

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 9th July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

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Natural Seaton Interpretive Masterplan

Report summary:

The Natural Seaton Masterplan has been drafted by consultant, Dominic Acland and engaged various stakeholders in its development. The resulting plan is ready for adoption with the authorisation of ELT, and seeks to use funds held from the sale of the Seaton Jurassic building to deliver the various outputs of the masterplan.

Following on from this piece of work, Countryside will be looking to use this strategic document as the foundations of a major grant application from National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding work at the southern end of the wetlands site to deliver habitat creation, access and interpretive work to "complete" the Seaton Wetlands project.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Cabinet;

- To approve the direction of travel in relation to the current version of the masterplan; a working document to guide project work relating to the natural world in and around the town of Seaton.
- Delegates authority to the Director of Place to convene the proposed stakeholder group.
- Recommends to Council that residual budget of £80,000 from the sales receipts of the former Seaton Jurassic building are ringfenced for delivering outputs of this interpretive masterplan as detailed in table 3.
- That the Countryside Team Manager seeks funding from a National Lottery Grants for Heritage application later this year.

Reason for recommendation:

To develop the Natural Tourism offer within the town of Seaton, with the input of partner stakeholders.

Officer: James Chubb, Countryside Manager JChubb@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement

- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☒ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☒ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ Better homes and communities for all
- ☒ A greener East Devon
- ☒ A resilient economy

Background and Context

1. In March 2025 Environmental Engagement Consultant, Dominic Acland, submitted his report commissioned with funding from the residual receipts of the sale of Seaton Jurassic building. This commitment to developing one of the underlying strands of the Seaton Jurassic interpretive model “Natural Seaton” was welcomed by co-funders Devon County Council and, while not being pivotal in its agreement to allow for the sale of the building, went a long way to satisfying their need to see the original contribution toward the interpretation centre having a legacy post the sale of the building to a commercial operator.
2. The report engaged the following stakeholders in its development:

Name	Role	Organisation
Alison Hayward	Project Manager Place & Prosperity	East Devon District Council
Doug Stanton	Projects Manager Place & Prosperity	
Julian Gray	Director	South West Coast Path Association
Tom Sunderland	Undercliff National Nature Reserve Manager	Natural England
Jenny Nunn	Chief Executive Officer	Seaton Tramway
Kate Hind	Natural Environment Officer (Partnerships)	Devon County Council
Sam Scriven	Head of Heritage and Conservation	Jurassic Coast Trust
Sally King	Visitor, Tourism and Access Manager	Dorset National Landscape
Joanna Cairns	Museum Development Officer (Devon)	Museum Development South West
Lesley Clarke	Chair	Axe Vale and District Conservation Society
Laura Hewitt	Curator	Axe Valley Heritage Museum
Peter Thomas	Assistant Curator	

Table 1

3. It was recognised that with the Jurassic Coast interpretation centre ceasing to operate, and the recent dissolution of the Jurassic Coast Trust, there was a need for an identifiable and marketable brand to attract visitors to the town.
4. The unique blend of nature-based recreational & educational opportunities which emanate from the town centre, namely the SW Coast Path; Undercliffs National Nature Reserve; Seaton Wetlands and Lyme Bay Reefs MCZ make it a highly desirable destination for eco tourism.
5. It was also observed by the plan's author that any future applications to HLF for major funding of project work on Seaton Wetlands, would be hugely strengthened by having a community involvement at its foundation.
6. The headline recommendations of the Masterplan are:
 - The formation of a Natural Seaton Partnership to support coordination and delivery of the Masterplan.
 - A range of physical infrastructure improvements so that people can more easily access Seaton's natural assets.
 - Refurbishing and updating interpretation across the existing Discovery Points.
 - The creation of a Natural Seaton Trail that promotes these new connections.
 - The development of a Natural Seaton brand.
 - The development of a busy programme of events and activities under the Natural Seaton umbrella.
 - The involvement of local residents and other stakeholders in the refinement and delivery of these plans.
 - The development of applications to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other funders to help deliver the above.

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7. The report identified key interpretive themes, and key audiences which a "Natural Seaton Storybook" would be a useful tool for stakeholders and partner businesses to use in attracting new visitors to the area.
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Audience	Description	What they seek
Nature Explorers	Families and couples/individuals who are post family (55+); also younger, pre family couples /individuals.	Motivated by curiosity, wonder and a desire to get out and enjoy new experiences. Emphasise spending time outdoors to socialise with friends. They are more likely to engage with activities involving a new, adventurous way to see the coast.
Family Fun	Families and extended families.	Looking for novelty and to be entertained and for moderately energetic experiences. Visits often revolve around hobbies, familiar places where access is easy, or where the facilities are good and there is infrastructure that aids relaxation and socialising.
Careful and Curious	Mainly older adults who may or may not be retired, this group tend to be more conservative.	This group places a much stronger emphasis on the social aspects of any visit and are looking for quality experiences that have an enriching aim in mind and which provide an experience suited to general rather than specific knowledge. This group will be less inclined towards strenuous physical activity. Their interests are typically local and specific, eg local history.

Natural Learners	School groups, community groups, volunteers, young people and local and Explorer families.	Normally taking part in an organised group visit.
Friends and Champions	Likely to be more affluent and active older people local and/or community leaders and active local volunteers.	Seeking opportunities to volunteer and socialise. May already be very active in the community and are ready to help out on a regular basis and to promote the Natural Seaton concept amongst their network of contacts.

Table 2

8. Underpinning this output from the proposal, the document sets out an ambitious vision, aim and several objectives:

9. The Vision proposed for Natural Seaton is that:

Natural Seaton has ensured that Seaton's natural assets and heritage develop strongly as a source of pride and the main driver of the town's prosperity, providing secure jobs, learning opportunities and community connection alongside a richness of wildlife and natural beauty.

Natural Seaton's Aim is:

To work together to protect, enhance and promote Seaton's natural assets so they catalyse the regeneration of the town, enhance community life and support nature's recovery.

Its Objectives are:

- To foster collaboration across the community to secure the Vision.*
- To ensure Seaton's natural assets and heritage are as accessible as possible, respecting the need to protect wildlife.*
- To provide excellent interpretation on site and online to encourage learning about and engagement with the themes of Natural Seaton.*
- To organise a busy programme of events and activities to improve access to and celebrate Natural Seaton assets.*
- To connect with allied locations and brands that help build the area's role as a gateway to the natural world and our heritage.*

10. And finally, the document details the specific Discovery Point infrastructure in need to updating and refurbishment:

Name	Description	Estimate
Phase 1	Signage and Discovery Point improvements	
Old signage	Remove and replace signage which references Seaton Jurassic and replace with elements which tell the Natural Seaton story	£4,000
The Wave	New interpretation panel to better link the sculpture to the story	£3,000
The Prow	Repair and refresh the structure and interpretation at this key location	£5,000
Orientation point	Develop new interpretation to sit in this piece of public realm furniture, and allocate a responsible body to maintain it	£2,000

The Stargazer	Currently removed on safety grounds, replace with a wildlife-themed piece of substantial site furniture which is also wheelchair accessible	£8,000
The Portal	Repair the sculpture and relocate to the seafront. Renew interpretation panel.	£10,000
Field shelter	Replace a thatched basic shelter at Stafford Marsh with more purpose built structure with a locally-sourced wooden shingle roof	£10,000
		£42,000
Phase 2	New works	
Waymarking	Marker posts for a circular discovery trail through the town, the high street and the seafront taking in all Discovery Points plus other points of interest and stakeholder locations	£12,000
The Natural Seaton Storybook	A set of interpretive stories and characters which stakeholder businesses and groups can use to tell their own part of the Natural Seaton message	£7,500
Brand development	Create an identifiable brand and marketing strategy for the Natural Seaton Offer	£5,000
Engagement and Events	Develop a range of new engagement events running under the Natural Seaton brand led by officers and partnership organisations, to run over a trail 3 year period	£15,000
		£39,500*
*This estimated cost of proposed outputs is in excess of the remaining budget from building sale, it is therefor proposed that this shortfall would be found through Stakeholder contributions in year three of the project lifetime.		
Table 3		

Financial implications:

The financial details are contained within the report requesting use of a pre-existing budget of £80k to be used for outputs of this report

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.