

YEG annual report 2025/6

This year, members of YEG and their volunteer workers have continued to improve the quality and biodiversity of the air, land and river water in our parish.

River Yealm

Systematic monitoring of the chemical and physical properties (temperature, pH levels, dissolved oxygen, total dissolved solids, dissolved organics and turbidity) of Yealm water has continued. Results from July 2022 to April 2025 were reported in Yealmpton Press in January 2026. Such evidence can be used to inform remedial action locally via the River Yealm Water Quality Group and informs the scale of response required nationally through Westcountry Rivers Trust (one of 65 UK Rivers Trusts) and other national organisations who aggregate the data and use it to lobby ministers on our behalf to improve the quality of water in the UK.

In addition, we now have trained citizen scientists (training funded by YPC and Wildfish) who can identify and report invertebrates in Yealm water samples. YEG also receives swift reports on local pollution incidents from the public that are logged with the Environment Agency (incident hotline 0800 807060).

A set of specific projects that would help to prevent further pollution events and improve Yealm river water quality has been prepared with YEM and RYWQG. We are developing a standardised system for collecting information on run-off from land into the river as the EA's Mudspotters system does not address the source of run-off and is therefore unlikely to deliver the impactful change we need locally.

The episode of pollution on the River Piall reported to EA in early 2025 was deemed 'within allowable limits'. Although RYWQG considers that the relevant licence really needs to be renegotiated, the documentary 'Dirty Business' on BBC iPlayer explains how this has happened. And where is Public Health when you need it?

Trees

Many more trees and shrubs have been planted in the 12 months from April 2025 using 1,600 trees from the Kitley Community Tree Nursery, funded by Yealmpton PC and managed and maintained by volunteers. We have also planted trees from community nurseries at Noss Mayo and Newton Ferrers. Towards the end of the planting season a wildlife corridor hedge 275-metres long (1,500 whips) was planted. Volunteers also planted mixed woodland of approximately 650 trees and in the last planting of the season 110m hedge at Worston Farm, 2,000 trees at Ewells Wood, Kitley and 80 low density hedge trees at Long Meadow by Steps River Lane and 160 metres of hedge restoration work at Highter Torr. Tree planting **the Yealmpton section of the river is now completely lined** with trees and shrubs, preventing animal access and limiting run-off. We have until the end of March to plant whips before the end of the season.

The orchard and other trees in Stray Park have been pruned. The ancient orchard at Mill Farm in Yealmpton has been restored by volunteers from YEM and YEG this January. Tree Seed Sunday 2025 was a great success again. 1700 trees at the tree nursery will be ready for planting from autumn 2026. The Mini Tree Nurseries at primary schools in the catchment have had a three year review, including the nursery at Yealmpton, that has not suffered from theft by squirrel as much as others.

Biodiversity

Ruby's wood biodiversity surveys with ICC continue. Volunteer bird, mammal and bat surveys are planned. A new pond for invertebrates is planned at a location beside Steps River Lane. Ivybridge Community College students undertook two days' field work on the Research Methods Module of the AQA A Level in Environmental Science at Rubies Wood. This resulted in a standardised data set that will act as a template for the future. A second cohort of 23 Environmental Science students at ICC Have used methods such as quadrant analysis, transects, camera capture, setting traps, nests, sweep surveys, water analysis, kick surveys and river flora and fauna surveys in Rubies Wood.

Programmes to control invasive species and eradicate noxious weeds continue. The Yealm Erme Species Survival programme is currently working with six non farming landowners within the Yealmpton parish. Work involves tree and hedgerow planting, stream realignment with leaky dams, fencing to protect the watercourse from poaching and preparation works for wildflower meadow creation.

The area of Kitley Meadow at Lodge Gate Field that is under power lines, and therefore cannot be planted with trees, has been scarified, topped and raked and planted with wildflower seeds.

Catchment based approach

YEM is finalising the Yealm Catchment Management Plan that will highlight priorities for the catchment with regard to wild habitats, biodiversity, and water and land management, including natural solutions to flood and drought. It will also address water quality and pollution and community engagement.

Significant progress to improve the Yealm is dependent on action throughout the catchment. The River Yealm Water Quality Group has trailblazed this approach and now a programme has begun to work with the Plymouth and South Devon Community

Forest, YEM and Catchment Sensitive Farming, to establish works and management options for individual farms. This will result in improvements to water quality and management, biodiversity and habitat connectivity (a green corridor) throughout the catchment. Using low density tree planting (25 trees/ha) allows farmers and land managers to benefit and importantly does not interfere with DEFRA/other grant schemes.

Active travel

The long awaited 'Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan' (LCWIP) for South Hams was published in August 2025. Initial hopes that this would prioritise a safe walking-cycling route into Plymouth were dashed.

Air quality at Yealmpton sewage treatment facility.

The summer of 2025 brought the stench of deeply unpleasant smells emanating from the Yealmpton sewage treatment plant and trucks frequently taking away significant waste. **South West Water** has advised that the sewage works in Yealmpton are functioning within their designed capacity. No explanation of the cause of foul smells has been offered. They refer us to their Drainage and Wastewater Plan:

[yealm-erme_l2_dwmp.pdf](#).

With thanks to Yealmpton Parish Council for their funding for these projects.

Linda Durman

Chair YEG

Ancient Woodland Assessments within the Dynamic Dartmoor Landscape area

