

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 2.40 pm

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

Members agreed to the suspension.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 April 2024

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

3 Declarations of interest

None.

4 Public speaking

None.

5 Matters of urgency

None.

6 Confidential/exempt items

None.

7 2023-24 Annual Business Plan - Annual Report

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

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee

1. Notes the progress made in delivering the 2023/24 annual business plan;
2. Notes the status of mitigation measures from each of the plans, as well as explanations given for measures subject to delay and revised completion dates.

8 **Financial report**

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee

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

9 **Risk Register report**

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

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

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee:

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

10 **Communications report**

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

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

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

In addition, social media engagement is being monitored:

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee:

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

Attendance List

Councillors present:

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

Officers in attendance:

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

Chair

Date: