

Celebrating and safeguarding the Otter Valley

OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION



July 2025

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Our Cover Photo

A view of historical heritage being saved in Yettington (article below).

Chairman's update

Author: Haylor Lass, Chairman

Firstly, huge thanks and congratulations to Chris Boorman for gathering and putting into order all the things that the OVA's current actively engaged with.

It was good to see so many of you at the recent AGM, and contributing to a lively discussion following the 'Upstream Thinking' presentation by SWW. Following last year's massive response of volunteers for the Water Group's river testing programme, I sense that there is renewed interest and concern for the ecological health of the Otter Valley – long may it continue.

Leading by example, (part of our Vision Strategy focus): a week ago, encouraged by the fine weather, I cycled to Otterton for a Water Group meeting – of the ten people present, three had come by bicycle, at least two had walked, and one came in an electric car (I didn't see the others arrive). If we all did this – that is travel where possible by eco-friendly methods – we'd be playing our part in a transformational world.

No apologies for the lengthy and detailed article on maize growing. The OVA believes in taking a considered and detailed look at matters, rather than just the headline-grabbing response. We have all had autumn journeys dominated by huge tractor/trailer combinations rushing down the narrow lanes from the fields to the digester sites with the maize harvest – and a significant few are bitterly reminded of the effect of bare soils contributing to the devastating muddy run-off in the local flash floods of a couple of years ago – some are only now just back into their 'restored' homes, and living in fear of a repeat.

Planning and other government action are also important topics – the current philosophy seems to make everything subservient to 'big-business' economy, including ignoring the essence of our environment. We can't change the whole world, but we can do what we can with our beautiful bit of it.

Plenty more in the following pages to interest and enthuse you – join a walk if you can; if not, stay cool and green.

Haylor Lass

President and Chairman
Otter Valley Association

Annual General Meeting - Outcomes

Author: Jane Kewley, Secretary

The AGM occurred on Tuesday 17th June at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton. The meeting comprised three parts:

- The official AGM business.
- An overview of our new strategy and focus areas (see below).
- An excellent presentation given by Dr. David Smith from South West Water on the Upstream programs that are being implemented on the River Otter.

In front of a capacity audience of OVA members, the AGM business was conducted successfully. As a result, the OVA now has a new team of officers and trustees. You can find all trustees and members of the executive committee listed on the back page of this newsletter and the OVA website. All relevant documents from the AGM are also on the OVA website.

Thank you to everyone who came and joined in. It was lovely seeing so many familiar and new faces. Also, a massive thank you to those of you who stepped forward to volunteer for various roles and working groups.

An updated OVA vision for 2025

Author: Chris Boorman, vice-chairman

We have recently been reviewing our strategy as a charity - ensuring we remain relevant and engaged with the community around us. We presented an overview of the strategy and our chosen focus areas. We were delighted with the positive feedback to this during, and after, the AGM meeting.

Quite simply, your OVA wants to celebrate and safeguard the Otter Valley as a truly wonderful part of the world, ensuring it remains a source of joy and inspiration for both locals and visitors alike. We also believe that climate change is very real and, while we may not be able to influence countries like China and America to change, we believe that it is possible to live our lives in a way that allows us to do our bit for climate change and to reflect on the footprint we ourselves leave around us. So, in thinking through this, we have identified 6 focus areas that we hope you agree are a fitting testament to how we can help our community protect and enhance the lower Otter valley. Our chosen focus areas:

1

To champion for clean water in the River Otter and its tributaries.

We want to work with all interested parties to improve the quality of the river and ensure it is a thriving habitat for flora & fauna – as well as ourselves.

This means, for example:

- *To understand and raise awareness of the root causes for river pollution*
- *To test the quality of the river*
- *To work with relevant bodies such as the farming communities and South West Water to drive change and reduce pollution*
- *To be a visible champion for addressing water quality issues and solutions.*

2

To encourage sustainable and appropriate development.

Building on our amazing heritage, we want to encourage the need for sustainable and appropriate development in tune with climate change.

This means, for example:

- *To influence planning decisions that ensure the correct infrastructure is developed*
- *To champion for development that does not impact our rivers and natural habitats*
- *To use our planning expertise for sustainable development*
- *To champion for the wellbeing of our town high streets*
- *To encourage communities to use bikes & public transport versus cars*
- *To help the towns and villages to thrive*

3

To celebrate the incredible heritage of our Valley.

We want to showcase the amazing heritage of the Otter valley – from historical churches and buildings; to incredible design; to wonderful people who have paved the way for where we live today.

This means, for example:

- *To showcase through the web, social media and other ways the buildings, churches, design and people of the Otter valley.*
- *To find new examples for blue plaques.*
- *To partner with like-minded organizations (e.g.: Fairlynch museum).*

4

To encourage thriving biodiversity across our Parishes, Heaths, Valley & Estuaries.

We want to celebrate the incredible flora, fauna and fungi of the area, and help local communities and associations to control the spread of invasive species.

This means, for example:

- *To audit the biodiversity of our area, highlight key species and features, and develop knowledge of impacts and change.*
- *To work with local communities on ways of enhancing wildlife and diversity (from hedgehogs in gardens to butterflies in fields)*
- *To campaign for the removal of harmful pesticides and bad practices that destroy biodiversity*
- *To showcase the beauty of our local environment*

5

To encourage our local communities & visitors to adapt to better ways of living.

People are at the heart of every community. We want to help promote a healthy way of life with our community

This means, for example:

- *To work with other groups (e.g.: Seachange) to promote healthier living and positive change.*
- *To champion more sustainable living e.g.: move away from plastic, pesticides, harmful dog flea treatments and other harmful issues.*
- *To encourage engagement with members, towns and like-minded associations.*
- *To communicate the different things that happen elsewhere (through other associations)*
- *To help communities with areas such as community gardens, encouraging self-help*

6

Helping the younger generation to care for our planet.

We are all custodians of the area for our younger generation. We believe it is important that the younger generation understands the importance of nature, clean water, choices they make and to become at one with the outdoors.

This means, for example:

- *To work with local schools in helping them in their curriculum (e.g.: bringing in experts, bird-boxes, books)*
- *To work with like-minded organisations (e.g.: Pebblebed heaths) to help younger people to learn about nature.*
- *To understand the impact of chemicals in detergents, dog flea treatments, peat-based composts etc.*
- *To aspire to enjoying the outdoors, to see nature and to learn about the countryside around us*
- *To champion more sustainable living within their family and community areas.*

We believe this focus enables us all to make a difference. We will be sharing more about these areas in the coming weeks and months - please do watch out for them. We will also continue to update our web, arrange talks and walks and work with like-minded partner organizations.

We would welcome your support and engagement. If any of these are interesting to you, perhaps reach out and contact one of the committee members and discuss.

Are you receiving us?

Author: Martin Smith, Membership

The OVA uses a combination of printed newsletters, online website, Facebook groups, WhatsApp and email to help ensure everyone knows what is going on. The paper newsletter is published every quarter. At the end of the months when no newsletter is published a digital update is emailed to members. If you are not receiving the update, it is because the OVA don't hold an email address for you. If you are one of those not receiving the digital update and would like a copy, please email info@ova.org.uk and you will be added to the mailing list.

Our digital services include:

- Website (www.ova.org.uk) where all information is posted.
- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ottervalleyassociation>) where daily discussions occur, and interesting articles shared. **Now at over 1,000 supporters.**
- Our ORCA campaigning group has its own Facebook group
- WhatsApp is used by our walkers, water testers, and natural environment groups to share information
- Email is used to provide monthly updates and other communications.

Maize: Food or Energy?

Author: Geoff Porter, OVA Natural Environment Co-ordinator

For many years, Government and environmental groups have raised concerns about the increased growth of maize in this country. As a result, multiple pieces of legislation and guidance focused on good farming practice have been produced. A significant change in the amount of maize grown took place with the development of Anaerobic Digesters, AD's, that produced power from waste. Government supported this 'green' energy by providing producers with subsidies which still continue. Power plant owners found that adding vegetation to waste increased power output and that maize was ideal; it was no longer only grown as a foodstuff.

Government statistics show that in 1973, 8,000 hectares,(ha) of maize were grown; by 2000 this was 98,000 ha. At this point, almost all was grown as animal feed. Between 2008 and 2014, hectareage increased by 20% and significantly, 20% of that was produced for use in AD's. Ten years ago, 171,000 ha were grown in England of which 17% went to digesters. By January 2015, there were 174 AD's. Just 2 months later that had risen to 185.

What has driven this rapid increase in maize production and what are the repercussions? AD plants initially used waste food, treatment work waste and animal slurry which when broken down by microorganisms produces 'green' methane. This is used as gas fuel or to generate electricity. Adding plant material such as grass, cereals, sugar beet or maize produces more methane. Maize has become the preferred option because its high levels of biomass and basic starch make biological digestion easier. When the crops go to AD's it results in additional maize having to be grown for animal feed. Anecdotaly, this is happening locally.

Government supported using waste materials to produce 'green power' with subsidies for producers under the Feed-in-Tariffs (FITS) scheme in April 2010 guaranteeing a fixed price for A.D. generated electricity. The following year, the Green Gas Certification Scheme (GGCS) was established by the Renewable Energy Association, with quarterly payments for generators based on production along with capital investment for AD's. The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) was also introduced. These subsidies fuelled the growth of maize for use in AD plants rather than as a food plant.

By 2016, AD producers were receiving £50 million in Government subsidies. In June that year, the Soil Association said that growing maize for sole use in AD's was a threat to food production. Using public money to subsidise AD plants regardless of what they were using to produce their power should stop. Primarily, they should be fuelled with slurry and other waste products as originally intended. They concluded that 'double subsidies for maize use in anaerobic digesters was counter-productive to managing soil sustainability and should be withdrawn.' In 2021, the Governments Green Gas Support Scheme, (GGSS), administered by Ofgem was introduced, bolstering the UK's commitment to environmental sustainability and 'green' energy. It incentivised biomethane gas production. The scheme was to end on Nov. 30th 2025 but has been extended to 31st March 2028. GGSS does though expect that AD plants will reduce the use of 'organic' material to under 50% by increasing the use of food waste for fuel production by 2026. Extending the scheme underlines the Governments longer term commitment to AD's.

In order to increase the productivity of maize, seed growers have developed new varieties specifically for AD's. At harvest, these ideally constitute 32% dry matter and a high level of starch, perfect for biogas production. There are both early and later maturing varieties. Many of those favoured by AD's and farmers mature later. All have a narrow harvesting window when energy content is optimal. In 2024, total maize growth was 237,000 ha, an almost 30 fold increase in just over 50 years. It's estimated that over the next 3 years, 30% of that total (71,100 ha) will be grown for AD's.

Maize seed is usually planted along with diammonium phosphate, (DAP), a granular water soluble compound containing nitrogen and phosphorus. This encourages early plant growth but also temporarily increases soil pH and can result in increased soil acidity.

The Soil Association, a charity that promotes organically sustainable farming are concerned about AD maize production. Their focus is on environmental protection and encouraging 'farmers and growers to adopt sustainable practices, improve soil health and enhance biodiversity on their land'. Maize crops are seen to increase the risk of soil erosion and compaction. In 2016, the Environmental Audit Committee also heard concerns about more maize crops with the likelihood of erosion as climatic change increases the likelihood of extreme weather events, especially heavy rainfall. A study by the National Trust in South West England showed that the soil in $\frac{3}{4}$ of fields under maize was so damaged that rain was unable to penetrate resulting in run-off into watercourses and rivers.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Environment Agency (EA) published The Reduction and Prevention of Agricultural Diffuse Pollution (England) Regulations 2018 and the Sustainable Farming Incentive Scheme. Both detail guidance to maize growers.

It says they must:

- *focus on reducing soil erosion and water pollution*
- *choose appropriate fields for crops*
- *manage soil compaction*
- *use cover crops to minimise bare ground*
- *harvest early to prevent soil damage and run-off*
- *use fields that have good drainage*
- *avoid fields with steep slopes and*
- *light unstable soils most prone to erosion*

The Environment Agency echoed the above adding:

- *crops should not be harvested in wet weather as this compacts soil resulting in run-off.*
- *early maturing maize varieties are preferable*
- *farmers should be vigilant when harvesting late crops*
- *soil should be loosened following harvest to enable water penetration*
- *wheel ruts can develop into water channels and should be removed post harvest*
- *high risk fields should be avoided. (Alternative crops should be used)*
- *steep slopes and sandy soils should also be avoided*
- *crops should be harvested before the end of September to enable a cover crop to be grown*
- *cultivated fields should have buffer strips near water courses*
- *seed should be sown along contours not up and down slopes*

In September 2023, the E.A recommended to Devon and Cornwall farmers that they should consider crops 'other than maize' due to the increased likelihood of climate change, extreme weather events and increased likelihood of pollution incidents from soil erosion and run-off. The EA can take enforcement action if pollution prevention is not taken. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) advise that crops should be under-sown in June to aid soil and nitrogen retention and reduce the impact on the water environment. It says that the costs of under-sowing maize are balanced off by nutrient saving. This guidance equally applies to farmers growing root crops in light soils on hillsides.

At a time when farm subsidies are unreliable, growing maize for biogas must seem to be a good option to cash-strapped farmers. Government appears to be giving out mixed messages to growers, on the one hand underlining its commitment to AD green energy by extending subsidies to 2028 whilst, along with the EA producing advise not to grow maize in Devon and Cornwall. A.D. plants that Government are encouraging require fuel. The result is arable land producing fuel rather than food.

Heavy rain falling on bare compacted ground after late harvests has serious environmental impacts. Rain cannot infiltrate the ground and runs off hillsides. Soil, containing nitrogen fertilisers and insecticides is carried down roads, ditches and into watercourses. This leaves mud on roads, silt and chemicals in brooks and rivers and as witnessed locally, in severe circumstances it floods properties. Heavy agricultural machinery not suited to narrow Southwest lanes and roads often travel miles between field and A.D. plant causing structural damage, congestion and the consumption of large quantities of diesel. This has both an environmental and financial cost.



Poor agricultural management - planting up hillsides, single access above a watercourse, no under-planting

The River Otter is graded poor due to constant high phosphate levels. Whilst evidence shows that the majority of this comes from SWW treatment works rather than farming, the impact of soil run-off into watercourses can still be significant. Not only does the cocktail of previously mentioned diammonium phosphate, herbicides and insecticides used on crops damage aquatic life, silt also smothers riverbeds. Nutrient enrichment caused by high levels of phosphorus (and nitrogen) results in eutrophication, causing excessive algal and plant growth. This in turn blocks sunlight hindering plant photosynthesis and depleting oxygen levels.

Equally concerning as deposited topsoil is its removal from fields. In 2005, Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) standards were aimed at ensuring farmers protect soil, water habitats and landscapes underlining the importance of soil protection. In Sept 2009, DEFRA published Safeguarding our Soils – A Strategy for England and in 2018, a second that included Farming Rules for Water stating that Farmers

and Land Managers should minimise the risk of pollution by not using excessive nutrients and fertilizers. More recently in Jan 2024, they published Guidance, Code of Good Agricultural Practice (COGAP) focused on soil protection, water and air. Soil was described as 'a vital recourse for food production, water management, habitat support and carbon storage.' All of this legislation and guidance suggests ongoing Government concern about poor land management and pollution avoidance.



Soil runoff through rutted gateway from Maize farming resulting in soil erosion and village flooding

The John Innes Centre states that it takes between 200 and 1,000 years to produce 25mm of topsoil. In human timescales, soil is not renewable. One episode of heavy rainfall can rapidly wash that away.

In conclusion, much of East Devons hilly landscape once comprised multiple dairy farms with small grass meadows, hedges and ditches that helped prevent water run-off. Some of these meadows have become large open arable fields unsuitable for maize and root crops. Hedges and ditches have been removed.

Many tenants now use contractors, paid to sow, harvest and transport who have no investment in the land. This third tier increases the likelihood of poor land management, ignoring good farming practice; crops sown up hillsides, seldom under-sown and harvested regardless of weather conditions left with bare compacted soil. Poor land management

threatens the viability of future food production and negatively impacts water courses. When things do go wrong, it's too easy for owner, tenant and contractor to simply blame each other for the resulting pollution.

Despite all the concerns about the environmental impacts of maize growing in Devon and Cornwall, its production for AD's through financial incentives continues. Lessons are not being learnt and additional maize is being grown. Guidance is being ignored. Hillside arable fields of sandy soil are still being planted with maize. Producers fingers are being crossed behind backs that it won't rain when crops are harvested and that should there be run-off and pollution the penalties will be lenient.

All this evidence questions whether power generated by maize really is 'green', so are ongoing subsidies warranted? Will producers that ignore guidance resulting in environmental damage be held responsible and made to pay more than the crop's worth? Shouldn't both land and AD owners be made ultimately responsible for ensuring that maize is being grown in accordance with Government guidelines?

What can you do?

If you see pollution resulting from poor agricultural management or the threat that that could happen,

contact the Environment Agency on 0800 807060.

Swimming in the River Otter

Author: Denise Melhuish, Ottery St. Mary Town Representative

Now that we are more aware of the quality of the water in the River Otter, few people would risk going for a swim in the river. However, this was not always the case. Swimming in the River Otter in Ottery St Mary was very popular in the 1920's and 1930's. It was seen as a healthy way to take exercise and the deep water at Head Weir was the ideal site. It became so popular that a swimming club was set up in 1927.

The area at Head Weir in Ottery was popular with swimmers because the depth of the water by the weir made it ideal for swimming. The weir was installed to ensure there was an adequate flow of water along the mill race. Originally this was a shallow, stepped weir constructed of wood and supporting concrete wall but in 1909 this was swept away by floodwater and had to be rebuilt. The date 1909 is stamped on the wall (discovered by a very young Peter Harris). Subsequent floods which also caused damage happened in 1913, 1918, 1924 with major work to the wall done in 1946 when the concrete wall was found to have major cracks and liable to collapse.

Swimming was popular at Head Weir. In June 1918 there was a report in one of the local papers about “meadow boys misbehaving whilst swimming near Head Weir. They’d been granted the privilege to swim in that area and this was almost withdrawn because of their unruly behaviour.

Ottery Swimming Club



This was set up in 1925 and dressing rooms were built. The area was used by the swimming club and also by King’s School. The aim was to teach children from both King’s and the elementary schools to swim. At the time, 1927 that was about 300 pupils. The club was supported by Ottery St Mary Council and by Lord Coleridge who owned the land. In 1927 the council supported the scheme to add seating.

At first the club only offered membership to men, but this soon was extended to include the separate Women’s club.

The Club started to organize annual swimming galas from 1928 which were hugely successful and entertaining. At the first gala the chairman was so overcome by the event that he fell into the water fully clothed much to the amusement and glee on the audience!

The competitions included a 100 yard race for men, a 25 yards race for ladies, (later this increased to 75 yards), relays over land and water for King’s School, diving competitions including diving for plates on the river bed. Some years there were over 20 races! Local companies provided prizes, and a cup was offered by the London Inn. The winners, all local families included Mr Russell and his family, the Moons, M Retter and Master Frank Piney as well as the Luxtons and many others.

Every year AGMs held in various venues around the town including Barn Hall (now the dancing club) and there were a series of fundraising events during each year. In 1933 Mr Russell of the GPO, the chairman reported there were 208 members, that there would be displays of life saving and exhorted the benefits of freshwater bathing. The club was affiliated to the National Association of Swimming.



All went swimmingly until 1940 when staff from Kings School “were perturbed by the site close to the pool” when certain things floated by. The newspaper report isn’t more specific. The swimming lessons were halted and the water analysed. The Headmaster realized that

the bathing place was no longer satisfactory or free from risk. The water analysis showed that there was a significant presence of e-coli. Membership dropped to just 30 and the club folded. The Headmaster spoke about how hard it was to make the decision to stop swimming classes and swimming at the weir. He knew he was unpopular but realised the risk was too great for his pupils. There was some talk of installing a filtration system, but this project ever progressed further.

Not everyone stopped swimming there, Peter Harris, Ottery's local historian remembers swimming there after 1940 as well as below Pixie's Parlour and Cadhay. He liked nothing better than putting on his "swimmers" and going to the Tumbling Weir which the local boys imaginatively as a water slide into the river. An activity definitely not to be undertaken now.

More recent water testing and reports by the Environment Agency and the Otter Valley Association have shown that the water quality is very poor. We can only hope that the recent water testing results and appeals to South West Water will result in drastic improvements to the water treatment works along the river.

The Planning & Infrastructure Bill 2025

Author: Dee Woods, Built Environment Coordinator

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill was introduced to Parliament on the 11th of March 2025 and had its third reading in the Commons on 10 June. It is now with the House of Lords, and had a second reading on 25 June.

It is central to the government's plan to get Britain building again and secure economic growth. It reforms the planning legislation to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure.

Part 1 of the Bill seeks to streamline nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIP), creating greater certainty, speed and flexibility in the planning system. The government says this is essential to delivering the commitment in the Plan for Change to determine at least 150 Development Consent Orders (DCO) in this Parliament.

It will do this by:

- 1 *keeping national policies up to date.*
- 2 *consultation requirements are streamlined.*
- 3 *greater flexibility in the planning system.*
- 4 *reduce the opportunities for judicial review, i.e. cases deemed totally without merit.*

The Bill will also reform the electricity network connection process to make it more efficient and strategically aligned, rather than the current 'first come, first served' basis. Other changes are proposed relating to long duration electricity storage cap and floor scheme. This will help store wind and solar power energy, to help decarbonise the electricity system.

Other reforms proposed concern:

- *Consumer benefits for homes near electricity transmission projects*
- *Extension of the commissioning period for offshore electricity transmission system*
- *Electricity generation on forestry land*
- *Reforms to the Highways Act 1980*
- *Reforms to the Transport and Works Act 1992*
- *Harbour Order fees*
- *Electric vehicle (EV) charge points*

The Bill will streamline the approval of street works needed for the installation of EV public charge points by removing the need for licences where the works are capable of being authorised by permits.

Part 2 of the Bill concerns various changes to the planning system, such as mandatory training for members of planning committees, reduced size of planning committees, increased delegation of decisions to officers with a national scheme; strategic planning at a regional/sub-regional level; and provision for local fee setting on planning applications, based on the cost of dealing with applications.

Part 3 of the Bill seeks to reform nature recovery requirements on development sites, and will enable the formation of a Nature Restoration Fund (NRF), to give a more strategic approach to habitat mitigation. It would enable Natural England to produce Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs), that set out strategic mitigations to address the impact that development has on a protected site or species. Where an EDP exists, the developer would no longer have to undertake their own assessments, or deliver project-specific interventions, for issues addressed by the EDP but could instead pay a contribution to the NRF. The government states this approach “will facilitate a more strategic approach to the discharge of environmental obligations and result in improved environmental outcomes being delivered more efficiently. By reducing delays to development, this new approach may also facilitate faster delivery of housing across England”.

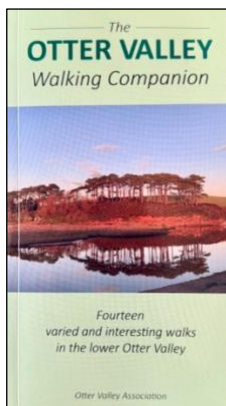
The OVA, along with other Wildlife and Nature Conservation organisations, are very concerned about resourcing this at a national level, and the need for this to be done on a habitat or landscape scale. The main concern is that this will significantly weaken the priority given to nature protection on development sites, in order to speed up the development process. However, it is clear that it is not nature that is causing delays in the house building process.

The bill also seeks to streamline the process for compulsory purchase orders to be made and extend existing powers to remove ‘hope value’ arising from planning permissions, and extend them to town/parish council and community councils to deliver affordable or social housing provision.

It will speed up the process to modify and confirm CPOs in certain circumstances and to take control of land more quickly. It seeks to make it easier to deliver large scale new communities through development corporations by creating a clearer and more flexible framework for development corporations.

Fortunately, many Lords and Baronesses spoke about their concerns with this Bill, so if you are interested it is worth looking at the Hansard report for this debate in the House of Lords on 25 June . Concerns were raised about serious flaws in the Bill, such as lack of resources both for planning authorities and Natural England; lack of community engagement and neighbourhood planning to empower citizens to shape places; and Part 3 offering no protection for irreplaceable habitats such as peatlands, ancient woodlands, chalk streams and other vital natural areas. It is hoped that the government will listen and amend this inadequate Bill, but sadly that was not the case when it was debated in the House of Commons earlier in the process.

The Otter Valley Association's Chairman has raised our concerns about this Planning and Infrastructure Bill with the two local MPs with the letter shown her sent to David Reed, MP:



The Otter Valley Walking Companion

All paid-up members of the OVA are entitled to a complimentary copy of the new "Otter Valley Walking Companion". If you have not already received a copy, then:

- *for members living in Budleigh Salterton, East Budleigh, Colaton Raleigh, Otterton and Newton Poppleford or attending an OVA walk please email info@ova.org.uk with your name, address and membership number (on your newsletter label) and we will arrange hand delivery.*
- *For members living further afield please send your name, address and membership number (on your newsletter label) together with a £2.00 stamped addressed A5 envelope to: Otter Valley Association, PO Box 70, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 6WN*

The Housing crisis – so who is to blame?

Author: Dee Woods, Built Environment Coordinator

The UK is currently facing a severe housing crisis characterized by a shortage of affordable homes, leading to increased homelessness, overcrowding, and rising costs for both renters and buyers. This crisis is driven by a long-term failure to build enough houses to meet demand, coupled with rising living costs. In addition, net migration to the UK was estimated to be 431,000 in the year ending December 2024, (a significant decrease from the previous year) which must fuel an already tight housing market.

Over recent years the planning system and planners have been blamed for the lack of housing that people desperately need. But is this true? Whilst it is a fact that there are currently substantial delays of six months or more in decisions being made on major planning applications, one has to look carefully at the complex issues to understand the whole problem.

Due to years of financial cut backs in local government, planning departments are now seriously under resources. Not only do they lack staff, but they also have problems retaining staff. In a debate in the House of Lords on 25 June, Lord Young said that 62% of councils had difficulty recruiting planning officers; 45% had difficulty retaining planning officers, and two thirds of councils relied upon agency staff. The government plans to address this by funding more planners, (purported to be about one per local authority), so that is unlikely to remedy the current situation. However, the government has pledged £24 million to attack the planning backlog and get the right skills in place, as well as streamlining and reforming the system with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

But what about the companies that are responsible for building these homes? There used to be many civil engineering companies, but after recent acquisitions there are now only six volume housebuilders who build about half of all private-sector homes in the UK. They have also had a very strong influence over the government's past housing policies. They are Barratt Redrow; Bellway; Berkeley; Persimmon; Taylor Wimpey and the Vistry Group (Bovis, Linden and Countryside). Obviously, these companies are in business to make a profit, so build at their own pace to ensure that supply lags behind demand (see below), and prices remain on an upward trajectory.

This government's target is to build 1.5 million new homes during its term in office, and is aware that house building is a major economic driver. But will these be the affordable homes that we need?

Research undertaken by the Architects Journal found that over 1 million homes that have received planning permission since 2015 remain unbuilt, accounting for approximately one third of all approvals. This backlog suggests that if all homes with planning permission had been built, the government's annual target of 300,000 new homes could have been met for 8 of the last 10 years. No doubt housebuilders will have many reasons for not building these homes, but clearly having to make a profit for their shareholders is a very important factor.

An award winning report in 2023 entitled “Why have the volume housebuilders been so profitable” was published by the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence. It found

- *Unusually high profits have been made by the volume housebuilders in England since 2014.*
- *This does not, however, reflect an increase in the quantity of delivery, and housing affordability in England continues to worsen.*
- *The state’s own policies have enabled this, because the state saw itself as needing to be a passive player in the production of housing, reliant on the structural power of the largest housebuilders to deliver.*
- *To expand housing supply in a way that meets social and environmental needs, the state should take a larger and more active role in the housebuilding and land market.*

In this report the authors discuss their findings that since 2014 the largest housebuilders by volume (Taylor Wimpey, Barratt and Persimmon – the ‘big three’) have consistently attained “supernormal” levels of profitability, with gross profit margins reaching 32% and never falling below 17%.

Key questions that the authors go on to ask include:

- *how and why have the big three been so profitable?*
- *what does this profitability say about the nature of the housebuilding industry, the development land market and the relationship between volume housebuilders and the state?*
- *what can the state do differently to enable more affordable and sustainable housing to be delivered?*
- *In answering these, the report explains how the state played a vital role, through two interventions which benefitted larger housebuilders over smaller ones:*
- *Mortgage market support schemes which (likely) inflated their sales prices and allowed them to wind-down their own shared equity schemes.*
- *Renegotiation of section 106 agreements and the subsequent liberalisation of the planning system.*

The authors argue that to increase housing supply in a way that better meets social and environmental needs, the state should recognise its own structural and market power and take a bigger and more proactive role in the housebuilding and land market. While acknowledging barriers as well as opportunities, they go on to discuss different ways that the state could do this, such as:

- *more direct delivery by the state of non-market housing e.g. via housing associations or local authorities.*
- *a more active and expansive role for the state in planning and acquiring large-scale sites and then servicing them for SME and custom builders.*
- *a more coherent approach to capturing land value uplift, so that more of it can be used to support the delivery of affordable housing and infrastructure.*

The housing crisis could also be addressed by tackling the many empty homes. The data shows that more than one million properties across England in 2022 were unoccupied (4.01 per cent of all dwellings), an increase of nearly 60,000 homes since 2018. This includes second homes, holiday lets and Airbnb’s. Empty homes are a hugely wasted resource when there are over 1 million people on council housing waiting lists and in temporary accommodation.

As mentioned earlier, this is a very complex issue, which has deteriorated over recent decades. There are many reasons for this crisis apart from our restrictive planning system, such as loss of social housing, house prices and rents rising much faster than wages, increased housing costs and many other financial and economic factors.

There has always been a lack of holistic planning that has held back community support for new houses. Surely it is not beyond our capabilities to train people to fulfil the shortages of skilled and unskilled construction workers, to provide much needed water treatment plants and other essential infrastructure in advance of house building. Let us hope that solutions can be found that will solve this chronic crisis, and make the housebuilders construct the homes that already have permission. Also, that a mechanism can be found to quickly bring back into use all the properties that are currently empty, so that our natural environment and beautiful countryside are not lost forever to housing development.

Reference

Foye, C. & Shepherd, E. (2023) *Why have the volume housebuilders been so profitable? The power of volume housebuilders and what this tells us about housing supply, the land market and the state.* UK Collaborative Centre for Housebuilding Evidence.

Heaths to Sea: Proposals for a nature-rich, climate resilient and productive landscape

Author: Beth Humphrey, Heath to Seas Project Support Officer

Clinton Devon Estates recently unveiled its draft proposals for the Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery Project at a public forum held at Bickton College. Covering 4,666 hectares across the lower River Otter catchment, the project aims to create a thriving, diverse landscape that supports nature, climate resilience, sustainable farming, and public access.

Proposals include the creation of up to 100 hectares of productive woodland with climate-resilient conifer and broadleaf species. An additional 185 hectares will be transformed into wood pasture and scrub mosaic habitats, grazed by traditional livestock breeds. Selective thinning and species diversification will enhance existing woodlands, creating a more natural woodland structure and increasing biodiversity.

Another important aim is to reconnect the river to its floodplain through the development of 200 hectares of wetland, including ponds, wet woodland, and grazing marsh. Buffer zones along field edges and tributaries will provide vital wildlife corridors.

In fertile agricultural areas, the project will support farmers to continue to grow food and support nature using sustainable, nature-friendly agricultural and conservation practices alongside their existing farm model.

The draft plans will be submitted to Defra in December 2025. If approved, implementation will begin in summer 2026 and continue for at least 20 years. Throughout, the project team will work closely with local communities to balance public access with the needs of farming and nature.

For more information on the proposals visit www.heathstosea.com/draftplans or come see us at one of our events, more information at www.heathstosea.com/events.

Saving our heritage – Yettington

Author: Chris Boorman – Vice-Chairman

Have you noticed the work being done in Yettington on the walls alongside the road up towards Stowford, and by the entrance to Bicton?



I was lucky enough to pass by when the gentleman, Ian Taylor, who is doing it was there clearing another stretch. With his permission I am recounting our encounter. You can see from these pictures the section of road I am talking about. Ian has been clearing the dry wall stones for many months. I asked him why he is doing it - he told me quite simply that he wanted to and if he didn't do it, then who would? It's part of our heritage and something that will otherwise simply disappear.

I asked him if he knew when it had been built. He told me that no-one really knows - probably early 1800's and maybe built by Napoleonic prisoners. Intrigued by this, I chatted also to the archivist at Clinton Devon estates. She thought they were probably built in the first half of the 1800's - potentially by estate workers in the time of the second Lord Rolle (John Rolle), and his wife Louisa Trefusis. She also expressed grave doubts that it would have been Napoleonic prisoners (I didn't know that Dartmoor prison was actually built to house them!).



I wanted to recount this because we at the OVA are extremely proud of our heritage of this area, and I hope you will join me in applauding Ian for the amazing work he has been doing.

Tree, Hedge & Woodland Strategy

Author: Dee Woods, Built Environment Coordinator

The Tree, Hedge & Woodland Strategy (THaWS) has been launched and sets out East Devon District Council's bold 10-year vision to protect, enhance and expand the district's treescapes. Developed in response to the declared Nature Emergency, the strategy aims to increase tree canopy cover to 30% by 2035, improve biodiversity, and ensure equitable access to green space for all residents.



East Devon's trees, hedges and woodland are an integral part of our landscape, our cultural heritage, and our future. They define the landscape where we live, work and enjoy our beautiful countryside. It is now universally accepted through research that society feels better when they are in the company of trees. Just as importantly our urban areas require our contact with the natural world and trees bring this right into the heart of our towns reducing the impact of the built environment by providing shade, shelter and improving our air quality.

East Devon District Council declared a Nature Emergency in 2023 and central to restoring our natural environment are our trees, hedges, and woodland as they provide a crucial home for our wildlife to live and to thrive. Trees are also integral to our wellbeing, health, and quality of life. The Otter Valley Association is proud to have participated in workshops that contributed to this report.

To read more about this important imperative, please visit the East Devon website where the full report has been made available. The link is:

https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/maslyxjp/eddc_treewoodlandhedgerowstrategy_v2-7_lores.pdf

Walks: Programme [August – October]

Author: Paul Kurowski & the walks team

Welcome to our walk programme for August, September and October - a huge thanks to all the walk leaders who have come up with a wide variety of interesting walks in and around the Otter Valley plus further afield.

For those fancying a challenging walk: we have the Exeter Green Circle, 12 miles, in one day; otherwise, most of the walks are between 5 and 7 miles. Making a welcome return to the programme is Dee Woods' two mile 'Otterton Heritage Walk' giving insights into the village's history and heritage. Part 2 of the Templer Way, the next in a series of circular walks, goes from Bovey Tracey's Pottery Pond into the countryside and back along the tramway.

As the Sidmouth Walking Festival is taking place from Saturday 13th to Friday 19th September, and some of our walk leaders are involved, we are not offering any walks during that period - if you want a walk that week take a look at their website: <https://sidmouth.gov.uk/bookings-now-open-for-sidmouth-east-devon-walking-festival/>

If there are any 'pop-up walks' offered during this quarter, these will be advertised on the various OVA media – so keep your eyes open. Also, all walks are subject to confirmation nearer the time, bearing in mind weather, time of year, etc - check the website, Facebook and WhatsApp for updates. <https://www.ova.org.uk/ova-diary/category/walks> will always have the latest information.

We hope to see you at one or more walks ... enjoy your time with us taking in the wonderful countryside, towns, villages, and coast.

Note: we need a few more walk leaders - if you might be interested as to what is involved, please talk to a walk leader, or Jon Roseway or, Penny and Paul Kurowski. Support and training can be given to help.

Wednesday 6 August 2025 10.00am - 5.5 miles, 3 hours

"Otter and Orchards"



Meet: Newton Poppleford, Recreation Ground car park, Back Lane, Newton Poppleford OS 115, SY 088 899; what3words [///wisely.amazed.configure](https://www.what3words.com/#!/w/wise/y/amazed/configure)

A walk northwards from Newton Poppleford taking in hamlets west of the Otter as far as Fluxton, as well as the river bank. An easy to moderate walk, although a short section can be very wet underfoot after rain. There will be a coffee stop part way round, so bring a flask.

Walk Leader: Ross Hussey: rdandamhussey22@gmail.com or 01395 227991 / 07902 255915 mobile on the day. No need to contact in advance unless weather is uncertain.

Tuesday 12 Aug 10.00am - 12 miles, about 7 hours **BOOKING REQUIRED**

“Exeter Green Circle”



Meet: Exeter Central Station, New Road, Exeter.

OS 192, SX 919 930; EX4 3SB; what3words ///cheat.final.speeds

The 09.24 train from Exmouth arrives at 09.51 at Central Station: in time for the 10.00 start.

A clockwise walk around the Exeter Green Circle: a great walking experience within the boundaries of Exeter - from green countryside valley parks to the pavements of quiet leafy suburbs. For those that don't want to do the full 12 miles ... you could leave at a convenient point; the Circle is split into five sections:

- Hoopern Valley Walk: just over 2 miles - finish Pennsylvania Road / Stoke Valley Road
- Mincing Lake Valley Walk: just over 2 miles - finish Vaughan Road / Whipton Lane
- Ludwell Valley Walk: almost 3 miles - finish near swing bridge over canal: Topsham Road for bus
- Alphin Brook Valley Walk: about 3 miles - finish Little Johns Cross Hill / Dunsford Road
- Redhills Walk: approx. 2.5 miles - finish Exe St.

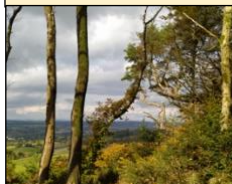
There are bus routes near to the start/finish of each section. Please bring coffee, lunch and any other refreshments. At the end, we plan to have a celebratory meal at the Mill on the Exe, Bonhay Road - anyone, non-walkers included, can come along to eat and meet up by 18.00.

Walk Leader: Claire Read 07866 435333

Please book with Claire for the walk and the meal

Thursday 14 Aug 10:00am - 6 miles, 3 hours.

“Woods around the Moor”



Meet: Peak Hill car park, Peak Hill Road, just west of Sidmouth

OS115 , SY 109 872; what3words ///saves.draw.cage

A walk through the high ground to the west of Sidmouth to include Mutter's Moor, Bulverton Hill, and Greystone Hill Plantation. The walk will afford good views if the weather is kind. Please bring refreshments for a mid-morning break.

Walk Leader: Ted Swan (07848 852463)

Tuesday 19 Aug 10.00am - 6 miles, 3 hours

“Just Over The Hill”



Meet: The Green, Fore St, Otterton, parking in nearby roads.

OS 115, SY 081 852; what3words ///panning.financial.scatter

On the 157 bus route between Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth.

Otterton Green to Sidmouth Triangle via Mutters Moor plantation – please bring coffee.

Walk Leader: Iain Ure 07597 921007 on the day.

Tuesday 26 August 10.00am - 6.5 miles, 4 hours

"Two ridges between two Sids"



Meet: Street parking on Harcombe Lane, Sidford
OS 115 SY 139 900; EX10 9QN; what3words ///funny.filed.relay

This walk takes in two villages nestling in the Sid Valley and some of the highest sections of the East Devon Way (EDW), promising good views on a clear day. We begin with a climb up Buckton Hill and join the EDW as it drops steeply into Sidbury. There follows a gradual climb up to White Cross overlooking the Otter Valley. Then we go along the East Hill ridge to Hollow Head Cross and back down to Sidford after 350m of ascent. Bring a picnic lunch.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway, 01395 488739/ 07887936280

Tuesday 2 September 10.00am - 2 miles, 2.5 hours

"Otterton Heritage Walk"



Meet: The Green, Fore St, Otterton, parking in nearby roads
OS 115, SY 081 852; what3words ///panning.financial.scatter
On the 157 bus route between Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth.

A gentle two-and-a-half-hour stroll around the village looking at its history and heritage buildings.

Possibly lunch at The Mill or The Kings Arms in Otterton?

Walk leader: Dee Woods 07789 334469 on the day.

Sidmouth Walking Festival: Saturday 13 - Friday 19 September

See <https://sidmouth.gov.uk/bookings-now-open-for-sidmouth-east-devon-walking-festival/>

Some of the walks are being led by OVA Walk Leaders.

Tuesday 23 September 10.00am - 6 miles, 3-3.5 hours

"Woods, Coast and Country loop"



Meet: Picnic area opposite Seaton Tower garage, Seaton Down Hill
OS116, SY 233913; what3words ///blackbird.injket.encourage

Down through Holyford Woods, a beautiful woodland, nestled in a picturesque valley, then tracks and paths into Beer. Bring coffee.

Walk Leader: Dee Woods 07789 334469 on the day

Photographs from across the Otter Valley



Credit: Geoff Porter



Credit: Chris Boorman



Credit: David R. White

Wednesday 8 October 10.00am ~5 Miles, ~2.5 hours: **BOOKING REQUIRED**

"The Templer Way, Part 2, from Pottery Pond - industrial archaeology and natural history ... and the House of Marbles"



Meet: On road outside House of Marbles in Bovey Tracey

OS OL28 815771; what3words ///torched.fury.shortcuts

Park on the road, or try the large free coach/car park behind House of Marbles. The drive from Budleigh Salterton takes about 40 minutes.

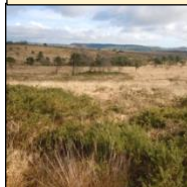
We will walk up to Pottery Pond, then follow quiet lanes and tracks in a circular route which joins the Templer Way where we will see some of the granite tramway and original milestones. Please bring a flask for a coffee stop. The House of Marbles has a café if you want lunch afterwards (they suggest booking) or just browse the shop and free museums: <https://visit.houseofmarbles.com/>

Please book with the walk leaders, in case we need to cancel due to bad weather etc. We may also be able to help with sorting out lifts. Any time up to 8.00am on the day of the walk is fine.

Walk Leaders: Penny and Paul Kurowski, 01395 742942, 07792 619748 pandp@kurowski.me.uk

Week commencing 13 October 2025 10.00am - 5 miles, 3 hours.

Check website for final date ***"Castle and Commons"***



Meet: Four Firs Car Park

OS 115, SY 032 864; what3words ///manicured.unfilled.elastic

A walk on Woodbury and Colaton Raleigh Commons and their fringes, taking in Woodbury Castle, Stowford, Uphams Plantation, and Four Firs. A moderate walk with a coffee stop part way round (so please bring a flask).

Walk Leader: Ross Hussey: rdandamhussey22@gmail.com or 01395 227991 / 07902 255915

Wednesday 22 October 10.00am - 5.5 miles, about 3 hours

"From East Budleigh to the sea and back"



Meet: East Budleigh Car Park, Hayes Lane, East Budleigh

OS115 SY 065 848; what3words ///workroom.pigtails.tungsten

From East Budleigh public car park, we are soon on back roads and paths to walk to Budleigh Salterton via Kersbrook. Then to the seafront, and a stroll along to Lime Kiln car park before heading up beside the Estuary and so back to East Budleigh.

Please bring a flask for a coffee break, or buy something on the seafront. The Sir Walter Raleigh pub in East Budleigh should be open for a drink/lunch afterwards.

Walk Leaders: Penny & Paul Kurowski, 01395 742942/07792 619748 pandp@kurowski.me.uk

Thursday 30 October, 10.00am - 7 miles, 4 hours: **BOOKING REQUIRED**

"Cranbrook Castle and the Teign Gorge"



Meet: Fingle Bridge roadside parking

OL 28, SX 7375 8980; EX6 6PW; what3words ///invents.inversely.urban

Contact the walk leader if you wish to car share.

A gentle riverside walk through the Teign Gorge to Clifford Bridge returns on more demanding tracks through pine and beech plantations on the valley slopes. Lunch (bring a picnic) at Cranbrook Castle, an Iron Age hillfort with commanding views, is followed by a rapid descent to Fingle Bridge.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway, 01395 488739/ 07887936280

Q&A with the Water Quality team

We sat down with Peter Williams, lead data officer of our water team, for a quick Q&A of questions that our readers have been asking us. Here are his answers:

What are the problems with the River Otter?

- *Given its location, the River Otter should be crystal clear and teeming with fish and invertebrates, but instead, many sections are murky, slimy and in poor health.*
- *For several years now, the EA has classified the River Otter as 'Poor' ecologically. This places it in the worst 20 percent of the UK's river systems and means that there are significant impacts on plant life, wildlife and fish populations.*
- *High levels of phosphates are reducing the richness of the river's ecosystem and sucking the life out of the river, diminishing the quantity and diversity of plant, insect and animal life.*
- *The Environment Agency state that the primary source of this Phosphate is treated sewage effluent and untreated sewage discharges. This situation is set to worsen as thousands more houses are built in the area.*
- *In 2024, South West Water released untreated sewage into the River Otter for over 15,000 hours.*
- *An even greater source of Phosphate in the Otter, however, is from the high concentrations of Phosphate in treated effluent, continuously flowing into the river from SWW's sewage treatment works. This in spite of the fact that the Otter was designated a 'Sensitive Area' for Phosphate harm in 2022*



What actions are the OVA taking, and what is ORCA?

- *As a passionate local community group, the Otter Valley Association are committed to reviving the ecological health of the River Otter, for the benefit of wildlife and people.*
- *The Orca campaign has already recruited and trained 46 amazing community water testers, who have been recording 10 water quality indicators, at 12 sections of the river, every 2 weeks through 2025.*
- *Enables us to run the largest test program in the area, and capture a highly credible data set, which proves the harm being caused*
- *From the data collected so far, we can clearly see that the level of Phosphate rises steeply below Honiton Sewage Treatment Works (the largest in the catchment).*
- *In the latest round of testing, the Phosphate levels below Honiton averaged four times the Upper Safe Limit, peaking at six times this limit in the section just downstream of Honiton.*
- *This positions the River Otter as the worst major river in the South West for Phosphate levels.*
- *At a meeting convened by Richard Foord MP in June with South West Water, Otter Valley Association and the EA, SWW stated it currently has no intention to invest in its infrastructure in these locations over the next five years, as its plan to 2030 has already been approved (see 'PR24 investment' in the attached slides).*
- *So, unless they review this decision, the middle and lower Otter will remain designated ecologically 'Poor', as well as discharging many thousands of hours of untreated sewage, for at least the next five years - and possibly much longer.*
- *We believe that this is totally unacceptable to the people living and visiting this beautiful part of Devon*

- *The reasons given by SWW misquote the investment guidance agreed with EA and Ofwat, and we think that SWW need to review their plans in the light of the actual agreed criteria*

What is our message to SWW?

- *We are asking SWW to invest in its infrastructure, so that the Otter is shifted from ecologically 'Poor' to 'Good' status by 2030.*
- *We ask SWW to use some of the new £20m 'sensitive areas' fund - resulting from recent mismanagement of sewer overflows, to target the worst polluting units in the Otter catchment*
- *Specifically, to improve just five of the most polluting sewage works at Honiton, Feniton, Fluxton, Gittisham and Payhembury. Specific actions at these 5 locations to include:*
 - a) Reducing untreated sewage discharge hours from these 'high-spill' SWW assets : to reduce Phosphate damage to the ecosystem AND to stop the river of E.coli which spills out next to Budleigh's Blue Flag bathing beach*
 - b) Installing Phosphate removal schemes in two or three of those treatment works : reduce the high concentrations of Phosphate in treated effluent, continuously flowing into the river from SWW's sewage treatment works*

How is the community responding?

- *Fantastic response from all sections of the local community, right across the River Otter area. 46 people stepped forward to join our testing teams and went through comprehensive training. Enables us to run the largest test program in the area, and capture highly credible data set to prove the harm being caused*
- *Local community engagement and support is a key element in the Orca program. It's critical that SWW understand the views of local people, that the current situation is unacceptable and requires timely remedy.*
- *We have had a fantastic response and support from many local leaders and groups, who are actively promoting the campaign. We have also had active support from Richard Foord, the MP for Honiton and much of the river section affected by SWW's discharges.*

How can people find out more, and get involved?

- *Go to the 'Orca – Otter River' Facebook page and keep up to date with all the news and details on how they can help*

OVA: Archive

Author: Martin Smith, Membership

The Otter Valley Association was founded in 1979. Since that time the OVA has held many meetings and been involved in a great number of activities, all which have all been documented and the paperwork retained. The archive now contains scrapbooks, newspaper cuttings, artwork for the early newsletter covers, copies of publications and leaflets, AGM and Executive Committee meeting minutes, and the Constitution, amongst a great deal of other paperwork.

In recent years these documents have been distributed to various committee members and stored in their homes, while the file has continued to grow in size. Recently, to save space in peoples' homes and to prevent the archive being broken up or destroyed, it was deposited with the South West Heritage Trust at the Devon Heritage Centre in Sowton, Exeter. It amounted to three large boxes of paperwork plus a complete set of newsletters from 1979. The OVA archive has been deposited as a permanent long-term loan, meaning we still own it. It can be accessed at the Devon Heritage Centre during their normal opening hours.

An inventory of the deposit was provided to the Heritage Centre and a copy retained by the OVA for reference. A copy has also been posted on the OVA website under 'About Us', 'Policies & Documents'.

The Heritage Centre will now accession the collection, and all documents will be sorted and stored in archive-quality files and folders. It will then be placed in the Heritage Centre's store, where temperature and humidity are controlled. The Heritage Centre team confirm they are pleased to hold the archive, and state that it is an important record of the OVA and will be a useful form of reference for researchers in the future.

Otter Estuary Nature Reserve: News

Author: Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger

Early **April** saw many of the wintering teal, wigeon, curlew, and redshank depart for their breeding grounds to the north and east of us. These were soon replaced with incoming summer migrants such as reed and sedge warblers, swallows, and sand martins. By mid-month the spring migration was in full swing with a good passage of whimbrel (that included a high day count of over 40 birds). Numbers of black-tailed godwits increased to a maximum of 50 and then declined as these birds pushed on to their breeding grounds in Iceland. Redshank numbers also peaked at a new site record of 30 birds, and four bar-tailed godwits (three of which were already in their colourful summer plumage) stayed for a couple of days.



Wildlife Disturbance Form

Rarer species in April included a North American green-winged teal on the 7th, two fly-through ospreys, a bearded tit, and 3 cattle egrets at the months end.

The good weather through **May** resulted in a successful breeding season for many species. New breeding records for the reserve included a pair of grey herons



Credit: David R. White

that eventually fledged a single young, and two pairs of oystercatchers laid eggs with one of the pairs successfully raising two young. The mute swans nesting at White Bridge hatched two young that are still doing well. Numbers of shelduck built to around 80 and several broods of young were soon evident feeding on the mudflats. Kingfisher and goosander both bred somewhere on the river. With migration in full swing there were a few unusual visitors. Highlights this month included a black-crowned night heron on the 18th, a little gull for several days, and a grasshopper warbler on the 22nd. Aside from good numbers of whimbrel, wader passage was thin on the ground, although sightings of turnstone, sanderling, and avocet were noteworthy.

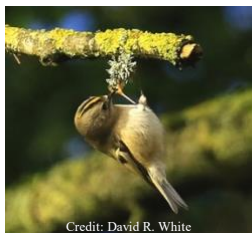


June is generally a quieter month on the estuary for birds as many of the resident species are concentrated on raising their young. The continuing fine weather has meant a good breeding season for many birds, although the few wading birds passing through at this time are often birds that have failed to breed or that have been unsuccessful on their breeding grounds. However, there is always something to marvel at and this month saw sightings of brown hare, beaver, and even a 'rarely seen' family of weasel that was observed crossing South Farm Road one morning. More unusual were a metre-long dog fish observed in the northern marsh, and an impressively large but deceased barrel jellyfish left stranded by the tide one morning. Hundreds of thin-lipped grey mullet could be seen this month feeding in the shallows.

If you are concerned about disturbance to wildlife on the reserve and wish to let me know of something you have seen, particularly as we approach the busy summer holiday period, there is a **wildlife disturbance monitoring form** that can be accessed via the QR here. It only takes a couple of minutes to complete. Thanks.

Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger
rick.lockwood@clintondevon.com
 07976 062709

Photographs from across the Otter Valley



Credit: David R. White



Credit: David R. White



Credit: Kevin Wills



Credit: Simon Wakely



Credit: Geoff Porter

2025 OVA Photo Competition

Author: Chris Boorman, Vice-chairman



It's time again to dust off your camera and take part in the annual OVA photo competition. There are two categories that you can enter:

- *Children (15 years old or younger, as of September 30th, 2025)*
- *Adults (16 years or older, as of September 30th, 2025)*

The closing date for this competition is the 30th of September 2025. All entries must be submitted via email to editor@ova.org.uk or by direct message to the editor on Facebook. Each entry must include contact details (name, phone, email), the date of the photograph and the location where the photograph was taken. The winners will be announced in October and included in the winter Newsletter. Winners will receive a £50 RSPB voucher, while each runner-up will receive a £25 voucher.

We are looking for photographs of any flora, fauna or fungi taken anywhere between Exmouth to Sidmouth and from Ottery St. Mary to Budleigh Salterton. Photographs must be taken in the defined competition timeline (July 1st to September 30th). Anyone who is a member of either the OVA Facebook group, or the OVA charity can take part. People can submit up to 5 photographs maximum. Judge's decisions will be final. NO disturbance of habitats is allowed in the taking of pictures. Indeed, for certain species it is illegal to do this. Pictures will be judged in digital form.

OVA Talks Programme

Author: Keith Grundy, Talks Organiser

We have now finalised our talks schedule for the coming winter. Please do mark your diaries for the following talks:

2025

- *September 10th* *Birds v People by John Goss Custard*
John has carried out scientific studies on the effect of human population on river estuaries
- *October 15th* *Organic Farming - Recovering the Landscape and Producing food by Sam Walker (local organic farmer)*
- *November 19th* *Devon Hedges by Tom Hynes*

2026

- *January 21st* *Update on the Otter restoration project and new Nature Reserve by Rick Lockwood (Chief Ranger)*
- *February 18th* *Have you seen my little rubber Duck by Ken Atherton*
A story of the Plastic Pollution of our Oceans
- *March 18th* *Water Quality update on the River Otter*
by Felicity Christie & Peter Williams

We are also looking forward to starting talks in Ottery St. Mary. We will be sharing details of these in future newsletters and via the OVA website. Please do keep an eye out for these.

Fairlynch Museum: Talks Programme

Author: Phil Ashworth, Fairlynch Museum

This will be the sixth year we've organised these events. The aim is twofold; to keep the museum in people's minds whilst the museum is closed for the winter and to raise much-needed funds for our museum.

The first talk on the 3rd of September tells the story of a lifetime of service to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the many miles travelled as a diplomat, one of her Majesty's Messengers. A role that Devon resident Peter Hearn filled for over 30 years. He'll be diplomatically telling the story of his historic but discreet service to Queen and country.

On the 1st of October we find out about the popular artist Beryl Cook who lived in Devon until her death 17 years ago. Comparisons may be made with our own Joyce Dennys. They both had their own unique styles, but Beryl was not afraid to ruffle a few feathers. Her pictures were often comical and featured the people she met in everyday life. Devon art historian Marilyn Bishop examines her work and her legacy.

On the 5th of November, in the buildup to Remembrance Day we recall the part East Devon played in the remarkable story of the Kindertransport. With war in Europe looming thousands of Jewish children were evacuated from the threat of Nazi Germany. Polish children who came to Britain found sanctuary in Talaton near Whimble. Stewart Raine recounts their story and that of Otto Deutsch who left Vienna in 1938.



On to the 3rd of December. It seems crazy to think about Christmas when the summer sun is still shining. But we'll be finding out, in distinctive style, how our Tudor forebears celebrated Christmas. Last season Rosemary Griggs came along as Sir Walter Raleigh's mother. But this time, assisted by her loyal peasant, she will be demonstrating, in period costume, what Christmas meant to the Tudors.

As special guests we're invited to join Sir Philip Champernowne's Christmas feast at the Court House in Modbury, and we'll discover the etiquette, menu and customs of a sixteenth century Christmas

More news of the talks from January onwards next time.

So that's a brief taster of what lies in store for this coming season of Fairlynch Coffee Morning talks. We look forward to greeting you and hope there's something for everybody in our new season.

If you're a regular, please spread the word and if you've not been before, do come and join us.

- 3rd Sep 2025. *The Silver Greyhound: Life as Her Majesty's messenger; Peter Hearn*
- 1st Oct 2025. *Beryl Cook. A distinctive Devon Artist; Marilyn Bishop*
- 5th Nov 2025. *Kinder Transport. The part Devon played in the escape from Nazi persecution; Stewart Raine*
- 3rd Dec 2025. *A Tudor Christmas; Rosemary Griggs*
- 7th Jan 2026. *The Land Army in Devon; Becks Pearson,*
- 4th Feb 2026. *A unique Budleigh Artist; Brenda Thomas*
- 4th Mar 2026. *The SW Coastal Footpath; David Westcott.*
- 1st Apr 2026. *TBA*

Once again, we will meet in St Peter's Hall for coffee at 10:30 and the talks will begin at 11. £4 for Friends and £6 for non-members .

The Otter Valley Association

Web: www.ova.org.uk

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ottervalleyassociation>

ORCA Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/otterrivercatchmentaction/>

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