

EXETER HARBOUR BOARD

Thursday 11 December 2025

Present:-

Councillor Williams, R (Chair)
Councillors Read, Rolstone, Snow and Sheridan

Jane Green, Lt Col David Marino, James Prescott, Charles Temple, Shelley Rhodes.

Apologies

Councillor Cookson.
Colin Seddon.

Also Present

Harbour Master Exeter Port Authority, Harbour Patroller, Head of Service Operations,
Democratic Services Officer and Engineer and Asset Manager.

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APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Cookson, and Colin Seddon.

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 29th September were taken as read, approved, and signed following an amendment to the attendance list to include external members of the Exeter Harbour Board.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair invited David Clarke to ask his question:

Will the work on Trew Weir include clearance of the trees and bushes growing in the adjacent Mill Pond, including the restoration of the barriers which previously prevented large logs entering the Mill Pond?

The Chair responded in the following terms:

As part of the works, the Bypass channel will be fully de-vegetated in early 2026, to deter birds from establishing nests in that area for the period covering the works.

This is largely to prevent later disturbance of nests during the works.

If the Bypass Channel is retained in its current form then we do anticipate some form of barrier being installed near the entrance to prevent large floating debris entering the channel.

In a supplementary question Mr Clarke advised that this would not be possible without dredging. Councillor Williams noted this comment.

The Chair invited Stephanie Ward to ask the following question:

During the restoration of Trews Weir could the trees growing in the river and undermining the riverside footpaths between the Port Royal and the weir be removed and the accumulated silt bed they are growing in also be removed to prevent regrowth?

The Chair responded in the following terms:

There are no plans to remove the silt and riparian vegetation on the eastern bank of the river, nor the trees growing in this bank, as part of the Trews Weir work. The silt bank and self-set trees provide valuable habitat not found elsewhere within this reach of the River Exe and would not be removed without a strong operational need to do so. These habitats are widely used by a range of birds, mammals, amphibians, fish and invertebrates for feeding, shelter, and nesting. They are not currently creating any operational issues for ECC. Devon County Council have not reported issues or undermining concerns with regard to the public highway, nor have any significant issues been raised by river users or other statutory bodies, so there is no justification for its removal.

Some areas of riverside vegetation on the silt bank nearest to the weir may be cut back in early 2026, prior to the works starting, to discourage birds establishing nests close to the works area which would likely be disturbed during the main works phase. This is good practice, as an established nest being disturbed has a much higher failure rate than the same birds being diverted to alternative nesting sites early in the year

In a supplementary question Ms Ward asked why it had been decided that these trees were no longer undermining the path? The Chair advised that this questions would be answered outside of the meeting.

The Chair invited David Thompson to ask the following question:

Local residents would prefer the lagoon to remain and be dredged. It is a visual amenity and wildlife haven. If the council decides to infill, please confirm a railing will be installed along the northern edge protecting the privacy of the ground of The Mills, Pitts Court and Weirside Place.

The Chair responded in the following terms:

A public consultation exercise will be held in January 2026, in which residents will be asked to provide their views on the Trews Weir scheme, including works to modify the Bypass Channel.

If the recommendation is to infill the Bypass Channel, we can confirm that a railing could be installed along the northern edge of the channel to protect the privacy of The Mills, Pitts Court and Weirside Place, and we would also engage with local residents about possible additional privacy screening such as planting

The Chair invited Judith Read to ask her presentation but was advised that she was unable to attend. David Clark asked the question in her place:

I understand that there may have been some discussion re future of Trews Weir Mill Pond as part of the Trews Weir Upgrade.

I should like to know if this matter is under discussion and what options are being considered.

The Chair responded in the following terms:

Our designers are considering options to make the bypass channel outlet significantly less attractive as a route for migrating fish. Migrating fish follow fast, aerated water and at Trews Weir are often drawn to the bypass channel's outfall instead of the fish pass, where they repeatedly fail to jump. Failed jumps can injure fish and make them vulnerable to disease, while repeated attempts drain their energy reserves. The outcome is potentially they die by predation or disease, or migration is delayed reducing successful spawning.

The upgrade works aims to improve migratory fish passage over the weir and reduce the Bypass channel outlet as an attraction flow, especially during dry-weather conditions.

Designers are exploring several ways to make the bypass channel less attractive to fish, the leading option are:

- Infill the channel, removing all attraction flows and preventing injury and entrapment of fish entirely.
- adding boulders to reduce water energy
- piping the outlet elsewhere, but these options could still attract fish and require high-maintenance screening.

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CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair advised the Members of the following announcements:

- the Malinson Bridge development was not going ahead as the cost was now in excess of the grant that had been approved, and she was going to write to Devon County Council to suggest where the grant could be diverted;
- there had been issues with the leat at Cricklepit Mill but Exeter City Council were working with Devon Wildlife Trust to identify the necessary contacts at the Environment Agency; and
- the presentation due to be given by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership had been postponed to the meeting in March.

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HARBOUR REVISION ORDER

The Chair advised that the consultation period was now closed and that the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) was currently compiling the submitted responses. Until the process is complete and the advisors at Ashfords have reviewed the responses, it is not possible to provide any further information. However, all individuals who submitted correspondence as part of the consultation would receive a formal consultation response in due course.

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PORT MARINE SAFETY CODE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The Harbour Master provided an update on the Port Marine Safety Code Management Objectives making the following points:

- this as for the safety of the port and management of the waterway;
- there had been a quarterly meeting regarding the risk assessment as it had not been as good as it could be. The risk assessment and method statement for all activities would be updated;
- he had been working within the Designated Person since the last quarter and a HazID workshop had been scheduled in late January;
- the PMSC audit would hopefully be completed by March 26; and
- the conservancy duty survey would start in March 2026.

Councillor Read asked where the funding for the training course would come from, as it had not been highlighted in the accounts.

The Head of Service – Operations advised that the funding for training was held centrally within the HR budget. She was not sure of the total but the total for the PMSC compliance elements had been approved for this year, and it refreshed every three years.

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HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT

The Harbour Master updated Members on the following:

- it was always busy on the waterway;
- he had met with the resilience forum;
- in the last month one yacht had been sunk and 4 boats had broken free from their moorings;
- there would be staff covering the Christmas swim as it was within port limits;
- the deadline for licence request for pontoons at Topsham and Turf had been extended with the MMO until the 18th of December; and
- BBC Countryfile were going out on the river to film on the 16th December.

In response to Member questions, the Harbour Master provided the following answers:

- Selling abandoned boats required a number of steps;
- they would be communicating more with other areas for events in the water;
- they would be looking to recruit a casual employee but there was a planned restructure of the service coming so it would not be good to hire permanently; and
- the reported events were only a fraction of what is happening and they relied on the community to feed information in so it could be reported.

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EXETER PORT USERS GROUP UPDATE

The Chair advised that Rex Frost, the Chair of the Exeter Port User Group was unable to attend the meeting and did not have an update to give.

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TREWS WEIR UPDATE PRESENTATION

The Engineering and Asset Manager gave a presentation to update Members of the Board on the progress at Trews Weir making the following points:

- they were working behind the scenes to come up with a design;
- the biggest outstanding point of the public consultation was the bypass channel;
- there was lots of hidden damage that was uncovered through intrusive investigations;
- work had been done in 2020 with the Environment Agency regarding the fish pass;
- the work done would not increase the flood risk;
- it was complicated and had taken a large amount of work to get correct;
- the Weir would look similar but would be safer for boats and fish;
- as much of the Weir as possible would be kept in place;
- if the budget allowed the concrete would be coloured;
- it was worth spending the money now to ensure that the fish pass was correct and was better to do it at the time rather than have it retrofit;
- the project would take approximately nine to ten months and would be split into two, May – September 2026 and March/April – September 2027;
- the materials would be brought upstream and then work would be carried out from the Weir;
- Haven Banks Road would be closed during that period but would be open where possible in the evenings and over the winter;
- he was confident that this could be delivered.

In response to Members' questions the Engineering and Asset Manager provided the following responses:

- the public consultation was planned for January and people living in close proximity would be invited to consultation event to give initial comments and establish best practices for engagement;
- a public event with the contractors would be held by the end of January;
- the shape of the Weir would be changed to a gentler shape, which would have a benefit on fish migration and would provide more of a push over the top;
- the East side of the Weir would be repaired first;
- they were working with a fish pass designer, and the benefits of each option were being considered;
- health and safety were a primary concern; and
- it was unlikely that the marine timber removed from the Weir could be used. Archaeological recording was taking place throughout the process, and the advice was that the timber was not saveable.

The Chair thanked the Engineering and Assets Manager for his presentation and advised Members that the slides would be appended to the minutes.

STATUTORY HARBOUR AUTHORITY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

There were no questions from Members regarding the budget information.

(The meeting commenced at 5.32 pm and closed at 6.45 pm)

Chair