

Report to: Overview Committee



Date of Meeting 27th March 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

East Devon National Landscape annual review 2024/25

Report summary:

East Devon National Landscapes to present their 2024/25 Annual Review to Overview Committee and update on progress being made with reviewing their Management Plan 2025 – 2030. It is an opportunity for Overview Committee to understand the work programmes and activities that have been carried out by the East Devon National Landscape team over the last 12 months and also to hear about the plans for 2025/26 and how they align with the Council's own priorities for the environment. It is also an opportunity for Overview Committee to meet the recently appointed Manager and his team. East Devon DC is the host authority for the team and is also a key funding partner along with Devon CC and Natural England.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Overview Committee note the East Devon National Landscape Annual Review report 2024 and update on the Management Plan Review 2025-2030.

Reason for recommendation:

To enable the Annual Review 2024/25 to be presented to Overview Committee for noting and receive an update on the review work being progressed with the East Devon National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk

Links to background information [East Devon National Landscape Annual Report 24-25](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
 - ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services
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Report in full

1. East Devon National Landscape (EDNL) Team

- 1.1 EDNL has undergone significant staff changes over the last year. A new Manager arrived in April followed by a new Project Officer in September. Despite these significant disruptions for half the year, the new team has managed to deliver and exceed on all the National Landscape business plan targets. There is currently a live recruitment matter as the team's Communications Officer has recently resigned. This will mean a completely new team has been put in place in the last 12 months along with a new Chair (Cllr Richard Jefferies) as the previous Chair decided also to step down a year ago after serving two terms.
- 1.2 The team are currently recruiting a new Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) Programme Officer alongside the Communication post. There are also proposals being pulled together to add additional capacity in two key areas of the teams work programme due to increased workloads and these are for a Planning Officer and a Project Officer. Once in post, the team will have doubled its capacity since last year and be in a far stronger position to deliver new targets set by government.

2. East Devon National Landscape finances

- 2.1 The EDNL total combined budget for the 2024/25 year totalled £736,960. Of this, £480,391 was project specific, the remainder comprised of a majority Defra core grant and Local Authority match contributions.
- 2.2 The EDNL Partnership have allocated all available funds including saving £70,000 into reserves to support contingency costs such as redundancy costs. The EDNL Partnership indicative total budget for 2025/26 is £685,895 which represents a reduction of £51,065 on last year.

3. East Devon National Landscape projects

- 3.1 Through the EDNL Communities Project Fund, the Partnership have allocated and committed £25,000 which supported a diverse range of eleven projects across the National Landscape and the Annual Review 2024/25 highlights more on this area of activity. However as a "snapshot" of these projects they have included biodiversity improvements to a churchyard, developed a sustainable catchment plan to improve water quality in the Wotton Brook and planted 1000 trees to create 200m of hedgerow at Farway Common.
- 3.2 The East Devon Farmers Group delivered 10 events this year to a group of over 113 landowners and land managers. Events included slurry management, calf rearing best practice

and introduction to the new Sustainable Farming Incentive. The EDNL Partnership's annual summer gathering was attended by 60 farmers demonstrating the value and strength of this network.

- 3.3 Through the EDNL nature engagement program, the team led 11 events attended by 209 adults and 57 children. Events included stream dipping, bat walks and wildlife surveys.
- 3.4 Through the EDNL Access for All programme, the team committed and spent £57,824 which supported 8 projects with a combined total value of £96,208.84. The projects included installing beach matting at Sidmouth to improve disability access, audit the full East Devon Way and circular routes and develop new accessible interpretation for the Lower Otter Estuary area.
- 3.5 This year the EDNL Partnership were accepted as a 'spoke' for the National 'Nature Calling' project led by the National Landscapes Association. The EDNL Partnership as a spoke has enabled a collaboration with Blackdown Hills, Dementia Friendly Honiton Group and Honiton Community College to deliver a series of events throughout Spring/Summer 2025. Final details of this programme are still being worked out, but it will be a spectacular artistic initiative.
- 3.6 The EDNL Ambassador programme this year has been slightly different to previous years due to staff changes and low resource at start of the year. A 'meet & greet' was held in June so the existing ambassadors could meet the new Manager. They were also consulted as part of the Management Plan review process.
- 3.7 The EDNL event programme for 25/26 is under development.
- 3.8 It has been another hugely successful year for EDNL Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. In total the EDNL Partnership supported 44 projects worth a combined £300,751. The total value of those projects was estimated to be £379,783. The EDNL Annual Review 2024/25 details a case study where we restored an old barn to create a vital bat hibernaculum.

4. Wider Strategic Initiatives

- 4.1 As ever, the East Devon National Landscape team is involved in a wide range of regional and local partnerships. The team sit on many of these groups as part of the core steering group and are partners on some of them.
- 4.2 A new project for this year is Rivers Run Through Us, a partnership between Blackdown Hills, Dorset and Environment Agency. The new project team has been recruited, and the project aim is to restore natural heritage of the Axe through focussing on 3 key strategic themes: River, Soil and People. The work programme has just started for this project. Details of other initiatives the team we are involved in can be found in the Annual Review 2024/25 report.

5. Management Plan 2025-2030

- 5.1 The EDNL Partnership are now well underway with the development of the new five year Statutory Management Plan review work. After detailed evidence gathering, publication of the new State of Nature report and comprehensive stakeholder engagement, the EDNL Partnership submitted the first draft to East Devon DC's Cabinet seeking approval to advance to an 8-week public consultation. That was granted and the EDNL Partnership are now amid a public consultation which is due to end on Friday 18th April. The target date to seek full adoption of the new Management Plan is July 2025.

6. Planning and Consultation

6.1 The EDNL team respond to planning applications when resource allows. This year was particularly challenging due to staff changes and lack of capacity in the first half of the year. However, the teams did still engage with Planning Officers at East Devon DC in respect to the new Local Plan review work and continued to provide planning advice and guidance to members of the public when requested.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to the report