

Axe Catchment restoration & Nature Recovery Network pilot project

- The Axe Catchment restoration project is a new collaborative partnership between East Devon DC's Countryside team, Natural England, Blackdown Hills, Dorset & East Devon AONBs, Devon Wildlife Trust & SW Water.
- There are significant opportunities and implications from this project for the Seaton Wetlands.
- At the East Devon Catchment Partnership (EDCP) meeting on 12 June 2020, a renewed ambition to collaborate to tackle issues and realise opportunities in the Axe catchment was presented.
- The EDCP has a broad remit across many water catchments, but the Axe remains a priority across the partnership for the following reasons:
 - It is a failing water quality catchment with a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) that is partly unfavourable, largely due to phosphates and Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). It is subject to an associated, statutory Axe Nutrient Management Plan.
 - It has important building blocks of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN), but areas are fragmented and some are in a poor condition
 - it has a wealth of opportunities for working with natural processes
 - trust has been built with members of farming community through previous projects and on-going farm facilitation schemes
 - it has local flooding issues and solutions are being developed in partnership with Local Flood Action Groups
 - it is a Catchment Sensitive Farming and Woods for Water (tree planting) priority catchment
 - It straddles parts of 3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is the focus for a national Colchester Declaration (nature's recovery) pilot, looking to align AONB Nature Recovery Plans by creating a shared vision and delivery plan.

The Axe Catchment Restoration proposal:

- There is now the momentum to build on current drivers/ incentives and initiatives to really make a step-change difference in how we work together to benefit the Axe catchment utilising the nature recovery programme.
- There is a need to 'fix' the Axe catchment and enable it to function in a resilient way. There is also a need to share lessons learnt from the Axe with other East Devon Catchment Partnership catchments and vice versa.
- The proposal's three main pillars underpinning Axe Catchment Restoration (the whole is more than the sum of the parts principle):
 1. **Building resilience:** including nature's recovery actions, soils and physical modifications, sustainable land management practices
 2. **Regulation:** including Water Framework Directive and the Axe Nutrient Management Plan
 3. **Securing wider benefits:** including flood & drought, net zero/ carbon and community benefits

What does a resilient Axe catchment look like by 2050?

- Stakeholders have a unified vision as to how the catchment should be managed with nature's recovery, climate resilience and delivery of public goods & services at its core.
- (Important) Habitat (mire/ woodland and heathland) mosaics have been established through a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) that are better, bigger, more joined and operate as a viable, functioning and interconnected carbon rich nature network
- This interconnected NRN allows flagship species such as horseshoe bats, dormice and fritillary butterflies to move freely to new climate spaces
- Designated nature conservation sites are operating as functioning 'core nature areas' in the Nature Recovery Network, from terrestrial through to marine

- Sustainable and Regenerative agriculture has been widely embraced by the farming community providing public goods and services benefits
- The Axe Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is in near natural/ favourable conservation condition/ and phosphate levels in the catchment are reduced and stable
- Natural processes are operating across the catchment with rivers reconnected to their floodplains, and beavers are integral components in a sustainable landscape
- Sustainable farming across the whole catchment is providing public goods and services and is being rewarded through support mechanisms
- Local businesses are thriving and reaping the benefits from a nature rich catchment landscape
- The knock-on benefits that accrue from the three National Landscapes (world class nature rich landscapes) feeds into the surrounding catchment area, so that everyone feels the benefit
- New developments are sustainable, resilient and exemplars of green development including appropriate use of resources and recycling
- Existing settlements and infrastructure are retrofitted to ensure careful use of natural resources and flood risk is greatly reduced
- Biodiversity net gain and other investment opportunities are used to continue to rebuild and strengthen a resilient and coherent nature network
- People can access and make a 'connection to nature' from wherever they live in the Axe catchment and opportunities are available to all.