

# Chapter 13 - Protecting and enhancing our outstanding biodiversity and geodiversity

East Devon benefits from an exceptional abundance of biodiversity and geodiversity interest - from our Internationally Designated Sites to our extensive network of priority habitats and protected species. We recognise the value of these resources for nature conservation, scientific interest, health and wellbeing, education, climate change mitigation, flood risk management, air and water purification and the economy.

Our biodiversity and geodiversity are intrinsically linked to and often threatened by a range of factors, including climate change, agriculture, pollution, land use change, urbanisation and increasing human populations. These impacts can arise through complex mechanisms, both direct and indirect.

The value and importance of wildlife and the natural world is increasingly recognised by Government, as evidenced by the Environment Act 2021, which itself followed on from the Government paper 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' – see  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)



Seaton Wetlands

## **Biodiversity value and importance**

The policies of this new local plan seek to protect, enhance and expand existing features of biodiversity value, we also seek creation of new features and habitats. In our work and applying plan policy we will seek improvements in the quality and accuracy of ecological information submitted for assessment and improved avoidance, mitigation and compensation outcomes resulting from permissions granted and through their implementation.

## **The mitigation hierarchy**

All proposals should be developed in line with The Mitigation Hierarchy. This is a hierachal process whereby proposals should first seek to avoid biodiversity impacts. Where impacts cannot be avoided measures should be proposed to mitigate (lessen the impact) of the proposals. Where residual impacts exist (following mitigation), impacts should be compensated for. Compensation is a last resort and should only be considered once avoidance and mitigation measures have been fully considered and are reasoned to be unachievable. Where development is subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment compensation can only be considered under exceptional circumstances relating to reasons of overriding public interest.

## **Protection of wildlife sites**

Many sites are protected on account of their intrinsic importance and value for the wildlife they support. At the highest level, sites can be internationally and nationally designated and there is considerable legal protection afforded to them, though such protection is expanded and further articulated through planning policy.

## **84. Policy PB01: Protection of Internationally and Nationally important wildlife sites**

International and nationally designated wildlife sites are of greatest importance and must be given upper most protection.

Development proposals that would cause a direct or indirect adverse effect upon internationally and nationally designated sites will not be permitted unless all of the following criteria are met:

1. They cannot be located on alternative sites that would cause less or no harm.
2. The public benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the impacts on the features of the site and the wider network of natural habitats and designated sites.
3. Suitable avoidance and mitigation (and exceptionally where legally compliant compensation) measures are secured, in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy.
4. Where permanent or long-term temporary habitat loss or direct reduction of habitat condition is identified, bespoke compensation measures will need to be agreed. This must be undertaken as early as possible and include utilisation of Discretionary Advice Service from Natural England.
5. In respect of internationally designated sites, the overall coherence of the national site network must be maintained.

**Internationally designated sites falling under this aspect of policy include:**

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Proposed SACs

Potential SPAs

Ramsar sites

Proposed Ramsar sites

Areas secured as compensation for damage to an internationally or nationally designated site

**Nationally designated sites falling under this aspect of policy include:**

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)

National Nature Reserves (NNR)

## **Justification for inclusion of policy**

Statutory designated wildlife sites (those of international and national importance) benefit from substantial protection under national legislation. This local plan policy does not seek to duplicate existing protections but does provide clarification as to existing legislation and government guidance, and seeks to add detail on - when impacts may be permitted, expectations of enhancement of biodiversity interest, and an indication of which designations are included within the policy scope.

A more specific Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) policy is included in this chapter detailing requirements for HRA and existing East Devon mitigation strategies relating to impacts on European sites.

## **Policy PB02: Protection of Regionally and Locally important wildlife sites**

**Note this new policy is a product of the splitting and rewriting of draft Policy 84**

Development proposals that would cause a direct or indirect adverse effect upon Regionally and Locally important wildlife sites and features will not be supported, unless all the following criteria are met:

1. They cannot be located on alternative sites that would cause less or no harm. When destruction of these habitats is proposed, proof of there being no satisfactory alternative will need to be provided.
2. The public benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the impacts on the features of the site and the wider network of natural habitats and designated sites.

The sites have been surveyed in the optimal botanical period by a suitably experienced botanist (FISC<sup>1</sup> level 4 (or equivalent) or above) in accordance with published (or updated) designation criteria<sup>2</sup> and suitability assessment.

3. Suitable avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures are proposed, in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy, commensurate with the ecological value of the site affected, secure for the duration of the development, and providing like-for-like habitat restoration and/or creation, and ensuring that there is no degradation to the wider ecological networks and priority habitats.

### **Such sites include:**

Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

County Wildlife Sites (CWS)

Unconfirmed Wildlife Sites (UWS)

Special Verges designated for biodiversity.

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<sup>1</sup> Field Identification Skills Certificate

<sup>2</sup> DBRC (2022). The Devon Local Sites Manual Policies and Procedures for the Identification and Designation of Wildlife Sites

Non-statutory sites (those of regional and local importance) benefit from little protection under national legislation, and typically rely on local planning policy and the NPPF for protection. The council recognises the biodiversity value and strategic importance of locally designated sites of ecological importance, as well as and priority habitats. These features and areas are ecologically important, are often irreplaceable, and will play a major part in ecosystem resilience and nature recovery in coming years. The value is recognised of these often-fragmented habitats within the current biodiversity crisis and seeks to afford these features with a high level of policy protection and consideration within the planning process. This local plan policy provides clarification as to when impacts may be permitted, expectation of enhancement of biodiversity interest, and an indication of which designations are included within the policy scope.

## **Irreplaceable habitats and important features**

Whilst many sites are designated for the species and habitats the support there are also areas and features that are not specific designated and have not necessarily been surveyed and assessed but none the less are of great importance to wildlife interest. Of particular importance and value are trees and hedgerows and plan policy seeks to afford specific protection to these assets.

### **85. Policy PB03: Protection of irreplaceable habitats and important features**

Development proposals which would result in the destruction or degradation of irreplaceable habitats will be refused unless there are exceptional circumstances to justify loss and suitable mitigation or compensation measures are identified and implemented to address negative impacts arising. Adverse impacts will include through direct, adjacent, or indirect pathways, including lighting and pollution.

Habitats include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees (within and outside of ancient woodland).

#### **Mature trees**

Mature trees showing early signs of veteranisation or trees classified as 'notable' will require a high evidence burden for any proposed impacts, with mitigation and compensation measures consummate with their value.

## **Hedgerows**

Important hedgerows as defined by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, and species-rich Devon hedges have a very high intrinsic biodiversity value.

Proposals resulting in the loss and/or degradation of these hedgerows, will only be permitted where the mitigation hierarchy has been applied and evidenced in earnest.

Impacts should first be avoided, and where this is not possible, justification for impacts should be provided in full. Following this, suitable avoidance and mitigation measures should be proposed, followed by compensation measures as a last resort. Any compensatory hedges should be species-rich, include a bank, standard trees, and be mindful of temporal time scales to become a functional habitat in their replacement ratios.

Hedgerow translocation should always be considered first, as a preferential option to hedgerow destruction followed by compensation.

Hedgerow management should be in accordance with, Hedgelink guidance and the Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy for East Devon. Any new hedges must be distinctive to the local area.

## **Priority Habitats<sup>3</sup> and habitats supporting protected and notable species**

Impacts on Priority Habitats and habitats which support the functionality of Priority Species, such as bat foraging and commuting habitats, cirl bunting nesting and foraging habitat will require adequate mitigation and compensation for any potential direct or indirect adverse impacts from development.

Mitigation and compensatory requirements, including details regarding long-term maintenance of functional habitats, must be explicitly quantified within submitted Ecological Impact Assessments (EIAAs) to ensure these can be appropriately secured. EIAAs should be informed by recent survey information undertaken at suitable time of year following best practice guidelines and BS 42020:2013.

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<sup>3</sup> Habitats of Principle Importance, as listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (identified through site survey work or as identified through existing mapped resources)

## Justification for inclusion of policy

Some habitats are considered to be irreplaceable due to the fact that they are technically very difficult (typically taking a significant amount of time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed, taking into account their age, uniqueness, species diversity or rarity. Planning permission will not be granted for proposals which could result in the destruction or degradation (through direct or indirect impacts) of irreplaceable habitats, unless an absolutely exceptional reason and exceptional mitigation/compensation strategy exists, as per section 180c of the NPPF 2023.

An exceptional reason could include nationally significant infrastructure projects, or development which is clearly in the public (not private) interest, but only where the benefit is substantial and clearly outweighs the harm to the receptor. A suitable, exceptional mitigation strategy would still be required in any circumstance where habitat degradation or destruction is proposed. Natural England will be consulted where these impacts are proposed.

Hedgerows are incredibly valuable biodiversity resources, which often come under threat by development. Devon boasts the largest hedgerow network in England. East Devon's Hedgerows are typically very old, and contain specific soil conditions, understorey vegetation communities and structural niches. These conditions support a wide range of wildlife, including protected and notable species. These factors are difficult and sometimes impossible to recreate once lost. It is therefore imperative to protect and enhance these features, and promote their appropriate consideration during the planning process, including promoting the proper application of the mitigation hierarchy.

Compensatory hedgerow planting takes a considerable amount of time to establish (more than 10 years) and leads to varied results. Where appropriate, translocation of existing hedgerows can decrease establishment time, retains some of the original soil conditions and biota, retains some ecological niches, retains the understorey seed bank - resulting in a better quality hedgerow following works. The council will support and promote hedgerow translocation, rather than replacement.

# Habitat Regulation Assessment

The most significant wildlife sites in East Devon benefit from an international designation and for these sites and where adverse impacts may be possible from development there is a need for assessment under the Habitat Regulations to determine the acceptability of proposals. Plan policy set out details of the approach to be taken.

## **86. Policy PB04: Habitats Regulations Assessment**

### **HRA avoidance and mitigation strategies and guidance**

Subject to exceptional circumstances referred to in policy PB01, proposed plans or projects must not adversely affect the integrity of sites protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. These sites consist of:

1. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
2. Special Protection Areas (SPA)
3. Proposed SACs
4. Potential SPAs
5. Ramsar sites
6. Areas secured as sites compensating for damage to a European site.

The proponent of the plan or proposal must provide all necessary information to allow the planning authority to carry out Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the proposal.

Where there are likely significant effects to a European site, alone or in-combination, from an application, mitigation measures will need to be secured. Appropriate assessment will be necessary and will need to ensure mitigation measures are adequate and secured for as long as the impact might occur. Legislation and government guidance requires the planning authority to be confident beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the proposals will not result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the site. Consequently, we will require evidence of a high quality and accuracy to inform HRA and we will seek the advice of the statutory conservation body (Natural England).

Where it is not possible to rule out adverse effects on integrity, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, permission will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. In such cases it will be necessary to demonstrate that there are no alternatives, there is over-riding public interest and compensation can be secured).

## **Specific HRA mitigation strategies and guidance**

Plans and proposals should take into consideration and be in accordance with the latest versions of all council and wider HRA guidance documents and strategies. These documents and strategies are intended to facilitate HRA assessment by providing a coherent strategic approach to the delivery of mitigation requirements whilst avoiding unnecessary duplication of assessment effort, where applicable. These documents include (existing and pending production):

- South-East Devon European Sites Mitigation Strategy (existing – undergoing review)
- Beer Quarry Caves SAC Guidance Document (existing)
- Exmouth Imperial Recreation Ground Events Protocol (existing)
- River Axe SAC Mitigation Strategy (proposed)
- Vehicle emission impacting on designated sites (proposed)

## **Specific HRA policy requirements in relation to avoiding, mitigating and compensating for HRA impacts**

### **The South-East Devon European Sites Mitigation Strategy (SEDESMS)**

In respect of the Exe Estuary SPA and the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SPA/SAC (and Dawlish Warren SAC in Teignbridge District) an over-arching strategic approach to HRA mitigation has been established. All residential development schemes within a straight line 10 kilometers distance of any part of the European sites will be required to provide mitigation to offset increased recreational pressure associated with new development.

Developers must clearly demonstrate that mitigation can and will be provided to ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of the European sites and identify and secure mechanisms through which delivery will be achieved, secured in perpetuity, and delivered within agreed timescales. All mitigation is to be delivered in accordance with the most recently adopted/approved version of the strategy and supporting guidance.

### **Development within 400 m of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SPA**

Predation of birds by domestic cats, direct recreational disturbance, and dog related impacts are identified as a particular concern on the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths. To help preserve the integrity of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths, specifically on account of these potential impacts, new dwellings and tourist accommodation will not be permitted on or within 400 meters of the Pebblebed Heaths.

### **Nutrient neutrality in the River Axe SAC catchment**

East Devon District Council requires development proposals within the River Axe SAC catchment to demonstrate how nutrient neutrality will be achieved in accordance with the latest guidance and nutrient budget calculator provided by Natural England or local calculator (if subsequently approved). Non-standard proposed mitigation techniques will require evidence of their effective use elsewhere and/or utilisation of Natural England Discretionary Advice Service.

### **Protection of Beer Quarry Cave SAC bat pinch points between Seaton and Colyford, and between Colyford and Colyton**

In order to protect the pinch points and secure their long-term suitability for the SAC bat species, the council will not support any applications which reduce the quality or functionality of the bat foraging and commuting habitats within these pinch points, such as through hedgerow\tree loss and adverse impacts from lighting. The objective is for these pinch points to be retained in perpetuity and enhanced where possible in order to guard against potential future development pressure.

### **Vehicle emission impacting on designated sites**

Development will not be permitted where there is potential for increased vehicle numbers, applying a precautionary approach, resulting in increases of emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and/or ammonia (NH3), from internal combustion engine vehicles, to exceeding threshold levels of harm to designated sites (specifically the Pebblebed Heaths).

## **Justification for inclusion of policy**

### **Habitat Regulations Assessment**

As a Competent Authority, the planning authority has a duty to carry out Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA), in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). European Sites and European Offshore Marine Sites identified under these regulations are referred to as 'habitats sites', and now form the 'National Site Network'. These are sites of international importance for wildlife.

East Devon Contains 7 Habitats sites:

Exe Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) (also a RAMSAR site)

East Devon Pebblebed Heath Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

East Devon Heaths SPA

Beer Quarry and Caves SAC

River Axe SAC

Sidmouth to West Bay SAC

Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC



Low tide on the Exe Estuary/the sea

All plans and projects (including planning applications) which are not directly connected with, or necessary for, the conservation management of a habitats site, require consideration of whether the plan or project is likely to have significant effects on that site. This consideration – referred to as the ‘Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening’ – should take into account the potential effects of the plan/project itself alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Where the potential for likely significant effects cannot be excluded, the council must make an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site, in view of the site’s conservation objectives.

Natural England are a statutory consultee on all Appropriate Assessments. Planning permission may be granted for a plan or project only after having ruled out adverse effects on the integrity of the habitats site. Where an adverse effect on the site’s integrity cannot be ruled out, and where there are no alternative solutions, the plan or project can only proceed if there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest and adequate compensation can be secured.

This policy is proposed to provide clarity to proponents of plans or projects as to the specificities of HRA, and the evidence burden required of them. The policy details specific proposed policy elements which avoid and mitigate impacts on specific habitats sites.

# **The South-East Devon European Sites Mitigation Strategy (SEDESMS)**

In respect of the Exe Estuary and the Pebblebed Heaths (and Dawlish Warren in Teignbridge) an over-arching strategic approach to habitat mitigation measures has been established. All residential development schemes within a straight line 10 kilometres distance of any part of the SAC and/or SAC designated areas of the Exe Estuary or Pebblebed Heaths will be required to provide mitigation. The onus will rest on developers demonstrating that mitigation can and will be provided and granting of planning permission will be linked to clear evidence that delivery will actually happen to agreed timescales.

The South-East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy and associated assessments provide confidence in the delivery of adequate mitigation to ensure the cumulative effects of recreational impacts on the habitat sites can be ruled out. Through this strategic approach monies collected through CIL, negotiated separately through Section 106 agreements and/or potentially otherwise paid or contributed through other means will address mitigation requirements.

Non-residential development schemes within the 10 kilometres catchment (and potentially beyond) will need to be subject to project level assessment to establish potential mitigation need.

Mitigation measures identified as “infrastructure” will require payment as part of the CIL contribution. This will typically be the expected approach for such mitigation and this will form the first draw on CIL funds. However, mitigation will also require measures identified as “non-infrastructure”, such as the provision of staff. Therefore, the Strategic approach to mitigation includes both on-site and off-site measures, to include:

- Improved wardening and management of sites;
- Information and education;
- Changes to access arrangements and points;
- Habitat improvements and provision ; and
- Provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS).

On-site (referring to the protected sites) mitigation measures are combined with off-site provision in the form of SANGS. SANGS are required to achieve a target level of provision of 8 hectares of open space provision for every net new 1,000 residents accommodated through development. At a residential density averaged at 2.2 persons per each new home this will equate to around 176 SqM of SANGS space per each net extra dwelling. However actual space standards will depend on the type, character and location of provision.

SANGS will need to include substantial open space areas ideally of semi-natural character and should specifically be appealing to dog walkers. They can utilise land previously inaccessible to the public or arise from improvements of currently accessible but under-used spaces. SANGS sites are required to encompass land acquisition, establishment and provision of ongoing management in perpetuity. Schemes which look to utilise service charges or increases in resident precepts will not be considered.

To help ensure and secure timely delivery of mitigation, specifically SANGS, the Council has the option of exercising Compulsory Purchase Order powers to ensure availability of land.

To help preserve the integrity of the East Devon Pebblebeds Heath, specifically on account of the impacts of domestic cats through bird predation, direct recreational disturbance, and dog related impacts, new residential uses will not be allowed on or within 400 metres of the Pebblebed Heaths Special Protection Area.

The mitigation proposals, including those of the 'South-east Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy', must provide for mitigation in perpetuity to ensure that development does not have a net adverse impact on the integrity of European designated wildlife sites. This will include provision of on-site, off-site and cross-site measures and monitoring. Provision of developer-led SANGS are required to be fully implemented ahead of development being occupied, in order to deliver mitigation ahead of impact. Strategic SANGS delivered by the local authority will be commensurate with the levels of housing growth.

The delivery and success of mitigation will be monitored alongside development (specifically new housing development) and changes in population. Where mitigation lags behind development it will be a potential indicator that the worth and integrity of European sites could be being eroded. This will provide a policy basis and justification for resisting further development or occupation until effective mitigation is delivered in accordance with past development/occupancy.

## River Axe SAC

The River Axe Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is being negatively impacted by poor water quality, largely due to increased phosphate levels. Proposals which result in increased phosphate levels in the River Axe SAC require HRA (this specifically includes new housing development in the catchment), with mitigation of the proposed increases in phosphate levels being secured in perpetuity through the HRA process. Such proposals include new residential units and overnight accommodation, as well as many others. This will be described and addressed fully in the proposed River Axe HRA Mitigation Strategy document. As part of this strategy, East Devon District Council are required to follow the mitigation hierarchy and apply a precautionary approach to carrying out HRA, within policy, strategy and when carrying out individual HRAs.

In terms of new proposals, the increases in phosphate loading of the River Axe SAC are from two sources – increased surface water runoff, and increased grey and black water discharge.

Whilst the above regulatory procedures under the Habitat Regulations do not apply to other rivers in East Devon the council are, none the less, aware of and concerned by high nutrient levels across watercourses in East Devon and the adverse impacts they are causing. We will therefore carefully assess development proposals and planning application in respect of any possible increases in nutrient levels that could occur and will encourage measures to protect and where possible enhance water quality.

## Beer Quarry Caves SAC Pinch Points

The areas of semi-natural habitats between the northern edge of Seaton and Colyford, and between Colyford and Colyton are known commuting routes for the three species of bats which form the qualifying features of the Beer Quarry and Caves SAC (greater horseshoe, lesser horseshoe and Bechstein's bats). These areas consist of mosaics of commuting and foraging features suitable for use by these species and are used to facilitate dispersal into the wider landscape, as well as foraging.

These pinch points are limited in size due to urban encroachment. Further restriction of these pinch points could severely impact on the movement of the SAC bat species in the local area and hinder dispersal to important roosts in the wider landscape and local foraging resources such as Seaton Marshes. Development within the pinch points is likely to be irreversible.

Beer Quarry and Caves (SAC) Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) guidance<sup>4</sup> provides specific guidance for developments within bat consultation zones for qualifying bat species associated with BQ&C SAC. It includes mapped consultation zones, including pinch points, and provides clarity on HRA requirements for developments within these consultation zones. The guidance may be subject to change and the most recent published version should always be referred to.

### **Vehicle emission impacting on designated sites**

Impacts of atmospheric nitrogen disposition is identified as a pressure on the qualifying features of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths<sup>5</sup>. Exceedance of threshold levels may affect heathland features by the transition of heather to grass dominance and changes to vegetation mosaics affecting associated fauna.

Development is typically associated with increased traffic and emissions which can increase the airborne concentration of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and ammonia (NH3), and the subsequent rate of nitrogen deposition from the atmosphere. This can lead to unacceptable adverse impacts of nutrient enrichment and acidification of soils, encouraging more tolerant ruderal species at the expense of sensitive plant, lower plant and invertebrate communities. In high concentrations, ammonia can result in direct toxic effects on vegetation.

The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths, receive emissions from vehicles that are at or beyond harmful levels. In the absence of mitigation, and/or a net decrease in emission levels, for example resulting in a net shift to electric vehicle, and/or less polluting engines, resulting in emission falls the result will be unacceptable adverse impacts. Development will not be permitted, in the absence of mitigation, where such impacts may arise. .

We will keep under review potential impacts on other designated sites including the River Axe and assessments under the Habitat Regulations may be applicable if concerns arise.

## **Biodiversity Net Gain**

Biodiversity net gain is the principle that the net result (the end position) after development has occurred is that the biodiversity or wildlife value is greater than that of any site that is being developed. The Government support

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<sup>4</sup> Beer Quarry and Caves (SAC) Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) guidance (October 2022)

<sup>5</sup> Natural England (2014). Site Improvement Plan East Devon Heaths

biodiversity net gain and in East Devon we recognise the importance and are seeking to exceed minimum national levels.

## **87. Policy PB05: Biodiversity Net Gain**

Major development<sup>6</sup> proposals will need to deliver biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 20% to be calculated using the most up-to-date statutory metric. Where there is a demonstrable viability problem to achieve this target, it will be expected that all measures to exceed the national minimum requirements are made, and evidence for not achieving the 20% target is provided in full. Non-major developments will be required to secure at least 10% BNG.

All applications subject to biodiversity net gain will need to be supported by a Biodiversity Gain Statement which clearly demonstrates how the biodiversity gain hierarchy has been followed. The statement will need to be supported by a completed biodiversity metric (including condition assessment sheets) and demonstrate how BNG will be delivered in accordance with good practice principles for development<sup>7</sup>, BS 8683:20218, and local guidance (or subsequently updated guidance). Any development proposal including significant onsite gains will need to include a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) and be clear in terms of how habitats will be maintained, appropriately monitored, and reported for 30 years. The statement should provide the expected balance of any off-site gains and whether the use of statutory biodiversity credits is expected.

Where offsite habitats are created or enhanced to deliver BNG, in full or in part, the delivery should be provided within the locality of the impact and contribute to ecological networks and published strategies in accordance with BNG principles. Offsite habitat delivery should prioritise the recovery of ecological networks, priority habitats, and contribute to the aims and objectives of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and other locally published plans, policies, and strategies including the Clyst Valley Regional Park, Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy for East Devon, and the East Devon Nature Recovery Plan.

Where there is evidence of deliberate habitat degradation on development sites prior to the submission of planning applications, a precautionary view in terms of the habitat distinctiveness and condition will be assumed unless there is evidence to support a lower categorisation.

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<sup>6</sup> The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010

<sup>7</sup> Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development

<sup>8</sup> BS 8683:2021 process for designing and implementing biodiversity net gain

Developments exempt from mandatory BNG are required to deliver ecological enhancements consummate with the scale of development. Self-build developments will be required to provide a completed statutory biodiversity metric to evidence their baseline ecological value and the predicted ecological outcome of the development.

## **Justification for inclusion of policy**

The Environment Act 2021 requires all development proposals (except where exemptions apply) to result in a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of at least the relevant percentage (currently set at 10% by the regulations). The Environment Act 2021 also requires identification of measures to further the biodiversity objective (i.e., measures to enhance nature recovery in the district) and act on those measures.

The planet is facing an ecological emergency. Globally, wildlife populations have declined by over half in the past 50 years (Living Planet Report 2022). Over 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, and the planet is currently undergoing the sixth mass-extinction event in history, as a result of human activities and behaviour (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) 2019). Within the UK, 13% of England's species are under threat of extinction, with 32% having declined in number and 151 species made extinct since 1500 (State of Nature Report, 2023). Habitat degradation and habitat fragmentation through development have been identified as Devon specific threats to the natural environment (Devon Local Nature Partnership, 2018).

The Lawton Report (2010) recommended “a step-change in our approach to wildlife conservation, from trying to hang onto what we have, to one of large-scale habitat restoration and recreation, under-pinned by the re-establishment of ecological processes and ecosystem services, for the benefits of both people and wildlife.”. This report concluded that in order to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network, habitats need to be “bigger, better, and more joined up”.

Nature recovery through habitat creation can lead to a myriad of interlinked benefits for society. Natural and semi-natural habitats (such as those delivered through biodiversity net gain) can be intrinsically linked to sustainable development, mitigation of climate impacts (flooding, heat extremes), carbon storage, and improvement of mental health and well-being.

East Devon contains a high diversity of ecologically important sites and habitats, however, many of these are sporadic and small, and exist in isolation without connection to other similar habitats. In order for the council to further the biodiversity objective, make progress towards halting biodiversity loss and aid biodiversity recovery in the district, East Devon District Council recognise the need to take action to implement the recommendations of the Lawton

Report (increasing the area of natural/semi-natural habitats, improving the quality of existing habitats, and connecting isolated habitats. Biodiversity net gain provides a mechanism to achieve some of these goals.

East Devon District Council formally adopted a Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon in August 2023. The council recognises that the biodiversity crisis and climate crisis are intrinsically linked. The declaration provides an overarching framework and principles of how the local planning authority will meet its enhanced biodiversity duties required under the Environment Act such as embedding Nature Recovery into all strategic plans and policy areas and a commitment to exceed 10% BNG.

Recent evidence<sup>9</sup> demonstrates that the 10% net gain target without a focus on species management provides negligible gains for wildlife such as birds and butterflies due to disincentives to the creation and management of certain habitats.

Biodiversity net gain is a new system. Habitats are to be secured and maintained for at least 30 years through legal obligations, in order to meet a target habitat type and condition. Delivery and long-term security of habitats is not yet fully tested, which leads to uncertainty in outcomes. Delivery and aftercare of compensatory habitat is complex, both in terms of physical management and legal obligations. When uncertainty exists within environmental decision making, the precautionary principle should be applied. The precautionary principle is a basic tenet of environmental decision making. The precautionary principle proposes taking preventive action in the face of scientific uncertainty and shifting the burden of proof to the proponents of an activity. It needs to be recognized that the Council must apply the precautionary principle to avoid trading certain biodiversity losses for uncertain biodiversity gains.

Increasing the BNG level from 10% to 20% is not a doubling of works: a 10% gain means 110% of the pre-development baseline value is provided, and a 20% gain means 120% of the pre-development baseline value is provided. This equates to an increase on the national standard of around 9% (120% is around 9% higher than 110%).

In August 2024, submitted habitat bank proposals in East Devon indicate they can deliver at least 230 habitat biodiversity units. There is also further demand to register habitat banks in the district.

Significant growth is proposed in the west end of the district, including a proposed new town. Any development within 10 km of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths and Exe Estuary are required to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), including the proposed new town. Therefore, there is a requirement to deliver large areas of open-space habitat

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<sup>9</sup> Marshal *et al*, 2023

to offset development impacts on European designated sites. Provided that habitat enhancements are in addition to the requirements of SANGs (which are delivered to offset recreational impacts) BNG can be delivered on SANG sites and offers significant opportunities to deliver BNG within the district. SANGs require management agreements in perpetuity (80-120 years), which also fit within the BNG framework.

Other BNG delivery opportunities exist over the district. The district is affected by nutrient neutrality, and BNG can also be delivered, with benefits stacked, on land used for nutrient mitigation. Furthermore, there are currently two Landscape Recovery schemes in the district. These new Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) support large-scale land-use change for the long-term with funding from public and private sources, including from BNG.

In recognition of the complexity to deliver BNG on small development sites and the scope to deliver BNG on larger sites though a design led approach, the 20% BNG policy would only apply to major development proposals.

## **Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Network**

Local nature recovery is the concept that environmental quality and biodiversity can be enhanced by improving areas for wildlife and creating green links between habitats to allow wildlife value to be enhanced and increase. The concept of nature recovery is increasingly gaining ground and is being actively promoted across Devon.

### **88. Strategic Policy PB06: Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Network**

Proposals which result in enhancement of existing NRN features, expansion of existing features within NRN areas, and increase landscape scale connectivity of ecological features within NRN areas will be supported.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) delivery within NRN areas, those meeting the aims and objectives of the East Devon Nature Recovery Plan, Clyst Valley Regional Park, and identified in Devon guidance are considered important for nature recovery within the district. BNG delivery in these areas is therefore formally identified as being in an area of strategic significance within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool until the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is formally adopted. Once adopted, the LNRS will define high strategic significance used within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool. NRN areas will still be considered important for nature recovery.

## Justification for inclusion of policy

The Environment Act 2021 requires a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to be produced for every area of England. Devon County Council (DCC) are the “responsible authority” for delivering the LNRS, but local authorities, such as EDDC, must have had input to the LNRS. The LNRS contains a statement of biodiversity priorities and a local habitat map for the strategy area, which will take the form of Nature Recovery Network (NRN) mapping. EDDC has contributed to the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), through identifying specific priorities for East Devon and inputting to NRN mapping.

The LNRS and NRN work is intended to implement the principles for nature recovery identified in the Lawton Report (2010) – “Bigger, better, more joined up” (in reference to ecological networks and habitats). Nature recovery in the district will be focused on landscape scale features and mosaics of habitats, in order to improve quality of existing features, expand existing features and connect isolated features. This will provide ecological resilience and provide a landscape scale strategy area within which to focus nature recovery.

The LNRS contains:

A description of the biodiversity of the strategy area.

Opportunities for recovering and enhancing biodiversity in the strategy area.

Priority habitats and species for recovering and enhancing biodiversity (taking into account the contribution that recovering or enhancing biodiversity can also make to other environmental benefits).

Details of measures proposed to achieve the recovery and enhancement of priority habitats and species.

The NRN map has been created through a process of combining existing identified sites of wildlife value, and then extending/connectivity habitats in accordance with suitable underlying geology/soil conditions in order to identify areas within which nature recovery should be focused. Links to the current NRN mapping version can be found on the EDDC website.

Existing sites of wildlife value which were combined to create the NRN are:

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Ramsar sites

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)

National Nature Reserves (NNR)

Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

County Wildlife Sites (CWS)

Special verges

Ancient Woodland Inventory sites (AWI)

Mapped Habitats of Principle Importance, as listed under S41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

## **89. Policy – Ecological Impact Assessment**

**Proposed to remove policy as its repeating best practice and probably better secured in a validation checklist.**

## **90. Policy – Due consideration of protected and notable species**

**Proposed to remove policy as its repeating best practice and probably better secured in a validation checklist.**

## **Design feature for wildlife enhancement**

Through new development we wish to see new areas and feature in which wildlife can thrive. We have therefore established policy to promote wildlife enhancement in development proposals.

## **91. Policy PB07: Ecological enhancement and biodiversity in the built environment**

In addition to features required as part of biodiversity net gain, mitigation or compensation, all proposals are required to incorporate features of biodiversity value tailored to the specific proposals, relevant local receptors and in accordance with best practice to maximise potential benefits.

### **As a minimum, the following features are required within new proposals:**

Integrated bird boxes (e.g., swift bricks) in suitable locations at a ratio of one per dwelling, or a relevant number to be agreed with EDDC for flats or non-dwelling applications, to be provided in accordance with BS42021:20221.

Provision of integrated bat boxes in locations suitable for use by bats (i.e., adjacent to suitable habitats and not significantly impacts by artificial lighting).

An integrated bat loft within all major planning applications, if ecologically relevant (i.e., if the site is a suitable location for a bat loft be constructed - not too isolated or within unsuitable habitat such as heavily urbanized well-lit areas).

Gaps (13 cm x 13 cm) in the bases of garden fences (between gardens, and within fences between gardens and wider ecological networks, to facilitate movement of hedgehogs and other protected and notable species).

Provision of overhanging eaves suitable for nesting house martins in all major development

The location and specification of biodiversity features should be designed with input from a qualified ecologist and informed by the most up to date research and guidance at the time of application. Bat and bird boxes should be integrated within the fabric of the building to ensure longevity and retention when ownership changes (i.e., to avoid removal by new owners).

### **Justification for inclusion of policy**

Over the plan period, East Devon will see significant development growth, which will in turn place greater pressure on the natural environment. This growth can also provide opportunity for nature recovery, if carried out appropriately.

This policy is a mechanism for EDDC to further the biodiversity objective, in accordance with the requirements of the Environment Act 2021, and is seen to be essential to the potential recovery of certain receptors, such as swifts. This is increasingly important in the current biodiversity crisis, within which the majority of new homes offer no value to wildlife.

Paragraph 185(b) of the NPPF states that plans should promote enhancement of ecological networks and recovery of priority species, and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity. The measures in this policy are designed to carry out this purpose. The priority species concerned (priority bird species, bats, reptiles, hedgehogs etc.) would benefit from the proposed measures. Many priority species can thrive in urban

and semi-urban locations, as well as within man-made structures themselves, if facilitated. Examples include swifts, bats, hedgehogs and common reptiles.

The recent BS42021:20221 guidance has provided evidence of the high occupancy rates of integrated bird boxes, and has been adopted and endorsed by the RPSB, as well as several large housing developers. EDDC endorse this guidance and promote its use throughout the district.

There is established and ongoing research and guidance on the integration of biodiversity and the built environment. Guidance includes (non-exhaustive list) the National House Building Council (NHBC) Biodiversity in new housing developments NF89 (April 2021), UK Green Building Council (UK GBC) fact sheets, Building with Nature, in addition to guidance from environmental non-government organization (NGOs). Many measures are cost effective, require little or non-maintenance, and will contribute to nature recovery.

Features that could be included are:

Reptile/amphibian hibernacula.

Brash and/or log piles.

Invertebrate bricks, bee hotels.

Water butts.

Wildlife ponds.

Sustainable urban drainage systems where required (e.g., through the provision of swales and pools, connected to the wider ecological network, planted with native vegetation).

Native hedge planting to divide building plots.

Swift/wildlife towers, green roofs.

Barn owl lofts.

Bat/bird/dormouse boxes in trees and hedges

## Trees in East Devon

Trees form a hugely important wildlife assets and are attractive features in their own right. We are promoting enhancement of trees and tree coverage in the district.

## 92. Policy PB08: Tree, Hedges and Woodland on Development Sites

### Retention of existing trees and hedges

All development will retain good quality and healthy woodland, trees and hedgerows, including: ancient woodland; ancient and veteran trees; those with visual amenity value; those that support wildlife (such as some appropriate U category trees as part current BS 5837) or provide habitat connectivity; those which positively contribute to local landscape character, the historic environment or the significance of a heritage asset and its setting; and rare or unusual species of trees. These will be incorporated into the overall design and landscape scheme, within public spaces where possible.

Where justifiable and unavoidable tree and hedge losses occur, these will need to be adequately compensated for on the development site or on publicly accessible land in accordance with the minimum compensation requirements for trees listed in the Table below. This replacement policy also applies to trees with Ash dieback on development sites.

Trunk diameter of tree lost to development (cm measured at 1.5 m)	Number of replacement trees <sup>10</sup>
7 – 19.9	1
20 – 29.9	2
30 – 39.9	3
40 – 49.9	4
50 – 59.9	5
60 – 69.9	6
80+	7

### Tree protection on development sites

All development proposals where trees and native hedges are present, or where trees outside of the boundary are within the root protection zone of the development boundary, will need to be informed by British Standard BS 5837 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction (or the most up to date

<sup>10</sup> Based on the Bristol Tree Replacement Standard (BTRS).

version), the recommendations of which will be taken fully into account in the scheme design.

The planning application will be accompanied by a detailed appraisal of their condition, location, and ecological and landscape significance both at the time of the application and with an assessment of their potential future value.

Applications should include an arboricultural method statement and tree protection plan to be followed during construction, reflecting the latest arboricultural standards for any tree works or development near to trees and demonstrating appropriate root protection areas.

Where woodland, trees and hedges are to be removed they should be accurately identified, with a clear justification set out for their loss, together with details of any mitigation or replacement planting as part of an overall approach to achieving biodiversity net gain. Development proposals that have not properly considered or prioritised development options enabling the retention of woodlands, trees and hedgerows will be refused.

No building, hard surfacing, drainage or underground works will be permitted that does not accord with the principles of BS 5837 or Volume 4 National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Apparatus in Proximity to Trees – Issue 2 (or the current revision or any replacement) unless, exceptionally, the Council is satisfied that such works can be accommodated without harm to the trees concerned or there are overriding reasons for development to proceed.

To avoid issues with subsidence all developments, including permitted development, will require appropriate depth of foundations considering local soil geology and water demand of nearby trees at full maturity in accordance with current industry guidance.

### **Provision of new trees and hedgerows on development sites**

The provision of new trees and hedges shall be based on the principles outlined in the Devon Tree Strategy, the Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy for East Devon, Devon County Right Tree Right Place Guidance, and New Devon Hedges and relevant guidance. Tree planting design and maintenance should:

Take into account climate change and local landscape characteristics. Planting material should be sourced in accordance with the national strategy for biosecurity;

Allow sufficient space for existing and newly planted trees to grow to maturity, both above and below ground;

Ensure that any new streets are tree-lined and residential areas and development sites as a whole are tree lined and will contribute towards 30% tree cover target for urban areas within the District.

Use large canopy tree species within new development as these provide the greatest benefits for increasing canopy cover, providing shade, intercepting rainfall and increasing biodiversity.

Within or adjacent to areas of paving where available soil volumes are likely to be restricted, technical solutions should be used to ensure that adequate soil volume and suitable growing conditions are provided, such as water infiltration, drainage and aeration, to enable new trees to establish and reach maturity as per industry best practice. These solutions must also prevent soil compaction and provide a load bearing capacity sufficient for the task for which the surface is designed for.

## **POLICY PB09 Monitoring requirements for new planting schemes**

Appropriate measures to ensure that new planting schemes are implemented in accordance with the approved details and to secure their long-term management and maintenance will be required including arrangements for monitoring. For major developments this will also require the placement of a financial bond by the developer prior to the commencement of construction, equal to 25% of the calculated planting cost for the scheme, or agreed phase, to be released on fulfilment of the following to the satisfaction of the planning authority:

- Within 1 month of the completion of planting works, the issue of a signed certificate by the developer's landscape architect or other appropriately qualified/ experienced professional consultant confirming that the planting works have been overseen by them and completed in accordance with the approved details.

For years 1-5 thereafter, the issue of an annual inspection report by the developer's landscape architect confirming that maintenance of the scheme has been carried out in accordance with the approved details and identifying any plant failures or other defects that require rectification together with a program for their implementation at the earliest opportunity. The annual certificate shall also confirm the satisfactory rectification of any defects identified during the previous year's inspection.

## **Justification for inclusion of policy**

Trees, woodlands, and mature hedges, including hedgerows or Devon hedge banks, are an important part of our natural and historic environment. They enhance landscape, townscape and street character, heritage significance,

provide habitats and important connectivity for wildlife and protected sites, support sustainable drainage, sequester carbon, reduce noise and pollution, and provide natural cooling. They are important green infrastructure assets that contribute to the local and strategic green infrastructure network and help to provide attractive spaces, distinctive features to aid navigation and help encourage people to lead healthy and active lives.

When new development is proposed, it is essential that existing woodlands, trees, and hedges are incorporated into the design at the earliest possible stage, to ensure their retention in the right places.

It is vital to include new planting within new development, to create pleasant spaces, maximise their environmental benefits and to provide the mature trees of the future. Existing and new natural features will need to be protected during development to ensure their successful growth and integration within the development and management will need to be in place to ensure their long-term health.

Sufficient information to demonstrate how development will meet the requirements of the policy will need to be submitted with all planning applications with the potential to have an impact on trees, woodland, and traditional Devon hedges.

Where required, for the wholly exceptional loss, or deterioration of ancient woodland or ancient or veteran trees, compensation strategies could include measures such as the planting of new native woodland as close to the site as possible, restoring or improving nearby ancient woodland, improving connections between existing areas of ancient woodland and habitats, or the planting of individual trees that could become ancient or veteran in the future.

Trees, hedges, and new areas of woodland can provide benefits to wildlife and people and can help reduce climate change through carbon sequestration. The policy seeks to assist the delivery of the Tree, Hedge and Woodland Strategy for East Devon and sets out clear support for development that will help to create of new areas of trees, hedges, and woodland, especially in appropriate locations where they can help wildlife or where they would provide for public outdoor recreation, helping to improve public health.

## **Geology and Geodiversity**

East Devon has a varied and important geology that has helped shaped the district over many years.

## The Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site

Most of the East Devon coastline forms part of the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site (often referred to as the Jurassic Coast). This coastline was given international recognition in 2001 on account of its exceptional geological importance and as such joined a global family of unique and exceptional places that illuminate humanity's collective history, identity and relationship with nature.

### **93. Policy PB10: Protection and Enhancement of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site**

Development within the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site, or that could adversely impact on its setting, will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that the Outstanding Universal Value of the coastline and specifically its geological importance, will not be adversely affected.

Development proposals that could give rise to adverse impacts, will be assessed in respect of:

- The setting and importance of the world heritage site;
- The inherent attributes and geological qualities of the site, specifically relating to its 'Outstanding Universal Value';
- The grounds and reasons for its inscription; and
- Its overall integrity (including possible incremental loss) and local impacts of development.

The international importance of the site and its setting is such that development proposals will be rigorously reviewed in determination of planning applications and this policy will sit alongside other affording coastal and countryside protection and enhancement.

### **Justification for inclusion of policy**

The Jurassic Coast is a hugely diverse and beautiful landscape underpinned by incredible geology of global importance. In 2001 it was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO for the outstanding universal value of its rocks, fossils and landforms. It remains England's only natural World Heritage Site though it is not a statutory designation site and as such is not afforded statutory designation national policy protection.

The Jurassic Coast begins at Orcombe Point at Exmouth, in East Devon, and continues eastward for 95 miles to Old Harry Rocks near Swanage in Dorset.

Its entire length clearly and visibly presents a continuous and time stepped range of geological exposures.

The Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan 2020-2025; see 7e0ff0f0-426f-523d-bd45-cc1fe4d60fac (dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) identifies the 'Outstanding Universal Value' (OUV) of the World Heritage coastline and identifies the following OUV attributes:

- Stratigraphy (the rock record) and structure;
- Palaeontological record;
- Geomorphological features and processes;
- Ongoing scientific investigation and educational use, and role in the history of science; and
- Underlying geomorphological processes in the setting of the Site

The Partnership Plan highlights the geological value of the site and identifies a significant opportunity to promote the role of geodiversity within the area's landscapes; with an emphasis on the presentation of the site and people's ability to use and enjoy it.

A key characteristic of the WHS is its high rate of erosion, creating a dynamic coastline which maintains rock exposures. Development requiring increased coastal defences would therefore be harmful to the OUV of the site. Likewise development at or on the inscribed area that could adversely impact on the site and be contrary to reasons for inscription will be closely assessed and unless schemes can be accommodated in an acceptable manner planning permission for development will be refused. It is relevant to note that the majority of the WHS falls with the East Devon National Landscape area.

## **Sites designated for their geological importance**

Geological sites may benefit from national designation, specifically as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (putting them equal to wildlife sites with the same designation) on account of their geological value and importance. Plan policy specifically seeks to afford protection to these designated sites.

### **94. Policy PB11: Protection of designated geological sites**

Proposals and plans that would cause a direct or indirect adverse effect upon nationally designated geological sites will not be permitted unless all of the following criteria are met:

- a. They cannot be located on alternative sites that would cause less or no harm.

- b. The public benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the impacts on the features of the site and the wider network of natural habitats and designated sites.
- c. Suitable avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures are proposed, in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy.
- d. the integrity of the site is maintained.

## **Justification for inclusion of policy**

Geological sites are designated because of their importance and intrinsic qualities. They can be of both scientific and educational value and will also be supportive of and complementary to wildlife interests. Indeed it is the underlying geology that can be or often is the determinant of wildlife species present and value. Some sites may be designated as SSSIs for both geological and wildlife value

Statutory designated geological sites, specifically Sites of Special Scientific Interest, are recognised for their geological importance. Local plan policy seeks to complement existing legislation and government guidance, and seeks to add detail on when adverse impacts may be permitted.

## **Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites**

At the local level there are sites or areas that are designated as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS). These sites are identified for their scientific and educational value and provide a valuable local asset to complement nationally designated or recognised sites.

### **95. Policy PB12: Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites**

The granting of planning permission for development or land-use changes that may have an adverse effect, either directly or indirectly, on Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites will only be permitted if the justification for the proposed development clearly outweighs any harm to the intrinsic scientific or educational value of the site.

Where development is permitted mitigation will be required to minimise the negative impacts and where this is not possible adequate compensatory enhancement or new site creation schemes will be required.

## Justification for inclusion of policy

Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) are places in Devon that are considered to be especially important for the geology they exhibit. The Devon Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites Group was established in 1991 and is a voluntary organisation exclusively concerned with geological conservation in Devon. The Group is composed of a wide selection of individuals from professional geologists to amateurs interested in conserving the county's important geological history. The group establish and define RIGS and they are an important educational, historical, and recreational resource. The following criteria are used for site selection, taken from the Nature Conservation Committee (NCC) strategy:

Education – for fieldwork in primary and secondary schools, at undergraduate level, and in adult education courses.

Scientific Study/Research – by professional/amateur Earth scientists. These sites demonstrate the geology/geomorphology of an area, either alone or as part of a network.

Historical – for their important advances in Earth science knowledge or economic importance.

Aesthetic – qualities to the landscape, particularly for promoting public awareness and appreciation of Earth Sciences

RIGs are mostly old quarries, pits, roadside cuttings and other excavations which expose rocks normally covered by soil and vegetation. Some sites are, however, natural exposures of interesting rocks in river banks and cliffs, and others are fine views which demonstrate how the underlying geology and forces of erosion have shaped the landscape.

It is notable, therefore, that RIGS are often 'created' through the processes of development and can often result as an action of human intervention. Where development offers scope to show or expose geological features in an interesting and informative way we would welcome inclusion in planning applications submission about how such potential can be realised.

By recognising localities as County Geological Sites, activities which might damage or destroy their geological value will be avoided.