportunities. Dawlish less so.

Need slipway access for responsible estuary users – not people who can't use facilities elsewhere.

Need some sort of national registration scheme for PWCs.

If PWC users had their own area they wouldn't come into conflict with other users, but there's a problem with slipway access at the moment that makes launching v difficult.

Parking in Powderham in the vicinity of the Estuary Trail is spoiling the area. Need more parking along the Trail. Learn lessons from Camel Trail where there is plenty of parking. Could be designed carefully to blend into the surroundings.

More public toilets needed along Trail. Only one set between Dawlish and Turf. On east bank, EDDC still closing them.

The enclosed design of the Trail bridge and proposed new section of trail between Turf and Powderham, intended to reduce bird disturbance and deter jumpers over the bridge, is likely to present security risks for people due to reduced visibility.

C. Water Sports Group – with Dave Preston, Exe Sailing Club

Lots of discussion about Harbour revision Order – pending?

Is the future of the estuary financially viable?

Constant change of officers / councilors seen as a barrier to making progress / improving the estuary

ECC criticized for not attending EEMP meetings.

Lots of discussion of possible Harbour Trust Authority – viable?

No plan for access to the estuary for boat users

EDDC seen as 'discouraging' estuary water users and visiting boat users

EDDC seen as a 'block' to the future of the estuary re boat owners and users.

Launching facilities – no deep water slipways

Lack of storage / parking facilities for day trippers re their boats

Lack of facilities seen as a barrier to tourism, special events run by the clubs, kite surfers etc

Greater use of estuary could be made by visitors if facilities available. Lack of slips is holding back tourism on the estuary.

Lack of consultation re slipway

Lack of ongoing management of Imperial Recreation Work. I.e. glass cutting feet, danger to small craft from cutting rubber boats etc.

Environmentalists seen as having greater say on development rather than people who use the estuary.

Need to get 'best practice' from other parts of the country and bring down to the estuary. I.e. boat users in and around the Solent – well catered-for, facilities provided.

Why not able to use the lorry park by Railway Station for trailer parking at weekends when not being used by lorries?

EDDC not managing access issues to estuary. EDDC seen in very poor light by group.

Constant change by ECC of canal manager very unhelpful

Canal User Group – run by ECC – get Exmouth / other local representative on it to broaden base.

Does ECC have a management plan for the estuary in their role as Harbour Authority? If it does it needs to be made public to consult.

General Comments received on Feedback Forms:

Cllr Andrew Cadbury, Starcross Parish Council

"I was particularly interested in the information regarding the birds and the heritage of the River Exe."

Ian Egerton, Devon Biological Records Centre

"Your audience was more contentious than my audience at my forum..... I therefore appreciate the difficulties you face."

Jane Evans, Exeter Canoe Club

"Suggestion for next Forum: Please may I give a talk for 15 minutes on St James' Weir (also known as Salmon Pool Weir) – the limit of the tidal estuary. The weir is collapsing and I am trying to raise awareness."

Ed Hughes, Exmouth Power Boat & Ski Club

"Need to see an outcome that provides improvements to facilities for our members and other water users. Noone there to explain why EDDC have refused to enter discussions with us on these issues – despite being the representative body for power boating and skiing."

Andrew Turpin, Dawlish Transition

"As there are more cycling tourism enquiries than any other topic, I wonder whether there could be more of an emphasis on this next time?"

David Vaughan, Teignmouth Harbour Commission

*"1. Birds – excellent could have been longer 10/10;
2. Archaeology – a bit dry 4/10;
3. River Exe Sailing Club – bit of an advert (not helpful) 4/10;
4. Tourism – well done the stand-in presenter – interesting facts but what about the Exe? 6/10;*

Spoilt by outside noise for first 1.5h. Ask ECC to talk about their River Patrol and what they are doing?

TDC / EDDC to talk about river access / slipways

Q to Chairman – "Given the feedback from attendees will Exe Estuary Forum write to EDDC, ECC and TDC about Exe Estuary access and slipways and negative effects on tourism? I did ask this in the end – but I think it needs to be taken forward access to the estuary for boaters is key to encouraging tourism."

Anonymous form

"My first visit. In 5+ years since arriving in Exmouth I have heard over and over that EDDC is the big bad wolf and that nothing happens. Today that all seems to be true and nothing much happens. Are there some vested interests behind the scenes?"

Comment received after the event (e.g. by email):

DARE (for the Environment of Dawlish):

It would not be fair to say the topic covered were uninteresting or not relevant to **DARE**, however some items such as 'why is the Estuary so special for birds' and

'tourism our special visitors' do on occasions both frustrate and conflict with current policies and thinking.

Birds - Natural England appear quite happy to see erosion of the sandspit and Dawlish Warren possibly leading to a new habitat requirement along Powderham Banks and the Darts Farm area this combined with different tide heights have the potential to change the feeding areas within the Estuary.

The reluctance of Teignbridge District Council to draw more awareness to the Nature Reserve (Dawlish's best kept secret) and the proposed new coastal park outlined at the approach to Dawlish Warren as shown in the emerging TDC Local Plan I fear do not bode well for the Warren and the Estuary.

Tourism - Much of what was said about tourism and why the visitors like this location so much is being lost to overdevelopment. We ask how much countryside will be left in the Dawlish area and will the transport infrastructure cope, especially roads at Starcross, Kenton and Dawlish. Gridlock at these locations will not encourage the visitors.

Although there are opportunities for discussion some topics are not always easy to take up with attendees unfamiliar with local plans and local issues etc. That said I was pleased to hear strong comments regarding problems with the slipways at Exmouth.

Heritage - This particular section was excellent and most interesting, perhaps it could/should have been longer?

Finally thanks to you Midge for stepping in to the Tourism discussion at short notice, not easy I am sure!

These meetings are important but on occasions I wonder if more localised events may be useful.