4.3 Recreation

On and around the Exe Estuary the importance of recreational activities has grown as the commercial importance of the ports (Exeter, Topsham and Exmouth) has declined. Waterside recreation activities and watersports are becoming more and more popular providing an excellent way for the public to enjoy the open spaces, to appreciate the environment, and to engage in a healthy lifestyle.

With more people wanting to use the Estuary for recreation, competition for space on and around the water is intensifying and conflicts between user groups can arise. For example, the use of faster, more powerful and manoeuvrable boats and Personal Water Crafts (jet skis) on the Estuary creates greater potential for injury of swimmers and windsurfers despite the speed limit of 10 knots. It is important to ensure all users of the Estuary are given maximum space to enjoy their recreational activity without threatening or causing undue damage to the wildlife, the Estuary’s conservation status, or other users.

Several of the local authorities around the Estuary – notably Exeter City Council - have created Byelaws intended to do just this, however currently measures for enforcing the Byelaws are limited (please see later section on the Harbour Patrol boat). The Exe Estuary Water and Shore Code, a voluntary code of conduct, was developed and introduced in 1998 by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership to help encourage the safe enjoyment of the Estuary for the benefit of both people and wildlife species.
Use of the Exe Estuary

Water Based Activities

Image 4p: Canoeing on the Exe
Source: EEMP

Image 4q: Kite surfers at the Exmouth Seafront
Source: www.exepics.co.uk

Image 4r: Laser sailing on the Estuary
Source: www.exepics.co.uk

Image 4s: Personal Water Craft Launching area at Exmouth
Source: EEMP

Technological developments have enabled new all-year round watersports activities such as windsurfing, kitesurfing, water-skiing, wakeboarding, paddle boarding, jet skiing (personal water craft), canoeing and kayaking to emerge alongside the traditional boating activities. The Exe Estuary is now regionally important for a range of water based activities - especially sailing and windsurfing - with the main schools and largest clubs based in Exeter and Exmouth, and further active sailing and boating clubs at Topsham, Starcross, Lympstone and Cockwood. The Exe Estuary provides space for about 1,900 moorings (including pontoon berths at the marinas) and follows a mainly seasonal pattern of activity concentrated between the end of March and the beginning of October. Use of the water space is naturally zoned by restrictions of shallowness, the large tidal area, and a limited number of access points. Navigation Byelaws and several codes of conducts are also in place and users are expected to comply with them.

Table 4b provides a summary of existing Byelaws and codes related to water activities and Figure 4i provides an overview of the water based activities on the Exe Estuary and where they mainly occur.
## Byelaws and Codes of Conduct related to water-based activities on the Exe Estuary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Byelaws</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exeter City Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Exe and Exe Estuary Navigation Byelaws</td>
<td>12/08/1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Devon District Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelaws as to seaside pleasure boats</td>
<td>13/01/1965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code of Conducts</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exe Estuary Water Code</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exe Kitesurfers Code of Conduct</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exe Canoe Loops</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Water Craft Code of Conduct</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4b: Byelaws and Codes of Conduct related to water-based activities on the Exe Estuary*
Figure 4: **Level of water use on the Exe Estuary**

Source: DCC 2014 and OS 2014 background mapping, ECC 2006 and EEMP 2014 data.

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Boating on the Exe

The Exe Estuary Management Partnership 2014 Water Sport questionnaire elicited information from seven clubs on the Exe Estuary – covering sailing, canoeing, kitesurfing, powerboating and jet-skiing activities - and in the total the responses represent the interests of 2,400 individual members.

There is a big contrast between summer and winter use, with the Estuary very busy at peak times in the summer. Access for visitors’ boats is rather poor, with only a few moorings and limited slipways available, which are only usable at certain states of the tide. There has been much recent discussion and concern about slipways and access to the water at Exmouth since the closure of the main public slipway (Mamhead) in 2012. The slipway was closed because of major structural problems, and East Devon District Council has recently approved a design option for a replacement. This improved redesign is subject to planning permission (including environment impact assessment), marine licencing and requires funding before the slipway can be constructed and re-opened in 2015.

Although maximum use of the Estuary by people with boats is during the summer months, there is a high level of competition for berths on the Exe all year round.

The Exe Estuary is a relatively small Estuary, and the level of usage tends to be limited by the space available. It is a challenging Estuary to negotiate, with a shallow navigational channel. In addition, many vessels have to enter the Estuary with the flood tide, as the ebb tide is very strong (about 6 knots).

Moorings on the Exe

The Exe Estuary is wider and shallower than most of the other south Devon harbours. Although it contains two marinas, one at Topsham and a larger one situated in the old Exmouth Docks, the rest of the Estuary has mostly swinging moorings and a few pontoons. Many of the moorings dry out at low tide, therefore boating on the Estuary does not offer a 24/7 opportunity, unlike other Estuaries in Devon.

The information provided below is part of the review of moorings on the Exe Estuary commissioned by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership in April 2014. In this review a questionnaire was sent to the five mooring authorities to gather up-to-date data on issues such as moorings infrastructure and management. Figure 4j shows the location of moorings on the Estuary.
Moorings Associations:

The moorings associations of the Exe Estuary are shown on Figure 4j.

**Back Gut** The Back Gut comprises 16 moorings on land owned by Mr. Martin McGahey. The area is a narrow channel situated between Topsham Lock Cottage and the motorway (M5) bridge.

**Lower Exe Moorings Authority** The Lower Exe Moorings Authority is the largest mooring association on the Exe and drying and deep water moorings are laid in seven different areas in the lower part of the Estuary. The total capacity of moorings for all the seven areas is about 800, and land is leased from East Devon District Council and Crown Estate. In 2009 there were 713 licensed moorings, with the bulk of the moorings being in Area 1, between Bull Hill and Shelly banks. The main facilities are provided by the clubs in Exmouth.

**Lympstone Fishery & Harbour Association (LFHA)** The Lympstone Fishery & Harbour Association is responsible for the management of 102 moorings on the land that it owns in the harbour and the foreshore at Lympstone. An additional small area on the foreshore is leased from Crown Estate. The actual number of moorings in use is 89. Moorings here are reserved for residents of the Lympstone Parish or members of the Lympstone Sailing Club. Boats can only use Lympstone two hours either side of high tide. There is potential capacity for more moorings at this site, but harbour space to store tenders limits the number in practice. All moorings are swing using block and moorings anchors only.

**Powderham Estate Moorings** Powderham Estate is responsible for about 450 moorings, including both drying and deep water mooring - a significant increase on the figure of 250 reported in 1993. The mooring area is on the west side of the Exe, from Powderham Point to Cockwood Harbour, with the majority being off Starcross. Licenses are issued by the Estate and customers’ facilities are provided by the two local clubs – Starcross Yacht Club and the Starcross Fishing and Cruising Club. The latter one also has visitors’ moorings available and can accommodate vessels up to 33ft long.

**Topsham Mooring Owners Association** Topsham Mooring Owners Association is responsible for managing and regulating about 260 moorings at Topsham on land leased from Crown Estate. The mooring area extends from the motorway (M5) bridge down to the junction of the River Clyst, with the moorings located in mid channel of the Exe River. The main limitations on mooring activity in this area are the shape of the River Exe, mud, and the type and length of boat to be moored. The mooring area seems to be at maximum capacity and there is a small waiting list of people willing to buy non-used moorings.

**Major Marina and Harbours**

**Exmouth Marina** Exmouth Marina is a 200 berth marina operating in a sheltered area at the mouth of the Estuary. In 2009, the mooring audit recorded 169 boats, of which 14 were commercial vessels. The marina operates 7 days a week and provides good facilities for customers. Exmouth Marina manages the function of the Exmouth Dock Company (EDCo) which is a harbour authority (Exmouth Docks Act 1864 and EDCo Harbour Revision Order 1998) with statutory duties and powers relating to its area of jurisdiction.

**Cockwood Harbour** Access to the harbour is very limited due to tide and two low railway bridges. Only small craft are therefore able to enter the harbour. The harbour is leased from Crown Estate to the Cockwood Boat Club and Harbour Commissioners. There are currently 80 licensed moorings and capacity for 200 moorings. There is one mooring available for visitors, but no facilities.
Figure 4j: **Moorings Associations of the Exe Estuary**

Source: DCC 2014 and OS 2014 background mapping, EEMP 2014 and LEMA 2014 data.

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Police Patrol

Use of the Exe Estuary for water-based recreation has increased dramatically over recent years, and as a result a police patrol boat has been used to issue advice, educate water users, enforce speed regulations and generally promote safety on the Estuary.

In the 1980s a crew of two people ran the patrol boat on a full time basis throughout the summer (from Easter to end of September) going out seven days of the week. Throughout the 1990s the Harbour Patrol still operated but it became increasingly difficult to find crew with adequate experience. This consideration, along with reducing income associated with dues for the sludge vessel, led Exeter City Council to cease operating the Harbour Patrol in 2000. In 2004 the patrol boat was reinstated by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership in conjunction with the Exmouth police. Many local organisations and clubs helped to make the patrol boat viable through donations towards the running costs.

After the promotion and relocation of the community police constable behind the initiative, the service wound down and ceased in 2008. However, in 2011 Exmouth Town Council initiated another re-launch of the original patrol boat – the vessel is owned, maintained and insured by Exeter City Council, who also pay for training of the volunteer crew. The cost of fuel is met from donations raised from clubs and local authorities by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership. Through necessity, patrols are limited to sunny summer weekends and Bank Holidays, when usage of the Estuary is at its height. The main activity of the patrol boat is to provide a visible reminder to water users to comply with rules and regulations and drive with consideration of other users. In 2013, the crew collected evidence that was used to bring a successful prosecution against a powerboat driver who exceeded the Estuary’s 10 knots speed limit.

The patrol’s authority is limited and there are few individuals that have flouted the rules, however educating users is very effective especially for visiting users who are unfamiliar with the Estuary’s bylaws. If users do continue to break byelaws then evidence would be supplied for prosecution.

As already highlighted, recreational usage of the Estuary is likely to increase significantly in future years due to new housing developments within 10km of the shoreline (approx. 47,000 new houses are planned). This could also result in increased antisocial behaviour by water users, increased risks of accidents and injury and increased disturbance to legally protected wildlife in the estuary. If they are not addressed these risks could seriously damage the reputation of the Exe Estuary as a visitor and tourist destination. Taking account of this, there is an urgent need for properly-resourced measures to enforce relevant legislation (including local Byelaws) in order to maintain personal safety, protect wildlife from disturbance and allow all users to enjoy the Estuary without harming others.

¹ Jack Knott, former Harbourmaster, Exeter City Council
Land and Intertidal Based Activities

In addition to water-based recreation on the Exe Estuary, locals and visitors alike use the river, canal and coastline as a place for walking, cycling, birdwatching, wildfowling, fishing, bait-digging and general recreation.

Management measures, such as Byelaws and Codes of Conduct, are in place on The Exe Estuary to ensure that land-based activities are not threatening both the protected habitats and wildlife, and also other Estuary’s users. Table 4c provides a summary of existing Byelaws and Codes of Conduct related to land based activities and Figure 4k is a map of the land based activities that occur around the Exe Estuary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Byelaws</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teignbridge District Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawlish Warren Nature Reserve Byelaws</td>
<td>25/02/1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelaws for Dogs on Seashore and in the Nature Reserve at Dawlish</td>
<td>03/01/2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Devon District Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelaws relating to Beaches – Dogs on the Beach</td>
<td>17/07/1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs on the Seashore and the Promenades</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Devon Seashores and Promenades Byelaws</td>
<td>2006</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code of Conducts</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exe Estuary Shore Code</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Devon Horse Riding on Beaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildfowling Code of Good Practice</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exe Estuary Trail Guide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4c: Byelaws and Codes of Conduct related to land based activities on the Exe Estuary
Figure 4k: Land and intertidal based activities on the Exe Estuary

Settlements | Land | Inter Tidal Zone | Tidal Water | EEMP Boundary

Foot Ferry | East Devon Way | Topsham Circular Walk | Exe Valley Way | South West Coast Path

Recreational beach

Areas leased by the Devon Wildfowling & Conservation Association

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With such an impressive variety of birds living in and visiting the Exe Estuary throughout the year, birdwatching is an incredibly popular activity. Based on data collected via people counters, approximately 36,000-37,000 people visit Bowling Green Marshes and 16,000-17,000 people visit Exminster Marshes each year. The Avocet cruise birdwatching trips attract around 1000 visitors per year. In addition, the Darts Farm Complex in Topsham receives 1,000,000 visitors, of which 40,000 visit the upstairs RSPB shop and visitor centre/bird watching platform. A Visitor Survey of the Exe Estuary undertaken by Footprint Ecology and Teignbridge District Council (Liley & Cruickshanks, 2010) showed that 45% of the Birdwatchers group interviewed spent more than three hours on sites and they tend to live a great distance from the Exe Estuary, highlighting the regional importance of the Exe Estuary for some activities. Birdwatchers undoubtedly contribute to the local economy, for example through the use of cafes, shops and accommodation in Estuary communities.
The Exe Estuary is a very popular location for dog walking, with activity focused on Exmouth Seafront, Dawlish Warren and Topsham. Both Exmouth and Dawlish Warren have Byelaws in place to regulate dogs on the beaches and in the case of Dawlish Warren, also inside the Nature Reserve. The Exe Disturbance report (Liley, D. et al, 2011), commissioned by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership to assess the human disturbance to wintering waterfowl on the Exe Estuary, highlighted that dogs off lead on intertidal areas such as mudflats had the greatest impact on feeding birds. Several measures have been proposed to reduce the impact of dog-walkers on overwintering birds, such as a tailored code of conduct and the provision of alternative areas for exercising (i.e. Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS). See section 3 for further information). The presence of dog faeces on beaches can adversely affect local bathing water quality, which is sampled from May to September. For this reason dogs are generally banned from popular beaches during this time.
Wildfowling

Wildfowling has been undertaken from the foreshore for decades and continues on the basis of an agreement between the Crown Estate and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC). Shooting is consented by Natural England for members of the Devon Wildfowling and Conservation Association (which is affiliated to BASC). The principal areas used for shooting include Cockle Sands, between Exton and the Clyst, and West Mud between Turf Hotel and Topsham Lock. Shooting activities generally take place at dawn and dusk, within the shooting season which runs from 1 September until 1 February or until 20 February for species listed in Schedule 2, Part 2 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Visitor Attractions

There are various visitor attractions around the Exe from amusement arcades to a magnificent 600 year old castle to explore.

Powderham Castle

Powderham Castle is located in a unique, picturesque setting just outside Exeter, beside the Exe Estuary. 600 years of history are contained within the walls of one of England’s oldest family homes. Nowadays, the Castle has developed a programme of concerts and events, and has opened a Country Store shopping centre.

A la Ronde

A La Ronde is an 18th-century sixteen-sided house located near Lympstone, and in the ownership of the National Trust. It contains many objects and mementoes of a great tour in Europe done by two cousins. The extraordinary interior decoration of the house includes a feather frieze and a 25,000 shell-encrusted gallery.

Topsham Museum

Topsham Museum shows the history of the town and port of Topsham including shipbuilding and ship owning, and also the great wildlife of the Exe Estuary. The Museum is housed in one of a group of late 17th century buildings in the margin of the Exe Estuary.

Exe Estuary and Public Access

Access Points to the water and Access Provision in and around the Exe Estuary

The following maps illustrate access points to the water and access provision in and around the Estuary.
Key to river access in Topsham

1. The Retreat Boatyard
2. Topsham Recreation Ground
3. Topsham Ferry
4. Topsham Sailing Club
5. Church Slipway
6. Trout’s Boatyard
7. The Quay
8. Oak Slip
9. Fisherman’s Slip
10. Strand End
11. Bowling Green

Key
- Roads, tracks and paths
- Buildings
- Location of settlement
- Land
- Inland water
- Inter Tidal Zone
- Tidal Water
- EEMP boundary

Privately owned access
- Beach or riverbank
- Jetty
- Crane or hoist
- Quay
- Pontoon
- Slipway

Figure 4: Water based access provision
Source: DCC 2014 and OS 2014 background mapping, EEMP 2014.
Use of the Exe Estuary

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Use of the Exe Estuary

Figure 4m: **Land based access provision**

Public Rights of Way and Access

The Exe Estuary affords excellent opportunities for recreational walking and cycling on the public rights of way and minor road network. The South West Coast Path National Trail traverses the South Devon coast and totals 115 miles (184km) East to West, crossing the Exe Estuary using the ferries (between Exmouth and Starcross in the summer, or between Topsham and Exminster in the winter, weekends only). Alternatively people can walk on the South West Coast Path to Exeter and down either side of the Estuary from there. The importance of the South West Coast Path to the Devon Economy is demonstrated by the £157 million direct spend by users of the trail during 2012.

Walkers can also begin or end their journey along two important Regional Routes from the Estuary. The first is the Exe Valley Way, which runs for 45 miles (72km) across Devon between the Exe Estuary and the heights of Exmoor. The second is the East Devon Way, which runs for 38 miles (61km) between Exmouth and Lyme Regis. In addition, in 2004 Devon County Council started to develop the Exe Estuary Trail to encourage more sustainable and healthy travel by walking and cycling around the Exe. The East side of the trail is totally completed and there is only one section on the West side to be finished (for more details please see section 4.5).

Opportunities also exist for extended ‘round robin’ walks and rides making use of the train, bus and ferry services. Within the Exe Estuary Partnership’s Management boundary there are permissive opportunities which complement the 22 miles (36km) of public rights of way. Devon County Council published its Rights of Way Improvement Plan in 2005 (Devon County Council, 2005) and Guidance to Improve Public Right of Way in Local Communities in 2010 (Devon County Council, 2010). The main objective of both is to improve rights of way and access for all. Devon County Council is also working to ensure that access management respects Devon’s environment, and is seeking opportunities to improve the environment and appreciation of it through works and promotional material.