

Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

Appendix D: 2018-19 Annual Business Plan (ABP).

Summary.

1.1 Projects outstanding from the 2016-17 and 2017-18 Annual Business Plan (ABP) are reported separately.¹ **Table 1**, below, shows keystone mitigation measures implemented during the 2016-17 recommended for ongoing commitment as part of the 2018-19 ABP.

Table 1. *Ongoing mitigation recommended as part of the 2018-19 ABP.*

Site	Measure	Capital cost	Revenue Cost	Total
Cross Site	Staff – salaries, NI, recharges, travel, training, stationery.	£0	£129,300	£129,300²
Cross Site	Warden vehicle	£0	£2,000	£2,000
Cross Site	Dog project	£0	£2,000	£2,000
Exe Estuary	Patrol boat	£0	£7,000	£7,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Dog bins	£0	£2,870	£2,870
	Total	£0	£ 143,170	£ 143,170

Proposed spend: Up to £143,170 ongoing commitment towards key projects established in the 2016-17 ABP.

Table 2. *New mitigation measures recommended as part of the 2018-19 ABP.*

Site	Measure	Capital cost	Revenue Cost	Total
Dawlish Warren	Visitor Management Plan	£12,000	£0	£12,000
Dawlish Warren	Regular Warren Newsletter	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Dawlish Warren	Monitoring of vegetation change	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Dawlish Warren	Monitoring of accretion and erosion	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Exe Estuary	Updates of the Exe Estuary leaflets	£6,000	£0	£6,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Educational work with schools	£4,000	£0	£4,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Interpretation Boards	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Pebblebed Heaths	Changes to car parks (preliminary survey)	£15,000	£0	£15,000
	Total	£49,000	£0	£49,000

¹ 2017-18 Annual Business Plan – Annual Report, April 2018

² Revised costs due to changes to staff salaries.

2. Visitor Management Plan (Dawlish Warren).

2.1 Teignbridge District Council (TDC) are currently working to respond to the Executive Committee's October 2017 recommendation³ to consider changes to the management of car parking at Dawlish Warren. It is therefore recommended that a Visitor Management Plan would be best delivered in step with any future proposal by TDC to address visitor impacts at the Warren.

2.2 Now that the geography of the site will change at a faster rate due to the coastal realignment work, embryo and mobile dunes may be created through natural processes, facilitated by the beach recharging operations. These habitats will be vulnerable to trampling pressure, which will no longer have the advantage of increasing the mobility of the sand, as it will be naturally mobile.

2.3 Depending on how the Dawlish Warren Special Area of Conservation (SAC) develops following the Beach Management Scheme (BMS), it may at some point be necessary to significantly change public access to part of, or indeed the whole, site. The creation of significant areas of mobile and embryo dunes which cannot be protected through visitor management (e.g. temporary or small enclosures, path management etc.) due to their location or extent could require more robust measures to regulate visitor numbers. This may include allowing access via permit or fenced paths only, or discontinuing public access altogether in vulnerable parts of the site.

2.4 A live visitor management plan is recommended to allow staff to collate relevant information, review it on a regular basis (e.g. annually) and plan appropriate measures as required. This will require work with other organisations & agencies to ensure that there is not duplication of work, evidence gathering or monitoring data. Although (by the very nature of the site) there is a degree of overlap, mitigation funds should remain focused on mitigating the effects of increasing visitor impacts, rather than monitoring or mitigating the effects of the BMS. The information required will include:

- A measure of visitor pressure. The installation of counters in at least three locations is recommended, e.g. the gate by the visitor centre; where the dunes narrow at the Bight; and a mobile unit which could be placed depending on need at Warren Point at the outer part of the dunes.
- A review of changes in the geography and habitat composition of the site due to coastal erosion or accretion. This was relevant whether or not the managed realignment took place, but now that it has, is a considerably larger job. Regular aerial photographs (see section 5) is recommended to inform this review.
- Existing vegetation and species data in the context of visitor management, including further monitoring as required.

2.5 An overview of all factors will enable sound decisions to be made on individual issues, leading to a co-ordinated approach to changes that are likely to occur as a result of changing coastal dynamics.

Proposed spend: Up to £12,000 for counters and consultancy support, subject to verification of work/funding required.

³ Car parking at Dawlish Warren, October 2017

3. Regular Warren Newsletter.

3.1 There are various approaches used to communicate widely with people living around important sites and with people planning visits. Websites, leaflets, and direct contact (people answering emails and other inquiries) provide detailed information for sites around the UK.

3.2 A Dawlish Warren newsletter, distributed to local residents, accommodation and tourist outlets is proposed as a means of educating potential users about the special nature of the site and codes of conduct. It will be a means of disseminating information about changes to the site and how they are being managed plus forthcoming events.

3.3 The newsletter should be short (e.g. two sides of A4) and a summer and winter edition produced. It will be a short, brief document circulated very locally around Dawlish Warren. The newsletter will aim to provide a means of communicating changes (for example relating to realignment) and engender local support and connection with the site.

Proposed spend: Up to £1,000 towards the cost of design, print and circulation of an A4 newsletter to be distributed twice annually.

4. Monitoring of vegetation change at Dawlish Warren.

4.1 It is difficult to be confident of how access patterns may change over time, for example in response to new activities, changes in climate, and changes on the site. As the tipping point at which trampling will negatively impact the plants at the Warren cannot be predicted, ongoing monitoring will provide an early warning (see also 2.4).

Proposed spend: Up to £5,000 towards the cost of specialist fixed point photography and detailed quadrat sampling.

5. Monitoring of accretion and erosion at Dawlish Warren.

5.1 The BMS at Dawlish Warren was a £12million project delivered by the Environment Agency (EA) and TDC, primarily aimed at reducing the risk of flooding to properties around the River Exe.

5.2 Work ranged from installing a new 'sandbag' defence under the dunes at the narrowest point of the Warren, removing stone basket "gabions", replacing and modifying timber wall "groynes" (used to capture and/or slow the movement of sand) and near-shore dredging operations to recharge the beach. Over 250,000 cubic metres of sand was pumped onto the beach.

5.3 The site is expected to continue to change, with the beach lowering and the dunes rolling back at some future point. It is also likely there will then be flooding behind the dunes at high tide. Further beach management works may be required at the site to manage future flood risk and to mitigate the environmental impact of the current scheme.

5.4 In order to be able to accurately inform visitor management of the site, it is very important to understand what impact the BMS has had and how the Warren is changing as a result. It will be necessary to understand what ongoing monitoring the EA is undertaking. It is recommended that sufficient funding be approved to ensure any specific monitoring requirements for visitor management as a result of an increasing population (as opposed to the BMS (see 2.4)) are met.

Proposed spend: Up to £1,000 towards the cost for the use of detailed aerial imagery. This imagery to feed directly into the proposed Visitor Management Plan (section 2 of this report).

6. Exe Estuary - Updates of the Exe Estuary leaflets.

6.1 Interpretation boards, signs and leaflets are widely used around the UK at nature reserve Sites. There are some excellent existing leaflets for the Exe Estuary, including the Exe Explorer, an Exe Activities leaflet and an Exe Wildlife leaflet, and these are widely distributed and available for download from the Exe Estuary Management Partnership Website.

6.2 The leaflets currently include a map of the estuary and information on where to go, sources of additional information and guidance. The Activities leaflet includes a (now old) map of the zones and a section on avoiding disturbance to wildlife. There is cross reference to old codes of conduct (where they existed) and information for users wanting to undertake particular activities. This leaflet works particularly well as an overview and has a good balance of promoting the estuary, providing information and guiding visitors on how to behave to minimise their impacts.

6.3 With the Wildlife Refuge and Codes of Conduct work now complete, it is recommended that updates are made to the Activities and Explorer leaflets. It will be necessary to ensure the leaflet stays 'live'. Much of the information within the leaflet could be promoted more actively within the Exe Estuary Management Partnership website and made both interactive and more accessible.

Proposed spend: Up to £6,000 for redesign and printing of the Exe Explorer and Exe Activities leaflets.

7. Pebblebed Heaths – Educational work with schools.

7.1 Educational work with schools would involve visits to local schools, site visits with groups from local schools and educational resources made available to local schools, potentially on the web. Such work would raise awareness with children as to the importance of the Pebblebeds, and how to behave on the heaths. It should aim to reach the wider community (parents and grandparents) as well as the children themselves.

7.2 There is already a countryside learning officer employed by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. There is scope to complement her work and ensure long-term funding which would allow schools linked to new development (e.g. Cranbrook) to be targeted.

7.3 It is recommended that funding be made available in order to produce resources for school visits – design of school packs covering behavioural change, alongside site and ecological information. This will include time to collate and design content – potentially contracted out to a graphic designer with production of artwork for digital packs. This could be complemented in future years with kit/equipment to help with delivery, informed by the work recommended here.

Proposed spend: Up to £5,000, for design and production of school packs. Work to cover key messages relating to behavioural change, alongside site, ecological and curriculum relevant information.

8. Pebblebed Heaths – Interpretation boards.

8.1 Interpretation would inform visitors about the wildlife interest and other features of the Pebblebeds, raising awareness with visitors about the nature conservation importance. The boards would ensure visitors recognised they were visiting somewhere special, that is important for wildlife and there should be clear, justified messages as to how visitors should behave. It would work well to incorporate the sensitivity map⁴, highlighting preferred routes and sensitive areas.

8.2 Signs and interpretation need to be eye-catching, carefully sited so as to be in the right locations (e.g. perpendicular rather than parallel to pathways) and the right number so that visitors do not feel bombarded with information. Panels should not be intrusive or create too formal a feel. Ideal locations will not necessarily be inside the car-park but at points where people will naturally pause and where the interpretation can fit with a sense of place, such as when people first emerge from woodland/scrub around a car-park onto more open heath.

8.3 Interpretation should use colour, structure, illustrations and potentially flaps, sliding panels etc. to capture people's interest. Interpretation should convey consistent messages relating to the importance for wildlife and why it is a sensitive place. They should refrain from too much technical jargon about designation.

8.4 There are some existing interpretation boards, but these would benefit from an update and new design. The visitor survey results show that current interpretation had not influenced where interviewees had gone on-site. Using the visitor model in the Visitor Management Plan (e.g. Map 11) it is possible to work out where interpretation might best be positioned to maximise the number of people that would see it – based on current distributions. Locations should also be selected based on where it is intended to focus access in the longer term, where there may be sensitive features and where material will be seen.

8.5 The timescales of other work being carried out by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust (such as car parking and branding work with partners) means that it would not be possible (or desirable) to fully complete the Visitor Management Plan interpretation board recommendation in the 2018-19 ABP. Instead, it is recommended that up to £5,000 be approved to begin design of the boards, with future spend to finalise & produce.

Proposed spend: Up to £5,000 initial investment to initiate design of new interpretation boards.

⁴ *Approved as part of the 2016-17 ABP, June 2016*
Appendix 1 2018-19 Annual Business Plan

9. Pebblebed Heaths – Changes to car parks.

9.1 Improving particular car-parks is a positive step and potentially may encourage visitors to use particular car-parks. Improvements could include better surfacing, clear marking of bays, ease of access onto/from roads and signage. Improvements should be targeted at formal car-parks and in particular at a select few in order to focus access a little more.

9.2 Over time these would become the main areas used by visitors and by limiting roadside parking and allowing other car-parks to deteriorate it would be hoped that the selected car-parks would become the main entry points used by visitors.

9.3 In the long-term the risk of diffuse access (multiple locations with ample parking) growing gradually and spreading over a wide area is therefore limited. The selected car-parks should match those where interpretation, dog bins and wardening time are focused, ensuring greater engagement with a higher proportion of visitors.

9.4 Such an approach in the long-term essentially allows a shift from widespread diffuse access to access more concentrated at fewer points (less access points with similar number of parking spaces), ensuring access is easier to manage, engagement is easier and recreation impacts can be better managed.

9.5 Improvements would provide the potential to also set the number of parking places at particular locations, giving a means of setting a limit on the number of visitors that may visit at a particular time (given the high proportion of visitors that arrive by car). Changes can therefore ensure no overall net increase in the number of parking spaces at the site.

9.6 The Visitor Management Plan identified 9 car parks and recommended these as the focus for improvements. In the same way that the audit of path erosion and width⁵ identified and accurately costed priority works for the path network, it is recommended that sufficient budget be provided for similar work on the car park network.

Proposed spend: Up to £15,000 to commission a consultant to prepare a detailed strategy of costed and prioritised options for works required on the ground.

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⁵ *Approved as part of the 2016-17 ABP, June 2016*
Appendix 1 2018-19 Annual Business Plan