



THE TAW TORRIDGE ESTUARY FORUM

CHAIRMAN:

SECRETARY:

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Minutes of a General Meeting of the Taw Torridge Estuary Forum held on Monday 20th April 2026
@ 19.00.

PRESENT

Tony Pratt (Chair/ND Yacht Club)
Jeff Needham (Vice Chair/Treasurer)
Mike Teare (Bideford River/Torridge Heritage Harbour)
Jack Phillips (Braunton Small Boats)
Liesje Birchenough (Coastwise North Devon)
Joe Newberry (ND Coast National Landscape and AONB)
Mary Breeds (Braunton Countryside Centre)
Helen Sheard (Bideford Sustainability Group/Ford Woods Steering Group)
Sue Smith (Bideford TC)
Tony Bown (Independent)
Brian Hopkins (Bideford Sustainability Group)
David Dixon (Fremington Parish Council/Barnstaple Pilot Gig Club)
Mark Haworth-Booth (North Devon DC/Westcountry Rivers Trust)
Dale Brain (Environment Agency)
Tristan Otten (Torridge DC)
Elizabeth Deee (North Devon DC)
Ray Turner (Devon Birds)
Anne Marie Eveleigh (Earth Action North Devon)
Aaron Lowe (Skern Adventure)
Martyn Bennett (Torridge DC)

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed Liesje Birchenough as the new representative for Coast Wise and advised that he had written to Sandra Knight thanking her for her support of the Forum for many years. Those in attendance introduced themselves to the group.

Apologies for absence were received from Sue Prosper (Love Braunton), Rose Day, Justin Gillet (Nat. England), Peter Hames (Northam TC), Helen Cooper (SoS), Andy Bell (ND Biosphere), Debbie Frazer (DWT), Jeremy Bell (Northam TC), Paul Brown (Bideford Harbour Master) and Ricky Knight (NDC).

2. ASPECTS OF BRAUNTON BURROWS

The Forum received a presentation from Mary Breeds regarding the wildlife and ecology of Braunton Burrows.

Braunton Burrows covers an area of approximately 4 sq. miles and is owned by the Christie Estate. The Burrows is a mixture of dunes and slacks. Many of the slacks are below the level of the water table and much of the area was once wetland attracting many wetland birds. Though many areas do remain damp and boggy, climate change has meant many areas have now dried out. Right in the heart of the North Devon AONB (Area of outstanding natural beauty) and an SSSI the Braunton Burrows is a vast and complex dune system that sits between Saunton Sands beach and the rural farmland surrounding Braunton. The whole area is protected by being a UNESCO Designated Biosphere Reserve due to the rarity of the plant and insect life that inhabits it.

In the summer months, the Braunton Burrows is carpeted with a sea of colour from 470 species of rare plants and flowers making Braunton the most biodiverse Parish in England, from common species such as yellow iris to rare species such as sea stock, sand toadflax and water germander – the latter being so rare that it is only found at one other site in England. The carpets of flowers encourage butterflies and 33 species have been identified there. However the amount of amount of shrub growth has increased greatly over the last twenty years. There is also an abundance of wildlife such as adders, roe deer and rabbits and bird life such as the Common Buzzard, Kestrel and Hawks along with many migrant birds. Disturbance from dogs, however, has contributed to a decline in ground breeding birds and a detrimental effect on some wildlife. There is also a threat to the dunes by invasive shrubs and non-native species. Braunton Burrows is North Devons best Natural Garden.

3. The Forum adjourned for a 20-minute refreshment and networking break.

4. MINUTES OF THE MAIN MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2026 (previously circulated) were approved as a correct record.

5. TREASURERS REPORT

The Treasurer reported that the current bank balance was £2,614.20. Expenditure was £21.20 refreshments, £100 Secretarial Assistance and £150 Room Hire. Income £10.00 from refreshments.

6. GROUP REPORTS AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE TTEF MINUTES

a) Planning & Consultation Committee.

The Forum noted the report (previously circulated)

i) Harbour User Group. Mike Teare reported that the Port of Bideford was in consultation with HUG regarding a voluntary Code of Conduct for the Port of Bideford that would only apply to the Harbour. It was hoped that the Code would be endorsed and hopefully extended in time to cover the whole estuary. To that end all the users of the Estuary had been invited to adopt the Code to enable it to be extended to cover the whole estuary.

- ii) The Chair reported that Chris Hassall had for health reasons resigned from the Planning and Consultation Committee as well as Mark Haworth-Booth due to other commitments. The Chair thanked both for their work on behalf of the Forum.
- b) North Devon UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve
The Forum noted the report (previously circulated).
- c) North Devon Coast National Landscape.
The Forum noted the report (previously circulated).
- d) Port of Bideford Harbour Master
The Forum noted the report and documents (previously circulated).
- e) Appledore Instow Ferry
The Forum noted that the Ferry had not been able to operate due to very high tides and the weather was also making it a slow start to the season.
- f) Devon Wildlife Trust
The Forum noted the report (previously circulated).
- g) WeBS
The Forum noted that the report would be put on the website.
- h) Formation of Trust Port.
The Forum noted that Bideford Town Council was promoting the formation of a not-for-profit Taw/Torridge Port Trust so that the Port would be governed locally to protect North Devons interest and not have actions imposed by Exeter. A Treasury Order 1928 had created a regulated Bideford Harbour including from Skerne to Instow Church. At the same time in 1928 a Treasury Order was made for Barnstaple Port. A revised order had extended the area to cover the Old Bideford Port. A revision order that would combine the Ports of Bideford and Barnstaple would be easier because of the existence of the Treasury Orders. Help was being provided from the Crown Estates and the Association of British Ports.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM TTEF MINUTES NOT COVERED

Helen Sheard asked a question of behalf of Councillor Jeremy Bell regarding what was happening behind 15-foot yellow fencing at Yelland Quay. It was suggested that it may be the removal of asbestos.

It was agreed to put an item on the next Planning and Consultation Committee Agenda.

8. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chair stated that the Forum was now a much larger organisation than it used to be with involvement for example with the Crown Estates work on wreck investigations and Bideford Town Council's Trust Port proposal. The Taw Torridge Estuary Forum was a widely respected body to be consulted on matters relating to the Estuaries. This, however, was bringing a lot more work for the Officers without at present a Secretary. Therefore, the future of the forum needed to be safeguarded, and the P&CC feels that if no Secretary was found then it may be necessary to employ one. The Treasurer was looking at what this would mean in relation to the re-introduction of subscriptions. In the meantime, we are continuing to search for a volunteer. Please give this matter some thought, as this will be a major agenda item at the July meeting.

9. AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

Secretary Position

Presentation from Navantia UK Appledore Shipyard Owners.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following matters were reported:

- Nature Education Conference in March at Kelly College – integration of nature into school curriculum. It was suggested that an Education Rep be invited to join the Forum.
- Wildlife Garden Event in Braunton and weekly wildlife walks starting every Tuesday evening until August.
- That Skern Lodge had been rebranded as Skern Adventure
- That Bideford Fair would be on June 6th and the Apple Juicing Event on 27th September. Information on the Devon Swift project can be found online.
- Trust Port Public meeting on 30th April @ 7.30 p.m. at Appledore Community Centre.
- The Waverley will be visiting Bideford on 15th June at high tide at 6 o'clock
- Bradiford Reserve Open Day 21 April 21, 2026
- Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). Details online regarding the weakening of the Ocean Current System.
- NDC/Torridge DC new Local Plan. Scoping Public Consultation 30th June 2026.
- Environment Agency Public Consultations regarding Bathing Water Designations and improving water quality for swimmers and other recreational users.
- Environment Agency Project yellow fish re-launch. A community focused initiative to reduce pollution by marking road drains with yellow fish symbols indicating rainwater should go down the drain.
- Screening of National Emergency Briefing on Climate Change at the Plough. A petition to lobby the MP was being prepared to raise the issues of climate change. Further screenings were being held at Braunton, Lynton and Chelfham.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

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

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 20.57.

