



SOUTH EAST DEVON  
HABITAT REGULATIONS  
PARTNERSHIP

East Devon District Council  
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Heathpark Industrial Estate  
Honiton  
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## **Agenda for South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee Thursday, 24th July, 2025, 2.00 pm**

### **Members of South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee**

Councillors Geoff Jung, EDDC (Chair), Ruth Williams, ECC and Gary Taylor, TDC

**Venue:** Otter Room (Ground Floor), Blackdown House, EDDC at Border Road,  
Heathpark Industrial Estate, Honiton, EX14 1EJ

**Contact:** Debbie Meakin 01395 517540; email [dmeakin@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:dmeakin@eastdevon.gov.uk)  
(or group number 01395 517546)  
16 July 2025

Due to the location of the meeting venue, the meeting will not be recorded and therefore not streamed to the EDDC youtube channel.

- 1 Minutes of the previous meeting (Pages 3 - 6)  
To agree the minutes of the last meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024.
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Declarations of interest  
Guidance is available online to Councillors and co-opted members on making [declarations of interest](#)
- 4 Public speaking  
Information on [public speaking](#) is available online.
- 5 Matters of urgency  
Information on [matters of urgency](#) is available online



Exeter  
City Council



6 Confidential/exempt items

To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the Press) have been excluded. There are **no** items which officers recommend should be dealt with in this way.

7 **Exe Estuary Patrol Boat - proposed pilot scheme** (Pages 7 - 17)

8 **Update on SANG delivery**

Verbal update from Paul Osbourne, Green Infrastructure Project Manager.

9 **Habitat mitigation team update** (Pages 18 - 32)

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If you are recording the meeting, you are asked to act in a reasonable manner and not disrupt the conduct of meetings for example by using intrusive lighting, flash photography or asking people to repeat statements for the benefit of the recording. You may not make an oral commentary during the meeting. The Chairman has the power to control public recording and/or reporting so it does not disrupt the meeting.

Members of the public exercising their right to speak during Public Speaking will be recorded.

[Decision making and equalities](#)

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## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee held at Council Chamber, East Devon District Council, Border Road, Heathpark Industrial Estate, Honiton EX14 1EJ on 24 October 2024**

#### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 2.40 pm

#### **1 Suspension of rule 4.2 as permitted by rule 21.1 of the Terms of reference and rules of procedure of the Executive Committee**

Members agreed to the suspension.

#### **2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 April 2024**

Minutes of the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **3 Declarations of interest**

None.

#### **4 Public speaking**

None.

#### **5 Matters of urgency**

None.

#### **6 Confidential/exempt items**

None.

#### **7 2023-24 Annual Business Plan - Annual Report**

The 2023/24 annual business plan had been debated and endorsed by the Officer Working Group. The plan outlined the delivery of ongoing measures established in previous plans, as well as a range of additional measures. In total, the plan released funding for new projects estimated at £36,000.

Projects included the continued funding of keystone mitigation measures such as the Delivery Manager, Wildlife Wardens and Project Officer (Devon Loves Dogs).

New measures approved as part of the plan included the redesign and rebuilding of the Devon Loves Dogs website, a footbridge crossing point to safeguard southern damselfly habitat, development of educational resources for GCSE/A level students, and Nightjar productivity modelling on the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths. At Dawlish Warren, funding for improvements/repairs to fencing along the front and at the distal end was identified.

Ongoing mitigation measures previously approved by the Executive Committee were also listed in the report with progress to date. These will be carried over to the 2024/25 plan considered later in the meeting.

In response to a question about the regular newsletter, Members were informed that diminished staff resources had impacted on the publication; now that staff were back in place, the publication would become more regular.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee

1. Notes the progress made in delivering the 2023/24 annual business plan;
2. 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.

## 8 **Financial report**

The report set out the overall financial position of developer contributions received by the partner authorities as mitigation payments towards measures identified in the South East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy. This included anticipated income from contributions where planning permission has been granted but the contribution has not yet been paid.

Rather than forecasting receipt of these amounts in the immediate future, the approach adopted recognises that the period between planning permission and commencement varies and assumes a steady but cautious rate of delivery over the five years of the plan. There remains the risk that some approved applications in this category will be withdrawn or expire. However, all authorities agreed that once permission is commenced, it can remain live and active, with no timeframe on reaching contribution trigger dates. It is therefore deemed more prudent to assume a more phased approach, with ongoing reviews of older applications.

Expenditure is an amalgamation of East Devon District Council financial download figures and Teignbridge information (in relation to SANGS and other relatively minor items such as accountancy and monitoring support).

Figures in the report reflected the long term nature of the projects, and Members discussed how this could be reported to reflect to the public why a large balance on paper was showing. The issue would be discussed with the finance team on how to clarify the financial data to reflect the short and longer term financial requirements.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee

1. Notes the update on the overall financial position including contributions received, expenditure and anticipated contributions (from signed s106 and CIL).
2. Notes the expenditure against budget for the 2023-24 Annual Business Plan and reasons given for any variance.

## 9 **Risk Register report**

The report included a detailed risk register, used to take account of the various categories of risk that exist or emerge in all elements of the South-east Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy. This updated members of the Executive Committee on the status of the risk management register and the status of risk management across the partner authorities at this time, including “inactive” risks which have either expired or are no longer considered a risk to the delivery of the Strategy.

The mitigation measures for Dawlish Warren were raised, shown with an amber warning on the report. The Committee were advised that the new mitigation strategy for that area had to go before each respective authority in the partnership for formal adoption before further progression could be made through transition arrangements.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the identification, categorisation and prioritisation of risks as recorded in the accompanying Risk Register, associated with delivery of the South-East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy.
2. Notes the control measures in place to mitigate the risks identified.
3. Receives an updated Risk Register report in 12 months.

## 10 **Communications report**

The report set out an update on work undertaken by the Communications team in relation to South East Devon Wildlife (SEDW), the public facing brand for the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) used had been recently amended to reflect software changes. These have been amended to:

1. Website visitors (previously website page views).
2. Website sessions (previously time spent on site).
3. Website average engagement time (previously average number of pages/session).
4. Website top referral channel (unchanged).
5. Top website content (previously website referrals).
6. Number of people signing up to newsletters

In addition, social media engagement is being monitored:

7. Social media followers and reach – facebook, twitter, Instagram

This data is reviewed with the team on a bi-monthly basis to understand how project delivery, stakeholder engagement and communications are impacting on overall goals and to steer improvement. Communications are delivered through the communications officer role as well as the Wildlife Wardens, so this work can be limited during busy summer months when direct engagement with visitors is underway. When resources permit, a campaigns approach, for more targeted messaging and QR codes for tracking and measurement, has been undertaken.

Due to a change in a staff members' circumstances, SEDW has benefitted from an uplift in communications resource. Warden Imo Salmon has been partially confined to desk based activities since July 2024. This has seen a raft of newsletter articles supplied to nature and other publications, work on the wildlife refuge public awareness campaign and increased scope and breadth of our social media approach. This re-emphasises the case for an increase in comms resource, as previously reported. A move to annual communications reporting would also free up resource.

Members were in agreement with how impressive the scale of communications was in relation to the time available.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the results of the communications report for the period March 2023 – August 2024.
2. Receives an annual communications update within the annual progress report for future meetings, rather than as a separate report.

11 **2024-25 Annual Business Plan and 5Yr Delivery Plan**

The report outlined key projects recommended for delivery over the next 12 months by the Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager, agreed by the Officer Working Group. The Annual Business Plan (ABP) is part of an updated 5-year delivery plan, which provides a budget and project timeline for the short and medium term.

Some measures in the 5-year plan, especially those for 2025-29, depend on the success of existing projects, such as the Exe Estuary wildlife refuges, and should be viewed as an indicative guide.

An updated mitigation strategy is nearly complete as part of Local Plan reviews and anticipated for presenting to the partner authorities for agreement in Spring 2025. While the 5-year plan anticipates some new measures, further adjustments will be needed once the new strategy is approved by the partner authorities.

Projects are allocated based on available budget, logical progression, and recommended timelines from the mitigation strategy, using funds from planning permissions.

The "Balance less expenditure" reflects the potential carry-forward of income after projected revenue and expenditure, ensuring funding for mitigation projects over their 80-year lifespan.

The 2024/25 ABP elements were set out to the Committee.

Questions included seeking a timeline for the updated mitigation strategy, including reference to mitigation for Dawlish Warren. The Committee were reminded of the work of the Environment Agency modelling and comparison with the reality of the changes to the area, appreciating the challenges of mitigation for the site whilst balancing the use of the site for recreational purposes. A proposal was made to include annual reporting to the recommendation on Dawlish Warren.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee:

1. Approves the 2024-25 Annual Business Plan and the commitments and actions set out therein.
2. Notes the updated 5 Year Delivery Plan.
3. Approves that the projects detailed within the report at Dawlish Warren are discontinued and funding is reallocated to future mitigation strategy projects there, in areas less at risk from wave and storm erosion, subject to annual reporting.

**Attendance List**

**Councillors present:**

G Jung, East Devon District Council  
J Hook, Teignbridge District Council (Chair)  
P Knott, Exeter City Council

**Officers in attendance:**

James Chubb, Countryside Team Manager, EDDC  
Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes EDDC  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer  
Paul Osborne, Green Infrastructure Project Officer, EDDC  
Matthew Diamond, Assistant Service Lead Development Management, ECC  
Rebecca Heal, Solicitor, EDDC



SOUTH EAST DEVON  
HABITAT REGULATIONS  
PARTNERSHIP

# South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

*Exe Estuary Patrol Boat – proposed pilot scheme.*

*July 2025*

#### Legal comment/advice:

EDDC Legal Services are advising on the terms of the Agreement attached to this report as Appendix 1, including the identity of the correct parties to this Agreement so that it is legally binding. As currently drafted, the Agreement is also light on detail in a number of areas.

DEM.1-0007/July2025/RAH

#### Finance comment/advice:

As detailed in the report, the proposal offers financial savings against the anticipated increase to current annual costs and offers additional benefits over and above current arrangements.



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

## Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the proposed 12-month pilot arrangements for the shared use of the Exeter Port Authority (EPA) rigid inflatable boat (RIB), workboat, associated training provision and plan for the existing Patrol Boat, commencing 1 August 2025, as detailed in Appendix 1.
2. Approves expenditure of £9,500<sup>1</sup> as set out in Section 3, to cover the use of EPA vessels, fuel, personal protective equipment, and associated boat cramage and cradle costs.
3. Receives a follow-up report following completion of the 12-month pilot to review outcomes and inform future decision-making.

**Equalities impact:** Low

**Risk:** Low

This report summarises the remit and intended function of the South East Devon Wildlife Patrol Boat and makes recommendations about a pilot scheme sharing use of two of the Exeter Port Authority's vessels. Appendix 1 is attached, which details the service level agreement and sets out the parameters of the agreement.

### 1. Summary

1.1 Purchase of the existing Patrol Boat was approved by the Executive Committee at their inaugural meeting in July 2016. A budget of approximately £30,000 was identified for an "up to date, fast and well-equipped" patrol boat with an appropriate level of staff resources.

1.2 The mitigation strategy identified the remit of the Patrol Boat, focusing on these key areas:

- Operational through the winter and be responsive to weather conditions (i.e. able to go out when the estuary is likely to be busy or particular activities are taking place).
- Able to patrol the entire estuary, have the power to enforce, and in particular be able to focus on:
- Ensuring all craft within the estuary remain within the speed limit.
- Personal watercraft users, kitesurfers and windsurfers are following agreed codes of conduct.
- Particular activities which are taking place within designated zones

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<sup>1</sup> Less any monies refunded from Exmouth Marina, see 2.7 and 3.2.

- Providing a clear presence that may deter particularly anti-social or unusual events that may have particular disturbance implications, such as hovercraft use, testing of model planes, etc.

**1.3** The opportunity to collaborate on the procurement of a new patrol vessel was initially explored, as Exeter City Council was undertaking a review of its role as Harbour Authority and had identified the need for new vessels to support harbour duties. It was noted that acquiring a single vessel capable of fulfilling multiple functions year-round would offer operational and cost efficiencies.

**1.4** The timescales for the Harbour Authority's strategic review did not align with the Habitat Regulations Partnership's requirement to implement mitigation measures within a set timeframe. As outlined in the July 2016 report, a cut-off date of 31 August 2016 was agreed to ensure timely delivery. Following this date, it was confirmed that a vessel would be procured independently using developer contributions allocated for mitigation.

**1.5** Following this decision, detailed research into suitable vessels was undertaken in consultation with the newly appointed Habitat Mitigation Officers (Wildlife Wardens). Key operational requirements included all-weather capability, ease of use, adequate on-board storage, and shelter for year-round use. The Quicksilver Pilothouse 605 was selected as the most appropriate model to meet these needs.

**1.6** After a lead-in time to allow for the boat's construction and delivery, the patrol vessel was brought into service on the Exe Estuary in August 2018. It is currently berthed at Exmouth Marina when not in active use.

**1.7** The 2024–25 Annual Business Plan highlighted several operational problems with the current mitigation patrol vessel. These included difficulties navigating in windy conditions due to the cabin, a hard hull that is easily damaged, and limited adaptability to the changing conditions of the estuary. To address these issues, £10,000 was approved by the Executive Committee to part-exchange the existing vessel for a Highfield 540 Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB), a model similar to the one used by the EPA.

## **2. Review of approach**

**2.1** Since the review of Exeter Port Authority's (EPA) functions, work boats have been procured to support the delivery of harbour-related duties. Due to differing timelines, remits and funding arrangements, South East Devon Wildlife (SEDW) and the EPA have each owned and operated separate vessels. Nonetheless, collaboration between the two organisations has continued where appropriate.

**2.2** As part of the EPA's reorganisation, it was mutually agreed by the respective operational teams that enforcement of speed limits on the Exe Estuary would fall under the remit of the EPA. As a result, Wildlife Wardens do not undertake this duty, except in unusual circumstances where there is immediate danger to life.

**2.3** After approval of the 2024-25 Annual Business Plan, (but prior to purchase of a new RIB), a more efficient way of working has been identified. The EPA has proposed a 12-month pilot scheme under which Wildlife Wardens would charter access to two EPA vessels — the Highfield (RIB) *Exe Harbour Launch* and the *Exe Harbour Workboat* — for an annual fee of £7,500.

**2.4** The proposed charter agreement would offer several operational and financial advantages compared to current arrangements:

- Primary use of the *Exe Harbour Launch*, with the *Exe Harbour Workboat* available when joint patrols are not feasible or as backup.
- Guaranteed maximum of forty patrol days within a 12-month period.
- Vessels fuelled and maintained in a ready-to-use state.
- Annual provision of four training days with EPA instructors.
- Insurance cover provided by EPA for both vessels.
- All maintenance, servicing, and anti-fouling included in the agreement.
- Greater operational flexibility and responsiveness through use of a RIB.
- Lower risk of damage and easier handling associated with a RIB.
- Potential for resale of the existing SEDW patrol vessel should the pilot prove successful — proceeds could contribute to multiple years of charter fees.
- Savings from the release of the current Exmouth Marina berth, which would no longer be required.

**2.5** The pilot scheme presents an opportunity to deliver improved value for money and streamlined operations through shared resources. Subject to approval, it is recommended that the charter agreement be progressed and reviewed after the initial 12-month period to assess effectiveness and value.

### Comparison of costs.

2.4 Expenditure on the existing SEDW patrol boat has varied annually due to changing requirements for training, usage, maintenance, and equipment. Table 1 summarises the associated costs over the past five fiscal years:

**Table 1.**

Year	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Expenditure	£4,411	£5,158	£7,178	£4,641	£9,172

**2.5** Despite an average annual spend of approximately £6,112, costs are projected to rise further due to:

- Reclassification of the boat's size category, resulting in increased berthing fees at Exmouth Marina.
- Continued annual uplifts to marina charges.
- Rising insurance premiums.
- Increasing costs for servicing and maintenance.

As a result, future annual costs are anticipated to exceed £8,000.

**2.6** Unlike the current vessel, the *Exe Harbour Launch* does not have an enclosed cabin. To ensure staff remain adequately protected from the elements, the purchase of new wet weather gear would be required at an estimated cost of £300 per officer (total £900). In addition, temporary team branding would be necessary at a cost of approximately £100 to ensure clarity of boat operator identity during joint use.

**2.7** During the initial 16-week notice period required to terminate the current marina berth, it is recommended that the existing patrol boat remain moored at Exmouth Marina. This provides operational resilience should the Wildlife Wardens require access to the vessel during the initial stages of the pilot. Subject to a successful pilot outcome, the boat could then be craned out, cleaned, and stored at Exeter Quay.

**2.8** Under the proposed charter agreement (see Appendix 1), the EPA has confirmed that dry storage at Exeter Quay will be included within the first year of the agreement. Any cranaage or cradle hire would be subject to additional cost.

### **3. Conclusion and Recommendations**

**3.1** The existing patrol boat has served successfully for over seven years. However, operational limitations have become increasingly apparent. The cabin, while offering shelter, contributes to wind resistance, making use in wind speeds above 20mph difficult. Additionally, the hard hull is fragile and more susceptible to damage. Routine tasks such as refuelling, maintenance, and cleaning — currently the responsibility of SEDW staff — would be covered by EPA under the proposed arrangement.

**3.2** In order to implement the pilot scheme, it will be necessary to procure appropriate personal protective equipment for officers and to provide storage for the existing mitigation vessel. It is therefore recommended that the £10,000 previously approved for the part-exchange of the current vessel be reallocated to support delivery of the 12-month pilot scheme.

**3.2** The proposed pilot offers an opportunity to modernise operations, reduce costs, and enable closer collaboration with EPA staff and volunteers. It is recommended that the patrol boat remain at Exmouth Marina during the 16-week notice period, before being removed from the water and stored, subject to the pilot proving successful.

**3.3** It is further recommended that the Executive Committee receive a review report at the end of the 12-month pilot period. This will enable informed consideration of the long-term future of patrol boat operations and associated funding arrangements.

**Proposed spend:**

**£9,500, consisting of:**

**£7,500 chartering fee to Exeter Port Authority for services as outlined in the Service Level Agreement (Appendix 1).**

**£900 personal protective equipment for Wildlife Wardens.**

**£500 fuel for Exe Harbour Launch and/or Exe Harbour Workboat.**

**£100 temporary logo covering for South East Devon Wildlife.**

**£500 cleaning, cramage and boat cradle costs.**

***Less any refund due from Exmouth Marina following the termination of the annual berth contract.***

**Neil Harris**

**South East Devon  
Habitat Regulations  
Executive Committee**

**July 2025**

**Natural England comment:**

NE have reviewed the report and have no comment to make.



## SHARED USAGE/CHARTER AGREEMENT

input made by EDDC Legal Services (IKEN3765): 8th July 2025 [CLEANED VERSION]

This Agreement is made on the -----/-----/----- (the "Agreement Date") between East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council ("the Three Councils").

### BACKGROUND:

Exeter Port Authority ("EPA") is a non-corporate organisation which is owned, reports to and is controlled by Exeter City Council.

South East Devon Wildlife ("SEDW") is a non-corporate organisation without assets which operates on behalf of the Three Councils, and which reports to and is controlled by a Committee with joint representation as appointed by the Three Councils individually.

Exeter City Council is entering onto this Agreement its own capacity and also as owner and controller of EPA, in order to confirm to all other parties that it affirms and will be ultimately responsible for ensuring performance and observance of all obligations and constraints imposed on EPA arising from this Agreement and its subject-matter .

The Three Councils are entering into this Agreement both in their own individual capacities and as shared controllers of SEDW, in order to confirm to all other parties that each of The Three Councils will be ultimately responsible jointly and severally for ensuring performance and observance of all obligations and constraints imposed on SEDW arising from this Agreement and its subject-matter .

Exeter City Council is the owner of the vessel described in clause 1 as "the boat".

### IT IS HEREBY AGREED THAT:

The subject of this Agreement shall be for the EPA operated vessel known as 'Exe Harbour Launch' (hereinafter referred to as "the boat") to be made available for use by SEDW for a period of twelve months from the Agreement Date listed below and subject to the conditions of this agreement.

- The term of this agreement shall be for a twelve-month period starting from the Agreement Date

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## 1. USE OF THE BOAT

Exe Harbour Launch will be the main vessel for the user/charter.



Above: Exe Harbour Launch

- SEDW shall be entitled to use the boat for a maximum period of 40 days, within a 365-day period, running from the Agreement Date.
- Any outstanding dates may not be carried forward after the twelve months period.
- A single use under 4 hours will count as a half day. Between 4 and 8 hours will count as a full day.
- The procedure for selecting these days is as set out in the Schedule to this Agreement headed "Booking Arrangements".
- This Agreement may be terminated by either EPA or SEDW if the boat is unavailable for use for more than a 4-week period as a result of theft or damage (except for damage caused by SEDW). By agreement, both parties may decide to wait for alternative provision to be made instead.
- This Agreement may be terminated by EPA or SEDW for any reason, upon receipt (by either party) of written notice. The notice period shall be a minimum of 8 weeks. By agreement, both parties may decide to wait for alternative provision to be made instead.

## **2. OBLIGATIONS OF EPA**

At all times during the term of this Agreement, EPA shall ensure that the boat is maintained to a reasonable and safe standard as set out in the respective boats' Operations Training and Operations Manuals (copies to be made available to SEDW staff).

This includes (at no additional cost to SEDW):

- Regular servicing of the boat.
- That safety equipment is regularly checked and maintained to an appropriate standard (in the opinion of SEDW, acting reasonably).
- That the vessel is available for use from Exmouth Marina.
- That the vessel is fuelled, the keys are readily available and in all other respects ready for usage by SEDW by 08.00 on each day in question.
- To provide prior to or within two weeks after the date of this Agreement four days of training in the usage of the craft for SEDW personnel through the instructors at EPA's RYA Training Centre.

## **3. OBLIGATIONS OF SEDW**

SEDW:

- will pay EPA for use of the boat an annual fee of £7,500 (in advance or in arrear or in monthly instalments by agreement).
- will pay separately for petrol usage on a quarterly basis in arrears. SEDW will keep a log on the engine hours. Cost of £7.50per engine hour. ([link](#))
- may in the twelve months term of this Agreement (at no cost to SEDW) leave their existing patrol vessel *Branta Isca* in the Exeter Canal in the water or at Exeter Quay on the hard (decision to be made by SEDW). If SEDW have their vessel stored on the hard at Exeter Quay at any times during the term of this Agreement, they can do so as an entitlement at no cost as part of this Agreement, but SEDW will need to pay separately for any crange and boat cradle costs incurred in such storage process.
- Insurance (to adequate levels consistent with what is usual in the marine market in South West England) of the boat, all SEDW personnel and invited passengers when using them and third-party liability.
- will pay for any damage caused by SEDW staff to the boat or a third party up to £500. Above this figure an insurance claim will be made by SEDW.



#### **4. VESSEL**

The boat must be used in line with its training and operations manuals.

All SEDW staff who helm the craft must hold the qualifications listed below:

- RYA level 2 power boat qualification.
- VHF licence.
- A Pleasure Boatman Licence issued by EPA (qualifying for which includes the helmsperson completing a competency test (the cost of which to SEDW is included in the annual boat use fee payable under this Agreement).
- A valid first aid certificate.

The helmsperson must also be accompanied by a competent crew member at all times a boat is being used by SEDW.

#### **AGREEMENT SIGNED BY THE THREE COUNCILS:**

*[ SUBSTITUTE HERE THE USUAL CORPORATE ATTESTATION CLAUSES OF EDDC, ECC + TDC ]*

#### **SCHEDULE - BOOKING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 1 The boat must only be used in day light hours in line with the relevant craft's training and operations manual.
- 2 On or before the date of this Agreement a shared calendar will be set up by EPA, allowing both them and SEDW to select a small number of key dates for their usage.
- 3 Where a clash of dates exists, EPA and SEDW will endeavour to share patrols/offer to drop and collect parties from designated points such as Dawlish Warren.
- 4 Exe Harbour Launch will be the boat mainly made available for use by SEDW.



SOUTH EAST DEVON  
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# South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

## *Habitat mitigation team update*

*Wildlife Wardens and Devon Loves Dogs  
Growth, Development & Prosperity,  
East Devon District Council  
July 2025*

Legal comment/advice:

EDDC Legal Services have read through this report and have no comments of a legal nature to make.

DEM.1-0007/July2025/RAH

Finance comment/advice:

There are no direct financial implications set out in the report.

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

## Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the updates from, and progress made by the Wildlife Wardens and Devon Loves Dogs Project Officer.
2. Receives a further update report at their next meeting.

**Equalities impact:** Low

**Risk:** Low

The purpose of this report is to provide a regular update from the habitat mitigation delivery team. This enables the Executive Committee to maintain a good understanding of the initiatives, partnership working and day to day activities of public-facing staff. Continued and effective delivery of the Strategy and the development this enables remains of very high importance to all partners.

### **1. Wildlife Wardens: Claire Spence (full time, maternity cover), Katie Jones and Sama Euridge (job share).**

#### **1. Winter season**

1.1 Between September and March, the wardens focus is in preventing disturbance to overwintering waterbirds within the Exe Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA).

1.2 Exmouth Wildlife Refuge is the peak pressure location from September to December. The refuge is 'active' September 15<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> to coincide with the arrival of migratory birds and is timed to finish when the main food source (eel grass) has been consumed.

1.3 Waterfowl are present in this area from high tide, where they rest on the water, waiting for the eel grass to come within reach. They feed from an hour after high-tide, until the water recedes around 3.5 hours after high-tide. Wading birds are always present, along the tide line, and feeding across the mud flats as the tide recedes. At peak tide, there can be several thousand birds within the refuge.

1.4 The potential for disturbance to birds at this site is high, due to the proximity to Exmouth town centre. Exmouth Wildlife Refuge, and the slipway at the adjacent Imperial Recreation Ground, is the first point of access to the estuary, and used extensively by those wanting to access the water or the shore for recreation, specifically dog walking or watersports.

1.5 Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve (NNR) is the most important high-tide roost of the lower Exe, and the Wildlife Refuge supports thousands of birds as they rest and feed throughout the tidal cycle. The Wildlife Refuge here is active all year and at all tidal states.

1.6 Erosion of the beach by winter storms now restricts access to the end of the sand spit in the hours around high tide. This natural barrier has significantly reduced the potential of disturbance to birds as they rest in the Wildlife Refuge and on the adjacent beach, during the winter season.

1.7 Disturbance to birds by visitors with dogs is most likely to occur in the hours around low tide. Access for dogs is restricted beyond the halfway point of the beach; dogs are not permitted past Groyne 9 (with Groyne 1 being closest to the resort and Groyne 18 at the end of the sand spit). In the hours around low tide, the sea recedes some distance from the bottom of Groyne 9, increasing the potential for dog walkers to miss this cut-off point.

1.8 Scheduling: During the Winter season, Wardens plan their schedule in accordance with tide times to ensure they are present at

- Exmouth Wildlife Refuge to prevent disturbance to feeding and resting birds as the tide recedes (Sept-Dec)
- Dawlish Warren NNR at least once, and preferably twice weekly, specifically Sundays and when a spring low tide occurs in the middle of the day (this lower tide means the beach below Groyne 9 is accessible for longer)

Outside of this, the team divide their time to maintain presence at other Exe estuary nature reserves at RSPB Exminster, Powderham & Bowling Green Marsh, across the Exe estuary through boat patrols, and the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths NNR.

1.9 Engagement: The branded South East Devon Wildlife gazebo is used as a pop-up hub, with display boards used to convey the importance of habitat and species present. Literature and leaflets from project partners are displayed, including Codes of Conduct (which are activity and location specific). (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Pop-up at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge

1.10 At Exmouth Wildlife Refuge, the telescope is an excellent engagement tool, and visitors are invited to look at the birds with guided descriptions and information on each species from the wardens. This technique is very popular, and the gazebo is often busy with visitors. Wardens ask anyone entering the Wildlife Refuge to exit at the closest safe exit point, with explanation and literature offered.

1.11 Monitoring. Monitoring of bird presence in relation human activity is conducted through Vantage Point Counts at three specific locations around the Exe estuary. Birds are counted by species and any human activity noted. Data are collated to provide information on bird numbers, within the Wildlife Refuges and outside of these areas, plus bird movements around the estuary in relation to where human recreation occurs.

## **2. Breeding Bird Season**

### **East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SPA**

2.1 While officially breeding bird season runs between March 1 and July 31, many key species begin nesting earlier and should conditions allow, will continue into August or even September. During this time, wardens focus on preventing disturbance to the breeding birds of the Pebblebed Heaths SPA, many of which are ground nesting.

2.2 Wardens also act to prevent activities damaging to the heathland habitat, including tackling dog fouling, dogs not under close control, and unpermitted BBQs and campfires to prevent wildfire. Visitors are encouraged to stick to main paths, to leave areas off the path disturbance free for wildlife – it is particularly important for dog walkers to keep dogs under close control and on the path, to ensure birds are not disturbed from the nest, leaving eggs or young vulnerable.

2.3 Engagement: As detailed in 1.9-10 - The branded South East Devon Wildlife gazebo is used as a pop-up hub and erected in car parks across the Pebblebed Heaths to act as a visitor welcome and to enable Wardens to have conversations regarding appropriate behaviour on site and highlighting wildlife value.

Key messages:

- Paws on paths – and of course, people on paths too! To prevent disturbance to ground nesting birds and other wildlife during the breeding season.
- Bag it and bin it – Combatting dog fouling. Heathland is naturally low nutrient. Not picking up dog poo affects plant assemblages and has a knock-on effect across the ecosystem.
- Wildfire awareness
- Conservation and management of the landscape
- Wildlife specifics and identification

### **Dawlish Warren Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**

2.4 Visitor numbers increase dramatically to this coastal nature reserve during the spring and summer months. Warden presence is required to ensure dogs are kept on lead during the appropriate sections of the nature reserve and do not proceed beyond Groyne 9 on the beach.

2.5 Key species here include sand lizard (Photo 2) (now only found here and at one other site in Devon) and nesting skylark (a red list species) – which nest on the ground at the dorsal end of the sand spit.

2.6 Landing of watercraft is permitted on the northern (estuary) side of the sand spit in 'Soft Sand Bay' in a designated Landing Zone between April 1 and Sept 4. This is a popular spot for boat owners to family picnic and Warden presence is required to remind visitors that dogs and BBQs are not permitted, due to nesting bird disturbance & wildfire risk.



Photo 2: Sand lizard, Dawlish Warren NNR. Photo credit: Phil Chambers

### 3. Warden diary of operations

#### September

3.1 An exciting start to the season at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge - on September 15<sup>th</sup> as we prepared for our first pop-up, there were already Dark-bellied Brent geese in the Refuge. On the first day, just 6, but quickly up to 70.

3.2 This is an early start to the winter season for this species – we see waders such as Curlew and Oystercatcher returning from breeding grounds as early as late July, but for as long as the Wildlife Refuge has been active, this as early as the team has seen Dark-bellied Brents.

3.3 Disturbance to birds from dogs on the foreshore was the greatest challenge we faced last year (and in many years previous). The use of A-frames reminding visitors of the Wildlife Refuge and showing a map of the boundaries, placed at the two key locations visitors enter the Refuge (via the slipway and hopping over the tidal defence wall opposite M&S car park) continue to be successful at reducing access from these points.

3.4 In continued effort, this year we have introduced three new Wildlife Refuge banners – located at the site boundaries such as the Exmouth Watersports shipping container close to the Imperial Rec slipway, Exmouth (Photo 3). They are visually easy to interpret and provide an excellent reference to identify key bird species. Positive feedback from the public received on these.



Photo 3. A new banner for Exmouth Wildlife Refuge

3.5 Pre-refuge season, Imo refreshed the display boards, providing new and updated information on subjects we are frequently asked about, including migration routes and bird identification.

3.6 Inter-department teamwork kept operations running smoothly during staff absence, with assistance received from Julie (Devon Loves Dogs), and Fiona, Penny and Elle (Wild East Devon) stepping in to help Wardens maintain presence at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge.

3.7 As with recent previous years, people are much more aware of the dates that the Refuge is active and the need to remain out of it. Most people the team spoke to already knew about the Refuge and said how lucky they were to be able to see the birds up close from the tidal defence wall. It's great to see 6 years of positive public engagement paying off!



## October

3.8 During October, bird numbers continued to grow in Exmouth Wildlife Refuge, soon topping 1000+ Brent geese and 2000+ Wigeon. A delight to see and hear!

3.9 This season, we've seen a noticeable reduction in dog disturbance. When we introduced the Wildlife Refuge some 6 years ago, seeing dogs putting the birds to flight was a daily occurrence, now thankfully, it is unusual.

## November

3.10 Although our winter focus is the estuary, we are still frequently up on the Pebblebed Heaths. Wardens Sama and Katie hosted a visit from St Peter's Prep School Yr 6 to Devon Wildlife Trust's Bystock Nature Reserve for their Wild Woodlands topic. The variety of fallen leaves, across a spectrum of colours and species, did absolute justice to our attempts at wild art in the style of Andy Goldsworthy (shown in Photo 4 below).



Photo 4. Wild art inspired by Andy Goldsworthy

3.11 Early in the month, the Warden team attended the Countryside Management Association Conference in Okehampton. A useful and informative couple of days catching up on local projects and making new contacts. The conference included a day of field trips, Sama and Imo went to Yarner Wood to learn about the East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery project; Julie went to Plymouth to learn about outreach in the urban environmental with the National Trust and Katie went to Okehampton Camp to gain more information on the military's activities to conserve Dartmoor's habitats (Photo 5)





Photo 5. Countryside Management Association field trip

## December

3.6 The last month of the year usually marks the peak in bird numbers across the estuary, and we've been treated to a lovely variety of species visible from the shore at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge. Grey plover, Ringed plover, Dunlin, Redshank, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Turnstone, Egret, a frequent Kingfisher, and Great-crested Grebe.

3.7 A successful season of interactions, with little to no negativity towards Wardens at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge as we have reminded visitors of the importance of giving wildlife space to rest and feed undisturbed.

Stats: 20 pop-ups achieved and more than 200 interactions.

3.8 There have been no recorded disturbance events from watersports activities, which is a dramatic improvement on previous years. Due thanks to the local watersports activity centres and schools who have promoted the ethos of the Wildlife Refuge during lessons and online.

3.9 The greatest cause of disturbance this season, has been low flying aircraft, including military helicopters, small aircraft and helicopters.

3.10 Numbers of Dark-bellied Brent geese in the Wildlife Refuge have fallen slightly this month, moving to other locations on the estuary after consuming most of the eel grass here. This species won't leave for their breeding grounds in the Arctic before March but may move to feed on terrestrial grass in fields surrounding the estuary once all the eel grass on the mud flats has been consumed.

3.11 In news to celebrate, Warden Imo has now had her baby! We bid a fond farewell to Imo when she went off on maternity leave in Dec and look forward to her return to the team next Autumn (Photo 6)

## January

3.13 This month, Claire Spence joined the team as Imo's maternity cover. Claire joins us from an internship with Birdlife International in Switzerland. With excellent experience in environmental education, public outreach and bird identification, she's already hit the ground running.

3.14 Dawlish Warren NNR: With a full team and the conclusion of Exmouth Wildlife Refuge for the season, Wardens are now back at Dawlish Warren every other Sunday, when visitor pressure is at its peak. On weeks without Sunday working, tides are assessed to ensure we are present at the most valuable time.



Photo 6. Warden Imo, out on the patrol boat



Photo 7. Claire at her first Pebblebed Heaths Pop-up



3.15 Pebblebed Heaths: Wardens are performing a couple of pop-ups each week, during which we have been supporting the Devon Loves Dogs 'Thanks for Picking Up' campaign. Most dog walkers comment on how nice it is to be recognised, and it is a great conversation starter to drop in some of our other key messages as we move toward breeding bird season – a really positive campaign. We are still seeing issues with dog walkers leaving full poo bags next to the path rather than returning to bins in car parks, and the prize of a Dickie Bag offered as part of this campaign is a fantastic way to gently encourage positive behaviours to visitors. (Photo 7)

3.16 Claire attended the Friends of the Common Forum, alongside Julie (Devon Loves Dogs), where she enjoyed meeting project partners from the PHCT team and learning more about the Heath to Sea Project. She spoke to ~20 attendees and commented on how enthusiastic the friends were!

3.17 Exmouth LNR: Wardens Katie and Claire teamed up with Jon Gardner (Wild East Devon/Countryside) to rejuvenate an area next to the estuary in Exmouth. This area has developed into thick bramble scrub over several years, encouraging anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping. Works are to include scrub clearance, new fencing, and the laying of dead hedge to prevent informal access to the Wildlife Refuge. The installation of new benches and areas designated for bird watching should improve accessibility. Several members of the public stopped to say how glad they were that this project was taking place, and we had positive engagement on social media following our post about it. (Photo 8)



Photo 8. Katie & Claire at Exmouth LNR volunteer work party

3.18 RSPB Bowling Green Marsh: Sama & Claire welcomed St Peter's Prep school Yr4 on a wildlife walk from Darts Farm, with guided bird watch at the RSPB Lookout. The students were treated to views of Oystercatcher, Avocet, Curlew, Shelduck, Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler and Marsh Harrier! Many thanks to the RSPB volunteers at the Lookout who were so welcoming and helpful during this session (Photo 9)



Photo 9. Sama & Claire host school group at RSPB Bowling Green Marsh

## February

3.19 Wardens Katie & Claire attended the Exe Estuary Management Partnership Winter Forum, with this year's focus on flood prevention and presentations on how this is managed from national to local level. It was a great opportunity to engage with river users and meet project partners.

3.20 This month we welcomed Millie Critchley to the team – Millie is studying and NVQ in Land and Wildlife at Bicton College and we are providing her with a volunteer work placement. Millie has already bought her enthusiasm to several heath pop-ups and joined us at Dawlish Warren NNR (Photo 10)

Quick month stats: Wardens achieved 6 pop-ups on the Pebblebed Heaths this month with close to 180 interactions recorded on site since the beginning of the year.



Photo 10. Bicton student Millie Critchley joins the team at Dawlish Warren NNR

## March



Photo 11. Wider team attends Devon Local Nature Partnership conference.

3.21 Wardens Katie and Claire gave a talk at Bicton College to Level 2 Countryside and Wildlife Management students, who were very engaged and asked lots of pertinent questions.

3.22 The team attended Devon Local Nature Partnership conference (Photo 11) – a valuable experience in understanding more about local nature recovery and an opportunity to connect with local ecologists and environmental partners.

3.23 Wardens Claire & Sama visited Marpool Primary School, Exmouth to give a lesson on local nature reserves, special species and appropriate behaviour to the Year 4s.

Quick month stats: Four heath pop-ups, 2 walking patrols, 4 visits to Dawlish Warren NNR



## April

3.24 Claire led on implementing a new recording system for engagements and interactions – so the team now have a simple and uniform way of recording numbers of visitors spoken to, and how many involved bylaw infringement or disturbance events.

Month stats: 5 heath pop-ups, 5 heath walking patrols, 2 boat patrols, 7 visits to Dawlish Warren across the month & 266 interactions logged since we began recording in 2<sup>nd</sup> week of April.

## May

3.25 Partnership working with the Exe Estuary Management Partnership on delivery of school sessions at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge & LNR has commenced – Wardens will be delivering sessions over the summer as an opportunity to incorporate our messaging to visiting school groups.

3.26 The team attended the Mitigation Conference in Portsmouth – a great opportunity to build and reaffirm relationships with other habitat mitigation teams working around the UK. Wardens attended workshops on the psychology of behaviour change, social media campaigns, how to engage with watersports users, and education and outreach.

3.27 Claire attended a busy Budleigh Gala day with the gazebo. On the edge of the Pebblebeds SPA this was an excellent outreach opportunity.

Quick stats: Six Dawlish Warren visits, 6 boat patrols, 5 heath pop-ups and 6 walking patrols - 467 interactions total including two busy bank holiday weekends.

## June

3.28 The team is still working hard on the water, with more boat patrols and focus on the tender. At the time of writing, we've already achieved: 4 heaths pop-ups, 2 walking patrols and 4 visits to Dawlish Warren NNR.

3.29 Planning and finalising the schedule for Heath Week is now well underway! Heath Week is an annual event celebrating the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths and the wildlife it supports. A partnership between South East Devon Wildlife, RSPB, Devon Wildlife Trust and the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust – ranger and engagement teams come together to provide a week's worth of free (or as close as we can get to it!) activities, open to everyone.



Photo 12. Warden Claire with SED Wildlife display boards

#### **4. Devon Loves Dogs: Project Officer Julie Owen**

4.1 At the start of 2025 my working hours increased from 2.5 to 4 days a week, this has made a really big difference to what I can provide and as a result I've run a total of 24 Waggy Walks since October. In addition to my regular walk locations, I've also been able to add some new dog walking areas including Parke near Bovey Tracey and a lovely estuary walk from A la Ronde in Exmouth.

4.2 We were also invited to take a group to the new community forest at Danes Wood on the Killerton Estate, all with our partners at the National Trust. I was delighted to run our first ever guided walk at Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve with Teignbridge District Council Ranger Phoebe. We visited in May when the spring flowers were looking beautiful.



Photo 13. Waggy Walk at Danes Wood, Killerton

4.3 My main work during the winter was focussed on our Bag It and Bin It campaign, launched just before Christmas. I worked with the Wildlife Wardens and our partners to promote the importance of picking up and removing dog waste, wherever you are. The campaign included large banners across our protected sites, information postcards and a competition to win a Devon Loves Dogs Dickie Bag – a purpose designed, smell proof, dog waste carrier.



Photo 14. Bag it and Bin it campaign banner.

4.4 The campaign was successful, we gave out approximately 300 postcards, we had over 360 entries over 3 months for the competition and we gained an additional 246 newsletter subscribers. The campaign also helped to raise the profile of DLD in the wider community, and we hope to run the campaign again, across more sites later this year.

4.5 I've been out with the gazebo and mobile display at a range of different locations across the Pebblebed Heaths, at Dawlish Warren and on the Exe Estuary. During a couple of these I linked up with our partners at Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust (PHCT) and a local trainer and behaviourist, Dawn Spence of "Pawsitive Canine" to promote the canine sport of Canicross. This activity involves the dog and owner being harnessed together so that both parties can run/jog or walk. Canicross encourages exercise, teamwork and improves communication and it's a great way of exercising your dog in the countryside on lead.



Photo 14. Canicross

4.6 During March, other officers in the habitat mitigation team and I gave presentations to Marian Spain, Chief Executive of Natural England about the work of DLD and attended the Devon Local Nature Partnership conference. I also presented to the Pebblebed Commercial Dog Walkers at their Annual Forum.

4.7 During April I did some filming on the Pebblebed Heaths with BBC Spotlight to promote our guided Waggy Walks and I also attended Woodbury Parish Council AGM with the DLD display. A bit further afield in the New Forest National Park, I attended an interesting seminar and site visit with SCCAMP (Southern Counties Canine Access Management Partnership) and it was great to see that this network of similar projects is growing steadily. It's a great source of topical information and ideal for sharing best practise.

4.8 During May I attended Haldon Forest Bark, a fantastic dog walking event hosted by Forestry England, with lots of opportunities to share our messages and work alongside other landowners and managers. Unfortunately Turn the Tide Dawlish had to be postponed due to some wild weather, but I did attend a celebration of National Nature Reserves Week with the PHCT on the Otter Estuary in Budleigh Salterton.

4.9 Most of our team travelled to Portsmouth in May for a fascinating day of workshops with our mitigation colleagues from across the Southern parts of the UK (and wider). Titled "Mitigation Meet-Up", there were representatives from Natural England, Bird Aware Solent,

Thames Basin Heaths, the Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities and environmental consultants. It was an inspirational day of talks, discussion and peer reviews.

4.10 During June I was able to give an interview on Devon Air Radio about the work of Devon Loves Dogs. Finally, due to increased funding, I'm delighted that we're currently recruiting for the post of Assistant Project Officer for Devon Loves Dogs. We've had a significant amount of interest in this role and I'm looking forward to expanding our team and being able to continue to grow and develop the work of this project.

**Natural England comment:**

NE have reviewed the report and have no comment to make.