



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

South East Devon Wildlife Communications Key Performance Indicators

Anne Mountjoy, Communications Officer
April 2021

Legal comment/advice:

The legal considerations are included within the report. Legal Services will assist with any further issues on which advice may be needed as they are raised.

Finance comment/advice:

The financial implications are set out in the report.

Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the results of the communications report for the period June 2020 – January 2021.
2. Receives a further communications report on communications Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and benchmarks for the new website in April 2022.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Low. This report provides the results of the communications report for June 2020 – January 2021.

1. Summary

1.1 South East Devon Wildlife (SEDW) is the public facing brand for the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership.

1.2 The Executive Committee approved the creation of a dedicated website to more effectively communicate the work of the partnership. As a result benchmarks and key performance indicators (KPIs) have been identified and will enable evaluation and measures of success.

1.3 See appendix 1 for information collected from similar conservation/nature websites which help to review possible benchmarks for the new website, when it is completed. More work needs to be done as insufficient detail is currently available. It does appear that targets are not being set on these sites, which means there are no comparable points of reference with which to set meaningful targets.

1.4 Six KPIs were identified to reflect the business plan objectives:

1. Website page views
 2. Website time spent on site
 3. Website average number of pages/session
 4. Website referrals
 5. Website top referral channel
 6. Number of people signing up to newsletters
- In addition, it is recommended to monitor social media engagement:
7. Social media engagement – Facebook, twitter, Instagram

Having now collected data for these, we will be able to monitor and evaluate them on a monthly basis to understand how communications efforts are impacting on our overall goals.

1.5 It's important to understand the context for this report for South East Devon Wildlife communications. Since 4 January 2021 a communications officer role has been providing 1 day per week support, which obviously affects the speed of progress/change. In addition, the delivery of communications is undertaken by the Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs) as part of their work in the limited time available while performing a range of duties. HMO time is limited so any communications

planning and monitoring depends on priorities and available time including their presence on site. To clarify, communications do not benefit from a dedicated, full-time resource with which to plan, monitor and report in detail.

1.6 Whilst there is undoubted value in planning and monitoring our web and social media content, there should be careful consideration of the best use of the 0.2 FTE communications officer resource. The communications officer is a Chartered Marketer with the Chartered Institute of Marketing. She is a marketing and communications generalist, not a web specialist.

1.7 The figures presented in appendix 2 are currently higher than we can expect in future, due to the pandemic. For the period presented, the focus of staff has been concentrated on more online, and less on-site activity to reduce face to face interactions (and the associated health and safety risks). A very busy summer holiday period is anticipated and it will be important for staff resource to be out onsite as much as possible, which will mean less time for social media and web development.

1.8 The current website emerged from a single page which promoted the wildlife refuge consultation in 2017. Since then the website has slowly evolved with minimum budget and without any planning for content layout, design and functionality.

1.9 The figures represented show the period from June 2020, when officers returned to work from furlough.

2. Setting benchmarks for new website

2.1 Appendix 2 shows SEDW average figures for the KPIs over the period from June 2020 – January 2021:

Page views: 294.75

Average number of page/sessions: 1.92

Total users / referrals: 126

2.2 Information is being collected from similar conservation web pages including partner authorities (see appendix 1). East Devon can only provide limited data as the webmaster post has been vacant since September 2020.

2.3 There is further work to be done in reviewing benchmarks in preparation for objectives for the new website and these will be finalised to coincide with the launch of the new website. As mentioned, research thus far indicates that other Council departments within the 3 partner authorities or similar conservation organisation within the partnership may not be setting communications KPIs or targets.

3. Current website

3.1 Appendix 2 shows the highest number of page views was experienced in September 2020 at 523. The top referrals were from Gov delivery, direct, organic search, and Facebook. Gov delivery means articles in local authority email newsletters which linked to SEDW, i.e. East Devon District Council newsletter (generating 122 page views) and Wild East Devon newsletter (generating 57 page views). In addition, untrackable interest was generated by Cllr Sutton talking on Radio Devon about the wildlife refuges. Visitors to the relevant content reflected this targeted publicity, as time on site was low and not many other pages were visited.

3.2 The second highest level of page views took place in December 2020 at 356. The following points help to explain. On 18 December an article written by the HMO's appeared in both the email and printed ExePress newsletter created by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) (approx. circulation of: post 907 hard copies and email 1390). This is supported by the figures shown as top referrals from visitors coming directly, then organic visits from searches, then Facebook and then SEDW newsletter. It is evident that this produced targeted visits to the Exe Estuary page as the time on site was fairly high but visitors did not go on to look at other pages. The SEDW newsletter experienced significant growth in subscribers and links from which led to an increase in visits to the website.

3.3 In third place for page views, November experienced 298 page views, which can be attributed in part to an article in the Devon Local Nature Partnership (DLNP) newsletter email.

4. Social media

4.1 Social media statistics are being compiled for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to respond to successes and plan future areas of priority (see appendix 2).

4.2 Facebook does not provide an engagement rate but for comparison purposes it has been calculated using total impressions for a post, divided by engaged users. This indicator has been provided because it is deemed to provide insight into the type of content which generates a response from users and it will be able to inform decisions about future content, as opposed to using reach or impressions which may be less meaningful and adaptable. From these stats we can see the engagement rate is much higher on Facebook than on twitter. This will help us to ensure and plan appropriate/timely content for Facebook, particularly to target particular users through Facebook groups, by location or interest.

4.3 Videos garner much higher engagement than photos, which is no surprise as social media algorithms prioritise video content. Video content already features as a priority by the HMOs.

4.4 The highest engagement rate to a Facebook video post took place in June, when we announced returning to work, at 19.15%. The second highest, at 17.98%

took place in December – a video highlighting the end of the Exmouth wildlife refuge.

4.5 We will focus on working with partners to increase engagement and reach new users. In September, a photo and post about working with Exmouth Watersports garnered an engagement rate of 15.6% - one of the highest rates shown. Numbers of followers are an important indicator of engagement and behaviour trends, where people choose to follow or unfollow. Although follower data is incomplete, there was an increase in followers from Aug 2020 to Feb 2021 of 183. This can be plotted more accurately in future, over time.

4.6 The Instagram account became classified as a business account on 24 July. This enables insights into the account. From this review, we now understand that historical data seems to be inaccessible. Therefore, we will monitor and evaluate Instagram insights on a monthly basis. For the month Feb-Mar 2021, the most active time for users is 6pm and that the number of followers is up 5.6% between those months. Content interactions are up by 33.8%.

4.7 The highest engagement rate on twitter was recorded at 12.8% in October, which was a photo of ponies taken at Dawlish Warren, describing them as habitat helpers. This was followed by November's video post about bird monitoring at 11.4%

5. Lessons learned and future plans

5.1 Social media: Engagement rate is much higher on Facebook than on twitter. Understanding this will help us to ensure and plan content for Facebook, particularly to target particular users with relevant content through Facebook groups, by location or interest. HMOs will continue to produce video content.

5.2 We will monitor and evaluate Instagram insights on a monthly basis. We will monitor social media followers on a monthly basis for each social media channel to identify trends, as followers are a good representation of engagement. We have recently started to use a social media scheduling tool (Orlo) to measure impact of social media campaigns according to season/theme.

5.3 Depending on staff capacity, we are forward planning social media and newsletters to ensure milestones, key dates and comprehensive links to the website are included. Newsletter content successes and growth in subscriber numbers will be reviewed after each edition. This will enable us to identify top links, to learn from and build on that.

5.4 We encourage sign up to the newsletter: for visitors to the website (a pop-up form will ask visitors if they would like to subscribe); through social media, via a pin to the top of social media pages; and through links through partner newsletters and more can be done on this. A newsletter archive will be available on the new website.

5.5 We will look for publicity opportunities and continue to provide content for networks and partners to reach new readers and drive web traffic. More articles are planned for: Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust (PHCT), DLNP, Exe Press,

and the Edge Watersports tide times booklet advert. We keep a record of all publicity activities regularly as they happen.

5.6 We will investigate opportunities to place articles in TDC and ECC newsletters, other partners and PHCT Friends of the Common. We have issued a call for support to the working group and would invite the members of the Executive Committee to please help us with this by identifying opportunities in newsletters and via other networks.

5.7 New website - We will set up tracking code to track conversions to newsletter sign ups and engagement (how far down the page visitors read). We will set web benchmarks if it proves possible to find comparable websites with which to do so. We will invest time in researching and identifying opportunities for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), setting up exclusion of our own visits and those of bots¹ to avoid double-counting.

Anne Mountjoy
Communications Officer

South East Devon
Habitat Regulations
Executive Committee
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¹ Norton describes bots as follows: "While bots may be utilized to perform repetitive jobs, such as indexing a search engine, they often come in the form of malware. Malware bots are used to gain total control over a computer".

Natural England comment:

Natural England have reviewed the report and have no further comment.