

Yealmpton Environment Group
Notes of meeting 25 Sept 2025 on Teams

Present: Sheila Barton, Linda Durman, Tony Hawkins Jane Pennington, Charles Weston-Baker

1. Minutes of 30th June meeting agreed.

2. Matters arising

Saltmarsh and intertidal habitat resilience project; Nigel Mortimer, Estuaries Officer at South Devon Natural Landscapes, is undertaking a review of our Estuaries Management Plan at the moment. He will forward the final document after the draft is approved.

3. **Accounts**

Charles has sent Sasha all invoices required for payment.

Sasha emailed that YCE granted the Parish Council £4,839 in February 2025.

4. **Yealm Water**

Air pollution; Inadequate capacity at Yealmpton Sewage Plant remains a problem for air quality with ongoing obnoxious smells. We need to encourage the public to report each day there is a smell problem due to the sewage works. Sheila advises that link will be on the home page of the YPC website 'REPORT IT' that makes reporting direct to council easier. A link will also be available on all relevant Facebook pages.

Action Sheila and Linda

Water pollution events; The Yealm was cloudy in July due to SWW repair work at Luton and Cornwood. Run off; five new volunteers were recruited this summer for Mudspotter training. We are only the second area trialling this system for West Country Rivers Trust. It became clear that the system does not address the source of run off and is therefore unlikely to deliver the impactful change we need locally. An alternative system is being developed that includes mapping the sources of run off. This will enable remediation attempts through existing contacts (Charles W-B). Brixton and other volunteers are developing a high resolution terrain map for this purpose. The EA still wants people to report in their incident hotline 0800 807060 as well.

CSI; we validate the accuracy of readings submitted by our volunteers whenever possible. Our CSI volunteers took part in a low-cost nitrate test comparison study on 12th August. The performance of the different kits used by citizen scientists across the UK, compared with lab analysis of four different nitrate samples from six selected sites: sample 1 for lab analysis, sample 2 against Hanna Nitrate Checker, sample 3 using Hach nitrate strips and sample 4 La Motte nitrate strips. All samples will be analysed by Bristol University School of Geographical Sciences – report on results due Spring 2026. This focus on accuracy builds trust in CSI data sets.

Additional Sonde. Our existing Sonde (measure various parameters including temperature, pH levels, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity and enables real-time data collection and transmission) is working well but doesn't tell us which tributary of the Yealm is the source of pollution. Fortunately, an additional Sonde has been funded by SHDC to improve information on the source of pollution in real time. It will be located on the Piall. This Sonde will include a sensor that measures an amino acid diagnostic of sewage and farm waste.

Flood prevention. Cllr Tucker is keen to install flood prevention measures for the green lane (Steps River Lane).

5. **Active travel/Public footpaths.**

Silverbridge Way extension; working group led by Cllr Hitchins has not met recently.

Footpath 20 has several areas of erosion, making it unsuitable for people with mobility problems. The Parish Clerk has applied to the EA for a permit to stabilise and improve this walk. There is a six week window in which to do the upgrade. The possibility of using the least environmentally damaging material by the river bank was considered. Jane offered to research this so that we can advise the Parish Clerk accordingly. Noted CO₂ emissions during production of concrete remain a concern. Action Jane

6. Terrestrial report

There are 1,600 trees in the Yealmpton Tree Nursery at the moment. They will be used for planting this winter. Tree Seed Sunday will be 5th October this year. It is a combined event for Yealmpton and Brixton. There is higher demand for hedging plants than for trees at the moment. Wasps' nests are a problem at the tree nursery, having swarmed and stung three volunteers badly this year. An improved water supply has also been installed. Seven additional volunteers were recruited during the summer.

Tree planting; Our section of the river is now completely lined with trees and shrubs, preventing animal access and limiting run off. We have established that alder is too fast growing to be of practical use. The Orchard in Stray Park needs a prune. The holly planted to shield the sewage plant is slow to grow but the bushes are establishing. Any that fail are being removed so that we can re-use the shelters and stakes. Kate Guess has secured £30k for fencing at Torr Farm.

Woodland enrichment programme; Cllr Thomas has arranged an award of £1665 from SHDC for this. Three sites have been selected for a trial: Lotherton Wood, Treby Wood and Torr Farm. The results where this system is in place (Dendles Wood and Dartmoor) are impressive. The system involves use of hurdles and fencing to keep deer and rabbits out until trees are established. Two professional advisers are involved.

Noxious weeds; there have been six episodes of 'Balsam bashing' this summer and the big stands from two years ago are much diminished. Especially that near Puslinch Bridge. One new area of growth has been found. Mervyn Newman is trialling a rust that kills Himalayan Balsam, along the Tamar. Japanese Knotweed in the DWT nature reserve by New England Quarry has been cut to ground level. There is funding for injecting this to kill it off.

Non-farming landowners. Jasmine Pearson has a cluster group advising on catchment sensitive farming and source of funding. They will meet at the Rose and Crown in January to encourage catchment sensitive activity along the Erme and the Yealm. Note: FWAG undertook a similar initiative three years ago that did not really take off. Small, medium and large farms will be invited. Keira, an ecologist, has joined Parklife, and is assisting with six YESS projects funded by the EA.

There is no shortage of volunteers for tree planting but we do still lack a Tree Warden for Yealmpton.

7. Biodiversity monitoring.

Apart from Ivybridge Community College students' field work at Ruby's Wood there has not been progress this year. Diane Castle and Keira are planning an initiative on this for the whole length of the Yealm. Proposal awaited.

8. Yealm Catchment Management Plan

Work in progress by YEM.

9. Budget setting for 2026/7. Linda will call for outline plans and costs in early November.

10. Next meeting February 2026 tbc.