



SOUTH EAST DEVON  
HABITAT REGULATIONS  
PARTNERSHIP

# South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

*2016-17 Annual Business Plan – Annual Report*

Neil Harris, Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager  
July 2017

Legal comment/advice:

As this is an update report, there are no direct legal implications arising.

Finance comment/advice:

The financial details are contained in the report and require no additional comment.

<b>Public Document:</b>	Yes
<b>Exemption:</b>	None
<b>Review date for release</b>	None

## Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the progress made towards delivering the 2016-17 Annual Business Plan.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Medium.

This report is an update on the progress made in delivery of the mitigation measures set out in the 2016-17 Annual Business Plan. It is important that progress continues to be made, or this would put the delivery of the partner Authorities' Local Plans at risk due to the continued legal duties under the Habitat Regulations.

### 1. Summary/Overview

1.1 The 2016-17 Annual Business Plan was approved at the inaugural meeting of the Executive Committee at the East Devon District Council Chambers, Knowle, Sidmouth on June 29<sup>th</sup> 2016.

1.2 The measures outlined in the plan had been scored according to agreed criteria and further debated and endorsed by the Officer Working Group. The plan demanded the delivery of a range of on site mitigation measures, outlining expenditure of an estimated £215,000.

1.3 Projects included the introduction of keystone mitigation measures such as the Delivery Manager, Habitat Mitigation Officers, Project Officer (Devon Loves Dogs) and the review of zonation on the Exe Estuary.

1.4 Significant progress is evident in the delivery of the Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) Strategy. Within the space of a year, the partnership has reached agreement on the prioritisation of sites, secured the land at Dawlish and is progressing the delivery of South West Exeter.

1.5 Representing an investment of £2.9m, the first SANGS site in our region, 26 hectares of newly accessible countryside at Dawlish, is due to open to the public this summer.

1.6 The operational year ends with a complete reassessment of the financial assumptions made in the Strategy, a new Visitor Management Plan for the Pebblebed Heaths, and significant reappraisal of mitigation project costs, leading to new per dwelling recommendations. This will ensure a secure and credible financial platform for future investment.

1.7 Sustained, meaningful and important progress has been achieved through local authorities and stakeholder organisations working together in partnership.

**Table 1. 2016-17 Annual Business Plan - mitigation measures.**

Site	Measure	Capital cost	Revenue Cost	Total
Cross Site	Delivery Manager	£0	£40,000	£40,000
Cross Site	Two Habitat Mitigation Officers	£0	£68,000	£68,000
Cross Site	Warden vehicle	£20,000	£2,000	£22,000
Cross Site	Dog project	12,000	13,800	£25,800
Exe Estuary	Exe revised zoning	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Exe Estuary	Voluntary Exclusion Zone	£2,000	£0	£2,000
Exe Estuary	Exe codes of conduct	£10,000	£0	£10,000
Exe Estuary	Patrol boat	£22,600	£7,000	£29,600
Dawlish Warren	Petalwort monitoring	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Pebblebeds codes of conduct	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Dog bins	£3,500	£2,870	£6,370
Pebblebed Heaths	Pebblebeds map	£1,500	£0	£1,500
Pebblebed Heaths	Pebblebeds monitoring		£2,000	£2,000
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 78,600</b>	<b>£ 135,670.00</b>	<b>£ 214,270</b>

**Table 2. 2016-17 Annual Business Plan – Expenditure (Actual)**

Site	Measure	Total
Cross Site	Delivery Manager	£40,708.00
Cross Site	Two Habitat Mitigation Officers	£34,501.00 <sup>1</sup>
Cross Site	Warden vehicle	£20,089.63 <sup>2</sup>
Cross Site	Dog project	£12,388.00 <sup>3</sup>
Pebblebed Heaths	Dog bins	£4,299.76 <sup>4</sup>
		<b>£111,986.39</b>

<sup>1</sup> Costs are lower than estimated because the HMOs started part way through the operational year.

<sup>2</sup> Costs are lower than estimated because procurement of the vehicle was more cost effective, see (1) above also.

<sup>3</sup> See (1) above.

<sup>4</sup> Costs are lower than estimated thanks to cost efficiencies and because they were installed part way through the year.

**Table 3 – mitigation measures to be carried over for delivery (not yet complete)**  
from the 2016-17 ABP

Site	Measure	Capital cost	Revenue Cost	Total
Exe Estuary	Exe revised zoning	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Exe Estuary	Voluntary Exclusion Zone	£2,000	£0	£2,000
Exe Estuary	Exe codes of conduct	£10,000	£0	£10,000
Exe Estuary	Patrol boat	£22,600	£0	£22,600
Exe Estuary	Small inflatable boat and outboard motor	£1,500	£0	£1,500
Dawlish Warren	Petalwort monitoring	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Pebblebeds map	£3,950 <sup>5</sup>	£0	£3,950
Pebblebed Heaths	Pebblebeds monitoring	£0	£1,500	£1,500
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 46,050</b>	<b>£1,500</b>	<b>£47,550</b>

## 2. Progress

### 2.1 Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager

2.1.1 The Delivery Manager continues in post, working to organise and implement the approved Annual Business Plans, report progress to the Executive Committee, co-ordinate delivery of the Strategy, liaise with the Officer Working Group and undertake ongoing review of the Strategy. Significant progress is marked by the recruitment of key staff, implementation of key projects (Dog project, zonation review) and rebasing the Strategy.

### 2.2 Habitat Mitigation Officers

<sup>5</sup> Strategy estimate was £1,500. This is the lowest quote out of 3 designers approached – representing an overspend of £2,450. Recommendation is contained in the 2017-18 ABP.

2.2.1 Following successful interviews on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016, two Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs) were appointed. They started on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2016, hosted by EDDC Countryside. Following staff changes, a replacement HMO, Amelia Davies started work on 24 April 2017, joining Sama Euridge (shown in Photo 1, below).

**Photo 1.** *Sama Euridge (left) and Amelia Davies, Habitat Mitigation Officers*



2.2.2 In the first 4 weeks of their employment, the HMOs were introduced to key stakeholders across the three sites and then integrated more closely with site management staff at the Pebblebed Heaths and at Dawlish Warren. Day to day work schedules now involve public education and engagement across the 3 sites.

2.2.3 The HMOs have access to a bespoke SNAP survey, which is an electronic form recording their engagement with the public – providing a daily record of locations visited, number of people spoken to, activities witnessed and disturbance events. Data retrieved from Nov 16 to June 17 is summarised in Table 4, below:

**Table 4: HMOs: Locations, number of people spoken to & interactions<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Dawlish Warren</b>	<b>Ppl Spoken to</b>	<b>No of interactions</b>
Dune Ridge	40	15
Finger Point	10	2
Greenland Lake	23	10
Groyne 9>	188	74
Groynes 1-9	10	3
Main Woods (DD)	8	3
Soft Sand Bay	17	7
Warren Point	9	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>118</b>

<b>Pebblebed Heaths</b>		
Aylesbeare Common	47	20
Bicton Common	59	32
Bystock	9	5
Colaton Raleigh Common	120	62
Dalditch Common	3	2
East Budleigh Common	44	30
Harpford Common	6	4
Hawkerland	27	19
Model Airfield	1	1
Woodbury Common	383	176
<b>Total</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>351</b>

<b>Exe Estuary</b>		
Bowling Green Marsh	2	1
DW VEZ	2	1
Exminster Marshes	1	1
Exmouth Duck Pond / LNR	22	15
Imperial Recreation Ground	6	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>

<b>Total (combined)</b>	<b>1037</b>	<b>492</b>
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2.2.4 The results above are open to misinterpretation in regard to time spent at each location because it only reflects actual interaction with visitors. Future monitoring will be adapted to also reflect “nil” interactions, time spent at a location.

2.2.5 An important function of the HMO remit is to engage with visitors. Their natural inclination may therefore lean toward spending a greater proportion of time at sites with more visitors and a reduced presence at less visited sites. This approach could require refinement based on liaison with and advice from site managers as it is important to maintain a presence across all locations.

<sup>6</sup> This accounts for interactions with groups of visitors as well as individuals

2.2.6 The results of the SNAP monitoring survey indicate a reduced number of people interacted with at various locations along the Exe Estuary. There are a number of possible explanations for this – the fact that there are a smaller number of access points, water based interactions are not possible due to the lack of a Patrol Boat, monitoring only began in November 2016 and one of the most popular areas (the Duck Pond, Exmouth) is most sensitive between mid-late August and late December.

2.2.7 The HMO remit is flexible, with continuity of presence at each site throughout the year. Seasonal requirements (breeding birds in spring/summer on the Pebblebeds, waterfowl in autumn/winter on the Exe) and the level of their involvement with other mitigation projects dictate how HMO time is allocated.

2.2.8 The HMOs have participated in a number of events with key stakeholders, including the Friends of the Common Forum and Board of Trustees meeting at Clinton Devon Estates. They also attended meetings of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership Officer Working Group and were speakers at the launch event for the public consultation on zones of activity for water users on the Exe Estuary.

2.2.9 The HMOs have visited other mitigation teams in the Solent and in Dorset in order to understand and learn from other approaches. A visit to the SPA Warden team in the Thames Valley area was achieved in spring 2017.

2.2.10 The mitigation value of the HMO roles as a means of directly engaging with and communicating key messages to visitors at each site cannot be overstated. As can be seen from the results in Table 4, the HMOs have engaged with over 1000 people since November 2016. These visitors may not otherwise have received the key messages about the importance and sensitivities of the protected sites.

## **2.3 Warden Vehicle**

2.3.1 Ultimately, an Isuzu D-Max 4x4 vehicle was selected. This choice of vehicle provided best value for money and compared very favourably with its' competitors in terms of specification and capability. At £18,303, this vehicle was delivered £1,697 under budget, with outright purchase of the vehicle (as opposed to lease hire) expected to result in cost savings of an estimated £380,000 over an 80 year period (when compared to Strategy estimates).



## 2.4 Dog project

2.4.1 The objective of the Devon Loves Dogs project is to reinforce positive messages about responsible dog behaviour in the countryside. The Project Officer, Julie Owen (shown in Photo 2, below), started on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016, also hosted by EDDC Countryside.

**Photo 2:** Julie Owen, Devon Loves Dogs Project Officer (and dog, Maisie)



2.4.2 Julie has also met with key stakeholders across the three sites. Ongoing contact with Dorset Dogs (the scheme we are attempting to emulate) has been invaluable in learning more about their approach and fine tuning our own.

2.4.3 Work to date has focused on developing and establishing the project, launching in July 2017. Now called “Devon Loves Dogs”, designing a visual identity for the scheme has been key (see Image 1, below), whilst work to develop a dedicated website and associated materials is due for completion in July 2017.

**Image 1:** Visual identity for Devon Loves Dogs



2.4.4 Key project goals such as a dog walking code, recommended walks in the area and useful information for dog owners have been completed and will be incorporated into leaflets and the project website [www.devonlovesdogs.co.uk](http://www.devonlovesdogs.co.uk).

2.4.5 Dawlish SANGS is due to open to the public during summer 2017. The Project Officer is working with Teignbridge District Council to deliver a dog festival as the launch event for the site<sup>7</sup>. This will announce that the site is open for business and firmly place dogs and dog walking as its core user group (see 3.8 below).

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<sup>7</sup> See *“Dawlish SANGS Marketing Strategy” (March 2017)*

## **2.5 Revised zoning, Wildlife Refuges (formerly Voluntary Exclusion Zones) and codes of conduct for the Exe Estuary.**

2.5.1 Two areas critical to the ecological function of the Exe Estuary (the intertidal areas to the north of Dawlish Warren and at the Duck Pond in Exmouth) have long been identified. Proposals to establish Wildlife Refuges (formerly Voluntary Exclusion Zones) in these areas were presented at a general meeting with users of the estuary on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

2.5.2 This started a consultation process, run by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) which included 18 meetings with different user groups, 2 general meetings and an online questionnaire which closed on 28 April 2017.

2.5.3 A critique (originally raised with NE and the Local Authorities in August 2012) regarding the scientific evidence and interpretation underpinning the approach taken to Habitat Regulations mitigation was raised. Senior ornithologists from NE met to discuss this issue with those raising it in October 2013 and subsequently also discussed related critiques regarding similar work on the Solent. The partnership maintains that the approach taken draws on robust examination of available evidence and is implementing a correct interpretation of the precautionary principle.

2.5.4 After taking into account both the consultation responses and the ecological requirements of these areas, final proposals have been discussed and amended by the EEMP Officer Working Group (which also includes South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership (SEDHRP) officers) and endorsed by the EEMP Management Group.

2.5.5 A drop-in event took place on Thurs 29 June at Devon County Council (County Hall) in Exeter. At this event the final proposals of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership were displayed and staff were in attendance to answer questions on the report.

2.5.6 The drop in event marked a handover in the ownership of the process from EEMP to SEDHRP. Started on June 29<sup>th</sup>, there is a 6 week period until 10<sup>th</sup> August during which people and organisations can look at and help to refine the final recommendations online. This is particularly to allow for seasonal estuary users to comment, and to allow for any comments on any amendments made to the proposals following the previous consultation.

2.5.7 Following the conclusion of the SEDHRP consultation process, a further report encompassing both the EEMP recommendations and any other amendments will be presented to the October 2017 meeting of the Executive Committee.

## **2.6 Purchase and run a new patrol boat**

2.6.1 Ensuring people remain within the speed limit and are following agreed codes of conduct will form a key element of any long-term strategy to reduce disturbance on the Exe Estuary. The patrol boat is a necessary element within this.

2.6.2 An extended period of searching the second hand market for a patrol boat which meets the specification and is within budget has proved very challenging.

2.6.3 The HMOs will be required to carry out regular patrols up and down the estuary, with a visible presence on the water and in a craft which is suitable for all the conditions they are likely to experience.

2.6.4 Following further research online and followed by a visit to a boat manufacturer in Poole, Dorset (Twinseas Boats), a variety of quotes have been requested for a custom built twin hulled boat. However, despite repeated requests for a final quote this has not been forthcoming and this avenue of research has stalled.

2.6.5 Given the potential role of the Patrol Boat in helping to establish any Wildlife Refuges, it would seem appropriate to wait until it is understood whether the proposals are approved before further investigating purchase of the patrol boat.

## **2.7 Petalwort translocation & monitoring at Dawlish Warren**

2.7.1 Petalwort is a small, pale green plant which is one of the special interest features for which Dawlish Warren Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is designated. It is nationally scarce in the UK, being widely but sparsely distributed.

2.7.2 The work proposals include habitat creation to create suitable conditions for petalwort and subsequent monitoring of success/failure. This necessitates disturbance of other habitat within the Special Area of Conservation and therefore the senior Ranger at Dawlish Warren has submitted an Assessment of Likely Significant Effect (ALSE) form to Natural England (NE) regarding the work.

2.7.3 The work remains dependent upon NE's response, which could include information on other consents and licences which are required to progress further.

## **2.8 Codes of conduct on the Pebblebed Heaths.**

2.8.1 Dr Sam Bridgewater, Nature Conservation Manager at Clinton Devon Estates is in the process of drafting text for the proposed codes of conduct and will circulate these to the Officer Working Group (OWG) for discussion.

## **2.9 Provision of dog bins on the Pebblebed Heaths.**

2.9.1 Dog bins as mitigation relate to impacts from dog fouling adversely changing heathland soil conditions and are particularly relevant to the SAC interest. The provision of more dog bins provides an indication to visitors that visitors are expected to pick-up and helps to generate a sense that the site is being looked after.

2.9.2 A total of 6 parking areas across the Pebblebed Heaths now have new dog bins installed and collections are underway. These are:

- Wheathills
- Estuary
- Stowford
- Bystock
- Aylesbeare
- Lympstone

## **2.10 Sensitivity maps for the Pebblebed Heaths.**

2.10.1 Draft sensitivity maps highlighting sites of high conservation value (based on presence of European Protected Species and fragile mire habitat) have been created. Maps also exist for all tracks.

2.10.2 Quotes from designers have been received to create draft maps that can then be used in a range of future media (including walking leaflets, panels and electronic media) to help manage and direct visitor traffic.

2.10.3 The quotes are all higher than the estimated cost in the Strategy and therefore it is recommended in the 2017-18 Annual Business Plan that sufficient extra resource is made available to complete this work.

## **2.11 Monitoring erosion of paths and tracks on the Pebblebed Heaths.**

2.11.1 An access audit and collection of baseline data on the condition of tracks/paths across the heaths is underway. This will include photographic data.

2.11.2 Outputs from the work will include “traffic lighting” of tracks (to determine a priority schedule for maintenance and repairs) and also highlight and develop work schedules for areas that are threatened from an increase in visitor numbers.

### 3. Dawlish SANGS

3.1 The 26ha Dawlish SANG is progressing well. Local firm JTT Contracting Ltd won a competitive tender to deliver the access road, surface water drainage and car park for up to 60 cars. Shown in **Photo 3**, this work completed on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

**Photo 3.** *Works completed on access road, drainage and car park.*



3.2 Transforming agricultural land into a Countryside Park involves a number of areas of work and a huge amount of progress has already been made. These have included Deer-proof fencing compounds which have been carefully located to preserve the expansive views.



3.3 Thousands of young native trees have been planted within the compounds and, as **Photo 4** shows, there has been planting of gaps in existing hedgerows and planting of new hedgerows, all protected with tree guards.

**Photo 4.** *New hedgerow planting.*



3.4 Almost a hundred larger trees have been also been planted, staked and guards fitted. A small orchard with individual timber and mesh guards have been constructed and planted with local varieties.

3.5 The majority of the former arable areas have been seeded with an appropriate grassland mix to allow for future wildflower planting. Other areas are being seeded with a grassland and wildflower mix, and some have been left to support nesting Skylarks this season.

3.6 Hedge banks and drainage ditches have been formed, as well as a graded trackway along the top of the site where visitors will be able to see the spectacular views.



3.7 Traditional hardwood gates, constructed by a local sawmill are due to be installed at various entrance points. Our Countryside Rangers will be constructing rustic benches and arranging signboards, as well as the installation of dog bins.

3.8 Work to implement the Marketing Strategy for Dawlish Countryside Park is underway. An opening festival event (“A Family Day Where Dogs Can Play”) is expected in early September which will target local residents and announce the formal opening of the SANGS.

**Photo 5:** *New fencing marks a park boundary*



**Neil Harris**  
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**South East Devon**  
**Habitat Regulations**  
**Executive Committee**  
**July 2017**

Natural England comment:

We are encouraged that delivery has begun, particularly the appointment of 3 officers responsible for direct delivery of mitigation measures and securing of the first SANGS site. We still have slight concerns regarding the rate of delivery and whether this can be sustained or increased given that there was an initial focus on delivering measures perceived to be “quick wins”.