

Maritime activity report

Since the meeting in December 2025 both the river team and the canal team have been carrying on with both routine and emergency work. It has also been a busy time for other unforeseen work; in mid-January there was a WW2 bomb dredged up at Exmouth Marina, which led to the closure of the bottom part of the river while the ordnance was being dealt with by the EOD team. Because the bomb was thought to be unstable a large area around the marina was evacuated for two nights. This put an enormous strain on the surrounding council's including ECC. We aided the police, and we loaned them our marina office to work from and assisted with the harbour patrol boat. On the third day the bomb was successfully towed out to sea and destroyed.

Straight after this event we experienced storm Chandra (the third of the winter so far) which culminated in severe damage to many boats left on moorings in the river.

The Safe Water buoy mooring chain twisted and broke at the weld point. The force needed to do that would have been in excess of 50 tonnes according to our supplier. (please see chain link) We had a report that the buoy was on the move, and we were on the beach at Exmouth waiting for it with our machinery to recover it back to the buoy store. No 2 buoy also broke free in the severe weather, both buoys are ready to go back out when the weather improves. We will have to replace all the mooring gear thought as it will now be covered in sand on the seabed and be difficult to find.

In that bad weather there were two other buoys dragged away from their station by a drifting tree moving at speed in the fast water flow, no 24 buoy and the Commissioners buoy close to the Retreat Boatyard. This drifting tree also collided with a small yacht breaking it free of its' mooring, which then went on to collide with another vessel. This large tree also dragged up several moorings and carried them away downstream.

Further down the river a 45 ft motor cruiser broke off its' mooring and landed on the Warren at Dawlish sparking off a pollution scare. Thankfully our team managed to refloat the vessel on the next spring tide and re moor it.

An old, abandoned ships' lifeboat broke free from a mooring off Cockwood and drifted upriver colliding with the Starcross pier causing damage to the structure and the railway bridge there. Fortunately, we were able to tow it away from there the following day. On the same day we recovered another motorboat from the rocks on the shore at Starcross Sailing Club at towed it back to the Starcross Fishing and Cruising Club.

In the same week we dealt with two other boats that had sank on their moorings. All the above happened within the space of just a few days putting enormous strain on the team and resources. Because of the poor weather and a fault developing on the crane on the moorings barge, we have not managed you to get as many navigation buoys serviced.

The poor weather that we have experienced since the start of the year has affected both the canal and the operations in the river. Under normal circumstances we would be further ahead with canal maintenance, and we would have had a good proportion of the Aids to Navigation serviced. Regrettably, we are way behind and will have to extend the servicing of these aids well into the season because from the end of February we will be starting our commercial moorings servicing work.

We had the Countryfile team visit us just before Christmas, they spent the day with us, and the programme was well received.

From Nicolas Stone – Senior Harbour Patroller

The new Harbour Patroller, Lee, left us in December due to a change in circumstances for him. We have taken on a new member of staff, Lloyd Williams, on a casual basis currently. Lloyd applied for the job initially and performed well in that process. We are very pleased to have Lloyd on board and he is learning the ropes very quickly.

The storms at the end of January were unprecedented, but sadly seem to be becoming more common. We had 3 consecutive storms, over a period of 10 days. During the storms the actual tide levels were almost 1 metre higher than predicted due to the atmospheric and wind conditions. These exceptionally high tides, combined with the wind resulted in a number of vessels breaking free from moorings, along with the movement of a number of navigation marks. We are still in the process of dealing with some of the boats which broke free. The general issue of wrecked / abandoned boats is something which needs to be looked at in detail. Whilst it is a national problem, it is dealt with in different ways locally. The common factor is that it is expensive. We have no allocated budget for dealing with these, but we do carry a large proportion of the responsibility for it.

Most of the navigation marks have been replaced, when the weather allows the final 2 marks in the entrance channel will also go back on station.

We were hampered somewhat through January as the Port Constructor crane was out of use, it is now back up and running in plenty of time start the work on the moorings. Whilst the adverse weather has been frustrating, it has allowed us to prepare well for the work ahead.

From Carolyn Nation – Mooring Co-ordinator

Since the last harbour board meeting there have been 12 incidents recorded, mainly due to the ongoing stormy weather. 8 mooring failures, 2 vessels sank, 1 vessel grounded, and 1 unexploded ordnance in the marina!

To date we have wintered 80 moorings in the river, and are now taking bookings for mooring servicing prior to the beginning of the 2026 boating season.

From Graham Manchester - lead officer on volunteers and Aids to Navigation

Volunteers. We hope to start the seasonal patrols at the beginning of April. We will undertake some additional training with the volunteers at the start of the season. We are also looking at undertaking some mid-week patrols as the season progresses.

Aids to Navigation. We continue working through the servicing of aids to navigation and gradual replacement of older buoys. In the last two weeks we have had a number of aids disabled by storms. As soon as the mooring boat is repaired, we will attempt to retrieve the ground tackle for the these aids to navigation and put them back on station.

We had our on water, Trinity house inspection on the 28/1/26. The result of which was:

Inspection of Local Aids to Navigation, Merchant Shipping Act, 1995, Section 198(1)

We are pleased to advise you that the local aids to navigation under the management of Exeter City Council at River Exe were inspected on 28/01/2026 by an Officer of Trinity House and found to be in good and efficient order.

From Colin Acton - Canal Manager

Ever since winter storage boats arrived in the autumn, the Canal team have been busy with various projects and winter Canal maintenance.

During last November, works were carried out with a contractor to install additional arms for the West pontoon extension at Turf. Additional work was carried out to the Canal bank by Topsham Lock Cottage.

In December diving contractors carried out repointing works to Turf lock inner walls.

Voids were discovered behind the lock masonry which had been anticipated due to historic leaks passing through masonry joints outside the lock gates.

During these works the Inner gates sluices were removed as one already had a broken mechanism.

Two replacements are being manufactured so the lock can be filled in a timely manner.

The underwater inspection also showed gaps around the west inner sluice housing which will need repair.

This year, following Storm Goretti the Station Road to Turf access track has been flooded through January and February. Unfortunately, the current access issue has become more problematic due to a tree falling down causing significant road damage near the Lions Rest. DCC Highways are responsible for this road section and have closed access. The next steps will be for DCC Engineers to survey the site and propose costs to repair.

We understand the road classification treats this works as low priority.

This will have an impact on the customers wishing to access their boats are moored at Turf.

The Canal Office have informed our boat customers and will consider how we can assist them further.

Also to note, the access road has suffered subsidence further towards the Canal side car park and it understood riparian owners on both side of the road at this location will need to engage in potential mitigations.

Other damage caused during the storms include Topsham Ferry causeway. At this time the damage cannot be quantified due to lack of access with current river levels / conditions. In addition, one of the Trews "Weir Ahead" Warning buoys have moved 50 metres downstream and the Sea Cadets have lost three moorings near Kings Arms.

The Butts Ferry wire became snagged with a tree during high river flows and has been cut.

This will need to be replaced when river levels allow access from the Canal in the Spring.

The river sluice to the Canal by Haven Banks Outdoor Education Centre will also need to be inspected around the same time.

During January and February, the Canal team have been carrying out tree and bush removal works along the Canal banks on the lower canal section below Double Locks.

The next planned works will commence in March with Canal bank repairs on the west bank from Clapperbrooke Lane E to Double Locks. There are significant holes along the Canal bank and towpath which are in need of urgent repair. This has been the first opportunity to carry out bank repairs works on a section of Canal for several years due to lack of staff resourcing.

The Canal team monitor canal levels both visually and remotely from water level sensors.

The Kings Arms water logger failed and has been replaced with an upgraded unit. The water logger by Bridge Road has also been replaced.

There are several areas where the build-up of river silt is an ongoing concern: Exeter Quay pontoons; outside the Kings Arms lock gates and the Canal section to the underwater power lines by Regents Wharf.

We have been trying to engage with the Environment Agency to agree a suitable and cost-effective method of silt removal.

The Waterways and Engineering teams are also considering a proposal to move these Exeter Quay pontoons further downstream towards the Butts Ferry wire.

The Canal basin swing bridge outside the Canal Office has just had a replacement non-slip deck overlaid.

The Waterways and Engineering managers have just offered the vacant Waterways Engineer position to a successful applicant. When the new member of staff begins work in March, they will be reviewing condition of all Waterways related assets.