



**The Otter Valley Association
TRUSTEES' REPORT
for the year ended 31 March 2025**

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.oval.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. Members of the Executive Committee, all of whom are Charity Trustees, *see page 15*.

Trustees Report of Activities for 2024~2025

Summary:

2024 has been a strong year of increasing momentum across the Otter Valley Association. We have welcomed a new team for the town of Ottery St Mary, engaged with local schools, donated swift and bird boxes, partnered 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 on a blue plaques program, reviewed our strategy and direction, initiated a water quality team with over 40 volunteers to test the river Otter, created a local Flora, Fauna & Fungi group, updated our website extensively and built a dynamic and engaging social media group of over 920 supporters on Facebook, and more besides.

Built Environment:

Regular monitoring of East Devon District Council's weekly lists of planning applications and decisions for our town, villages and valley has taken place. Where appropriate the Executive Committee has submitted comments on proposals that are considered to be contrary to national, local and neighbourhood planning policies, especially when they would be harmful to the character of the East Devon National Landscape, or the conservation areas.

We have also looked at various changes to government planning and land use policy, such as the recent revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Members have raised several local planning issues which have been considered by the Executive Committee. We are always pleased to be notified about any contentious planning issue that has arisen within the valley, and is causing local concern.

Your Committee also made detailed comments on the latest public consultation on the emerging East Devon Local Plan 2020-2042. The large number of 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 and sewage capacity for volume building. Once all the comments have been considered, EDDC will finalise the Plan and publish it later this year. Then it is inspected by a Government Planning Inspector for soundness and compliance with government policy. It will then be adopted for use in decision-making towards the end of 2026.

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 in 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

History

The main activity has been looking into the many notable people who have lived in the valley, so that consideration could be given to erecting Blue Plaques. This work has been in collaboration with Michael Downes and the Fairlynch Museum. So far, the OVA has contributed to the erection of a blue plaque for Robert Warington (1807–1867), a famous chemist who founded the Chemical Society, and lived in Poplar Cottage on Fore Street Hill. Other notable people are under consideration, but co-operation of the home owner is required, which is proving to be a bit of a stumbling block.

Swift & Bird Boxes

We have donated this past year various swift and bird boxes to the local community. In Budleigh Salterton, for example, swift boxes were placed on the side of the town hall and shared with the members in our July 2024 newsletter. We also donated bird boxes to the Pebblebed Heaths for placement in the new nature reserve.

The River Otter Water Quality program (ORCA)

The OVA setup a water quality group (ORCA – the Otter River Catchment Action group) to explore how we can address the significant pollution issues in the River Otter catchment. This group has been meeting every 6 weeks and have small groups working on water testing, farming, liaison with South West Water (SWW), planning, communications and partnerships. *continued*

- Unfortunately, the Middle and Lower sections of the River Otter are both classified by the Environment Agency (EA) as ‘Poor Ecological Status’. This puts the River Otter in the worst 20% of the UK’s rivers, with significant impacts on plant life, wildlife and fish populations.
- It is clear from Environment Agency (EA) reports that farming and pollution from sewage spills are the main factors affecting the water quality in the Otter. We have analysed the publicly available data to show that there are several sewage works with a high number of hours of untreated discharge. The largest number of raw sewage discharge hours are from the Honiton treatment works, up 63% from 2,820 hrs in 2023 to 4,604 hrs in the first 10 months of 2024. It is worth noting that along the entire length of the river Otter there are 23 SWW assets – showing a 36% increase in the first 10 months of 2024 compared to the whole of 2023.

In order to improve the water environment of the river the group has been focusing on specific areas:

- To raise awareness. There are groups campaigning on many rivers around the country, but the pollution in the Otter has been largely unnoticed. We have been sharing information through email and newsletter updates to OVA members, as well as a broader community of supporters via social media. Ensuring that local people, councils and politicians throughout the Otter catchment are aware of the problem is essential.
- To demonstrate where on the river the largest rises in pollutants occur and focus our efforts on these areas. To do this we have started implementing our own comprehensive testing strategy to provide the robust and informative data that we need. This includes citizen science tests for data such as phosphate and oxygen levels. Going forward, our intention is to use continuous monitoring devices (Sondes) and ecological testing. In this past year, we have started sharing data on our website.
- To ensure sufficient infrastructure is developed within new planning initiatives. We have been looking carefully at the house building specified in the East Devon local plan so that we have been able to highlight areas where sewage capacity is stretched and try to ensure sewage works are upgraded before new households are added to system
- We have started to form valuable partnerships with those organisations already testing on the river and those with expertise in water management and farming.

continued next page

We have now launched our systematic water testing programme. Two in-depth training programs took place for a total of 42 volunteers at Otterton Village Hall on Saturdays 29th March and 19th April. We have also now run two official test cycles at 12 locations on the river – and plan to continue every 2 weeks, with the volunteers split across 4 teams. We will regularly publish summaries of the test results on the ORCA page of our website.

We were delighted to receive a grant from Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust to cover the cost of our first set of testing equipment. We express our heartfelt thanks to the trustees for their kind generosity in helping us drive this important initiative forwards.

(At the start of May 2025 we met with Richard Foorde MP, to show him our testing programme and discuss the issues affecting the Otter).

You can find all the latest information about this, including published articles, on the OVA Website (www.ova.org.uk).

Flora, Fauna & Fungi working group

The OVA set up a group to look at the Flora, Fauna and Fungi of the Otter valley. We hold regular meetings and share updates with our members through email and newsletters, as well as informing and promoting our work to our supporters on Facebook and through the web.

We continue to update the OVA website with articles, pictures and news regarding the flora, fauna and fungi of the Otter valley. Our goal is to showcase the diversity and beauty of the Otter Valley for locals and visitors into the area. We would like to thank all the local photographers who have been contributing to the site.

We are actively looking at how to engage with local schools in the area. We want to help fund materials and provide volunteers to go to the schools and help with their curriculum delivery.

We have started a new program to work with like-minded organizations to help identify and remove relevant invasive species (such as Himalyan Balsam).

We want to provide some fun ideas and educational materials for families and children. We are thinking about producing some leaflets, made available ideally through local community shops and information centres. These can then be used to help identify common birds / insects / plants as families walk around the villages, heathlands and nature reserves.

Talks Programme

We ran a very successful series of talks over the winter months at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton. Each talk was extremely well attended – reaching the maximum capacity at times.

Our highlights from this last year included:

Date	Speaker	Topic	Attendance
November 2024	Olly Watts	Are we doing enough to help nature in the climate crisis?	90
December 2024	John Polley	London's New River.	80
January 2025	Iorwerth (Yog) Watkins	Farming Practices – how they affect our river quality.	100 (full house)
February 2025	Stephen Powles	Otters coming to a river near you.	80
March 2025	David R. White	Wildlife across the Otter Valley.	100 (full house)

Going forwards, we have already identified the majority of talks for next year and are looking at how to replicate these further across the Otter Valley – including Ottery St Mary and local villages.

Walks Programme

It has been a busy and productive year for the Walk Team with lots happening throughout the OVA.

The walk programme introduced historical walks around the local villages, which have been well received and attended. Dee Woods led the first walk around Otterton; Paul Kurowski around East Budleigh and at the time of writing Haylor Lass was due to lead a similar walk in Newton Poppleford. These historical walks have attracted a wider audience from the OVA membership.

We have had similar success with wildlife walks and for the first time we had two walks looking for the Silver-studded blue butterfly, which were led by renowned local expert Lesley Kerry.

continued next page

Her knowledge was amazing and her enthusiasm to share information was enjoyed by all.

We also had a successful Bird Watching Walk around the Otter Estuary Nature Reserve led by Pebblebed Heath Ranger, Rick Lockwood. Again, the audience included members who would not normally join a walk and it was encouraging to see.

We have had excellent feedback from these changes and local businesses have also benefited as many of the group headed for local pub / eatery after the walks.

The booklet '12 walks in the Otter Valley' has been in print for many years and all the team have been actively involved this year in a thorough re-vamp which will include seven new routes. More information will be included in the OVA newsletter as we near publication.

Social media has continued to be a useful and successful addition, the Walkers' Whats App group has proved to be beneficial and the group continues to grow. Publicising and promoting the walk programme on the OVA Facebook page has undoubtedly led to increased numbers attending walks. Thank you, Chris Boorman for your support.

A few stats:

- Number of walks offered during the last year: 44
- Average number of walkers per walk: 11.32
- As at 31 March 2025 the OVA has offered 1,358 walks which are free and open to all.

Thank you to the Exec Committee who quietly, in the background, have given lots of support during the last year.

Jane Connick on behalf of the Walk Team

Membership Report

At the end of March 2025 the Otter Valley Association had a total of 483 memberships, amounting to some 757 persons. Membership numbers are increasing slowly and the OVA hope that their new initiatives will boost the numbers of new members further.

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 with Aviva Insurance Limited.

Treasurer's Report

The Otter Valley Association had a satisfactory financial year during which a substantial bequest from the estate of Anita Jennings was received. The OVA also received a £1000 bequest from the Anita Jennings estate earlier in the year, and a donation from Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust for water-testing kits. Other income for the year can be seen on the statement of financial activities.

The outgoings for the year are detailed in the statement of financial activities and they include expenditure related to our new initiatives: bird boxes, water testing, a blue plaque, maintenance of a phone box, and the photo competition.

As the OVA income for the year exceeded the £25,000 threshold the Charity Commission required an independent examination of the accounts. The examiner appointed at the 2024 AGM, although a qualified chartered accountant, was not a registered auditor. This resulted in the OVA to having to seek a suitably qualified examiner and the trustees arranged for Hammett & Associates (formerly Saxby & Sinden) in Budleigh Salterton to examine the accounts. My thanks to Monika Kaliszczuk at Hammett & Associates for examining the accounts at short notice.

Assets at the close of the financial year stand at £234,475.

£50,000 of the Anita Jennings Legacy 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. The trustees will give consideration to spending the income from the Legacy on suitable projects in memory of Anita Jennings during 2025-26.

The remainder of the assets are held as a £10,000 contingency for unexpected eventualities; £10,000 is allocated to fund worthwhile projects in the lower Otter Valley; £5000 is reserved for the new walks book, 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/Membership Secretary

Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

	2025 £	2024 £
Receipts		
Membership	6,247	5,955
Donations	0	10
Talks	752	70
Events	0	0
Publications	0	189
Gift Aid	1,137	741
Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust	1,625	0
Interest	7	208
Legacies	200,989	5,500
Equipment sale	25	25
	<u>210,757</u>	<u>12,698</u>
Payments		
Newsletters	1,816	1,351
Publications	525	0
Affiliation Fees	199	109
Insurance	858	394
Website	420	504
Events	49	230
Administration	402	188
Angela Riddell – Blue Plaque	100	0
Bird Boxes	568	790
BS Info Centre donation	100	0
BS phone box	450	0
Group Mail (Membership emails)	30	30
Photo competition prizes	120	0
Royal Mail (PO Box)	353	330
SumUp card reader	95	0
Water testing kit	2,260	52
First Aid stock	0	50
Fairlynch Museum (Jennings exhibition)	0	94
The Clump	0	15
	<u>8,369</u>	<u>4,137</u>
Net Surplus (Deficit) for Year	202,388	8,561

Continued from previous page

General Fund

Balance at Start of Year	32,087	23,526
Balance at End of Year	234,475	32,087

Otter Valley Association Registered Charity No: 278266
Balance Sheet at 31 March 2025

	2025 £	2024 £
Current Assets		
Cash at Bank	<u>234,475</u>	<u>32,087</u>
Net Assets	<u>234,475</u>	<u>32,087</u>
Represented by:		
General Fund (Unrestricted)	<u>234,475</u>	<u>32,087</u>

Notes:

1. The bank interest shown above is a small sum due to the Virgin savings account being closed in early April 2024 and new savings accounts opened with CAF at that time. Interest will be credited in April 2025 and will show in the 2025-26 accounts.
2. The accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis.
3. No remuneration has been paid to any Trustee during the year.

Approved by the Committee on xx May 2024
and signed on their behalf by:



Martin Smith, Treasurer

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.

Our Ref: **MK/KT/OTT002/298108**

Date: 16 May 2025

Otter Valley Association

PO Box 70

Budleigh Salterton

Devon

EX9 6WN



Dear All

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 2025.

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.

Yours sincerely

Monika Kaliszczuk

Hammett Associates

Hammett Associates Ltd

8-10 Queen Street, Seaton, Devon EX12 2NY

T 01297 624188 | F 01297 624177 | E recep@hammett-associates.co.uk | W www.hammett-associates.co.uk

Registered at Companies House, Cardiff, No. 5375753



Strategy

We have created a team to review the overarching vision, strategy and objectives that will guide the organization under its constitution for the next 10 or more years. The purpose of this is to explain who the OVA is, what it stands for, and what it wishes to accomplish. This has become more relevant since the receipt of the Anita Jennings bequest, and the gathering momentum of programmes that the OVA is undertaking.

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 encourage thriving biodiversity across our Parishes, Heaths, Valleys and Estuaries.
- To encourage our local communities and visitors to adapt to better ways of living.
- To campaign for our villages and town high streets.

The OVA 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:

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

This is where all information is posted and maintained. During 2024 we have undergone a major programme of enhancing the web to include the following:

- 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 program (ORCA)

Our Facebook group:

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

This is where supporters of the VOA (including paid-up members) can discuss topics and where we can share information more broadly. The Facebook group has grown to 922 supporters, and we are seeing strong interaction – particularly around the natural environment. A few facts for you about the group:

- 63% of our Facebook supporters are female, and 38% male.
- Top locations of Facebook members are Budleigh Salterton followed by Exmouth, Sidmouth, Exeter, Ottery St Mary, Honiton, Lympstone, Newton Abbot and Topsham.
- While the UK is the overwhelming country of supporters, we also have supporters located in France, United States, Canada, Belgium and South Africa.

WhatsApp:

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

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
Martin Smith	Treasurer/Membership
Geoff Porter	Natural Environment and Otterton
Bob Wiltshire	Budleigh Salterton, <i>until 28th January 2025</i>
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
Michaela Manning	Colaton Raleigh
Denise Meluish	Ottery St Mary
Ted Swan	Newton Poppleford
Olly Watts	East Budleigh
Bob Wiltshire	Budleigh Salterton

This Trustees Report was approved by the Trustees
on 27 May 2025

for publication on request and on the website.