

Yealmpton Environment Group
Notes of meeting 27th May 2026 Parish Room

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

1. Minutes of 25th September 2025 meeting agreed.

2. Matters arising

Meeting on review of Yealm Estuary Management Plan chaired by Nigel Mortimer on 13th May; notes previously circulated.

Tony reported that the EA is still investigating the china clay pollution incident affecting the Yealm Dec 2022 and have determined the category of pollution.

3. Accounts

Sasha sent information on process Parish Council has to follow when reclaiming VAT:

Parish councils may only reclaim VAT in **specific and limited circumstances**. The key principle is that VAT can only be reclaimed where the **council itself** is the purchaser of the goods or services. This is particularly important when working with voluntary groups or project partners.

The council is free to consult community groups for advice or to involve them in shaping a project.

However, the **decision to spend**, and the **contractual relationship with suppliers**, must rest solely with the council. To lawfully reclaim VAT on non-business activities, **all four of the following conditions must be met:**

- **The council places the purchase order.** The commitment to buy must be made by the council, not by a community group or individual acting informally.
- **The council receives the goods or services.** Delivery may take place at another location (for example, a village hall or volunteer's address), but the council must be satisfied that the goods or services have been received in accordance with the contract.
- **The VAT invoice is addressed to the council.** The invoice must clearly show the council as the customer. An invoice made out to a community group, volunteer, or third party cannot be used to support a VAT reclaim.
- **Payment is made from council funds.** The council must pay the supplier directly from its own bank account. Reclaiming VAT on purchases paid for by others and later reimbursed is not permitted.

Because of these requirements, the council must take care **not to "jointly instruct" contractors** or allow arrangements that blur who the contracting party is. If it is not clear that the council alone is procuring the goods or services, VAT cannot be reclaimed.

These rules are set out by HMRC in **VAT Notice 749, section 6**, which explains the conditions under which local authorities may recover VAT on non-business activities. If the above criteria are not met, we cannot reclaim the VAT. It has to be a YEG project – not a YEM one. We can still fund YEM projects – but no VAT can be reclaimed.

Sasha Walton-Jackman

Clerk to Yealmpton Parish Council

4. Yealm Water

4.1 Air pollution; Sewage smells emanating from Yealmpton Sewage Treatment Works (STW); Sheila has added a link (report-a-problem) to front page of Parish Council website. A link is also available on all relevant Facebook pages.

4.2 Capacity at Yealmpton Sewage Plant. Sasha had the following response from Pennon:

‘there has not been an increase in tankers going in and out of the works. The sludge removal is on a weekly frequency and these only change should the operators note that we could do with some extra loads coming out of site.

Secondly, there are several ways to define capacity for a wastewater treatment facility. The Population Equivalent (PE) provides a basis for assessing the potential impact of wastewater discharges on receiving waters, for a particular population size. While there is additional treatment capacity for the plant to operate and meet its current permit conditions under the Environmental Permitting Regulations, when the Population equivalent crosses the Urban and Wastewater Treatment Directorate (UWWTD) threshold of 2000, then the plant may be required to achieve different, tighter standards under the UWWTD. This will require planning and agreement with the Environment Agency (EA).

We therefore closely monitor any population increases to understand whether the plant may require a step-change increase in capacity. We will invest in treatment upgrades when required due to the additional pressures that come with the increased organic loading that additional population growth brings. We are currently working with Local Planning to understand new development in all of our catchments, including Yealmpton, to re-assess capacity needs for all of our treatment facilities, which includes additional requirements due to crossing UWWTD thresholds. This gives us the line of sight needed to effectively build development into our plans.

Finally, to speak to your query regarding compliance to reassure you I can confirm that we have telemetry that monitors Yealmpton STW 24/7 365 days a year. In addition, 6 out of 7 days a week an operator will attend site and ensure that the site is fully compliant.'

Linda has responded to Sasha pointing out that the Yealmpton population is:

- 2024 Estimate: 2,428 residents.
- 2021 Census: 2,418 to 2,420 residents (consisting of 1,177 males and 1,241 to 1,243 females) living across roughly 1,020 households.

Tony does not accept that such frequent removals of sludge are normal for operation of a sewage treatment plant.

4.3 Water report May 2026

Yealm Estuary Management Group (YEMG) meeting Nigel Mortimer reported that seagrass floaters have been rescued and transplanted to Cofflete Creek and this will happen again Summer 26. Unfortunately geese tend to eat them. There is marked saltmarsh erosion at Puslinch Creek. SW Natural Solutions and SDNL will attempt restorations when they have a marine licence and landowner permission. Polder system to be used, wood brush across the marsh slowing flow and building up sediment behind, encouraging the growth of seagrass.

4.4 No water pollution events reported since last meeting although Riverfly survey has identified a problem at Bridgend and a report has been sent to EA. There was discussion on the difficulty of distinguishing between new pollution and normal resuspension causing unsightly organic film when tide rises over mud flats.

4.5 Run off; **Mudspotter**; Parish Councils are the authority responsible for taking action on runoff, so volunteer recruitment and training will be organised via RYWQG for each parish bordering the Yealm. RYWQG will consider this at meeting on 22nd June. YEM will focus more on sustainable farming.

4.6 CSI; results of two years' monitoring are being analysed to show priorities for intervention and to form the basis of a **project proposal** to SWW for funding from their Nature Recovery Fund (£240k) for improvement of water quality on the Piall and Wembury streams/rivers.

4.7 Action to promote awareness of water pollution from domestic products. Charles awaits a detailed report from Peter Brown. Following receipt Linda offered to draft articles for Yealmpton Press.

4.8 **Lee Mill stream. During high rainfall there is considerable silt flowing from upper reaches of Lee Mill stream, some of which settles downstream in the Yealm.** CSI results demonstrate considerable decline in river quality immediately below the point at which Lee Mill Stream flows into the River Yealm.

The decline is consistent with the lack of any confirmed treatment of effluent from Lee Mill Industrial Estate and numerous discharges of untreated sewage from Lee Mill STW. Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICWs) and sustainable settlement ponds naturally filter treated sewage and surface runoff before the water enters the river. These proven natural filtration systems would improve Yealm water quality. Charles has contact with the landowner and will approach him with CSI information and a request that we work together to position a suitable system to include planting and sediment trap in land north of New England Wood. DWT are also keen to engage with such a project, that would form part of that referred to in 4.6.

4.9 Noted that the Sonde has recorded the highest temperature in the river (21.5°C) so far. For both brown trout and Atlantic salmon water temperatures above 18°C cause the onset of thermal stress.

5. Active travel/Public footpaths.

5.1 Silverbridge Way extension; a local architect has explained that Parish Councils have Permissive Development Rights for footpaths and could apply under section 192 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for a Certificate of Lawfulness of Proposed Development. Next meeting 3rd June. Charles and Linda (on Sheila's behalf) will attend.

5.2 Sasha has asked for YEG support for the project. In particular:

- signboards to tell people about the management of the bank, help with the design etc could Devon Wildlife Trust do something re wildlife? Maybe also include something about the salmonoids and the birds? A nice opportunity to inform people about the wildlife down there. I can liaise with Kitley about permission for the boards. I thought maybe one by the footbridge over the river, one by the gauging station bench and then one in the car park area. Maybe that's overkill – appreciate your view on that. Action Linda
- The volunteer co-ordination and the planting along the bank. Rory Sanderson (contractor recommended by Parklife for the concrete part of the project) said this project could do with annual management (filling in of grooves and replanting bald spots). I thought that could fit with the balsam management. You could include a bit on the sign boards about that.
- Provision of plants and trees (willow was Rory's recommendation). Could YEG help with willow whips – maybe taken as cuttings in early spring and brought on in the tree nursery? Nice if they were local.

We agreed that Linda would take the lead on signboards and come up with some suggestions.

Action Linda

Charles agreed to lead on the planting. Sasha will keep us in the loop re a start date.

Re willow for stabilising banks; Linda to respond that this is extremely difficult to manage as it grows very fast. The roots will go out into the water and under the concrete and will not be easy to control. British Waterways do not plant willow on banks of canals. Linda will do some research of appropriate planting.

Action Linda 6.

6. Terrestrial report

6.1 Lodge Gate Field. Veterans Outdoors have installed the access track from the road to the VO area at the end of the field and fencing of the area. Two buildings will be installed: one for training and the other as an office. They plan to have 5 polytunnels and have raised £300k of the £400k total required.

6.2 The wildflower meadow under the power cables that cross Lodge Gate field has been planted.

Biodiversity; Ruby's Wood monitoring continues.

Himalayan Balsam bashing programme 2026 is underway; 50 square metres were removed at Longbrook. Parklife brush cut where the HB grows through brambles.

6.3 An application for £5,000 funding from the Anglers Trust has been submitted to fund the INNS control programme.

6.4 Funding of £2,000 has been agreed by YCE to assist with the restoration of the old fish trap in the Yealm Estuary for fish monitoring. This is located beside the disused railway track along the estuary, further inland than the seagrass restoration project for Puslinch.

6.5 Flood prevention measures elsewhere are planned.

6.6 There is a bid for funding a 'growing veg for cities' project.

6.7 Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest and YEM are working with the Catchment Farmers' Group to install hedges, trees and fencing to protect the river from cattle.

7. AOB

Linda offered to circulate an interesting article on leaf microbiomes.

8. Next meeting Tuesday 15th September.