



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

2017-18 Annual Business Plan – Annual Report

Neil Harris, Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager
April 2018



Exeter
City Council



Legal comment/advice:

There are no legal implications requiring comment

Finance comment/advice:

There are no additional financial comments required.

Public Document:	Yes
Exemption:	None
Review date for release	None

Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the progress made in delivering the 2016-17 and 2017-18 Annual Business Plans.
2. Notes changes to the operational year as specified in the 2017-18 Annual Business Plan.
3. Notes the status of mitigation measures from each of the plans, as well as explanations given for measures subject to delay and revised completion dates.
4. Receives a further report on the deployment and implications of the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) award.
5. Receives a further report on in-perpetuity arrangements in relation to Dawlish and South West Exeter SANGS.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Medium.

This report is an update on the progress made in delivery of new mitigation measures set out in the 2017-18 Annual Business Plan and ongoing measures from the 2016-17 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 2017-18 Annual Business Plan (ABP) was approved at the meeting of the Executive Committee at the Rennes Room, Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter on July 27th 2017.

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 outlined the delivery of ongoing measures established as part of the 2016-17 ABP as well as a range of new additional measures. In total, the plan earmarked expenditure of an estimated £237,120.

1.3 Projects included the continued funding of keystone mitigation measures such as the Delivery Manager, Habitat Mitigation Officers and Project Officer (Devon Loves Dogs). Other significant measures approved as part of the plan included signage at Dawlish Warren and along the Exe Estuary, monitoring and demarcating the Exe Wildlife Refuges and path repair on the Pebblebed Heaths.

1.4 There has been sustained progress in the successful delivery of the Dawlish Countryside Park Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS). This site continues to attract local visitors and has been the source of positive feedback from residents on social media.

1.5 On 1st February 2018, it was announced that Teignbridge District Council, on behalf of Exeter City Council, had been successful in bidding for the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) from Homes England. Up to £3.7M funding will be used for the phased delivery and maintenance of South West Exeter SANGS and the ongoing management (in perpetuity) of Dawlish Countryside Park.

1.6 Work to progress the phased delivery of the SANGS at South West Exeter (and secure management in perpetuity for both sites) is in progress and will be reported at a future meeting of the Executive.

1.7 As recommended in the 2017-18 ABP, the operational year has been shortened by a quarter, in order to align more closely with financial year reporting. As such, a number of measures identified in the plan remain in progress, due for completion within the next quarter.

1.8 Tables 1-4 report the status of mitigation measures identified in the 2017-18 ABP and those outstanding from the 2016-17 ABP.

Table 1. 2017-18 Annual Business Plan – ongoing mitigation measures.

Site	Measure	Status
Cross Site	Delivery Manager	Completed (ongoing)
Cross Site	Two Habitat Mitigation Officers	Completed (ongoing)
Cross Site	Warden vehicle	Completed (ongoing)
Cross Site	Dog project	Completed (ongoing)
Exe Estuary	Patrol boat	Initiated (ongoing) ¹
Pebblebed Heaths	Dog bins	Completed (ongoing)
	Total	

Table 2. 2017-18 Annual Business Plan – additional mitigation measures.
(completed/ongoing)

Site	Measure	Status
Exe Estuary	Disturbance monitoring	Initiated (ongoing) ²
Dawlish Warren	Changes to car parking management	Initiated (ongoing) ³
Pebblebed Heaths	Codes of conduct	Completed
Pebblebed Heaths	Boardwalks/ Path surfacing	Initiated (ongoing) ⁴

¹ Patrol Boat on order, expected summer 2018.

² Monitoring started Feb 2018, 3 year contract.

³ TDC are working to respond to the Oct 2017 recommendations.

⁴ Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust are working with a contractor to undertake 1st schedule of urgent works.

Table 3 – mitigation measures carried over from the 2016-17 ABP

Site	Measure	Status
Exe Estuary	Codes of Conduct	Complete
Dawlish Warren	Petalwort monitoring	Initiated (ongoing) ⁵
Pebblebed Heaths	Maps highlighting sensitive areas	In progress ⁶

Table 4 – mitigation measures to be carried over from the 2017-18 ABP

Site	Measure	Status
Dawlish Warren	Carry out audit of information boards	Initiated: Delivery Summer 2018
Dawlish Warren	BBQ info at local retailers	Initiated: Delivery Spring 2018
Dawlish Warren	Removal of Dog Control Order	Under investigation ⁷
Dawlish Warren	Byelaw preventing fires and barbeques in buffer zone	Under investigation ⁸
Exe Estuary	Update signs at public slipways	Initiated: Delivery Summer 2018
Exe Estuary	New interpretation boards (five boards)	Initiated: Delivery Summer 2018
Exe Estuary	Procurement, installation, maintenance of buoy markers.	Initiated: Delivery Autumn 2018

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 assuming management of key staff (HMOs and Project Officer (Devon Loves Dogs) and implementation of key projects (zonation review, codes of conduct, signage review and patrol boat).

⁵ TDC Rangers at Dawlish Warren have received a protected species license from Natural England and are engaging a botanist to undertake a preliminary survey.

⁶ Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust are working with a graphic designer to finalise.

⁷ Pending outcomes of TDC Dog Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) consultation.

⁸ Pursuing with TDC Legal department, collection of evidence.

2.2 Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs).

2.2.1 Over the course of the last 9 months, the HMOs have concentrated efforts on engaging with specific user groups as part of the (now completed) Wildlife Refuge consultations and the (now completed) Exe Estuary codes of conduct work.

2.2.2 The main focus of their day to day duties remains public engagement and education across the 3 protected sites. Close working with project partners further enhances understanding and knowledge of the sites. This has included work with the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) team, the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Green Blue, and liaison with conservation/land management teams across the region (EDDC, TDC, RSPB, DWT, Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust (PHCT)).

2.2.3 In September 2017, the HMOs organised and hosted the first meeting of different mitigation teams from across the south of England. Hosted by the RSPB, the event was attended by over 30 staff from the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership, Bird Aware Solent, Urban Heaths Partnership (Dorset), PHCT and the Exe Estuary Officer. The event provided opportunities for sharing best practise, networking and establishing an online source for sharing relevant information, scientific surveys and research via "Knowledge Hub".

2.2.4 November 2017 was a significant milestone, with the HMOs recording interactions with over 2100 people. This reinforces the value of face to face engagement to ensure delivery of key messages to the people using these areas.

2.2.5 Future work schedules include training to prepare for use of the patrol boat and, in partnership with the Green Blue, re-engaging with clubs and groups on the Exe in advance of the implementation of the Wildlife Refuges. The HMOs will also be contacting local schools to educate younger audiences about the value of their local areas and how they can help to protect them for the future.

2.3 Dog project.

2.3.1 With the official launch of Devon Loves Dogs (DLD) at Heath Week in July 2017, there has been significant progress in connecting with local dog owners and working across the region with project partners.

2.3.2 Membership of DLD stands at 150, with more members joining each month. The website now features enhanced information about walks, events and hosts a gallery of members' dogs. Importantly, it is increasingly used as an information hub for dog owners, which provides dog owners with alternative choices for walks and knowledge about best behaviour on the protected sites. Both Twitter and Facebook social media accounts have gathered a strong following, whilst work to adapt to recent changes in these platforms continues.

2.3.3 Over 1020 people have been recorded at the 12 events and guided walks organised by DLD since July 2017. At least 300 children have participated in the “how to pick up after your dog” fun activity!

2.3.4 Key project goals such as a dog walking code, recommended walks in the area and useful information for dog owners have been completed and have been incorporated into leaflets, posters and the project website www.devonlovesdogs.co.uk.

2.3.5 Additionally, DLD has worked with key partners such as PHCT in their Pebblebed Heaths specific dog walking code of conduct, included here as Appendix A. This has helped to shape the direction of key communications messages. Recent developments also include very positive discussions with Devon Wildlife Trust, exploring areas of overlap and where DLD can benefit sites with particular management issues.

2.4 Revised zoning, Wildlife Refuges and codes of conduct for the Exe Estuary.

2.4.1 Following an extensive and extended 9 month consultation process, two areas critical to the ecological function of the Exe Estuary were approved as Wildlife Refuges at the October 23 2017 meeting of the Executive. A 3 year schedule of monitoring is now in place, with annual results due for reporting in June each year until 2021.

2.4.2 Subsequently, the Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) began further consultation with local user groups and national bodies to review and update codes of conduct for activities on the Exe. There was a 6 week period from 25th January to 7th March 2018 for users to feed back their comments and recommendations via local clubs and groups.

2.4.3 The EEMP Management Group endorsed the final codes on 21st March 2018. The codes now form a pack of 6 which cover all the main activities on the Exe and a specific code for Dawlish Warren.

2.4.4 Printed copies of the codes will be distributed to local clubs, incorporated into club websites and circulated to all relevant forums as necessary. Additionally, copies will be distributed to local libraries and will be available at Dawlish Warren Visitor Centre. The EEMP and Exe Wildlife Refuge websites will also promote and host copies of the codes, whilst the HMOs will also distribute and use them as an educational resource.

2.4.5 With the completion of the codes of conduct work, it is now possible to incorporate key messages from this work into new interpretation boards at Dawlish Warren and across the Exe Estuary. Work to understand key locations and rationalise existing signage is underway, as is preliminary design work. Expected completion is in summer 2018, which will enable key messages to be in place ahead of the formal introduction of the Wildlife Refuges in September 2018.

2.5 Purchase and run a new patrol boat.

2.5.1 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.

2.5.2 Given the required specification, capability and intended lifetime of the patrol boat (20 years), finding a boat which met the requirements for the original budget of £22,600 proved extremely challenging. As such, it has been considered necessary to source a new boat, with an inflatable tender to assist patrols at Dawlish Warren.

2.5.3 Approval to proceed with the best value quote of £27,350 was sought from, and approved by, members of the Executive Committee. The overspend of £4,750 is covered by unspent budget of £12,500 for the running of the boat from the 2016-17 and 2017-18 ABP. Both HMOs are scheduled to undergo Powerboat Level 2, VHF Radio and Sea Survival training well in advance of the delivery of the boat, expected summer 2018. Arrangements for storing the boat are in place.

2.6 Pebblebed Heaths Codes of Conduct

2.6.1 In liaison with local partners RSPB, DWT, EDDC and DLD, PHCT have drawn up codes of conduct for dog walking, horse riding and mountain biking. These codes have been developed in liaison with local clubs and the Friends of the Commons group.

Photo 1: Press release announcing the new dog walking code

The image is a screenshot of a news article. The main headline is "Dog walkers are asked to take heed of new rules to protect precious landscape". Below the headline is a sub-headline: "Dog poo damages the plants and wildlife that make East Devon Pebblebed Heaths so special". The article includes social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, with 16 shares and 1 comment. It is attributed to "Amie Mearns" on 22/02/18 at 14:18. A search bar is present with the text "Enter your postcode to see news and information near you". Below the search bar is a photograph of a group of people and dogs standing on a grassy field. The caption for the photo reads: "Conservation experts from I. R. Julie Owen, Devon Lower Dogs coordinator, Kim Strawbridge, Site Manager, LDPI, Kate Penton, Countryside Learning Officer, CUL, East Devon Lido (Saman Larridge), Edric Hopkinson, senior reserves officer, Devon Wildlife Trust, Amelia Davies, Habitat Mitigation Officer for South East Devon habitat regulations partnership". To the right of the photo, there are "RECOMMENDED" articles, including one about "Dogs in Brest: Britain's 1087 could be rehomed in 1000s" and another about "UK weather forecast predicts 'stable' more".

2.7 Boardwalks / Path repair on the Pebblebed Heaths.

2.7.1 Results from the path width and erosion monitoring⁹ have informed a schedule of urgent works across Bicton, Woodbury and Colaton Raleigh commons. A summary report of these results is included here as Appendix B.

2.7.2 The protected status of the heaths means that there are strict criteria which govern the makeup, pH and type of aggregate which may be used for path material. Blackhill Quarry on the Pebblebed Heaths has traditionally provided this material but is no longer operating. As such, an amount of aggregate from Blackhill Quarry has been stockpiled in order to use for path repairs.

2.8 Mapping sensitive areas on the Pebblebed Heaths.

2.8.1 The PHCT are undertaking this work on behalf of the Executive Committee. The Committee gave approval for increased funding at their meeting on 27 July 2017, following a tendering process for the work. Graphic designers have been commissioned to carry out mapping artwork and draft styling is being worked up. This is expected to complete in spring 2018.

3. Dawlish SANGS

3.1 The 26ha Dawlish SANG was available for use by the public in summer 2017, with a (rescheduled) free public event on Monday 4th September marking the completion of enhancement works. This successful event, organised and staffed by TDC Countryside Rangers, DLD and the HMOs was attended by approximately 300 people.

Photo 2. Walkers exploring the Countryside Park



⁹ Approved as part of the 2016-17 ABP, June 2016

3.2 Due to poor weather leading to the cancellation of the first attempt, the site was officially opened by members of the Executive Committee on Sunday 7th January 2018.

Photo 3. The ribbon-cutting event



Photo 4. Planting a “Star of Devon” apple tree.



3.3 A leaflet for the park, designed by TDC, is included here as Appendix C.

Neil Harris
Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager

South East Devon
Habitat Regulations
Executive Committee
April 2018

Natural England comment:

We welcome the progress that has been made towards delivery of the mitigation measures set out in the 'SEDESMS' report and the 2017-18 Annual Business Plan.

We are particularly keen to see recommendations 4 (report on HIF) and 5 (report on SANGS 'in perpetuity' arrangements) acted upon and reports on these items brought to the next committee meeting in July 2018, however, as previously requested, we would prefer that the 'in perpetuity' paper covered funding of all measures and not just SANGS.