



Winter Exe Estuary Forum Feedback Report 2023

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Introduction

The Winter Forum was a success with 74 people attending in-person and 13 people attending virtually. Presentations included:

- The Exe Estuary in the Wider Catchment Management-Yog Watkins, East Devon Catchment Partnership
- Exe Estuary Condition Assessment- Jay Boyle, Natural England
- Pacific Oyster Policy- Jay Boyle, Natural England
- Introduction to the work of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) in 2023-
Stephanie Harper-Chung, Exe Estuary Officer
-Sedimentation Project-Lily-Anna Stokes, Coastal Support Officer
-Water Quality-Zuzanna Dusza, Coastal Support Officer
- Exeter Port Authority update including plans for Harbour Revision Order-Grahame Forshaw MBE, Harbour Master
- Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy-Paul Buckley, DCC Natural Environment Team
- Nature Recovery on the Exe-Natalie Holt, RSPB

Soapbox Session presentations

- Bird Flu on the Exe: Perspective from Devon Wildfowling & Conservation Association-
Jerry Hiscutt, DWCA

- Just for Fun: Good things happening on the river-Rex Frost, EEMP Stakeholder Representative/Exmouth Water Users Group
- Community Engagement and Use of the River-Gordon Betteridge, Forum Vice Chair

A presentation on the new Defra Pacific Oyster Policy was given by Jay Boyle from Natural England, and prior to that, attendees were given the opportunity to partake in an activity to express their views on the policy and its implications on this Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) in the Exe.

The Forum presentations can be found on the EEMP website at www.exe-estuary.org/get-involved/

Forum Chair: Ted Draper

Forum Vice Chair: Gordon Betteridge

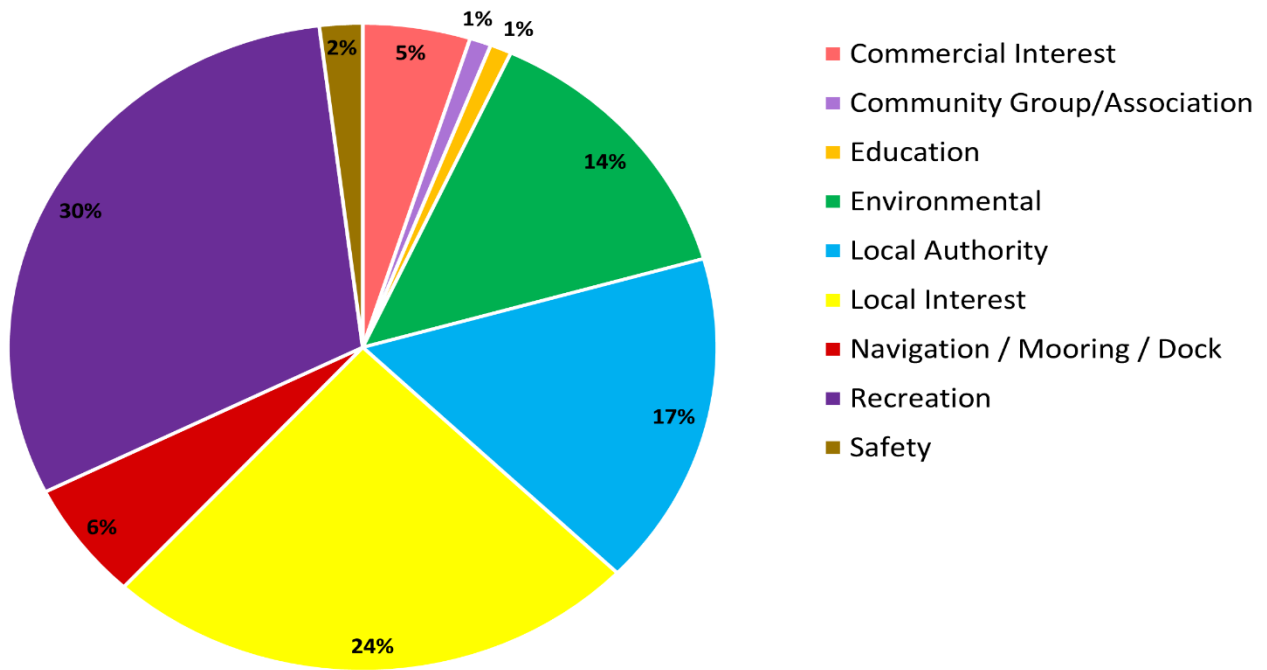
Exe Estuary Officer: Stephanie Harper-Chung

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Sectoral Balance

The sectoral representation of attendees was analysed to investigate the balance of interests presented at the Forum. The attendees have been grouped according to sector, for example “Local Authority” also includes the various partnerships which are hosted within a local authority. As shown by the pie chart below there was a range of representation of different sectors from Commercial Interest to those representing Local Authorities which had high representation including several councillors and partnership representatives. Most of the groups are fairly well balanced in line with the expected proportion of interest groups on the estuary, with representation from all sectors. A large representation from the Recreation sector was present, likely due to a large portion of the Forum content having relevance to this group. There was a good representation from Environmental groups, Navigation/Mooring and Docks on the Exe and Local Interest groups, which is a positive indication that local businesses are engaged with partnership work.

Sectoral Representation of Attendees



Feedback

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The forum was worth attending	44%	48%	0%	4%	4%
The presentations were interesting	35%	52%	9%	0%	4%
The themes covered were relevant to me	48%	52%	0%	0%	0%
I would like to attend the Forum again in the future	26%	57%	0%	17%	0%

The Forum is a key opportunity for me to learn more about the Exe Estuary, get involved and have my views heard	39%	52%	0%	9%	0%
I value the work of the Exe Estuary Partnership	61%	35%	0%	4%	0%
The venue was suitable (if disagree please provide suggestions below)	39%	39%	0%	17%	4%

The results were 100% positive in the case of the themes covered at the forum being relevant to the attendees. The majority, 92%, agreed that the forum was worth attending. 87% thought the presentations were interesting and 83% would like to attend the Forum again in the future. A large majority of 91% stated that the forum is a key opportunity to learn more about the Exe estuary, get involved and have their views heard. A large majority also stated that they value the work of the Exe Estuary Partnership, which is important to us.

A majority thought that the venue was suitable, however, 17% disagreed, and we received a lot of negative feedback stating the sound quality was poor and that this negatively impacted the experience. We didn't however receive any suggestions for an alternative venue.

Attendees who disagreed with any of the feedback form statements, were asked to explain this choice and their comments are included in the table below.

If you disagreed with any of the above statements, please explain why, and offer suggestions on how this could be improved at future events:

- Not possible to read slides and commentaries were nearly all delivered too quickly
- First speaker was very interesting, but he spoke too quickly making it difficult to follow (but did keep to time)
- Virtual attending did not go very well
- Sound quality very poor x2
- Not possible to follow presentations as screen size not correct and 40 minutes of presentations done in 5 minutes-speaking too fast
- Difficult to hear speakers especially with a laptop in front of them
- Although the venue is large, I found the sound quality of the presentation's poor, it was difficult to understand some of the quieter speakers. In addition, the attendees

on the screen reduced the size of the presentations making them difficult to see and were very distracting. Maybe face to face only would be better than a mixed event?

- Presentations were more about ecosystems and less about users than it should have been. It seemed that there was more about “haven’t we been wonderful about what we do “than what would be of interest to everyday Estuary users. More time should have been given to possible changes as a result of the harbour revision order- much more relevant to most people. I found the acoustics to be poor, most speakers were often difficult to hear due to low volume, poor projection or not using the PA system properly.
- The acoustics/use of microphones was very poor. Many of the speakers were far from clear and their presentations were rushed. If we had the slides printed out in front of us or emailed in advance, we would have been able to follow far better
- The venue has very poor acoustics. Many of the speakers were just reading from slides with no extra input or explanation. They were obviously all very rushed to keep to their time and so actually most of the presentations were extremely boring. The only person who actually made any sense on the stage was Harbour Master Grahame Forshaw
- Poor sound and use of microphone was not good enough
- Most people I spoke to just could not hear. Is this a good venue for the meeting? Or the organisers' fault?
- 2. All the speaker just read their job titles, telling us that the estuary is full of wildlife, how they work with partners. We know all that!
- Most of the presentations did not take into consideration of their audience.
- The Pacific oyster, he understood the subject but knows it is a lost cause.
- Harbour Master, I have not seen any improvement for boat owners (he promised a scrubbing grid etc.)
- We want to know what these well-paid people have done. The improvements you have made, and the things that did not work. How much money is used in projects, have their input improved the Exe, or not.
- The RSPB lady did not mention bird flu. It was left to a conservation charity who kill birds, to give clear advice and had done a survey of the current situation.
- Water quality no facts or what is the plan? The person whose new job is to look at this, did not know (??) I have got a good idea and I’m just a carpenter.
- More concrete evidence put forward on all your work not just words and paintings, leaflets.
- The soapbox speakers showed the good work local clubs are doing in this recreational estuary (national and international) More should be done to promote this for the benefit of health and wellbeing
- Free for all - on and off the water with easy access. More free public slipways etc
- On this occasion, sound quality and visual presentation were very poor. Speakers were speaking too quickly due to time constraint
- Some technical hitches presented, and the first speaker was muted. There were also a few times when it wasn’t possible to hear the speakers when the audience were

invited to ask questions. For people to have a worthwhile experience when attending virtually I would expect everything to run smoothly.

- The venue's echoing nature and technical problems, combined especially with poor and fast diction from most of the younger speakers, led to a pretty awful experience for me. Please either give future speakers longer to cover their topic and/or push them to speak slowly and clearly: I think this will greatly improve the ability of the audience to properly understand the messages. I sympathise with the MS Teams(?) issues, but these led to a poor experience from both those in the Council Chamber as well as those at home; I hope this can be improved for next time.
- This is meant to be genuinely constructive. The sound audio system was NOT set up well. Only just? acceptable! Was it ever checked for clarity. The first FOUR speakers ALL spoke much too quickly. Really made it more difficult to understand. First rule, clear and NOT too quick. Ps. my hearing is good! Hope this helps.

Suggestions for the Partnership's next Forum

Please tick which option you prefer:	
2 in-person events per year	83%
2 virtual events per year	8.70%
1 summer in-person event and 1 virtual winter event per year	8.70%

The majority of attendees showed a preference for 2 in-person events per year.

Is 2 hours the right amount of time for a Forum event?	
Yes, 2 hours is a good amount of time for each event	83%
I would like longer than 2 hours to allow for more content and more time for questions / discussion	17.4%
I would like less than 2 hours, and understand that this would mean less topics are covered less time for questions / discussion	0%

A majority agreed that 2 hours is a good amount of time for each event, with 17.4% preferring the events to be longer to allow for more content, question time and discussion.

Comments received through these feedback forms are included at the end of this report in the Appendix, along with a record of the question-and-answer sessions from the event.

Appendix

A. Questions & Answers from Forum Question Sessions

Invasive Species

Question: Francis Whitley-Himalayan Balsam where widespread in the UK and volunteers to clear the plants are few and far between, so little can be done except to protect small areas, and if global warming is a problem, then the surely other species that were not prevalent before will arrive so why is it realistic to try to hold back the tide? How much can we realistically make a difference to pacific oysters in the Exe?

Answer: Jay Boyle, Natural England- In our area they are absolutely everywhere, and I think I mentioned in my talk, if you were to remove them from the Exe completely, which would be a mammoth task, the next spawning event, the way that hydrodynamics work from neighbouring estuaries, they could arrive again anyway. It does seem like it's unrealistic to completely remove them from the Southwest. Whereas in the northern regions where pacific oysters have not reached yet, they can put mitigation measures in place.

Question: Dave Curnow-Are there any native oysters on the exe? Manual removal can be effective (for example in the Erme), will active monitoring restart on the Exe?

Answer: Jay Boyle, Natural England-I am not 100% sure if there are native oysters on the Exe, but we have had enquiries about projects to reintroduce UK native oysters.

Removal - DEFRA policy saying it isn't feasible, if there is appetite and drive for removal NE would encourage but need mechanisms in place (coordinated and funding). It has been shown to be effective, but it does take a lot of volunteer time.

Water Quality

Question: Starcross yacht club-What is the impact of CSOs on the Exe estuary for leisure users?

Answer: Steph Harper-Chung, Exe Estuary Officer-Zuzanna (Exe estuary coastal support officer) has only started but hoping to compile this information for the summer stakeholder forum.

Question: Keith Hill, Lymptone Parish Council-One of the concerns that we seem to have is the number of houses that have water or sewage that empties into streams then goes down into the river. What work have you done to investigate that as a potential pollution factor?

Answer: Ted Draper, Forum Chair-The mechanism for feedback about these issues is to the Environment Agency

Question: Andy Tyeman-650 hours of CSO overflows in Exmouth - is this the greatest threat to exe estuary environment?

Answer: Yog (Iorwerth) Watkins, East Devon Catchment Partnership-What the scale of the effect it will have on the Exe estuary, I can't answer that. That's outside my skill set. But I will say that within the rest of the catchment, there is an owner support South West Water group (for sewage/septic tanks). If people don't look after their septic tank, it can be an issue. And it's more acute in dry weather, which doesn't occur obviously with the combined sewer overflows, but in the wider catchment when the flows of the river go down, there is still a consistent amount of phosphate thrown into the system through South West Water and private sewage that then becomes magnified by the lack of dilution.

Question: Francis Whitley-In regard to reporting sewage events, key performance indicator run by the EA. Should we report to EA or South West Water?

Answer: Ted Draper, Forum Chair-We will issue some information on how reporting issues works.

Harbour

Question: Buoys 21 and 19 are in the wrong place, how are you going to manage them?

Answer: Grahame Forshaw, Harbour Master-It's very, very difficult. We will be looking at the information from the next LIDAR survey to check where the deeper water is. We were looking at moving the channel across to the front of Starcross and going up that way from 14 up to 25. But unfortunately, right in the track of where we were thinking about putting the channel is a wreck which can't be moved. We are looking at moving 21 across and I am speaking to Powderham about moving some of those moorings to the West of #21 further over into

deeper water so we can move 21 across. But we'll look at that when we get the survey results that hopefully will be in a few weeks' time.

General Enquiries

Question: Tim Hawkins-I expect users of the paths along the river Exe noticed last summer the state and collapse of the lower edge of Trews Weir. If Trews Weir was allowed to collapse as Saint James's Weir, it goes without saying, there wouldn't be any water left in the basin, or the quay, or even the canal.I have been in touch with Exeter City Council, who I believe are trying to get it repaired through the Environment Agency. I've not heard anything lately and I wondered if anybody on the panel tonight had any more up to date information on what I think is an urgent issue.

Answer: Grahame Foreshaw, Harbour Master-Spoken to councillors about it and will find out and get back to Tim with an answer.

Question: Peter Fellows-How many access points are there to the estuary?

Answer 1: Grahame Foreshaw, Harbour Master-I don't know the exact answer

Answer 2: Steph Harper-Chung, Exe Estuary Officer-We do produce flyers which has the access points on the map. It is difficult to create more access points due to the rail line etc.

Question: Mike Arstel, Starcross-There are very few access points for paddle boarders and canoes to the canal - where is the access?

Answer: Grahame Foreshaw, Harbour Master- haven't got easy answer, will discuss further in person

B. Questions & Answers from Defra Pacific Oyster Activity

Any thoughts (positive or negative) on Pacific Oysters in the Exe and the Defra Policy?	What impacts are Pacific Oysters having on you as a stakeholder?	Any thoughts on potential remedial measures/future management
1. Concerned about the impact of pacific oysters on other shellfish (cockles, mussels etc.) as food source for the oyster catchers which are declining	1. No idea-but would like to know any possible effects on wading birds 2. Severe cuts to foot-necessary to wear shoes	1. Use for lime mortar in historic building/bridge restoration 2. Any attempts to mechanically scrape the oysters off the surface should

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A big threat as an INNS to intertidal areas and wildlife 3. As oyster catchers are not known to eat many pacific oysters this is concerning 4. Concerned that if water temperature increases due to climate change, our native oyster populations might decline, and the pacific oyster will become a dominant species 5. Feral populations of pacific oysters are a threat to local species and habitats. However, the MMO supports P.oyster aquaculture if done in a sustainable manner and if under controlled circumstances that will prevent their spread in the wild 6. Are they edible? If yes, then is there really a problem? 7. We need to look at options for removal 8. I had no idea how many of the mudflats and the size of those zones affected are - the image of the oyster reef taken on the Yealm really drove home the potential encroachment and how dangerous they look. Before watching the presentation, I was thinking we could just harvest them for restaurants - this was of course before the numbers in the population and the fact the water quality needs to be improved - talking of which I know oysters clean water courses so I had thought they could be deployed to help with that. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Health and Safety issues due to the sharp shells of pacific oysters-both people and dogs 4. Pacific oysters are invasive so may favour only specific species of birds in our nature reserves 5. Obviously as a volunteer Wildlife Warden for Dawlish - we already see a lot of stalls on beaches - which can cause an issue for those with bare feet. The mud flats are vitally important for our bird life, the feeding wading birds - What I meant ask was whether removing the oysters from mud flats returns them to mud flats. I guess the sediment is still intact under the molluscs? It certainly is a clear indicator to the local population that climate change is happening. Clearly what were once inhospitable waters are now attractive to massive explosions populations. 6. I am a local amateur marine biologist and visitor to the estuary. I know what has happened to other estuaries such as the Yealm where they have become a serious problem and I would not want to see the same thing happen to the exe. 7. I think remedial actions are going to be very difficult unless someone is prepared to throw a lot of money at it and follow up on any actions taken. Obviously, the best thing to do would be for the oysters to be put to commercial use. I know that there are shell fishers from outside the area removing 	<p>assess damage to organisms living in the substrate below</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. May I suggest that someone is paid to 'farm' them to ensure their quality before they are supplied at a local restaurant to increase the market for them e.g., surf 'n' turf 4. The price for them must be very low initially so that chefs are willing to take the risk and can afford to discard unwanted stock -we need to build confidence in them as a food source 5. Must accept climate change will change species composition 6. The MMO supports proposals that aim to eradicate wild populations of pacific oysters because of the threats they pose to native species and habitats I 7. Introduced by humans, non-native, but maybe now they are (?), a destructive mollusc that there is currently no solution for, climate change favours them, can't be genetically removed, map the genome if not already done 8. Ecosystem change-can we nudge the system to live with them? 9. Have bio-remedial effects of pacific oysters been considered before removal gets encouraged? It seems wasteful amid concerns of water quality and sedimentation to get rid of potentially water purifying species/sediment trappers
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<p>9. There can be no place for Pacific Oyster farming in UK waters given their natural fecundity. This applies to the Exe as much as anywhere else. As it is they are probably having a significant impact on the structure and biochemistry of the surface sediments between Starcross and Cockwood. If they are expanding southward, they may threaten the seagrass beds in the Nature Reserve with subsequent impact to overwintering wildfowl. My thoughts are all negative I'm afraid. There are other non-native species in the Exe such as Devil's Tongue weed (<i>Grateloupia turuturu</i>) but now nothing compares to the threat from Pacific Oysters</p> <p>10. D&S IFCA recognises that the Pacific oysters are an invasive non-native species, but they are also important for the aquaculture industry. Mariculture plays an important role within D&S IFCA's District and therefore has a mariculture strategy for the District in terms of;</p> <p>a) an ability for the District to benefit from upcoming mariculture developments at a national scale,</p> <p>b) effectively balancing social, economic and environmental considerations in the sustainable exploitation of wild or cultivated sea fisheries resources (a duty under s. 153 (2) (a, b) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MACAA),</p> <p>c) promoting regional development of sustainable mariculture within the District (s. 153 (2) (c) of MACAA),</p>	<p>them (probably illegally and presumably for consumption) but their impact appears to be minimal compared with the size of the problem. At the very least regular monitoring, even if it's just over flying with a drone and a camera and undertaking some sediment / biological research etc to establish the extent of the problem as a precursor to determining what action is needed. There are several internationally recognised organisations in Devon that could undertake some of this work. Pacific oysters can release up to 200 million eggs a year, and with climate warming we can expect the oyster cover to increase over time. Whatever plan of action is adopted there needs to be collaboration with other organisations that manage other estuaries - for example a solution that involves converting the animal into foodstuff and the shell into hardcore would need a specialised processing centre taking oysters from all over the southwest</p> <p>8. There are wider concerns within the industry that landowners may seek to remove Pacific oyster mariculture from their estuaries. This would have a detrimental impact on the mariculture industry by reducing opportunities. This course of action would not necessarily be in line with Defra's position and there is little evidence on the impacts</p>	<p>10. I don't know how our public volunteers would feel about culling them with hammers - which I guess like explosions land snails in the Pacific where I grew up as a kid - culling involves smashing the shells, and a lot of people weren't happy to do that. I also know from growing up in the Pacific the importance of reefs in keeping sand in big storms and breaking up wave amplitudes - I don't know whether Reefs could be lifted wholesale and transported further out to sea to create natural sea defences - can they survive in the sea? Would the reefs break up? If so, could their shells be used in cement or to top beaches up when they're depleted in storms or to make sea defences?</p> <p>11. Could the shells be used in any manufacturing processes - maybe to fill in potholes? James mentioned the bodies could be used in fertiliser</p> <p>12. D&S IFCA must seek to ensure that the conservation objectives of any protected site in the District are furthered. Therefore, thorough consideration of what impacts certain control methods have on the protected features of a site needs to be taken into account. For example, destroying oyster reefs could cause potential harm from trampling and result in bird disturbance on the SPA.</p>
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<p>and d) balancing the different needs of persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the District (s. 153 (2) (d) of MACAA)</p> <p>The act of balancing the environmental considerations of sustainable fisheries, D&S IFCA have a duty to further the conservation objectives of MCZs, limiting impacts of fishing activities/mariculture on sensitive features within the MCAs spatial boundaries. Pacific Oysters are now established in D&S IFCA District and therefore are unable to be eradicated. The establishment of these species can provide opportunities to encourage aquaculture where appropriate controls can be put in place to ensure it does not conflict with the objectives of protected sites.</p> <p>D&S IFCA recognise that there may be some interest in collecting feral pacific oysters and using them as a stock or harvesting them directly for depuration. This would need to be looked at carefully in terms of food standards. Large feral oysters cannot be marketed for direct consumption as they are less desirable, but there may be a viable market for production of oyster sauce, for example.</p>	<p>of farmed populations on the establishment and spread of feral populations (for example, there are large populations of feral oysters in Plymouth but no local oyster farming).</p>	

Pacific Oysters on the Exe-Please include any additional comments/concerns here:

- Policy regulations for removal of aggregations on the lower mudflats
- Rivers in France have the same problem-more research needed
- Use artificial reefs to encourage colonisation at the up-stream limits-easily accessible and recoverable
- Having seen some of the presentation it would seem this INNS is an issue we don't appear to be able to prevent
- I anyone the impression given was that the official bodies have deemed any remedial action too difficult and don't apparently have the will to tackle the infestation. The natural consequence then will be that PO will take over the whole estuary in time - If this is deemed to be acceptable then so be it, but the impression from the meeting was that this is NOT desirable, which prompts the question What are we going to do about it in practical terms? - If we throw up our hands and say it is all too difficult or keep waiting for some government department to fund some action which will never come, then we should at least be honest with ourselves and say Pacific Oysters are here to stay, will expand their presence and we should stop talking about them because we are not going to do anything about it - the alternative is local action, but will anyone take the lead?
- I would see them as a possible threat to the Eco system
- They are not currently having a noticeable impact
- They should be kept under control by simply hand collecting on a regular basis.
- If tri butyl tin antifouling was able to be used again it would certainly inhibit pacific oysters, but I believe the indigenous species would be unaffected!
- Very worrying: please ensure appropriate monitoring of extent.

C. Comments Received from Feedback Forms

Suggestions for the next Summer Stakeholder venue:

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Suggested future topics/presentations (including local/community projects):

- Update on Dawlish Warren geo tubes and their ability to keep the Warren from being breached by the sea
- More on boating rules/discipline etc.

- Safety in boats
- Mooring in the estuary
- Update on Dawlish Warren protection
- Effect of sedimentation/access for vessels after changes-dissipation/dispersal of sand from Dawlish Warren
- Long term climate change adaptation
- Maybe a soapbox presentation from a different user group on a rolling basis, i.e., wind surfer, to explain why the estuary is so special to that group, what conditions/areas are best for their activity. To help understanding of recreational pressures by different users.
- Water quality in the Exe with information on the impact of CSO's
- Dawlish Warren and its future.
- I would like to know about the impact of the “no-go” zones demarcated by the yellow buoys on the estuary - whether it has proved worthwhile
- Regular reports on the state of Eelgrass, Pacific Oysters, mussels and other invertebrates of importance in the estuary, as well as bird populations and other species of conservation importance, from those doing or overseeing monitoring of these.
- Environment Agency explain about the complaint destruction of the mussel beds and the sand dumping on Bull Hill
- Perhaps more on effects of climate change and especially Dawlish Warren. Breach!

Suggested items for ‘round the table’ group discussion:

- Thoughts on boating in the Exe
- Publicity
- I would like to discuss better methods of policing the speed limits on the estuary. The harbour patrol often is not seen when motorboats are speeding. They don’t seem to be aware of other users
- Should/could there be managed realignment of the coastal defences to allow tidal inundation of at least part of Exminster Marshes, to improve resilience to sea level rise and increased storminess and to improve the wildlife value of the site?
- Provision of one or more birdwatching hides overlooking the estuary and Exminster/Powderham Marshes (in the light of the hide at Dawlish Warren now seemingly closed for good).

Do you have any other suggestions or comments to help us improve our future events, or to improve how local voices can be heard?

- Speakers need to be reminded that they are not speaking in a room but an echoing chamber. They all spoke too quietly, and a lot was lost as a consequence (Soapbox session excluded)
- Not enough time for questions-perhaps after each specific presentation
- Don't use pastel background for tables etc.
- Use full screen for presentations
- SWW should attend
- The event was very helpful and interesting. However, at times it felt like it was a bit rushed, and it would have been nice to have a bit more time for Q&A and discussion.
- Maybe a third meeting during course of the year in person.
- More input from RSPB and DWT, given their nature reserves and influence on human usage of the area. Are DWT represented, do they attend?
- Invite surfers against sewerage
- I attended virtually this February, but I will attend in person for future events as the sound was not very good. I think that people who work on the Exe have very good knowledge of the river and how it behaves, but I'm not sure that their voices are always heard or respected. It's difficult to know how to include these voices, but perhaps a wider advertisement of events might help.
- Ask speakers to speak slower
- Water Quality-sewage and runoff
- It would help if there was more opportunity to meet other attendees.
- An update on the Lower Otter Restoration Project.
- I would also be interested to find out about the shifting of sands in the Exe, on Exmouth beach (the beach appears to be much lower this year) and on Dawlish Warren.
- A presentation from the RSPB or from another wildlife organisation. I'm not so interested in shooting birds on the Exe.
- County Hall has always been a good venue but unfortunately not on the last occasion.
- Re Q13: I would like >2 hours but without extra content: keep the same number of sessions but allow longer and give speakers better direction.
- We love the estuary and are grateful for the good work you do in keeping it healthy. We do however think that there is more we can do to inform water users about local water quality issues, and we are interested in the work that Surfers Against Sewage are doing to make water quality alerts more readily available. Their app covers Exmouth and Dawlish. Do you have plans to help them roll out something similar for the whole estuary?
- **Water Quality** - clearly a hot topic and rightly so. My observation is that a plant built for when Exeter had 100,000 inhabitants cannot effectively handle the sewage and rainwater from an increased population of 132,000. Approx 20,000 new houses have been or will shortly be completed in the greater Exeter area all dependent on the

Cowley Bridge works, but to my knowledge there has been no expansion of the Cowley Bridge sewage treatment plant- not withstanding internal process efficiencies. This explains why South West Water have been highlighted by government as one of the worst offenders in discharge to the river Exe meriting only 1 star in the EPA review of performance. Furthermore South West Water has been deemed to be underperforming for the past 11 years according to the EPA metric, (Perhaps because they have made no attempt to expand the Cowley Bridge facility). I was interested to hear that Exmouth Council had engaged with SWW to try and get data on their discharges but it is a fact that reported discharges are not fully reported by water companies, so the SWW water figures are unlikely to tell the whole picture and I attach here a superb article about how two independent retired people showed up the reporting of DEFRA regarding the discharges into the River Windrush. Water companies are only supposed to discharge raw sewage or mixed sewage and rainwater to the environment in the event of a major weather event, yet in 2021 SWW declared 151 actual major incidents and nationally there were 2000 serious polluting incidents. Meanwhile the Environment Agency reported 400,000 polluting discharges of any type nationally when there were no more than 2000 extreme weather events. The fact of the matter is that water companies prefer to pay any fines as it is cheaper than investing and doing the job they are supposed to do, but that doesn't stop them paying their chief executives' eye watering salaries for overseeing this debacle (SWW CEO Susan Davey received £1.6m in 2021). So please talk more with Surfers against Sewage and other independent groups and do not believe SWW figures. Exeter should as a matter of urgency set up its own independent monitoring like those two men did on the Windrush to show the true extent of the shocking pollution of our river, and use that data to demand action from SWW

- **Pollution of the environment** from other sources like run off and silt were also discussed and it was mentioned that there was a lot of discussion with farmers, however a recent report has highlighted that Terese Coffey who is in charge of DEFRA has for the 3rd year running given an exemption for the use of Neonicotinoids which have been banned in Europe since 2018 and which are responsible for killing millions of our bees (1 teaspoon apparently will kill 1 billion bees) So when anyone says they are following government guidelines for the protection of the environment, we have to ask, "does that include any special exemptions?" Bees and pollination are vital to the health of our agricultural industry right across the Southwest, and we need to ensure that this exemption is not used in our region - especially after all the publicity in the last few years about the damage done to local bee populations by agricultural insecticides.

