



Riverfly testing on the banks of the Otter

**The Otter Valley Association
TRUSTEES' REPORT
for the year ended 31 March 2026**

Aims

The Otter Valley Association was established in 1979 as a civic amenity society covering the valley of the River Otter in East Devon and its environs and, but not exclusively, the area southwards of the town of Ottery St Mary including the civil parishes of Budleigh Salterton, East Budleigh with Bicton, Otterton, Colaton Raleigh, Newton Poppleford and Harpford with Venn Ottery and Tipton St John.

Its principal aims for the benefit of the public are (*in summary*):

- 1) To promote sustainable development for the benefit of the public by:
 - (a) the preservation, conservation and the protection of the environment and the prudent use of resources;
 - (b) the promotion of sustainable means of achieving economic growth and regeneration.
- 2) To advance the education of the public in subjects relating to sustainable development and the protection, enhancement and rehabilitation of the environment and to promote study and research in such subjects provided that the useful results of such study are disseminated to the public at large.

Sustainable development means development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Organisation

The OVA's activities are governed by a written Constitution, which sets out its objects and regulations. It is registered with the Charity Commission, and is subject to the legislation applicable to charities, in particular The Charities Act 2011.

A copy of the Constitution is always available on request and can be downloaded from our website www.ova.org.uk.

Management

The management and administration of the OVA is carried out by the Executive Committee (EC), which during the year met ten times. This Committee normally consists of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, and up to twelve other members of the Association. The Committee, most of whom are Charity Trustees, *are listed on page 16*.

Trustees Report of Activities for 2025~2026

Summary:

2025/6 has been a year of increasing activity across the Otter Valley Association. We have continued our partnerships with various associations and government bodies, organised regular walks, delivered talks to packed audiences, engaged at a strategic and local level with planning initiatives, partnered with other associations and a dynamic and engaging social media group of over 2000 followers on Facebook, and developed our new link with the town of Ottery St Mary, including the start of repeated talks to a new audience. We have completed our first full year with a water quality team with over 50 volunteers testing the river Otter regularly at 12 locations on its length, and brought the results to the attention of South West Water, the Environment Agency and the local MP, Richard Foord.

Partnerships

During this past year we have engaged with a number of like-minded associations. We have also worked with local councils and met with local members of parliament. This approach of partnering to further our goals and ongoing programs enables us to be seen as part of the community.

Here is a summary of such groups that we have engaged with this last year:

- Government: local MP's, East Devon District Council, local town and village councils, East Devon National Landscape
- Water companies: South West Water
- Regulatory bodies: Environment Agency
- Educational Groups: Exeter University
- Local Groups: Clinton Devon Estates, Pebblebed Heaths, Devon Wildlife Trust, West Country Rivers Trust, River Otter Fisheries Association, Devon Catchment Partnership, Sid Valley Association, River Otter Fly-fishing Club, Fairlynch Museum

Built Environment:

The Executive Committee made detailed comments on the Regulation 19 public consultation for the emerging East Devon Local Plan 2020-2042. In particular, we highlighted the work of the ORCA team in providing evidence of the serious pollution of the river Otter from the overloaded sewage treatment works in the valley.

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We requested an embargo on any further large scale housing development until such time as the capacity of these Sewage Treatment Works (STWs) had been upgraded to cope with the increase in sewage.

The number of very large housing sites on the eastern side of Exmouth, and within the National Landscape, has been a cause for considerable concern, particularly due to the lack of necessary infrastructure, services and sewage capacity for volume building. These proposals will have a significant impact on Budleigh Salterton as it is nearer to the site than Exmouth town centre.

This has been a busy year with objections lodged against a number of large development proposals in the valley, including major housing proposals in Ottery St Mary. Here our main objection is based on the totally inadequate sewage treatment works at Fluxton, already operating at 15% above design capacity, so it will not be able to deal with the additional load from the 200 houses proposed without a major upgrade.

We have also looked at various changes proposed by government to planning and land use policy, in particular the new Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 and further revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework. These are aimed at making it quicker and simpler to carry out development, but have seriously eroded protection of the natural environment and its wildlife.

Although we monitor East Devon District Council's planning applications and decisions weekly, we are always pleased to be notified about any contentious planning issue that has arisen within the valley, and is causing local concern. Details of the applications that we have commented upon can be found on our website under the Built Environment tab. Our comments on the Local Plan are also posted there.

Heritage and History

Continued work on blue plaques for notable local people has resulted in a new plaque being erected at Frewins in Bedlands Lane, Budleigh Salterton. This is to commemorate the suffragist and benefactor, Ethel Frewin Mathieson, who bought the land in 1911 and had 20 houses designed by the Arts and Crafts architect, Cecil Hignett of Letchworth. She was strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, and in particular the exhibition in 1905 of "Cheap Cottages" held in Letchworth. She was very active in the local community whilst living in Budleigh Salterton, and in the local and SW suffragist movement.

The River Otter Water Quality program (ORCA)

Summary

ORCA (Otter River Catchment Action) is a programme led by the **Otter Valley Association (OVA)** to address the ecological decline of the River Otter, which is classified by the Environment Agency as having *Poor Ecological Status* and is among the bottom 20% of UK rivers. During the reporting period, ORCA focused on evidence-based action, partnership working, regulatory engagement, and public accountability to deliver measurable environmental improvement.

Establishing a robust water-quality evidence base

ORCA designed and delivered a plan to complement and significantly expand statutory monitoring. During the year:

- The full length of the River Otter was sampled on the same day every two weeks, generating 24 times more samples than the Environment Agency collected in 2025.
- Volunteers collected **digital measurements** of phosphate, temperature, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, total dissolved solids and ammonia, supported by contextual data on rainfall, river flow, and wastewater discharges.
- Observational evidence of pollution incidents was logged, including photographic and video records where appropriate.

This programme created a credible, independently verifiable dataset that underpins engagement with regulators, water companies, and local authorities.

Volunteer coordination and capacity building

ORCA recruited, trained and accredited a large volunteer monitoring team, delivering:

- Recruited and trained 54 water quality testers, completing 288 location tests across 24 full sampling cycles, and logging 2,880 observations.
- A sustained community effort involving regular fieldwork under all weather conditions, demonstrating strong local engagement.

This approach maximised impact while keeping programme costs low and building long-term community capability.

Partnership action on structural and land-use pressures

ORCA worked in partnership with specialist organisations to tackle non-sewage pressures on the river: *continued next page*

- Collaborated with the Environment Agency, Westcountry Rivers Trust, and other partners to identify and prioritise weirs for removal, reducing barriers to migratory fish and restoring access to spawning areas.
- Engaged with farming organisations and environmental charities to promote best-practice land management, addressing soil run-off, fertiliser application, manure handling and slurry storage.

Regulatory engagement and holding polluters to account

- The programme engaged directly with South West Water (SWW), the Environment Agency and Richard Foord MP, challenging untreated sewage discharges and high phosphate levels from treated effluent.
- ORCA worked closely with Richard Foord and his team and led multi-agency meetings that resulted in SWW publicly committing to reduce untreated sewage discharges to fewer than 20 spills per outfall per year by 2030 and to “act where assets are causing harm”.
- Engagement has included a series of face-to-face meetings with senior representatives of Environment Agency and South West Water, plus a number of open letters to and from Richard Foord MP and ourselves
- ORCA continues to challenge the absence of phosphate-reduction schemes prior to 2030, particularly at Honiton sewage treatment works, using Environment Agency attribution data and SWW disclosures.

Influencing planning and strategic decision-making

- Input into East Devon District Council’s Water Cycle Study, which concluded that no further housing growth should be permitted in key catchments without addressing treatment capacity deficits.
- Supporting councillor commitments to defer further development until wastewater capacity is demonstrably delivered, strengthening environmental protection through the planning system.

Public awareness and accountability

Created a dedicated ORCA Facebook page, which now has 550 followers. Posted regular news items across many other local Facebook groups. Issued press releases generating over 50 articles in a range of media outlets. Presented data to public open meetings and a number of local councils.

Preparing for next-stage action

- Planned expansion of monitoring to include Riverfly (biological) indicators and consideration of routine E. coli testing.
- Set clear priorities for holding regulators, water companies and planners to account, to achieve *Moderate or Good Ecological Status* by 2030.

Flora, Fauna & Fungi working group

We have established that it is important to ensure that leaky dams are introduced where there are none, and that more are needed to ‘slow the flow’ and reduce water damage along the river and its tributaries. This work will be part of a River Otter Catchment Plan, already being developed by a number of organisations, and we will play our part in this going forward.

Members of the group continue to share photos and information showcasing the natural environment to the OVA website and Facebook (with considerable public engagement). We are close to finalising a promotional banner, similar to those produced for OVA and ORCA. We are working to document the flora of the Otter Valley and its catchment, with a view to producing lists of commonly seen species to enhance the experience of locals and visitors. However, we are no longer planning to produce any publications on fauna, flora and fungi as they already exist.

The group is keen to work with schools and young people’s groups to engage them in the natural world. We have had useful discussions with contacts and are aiming to progress this work, having established what can be helpful. A very successful session was held with Honiton Scouts recently.

We have identified a number of possible trips that OVA members might be interested in engaging with; eg Stuart Line birdwatching trips, visits to RSPB sites, such as Ham Wall, Seaton Wetlands, a local fossil trip.

Talks Programme

Following on from the successful reintroduction of a talks programme in November 2024, a series of 6 talks were arranged, Sept 2025 to March 2026. Again, care was taken to make sure each talk had some relevance to the overall aims of the Otter Valley Association, ranging from a study of river estuaries, Devon hedgerows, organic farming and an update on the local nature reserve on the river Otter, to the pollution of our oceans with plastics. With the final talk in the series of 6 being given by The Water Quality Group of the OVA, ORCA. *(This talk was repeated, and with a capacity audience and many questions, at The Institute, Ottery St Mary in April 2026. MP Richard Foord fielded some of the 'political' questions.)*

All of which were well attended, with an average audience of 65, consisting of both members and non-members of the Association.

Plans are now being put together for further talks from September 2026. It is hoped to further extend the talks to the local community, by the use of other venues in the OVA area.

Walks Programme

Jane Connick stepped down from the Walk Team in early 2025 - Jon Roseway, Penny Kurowski and Paul Kurowski split the workload between them and, with the superb support of the Walk Leaders, have organised 45 walks between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026 with three other walks planned but cancelled due to the weather.

Pleasingly, four new Walk Leaders have joined the team of leaders which has helped spread the workload.

During the year, there were only three weeks where a walk was not planned – one of these weeks coincided with the Sidmouth Walking Festival. The 16 Walk Leaders have put together varied walks ranging in distance from two miles (“An historical stroll around Newton Poppleford”) to 11 miles (“Otterton Annual Parish Boundary Walk”) and 13 miles (“Exeter Green Circle”) not only in East Devon but further afield in Dorset and other parts of Devon. Recognising people’s distance preference, most of the walks are between five and eight miles.

The walks often link into the OVA’s ethos relating to heritage, history and architecture of our villages and countryside as well as highlighting the natural environment around us; and we thank the Walk Leaders for bringing their knowledge and research to provide added interest into the walks. We have also supported other organisation’s initiatives, eg, the Pebblebed Heath Week. Often non-OVA members come on the walks and subsequently join which is a positive response.

Due to the hard work of Jon Roseway and Chris Boorman, “The Otter Valley Walking Companion” was published this year. The book provides clear directions and maps for 14 varied and interesting walks in the lower Otter Valley. A free copy of the book was offered to every member of the OVA as well as being available for sale in various local retail outlets.

Thanks go to Chris Boorman and Martin Smith for helping publicise the Walk Programme and updates on the OVA website, OVA’s Facebook and the WhatsApp; consequently there have been fewer walk reports being published in the OVA Newsletter. Also, our thanks go to the Executive Committee for their support during this last year.

The year’s statistics:– Number of walks led = 47

Average number of walkers per walk = 12.36 (as at 31 March 2026)

Paul Kurowski on behalf of the Walk Team

Insurance

As in previous years the Trustees employed the services of Marsh Commercial to procure Insurance cover for the OVA, which with effect from 1st April 2025 was placed by Q Underwriting with Aviva Insurance Limited and renewed with Aviva Insurance on 1st April 2026.

Treasurer's Report

The Otter Valley Association had a satisfactory financial year during which a further distribution from the estate of Anita Jennings was received. A donation was received from the Ottery Food Festival, as their environmental choice, following its closure. Other income is broadly similar to last year and now includes monies received from our investment in the CAF IFSL ESG Fund.

The outgoings for the year are detailed in the statement of financial activities. They include the publication of our Walking Companion book, the ORCA project, Exmouth Self Storage (where all OVA property is kept) and funds spent on our new publicity material.

As the OVA income for the year again exceeded the £25,000 threshold the Charity Commission require an independent examination of the accounts. Hammett & Associates were appointed at the AGM last year and have duly completed their examination. My thanks to Monika Kaliszczuk at Hammett & Associates for examining the accounts again.

Assets at the close of the financial year stand at £272,739.

Of the Anita Jennings Legacy, £90,000 has been invested in a Charity Aid Foundation Bank ESG Income and Growth account. The remainder has been placed in two 12-month fixed term savings accounts which mature in May and June 2026. The trustees will give consideration to spending the interest and income from the Legacy on suitable projects in memory of Anita Jennings in future years.

The remainder of the assets are held as a £10,000 contingency for unexpected eventualities; £10,000 to be allocated to a complete overhaul of the OVA website; £5000 for suitable projects in the Otter Valley; and the remainder is to cover our regular outgoings and expenses.

Thank you, again, to all our members who have continued to support us.

Martin Smith, Treasurer

21 April 2026

Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 31 March 2026

	2026 £	2025 £
Receipts		
Membership	6,363	6,247
Donations	401	0
Talks	831	752
Events	0	0
Publications	54	0
Gift Aid	1,221	1,137
Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust		1,625
Interest	3,254	7
Legacies	40,000	200,989
	<u>52,123</u>	<u>210,757</u>
Payments		
Newsletters	2,009	1,816
Publications	3,682	525
Affiliation Fees	99	199
Insurance	886	858
Website	1,152	420
Events	25	49
Administration	282	402
ORCA	649	100
Bird Boxes	164	568
BS Info Centre donation	100	100
Exmouth Self Storage	1,092	450
Group Mail (Membership emails)	30	30
Photo competition prizes	125	120
Royal Mail (PO Box)	372	353
Marketing / Publicity	2,558	95
Water testing kit	0	2,260
Wildflower donations	100	24
Accounts Examination	534	
	<u>13,859</u>	<u>8,369</u>
Net Surplus (Deficit) for Year	38,264	202,388

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of The Otter Valley Association

Charity No: 278266

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Otter Valley Association for the year ended 31 March 2026.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Otter Valley Association, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 (the Act).

I report in respect of my examination of the accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent Examiner's Statement

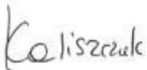
I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. Accounting records were not kept in respect of the Otter Valley Association as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. The accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. The accounts do not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the forms and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signature

Date: 09/04/2026



Monika Kaliszczuk FCCA, CTA
Hammett Associates
18 High Street
Budleigh Salterton
EX9 6LQ

Membership Report

At the end of March 2026, the Otter Valley Association had a total of 480 memberships, amounting to some 751 persons. Membership numbers are static but the OVA hope that their new initiatives and increased publicity will boost the numbers of new members further.

Strategy

We have reviewed the overarching vision, strategy and objectives that will guide the organization under its constitution for the next 10 or more years, as listed below. The Trustees have concluded that further review may be needed, and have referred the matter to the 'new' committee following the 2026 AGM.

We have currently identified a number of specific initiatives to drive debate:

- To champion for clean water in the river Otter and its tributaries.
- To encourage sustainable and appropriate development.
- To celebrate the outstanding heritage of our valley.
- To encourage thriving biodiversity across our parishes, heaths, valleys and estuaries.
- To encourage our local communities and visitors to adapt to better ways of living, particularly in the light of inevitable climate change.
- To campaign for our villages' and town's high streets and social facilities.

Digital & Printed Communications

We have overhauled our digital and printed communications to members:

- **The Quarterly Printed Newsletter**

We have changed this from a newsletter to a lifestyle magazine called "Otter Life". All OVA members continue to receive this free-of-charge as part of their membership. However, we now also sell this for £1 through local shops and information centres – with those outlets keeping the proceeds as a contribution from the OVA.

- **Email Updates**

We continue to send email updates to members in those months where no printed magazine is produced.

The OVA Brand, Website & Social Media

The OVA uses a combination of printed newsletters, online website, Facebook groups, WhatsApp and email to help ensure everyone knows what is going on:

Branding

We have updated the logos and marketing materials to showcase a modern charity for the modern era. Included in this are:

- New logos for the OVA, as well as for two of our campaign areas – ORCA and Flora, Fauna & Fungi (FFF).
- New pop-up banners for use at events for the OVA, ORCA and FFF
- New online adverts that are being used across different local community Facebook groups to showcase the charity and advertise programs we run.
- New printed adverts that are being used in various local publications such as the Ottery Gazette, the Newton Poppleford Magazine, and others.



You can see the new pop-up banners at the AGM or at most meetings.

Our website (www.ova.org.uk).

This is where all information is posted and maintained. During 2025/6 we have undergone a major programme of enhancing the web to include the following:

- A redesigned home page to showcase the breadth of campaigns and activities for people to be aware of.
- More engaging and dynamic pages that reflect the modern nature of the OVA and its programmes.
- Historical articles of interest for local and visitors alike.
- A showcase of the flora, fauna and fungi that can be seen across the Otter Valley.
- A home for the water quality programme (ORCA).
- Regular updates for all walks, talks and ongoing programmes.

Our Facebook groups:

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ottervalleyassociation/>).

We now have two very active Facebook groups where supporters of the OVA (including paid-up members) can discuss topics and where we can share information more broadly:

60% of our Facebook followers are female, and 40% male.

Top locations of Facebook followers are Budleigh Salterton followed by Ottery St Mary, Honiton, Sidmouth, Exmouth, Exeter.

While the UK is the overwhelming country of followers, we also have some located in France, United States, Canada, Belgium and South Africa. We consistently see many posts being viewed by multiple thousands of people.

The OVA Facebook group:

Our main Facebook group represents the whole Otter Valley Association. This group has grown to over 2,500 followers with strong interaction, discussion and debate.

The ORCA Facebook group:

We also have a dedicated Facebook group for our ORCA water quality group. This group is independent of the OVA group and has itself grown strongly to 547 supporters.

WhatsApp:

We now use WhatsApp to debate and action programs for our walkers, our water quality group (ORCA) and our Flora, Fauna and Fungi group (FFF).

Risk management

The major risks to which the Association is exposed are reviewed on a regular basis. Policies and controls have been established to mitigate those risks. These include appropriate property and public liability insurance.

Reference and administrative information

Name of Charity:	Otter Valley Association
Correspondence address:	PO Box 70, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 6WN
Registered Charity No:	278266
Independent Examiner:	Hammett Associates
Bankers:	Lloyds Bank Plc, current account CAF Bank, investment accounts

Trustees

The following people served as Trustees during the year:

Haylor Lass	Chairman
Chris Boorman	Vice-Chairman, Newsletter Editor and Communications
Jane Kewley	Secretary
Jonathan Kershaw	<i>Treasurer-in-waiting</i>
Martin Smith	Treasurer/Membership
Geoff Porter	Natural Environment and Otterton
Peter Williams	Water Quality
Dee Woods	Built Environment and Otterton

There are vacancies for other Trustees.

Other Executive Committee attenders at some time during the year:

Felicity Christie	Water Quality Group
Keith Grundy	Talks
Jan Kershaw	Natural Environment
Jonathan Kershaw	<i>Prospective Treasurer</i>
Denise Meluish	Ottery St Mary
Mike Miller	<i>Prospective Secretary</i>
Ted Swan	Newton Poppleford
Olly Watts	East Budleigh
Maria Malinowska	East Budleigh & Heritage

This Trustees Report was approved by the Trustees
on 21 April 2026
for publication on request and on the website.