



THE TAW TORRIDGE ESTUARY FORUM

CHAIRMAN:

SECRETARY:

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Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Taw Torridge Estuary Forum held on Monday 19th January 2026 @ 19.00.

PRESENT

Tony Pratt (Chair)
Jeff Needham (Vice Chair)
Tom Humphreys (ND Devon UNESCO Biosphere)
Mike Teare (Heritage Harbour)
H. Cooper (S.O.S.)
Jack Phillips (Braunton Small Boats)
Eric Evans (North Devon Yacht Club)
Sue Prosper (Love Braunton)
Debbie Frazer (Devon Wildlife Trust)
Liesje Birchenough (Coastwise North Devon)
Sandra Knight (Coastwise North Devon)
Tony Nicholls (Rolle Canal Society)
Joe Newberry (ND Coast and AONB)
Russell Walters (Royal Marines)
Chris Dee (WeBs)
Mary Breeds (Braunton Countryside Centre)
Wendy Lo-Vel (Torridge DC)
John Puddy (Fresh Spring Trust)
Helen Sheard (Bideford Sustainability Group/Ford Woods Friends)
Sue Smith (Bideford TC)
Tony Bown (Independent)
Brian Hopkins (BSG)
Tara Jenkins (NDC)
John Challis (Barnstaple TC)
David Dixon (Barnstaple Pilot Gig Club)
Tim Jones (Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan)
Mark Haworth-Booth (Westcountry Rivers Trust)
Rick Knight (NDC).

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

The Chair introduced Martyn Isaac who would be taking the minutes of the meeting and welcomed Jack Phillips (Braunton Small Boats & Angling Association) and Eric Evans (North Devon Yacht Club) to their first meeting. Those in attendance introduced themselves to the group.

Apologies for absence were received from Ken Hind (Bideford TC), Paul B (Bideford Harbour Master), Mark Cann (Braunton PC), Peter Hames (Northam TC), Justin Gillett (NE), Tristan Otten (TDC), Rose Day, Ray Turner (Devon Birds), Andy Cox (BCC) and David Brain (EA).

2. CONFIRMATION OF OFFICER APPOINTMENTS

The Chair reported that in accordance with the constitution Officer appointments were for 2 years and therefore there would be no election this year.

The following appointments were confirmed for 2026/2027:

Chair – Tony Pratt

Vice Chair – Jeff Needham

Treasurer – Jeff Needham

Secretary – Position vacant. The Chair recorded his thanks on behalf of the Forum to Ian Crawford for his work and time as Secretary.

The Chair emphasised the need to appoint a Secretary as soon as possible and sought volunteers. This was also emphasised by the Vice Chair.

It was agreed that Jeff Needham be co-opted onto the Planning & Consultation Committee. He had agreed to be appointed as Secretary for the Committee.

3. MINUTES OF THE MAIN MEETING

The minutes of the Planning & Consultation Committee meeting held on 20th October 2025 (previously circulated) were approved as a correct record.

4. CONSTITUTION

Jeff Needham reported that following the adoption of the new Constitution last year he had undertaken a review and recommended the following amendments:

- That the Chair of the TTEF be appointed, on retirement as Chair, to the new position of Past Chair for 2 years to provide continuity to the incoming Chair.
- Paragraph 2 being amended to state that Co-opted Members of the TTEF had full voting rights.
- Jeff Needham explained that currently 2 members of the constituent organisations were entitled to attend/participate in meetings of the Forum but only 1 could vote and recommended that this remained in the Constitution.
- Jeff Needham explained that currently the Constitution did not clearly state the voting rights of members of the public. He therefore proposed the following be added to the Constitution. The Public had the right to attend meetings of the Forum but had no voting rights.

It was RESOLVED that the above amendments be adopted.

5. ACCOUNTS 2025

Jeff Needham – Treasurer presented the accounts for 1st January 2025 – 31st December 2025 (previously circulated). He stated that the Forum may need to consider the introduction of annual subscriptions next year 2027 but he was recommending that again this year there would be no annual subscriptions as there was a good bank balance and Officers had agreed to waive their honoraria. However, there may be a need to pay for Secretarial Services in future on an ad-hoc basis. The Forum thanked the Officers for waiving their honoraria and Jeff Needham for producing the accounts.

It was stated that the groups represented on the Forum could make a voluntary donation to the Forum if considered appropriate and grant aid could be sought from the 2 District Councils or other appropriate bodies. It was suggested from the floor that members could make voluntary contributions to the cost of the refreshments.

It was RESOLVED:

- a) That the Accounts for 1st January 2025 to 31st December 2025 be approved.
- b) That there be no annual subscriptions for 2026.

6. ASPECTS OF THE WORK OF THE NORTH DEVON BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The Forum received a presentation from Tom Humphreys, Biosphere Communities Project Coordinator. He outlined the role of The North Devon Biosphere Reserve Partnership as the body responsible for coordinating, on behalf of the constituent local authorities and stakeholders, the management of the Biosphere Reserve and his role as the lead for the Biosphere Communities Projects, empowering groups and individuals to champion nature's recovery in their local area and offer sustainable solutions to the shared environmental and social challenges faced by communities across our Biosphere.

The foundation Team consisted of 17 Officers who worked with a wide range of partnerships/stakeholders through positive action, to create practical solutions to realise a low carbon society and address the climate/nature emergency.

The Forum thanked Tom for his presentation and the work and support of the Biosphere Team.

The Forum adjourned for a 20 minutes refreshment and networking break.

7. ANNUAL GROUP REPORTS

a) Planning & Consultation Committee

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated)

b) North Devon UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated). An event on 5/6 March 2026 was noted

c) North Devon Coast National Landscape. It was noted that:

- A review of the management plans for National Landscapes was required every 5 years by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The next review for North Devon

Coast National Landscape was due to be completed by March 2024, but this deadline had been extended by Defra and would be presented to NDC , TDC and DCC for adoption in July. The current plan was still valid.

- That the lottery funding for the ‘Finding Nature’s Footprints’ project being delivered by the North Devon Coast National Landscape was ending in March 2026.
- That all Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty had become National Landscapes and acted as a conduit for the Government to make beautiful landscapes better and had attracted funding from DEFRA.
- That an additional £30 million funding from the Farming in the Protective and landscape had been identified.
- That money was available for access focused projects across the North Devon Landscape.
- Consultation with stakeholders and local communities is a key part of the planning process.

d) Port of Bideford Harbour Master

The Forum noted the report and documents (previously circulated).

e) Appledore Instow Ferry

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated).

f) Devon Wildlife Trust

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated). It was noted that:

- There would be a free tree hub in South Molton on 31st January at the Quince Honey farm.
- That Bird song monitors were being used.
- That Wider Community drop in sessions were being held at Northam Burrows
- That more beavers were being released in the Taw Torridge catchment area.

g) WeBS

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated).

h) Website. Nothing to report.

i) Harbour User Group Report.

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated). It was reported:

- that the first Harbour User Group had been held in January. Proposed Pilotage and Marine Safety Policies had been forwarded to the Harbour Board for consideration.
- That Exeter City Council were currently undertaking a Harbour Revision Order of the Exe Estuary. Bideford Town Council promoting that a Taw/Torridge Port Trust should be considered so that it would governed locally to protect North Devon’s interest and not have actions imposed by Exeter.

It was agreed that the matter be included on the agenda for the next Planning and Consultation Committee.

j) Crown Estates

Eric Evans (North Devon Yacht Club) reported that the Crown Estates had had a change in policy and now recognised environmental gain as well as financial gain and had allocated funding towards the removal of abandoned and wrecked vessels. A group had been set up to work on priorities in the area for funding. Ricky Knight reported that there was an abandoned vessel at the corner of Chivenor and Heanton Court.

k) River Champions

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated). It was reported that the group were looking for new sites and that a North Devon/Torridge Climate Water Quality meeting was being held at Barnstaple Library on 7th February 2026.

1) Heritage Harbour Group

It was noted that a symposium would be held on 21st March 2026 at the Bideford Amateur Athletics Club to promote local maritime history.

The following future dates of meetings were noted: 20th April 2026, 20th July 2026, 19th October 2026 and 18th January 2027 (AGM)

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 21.08.