

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 1 April 2026

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Wild About Seaton NLHF Grant Submission

### Report summary:

Permission is sought from Cabinet to submit an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for one of its Heritage Grants, to support a project entitled Wild About Seaton.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

That Cabinet approves the application for funding to National Heritage Lottery Fund for the Wild About Seaton Project

### Reason for recommendation:

This gives EDDC the most efficient opportunity to fully fund the extension of Seaton Wetlands into newly acquired land; the creation of Sheeps Marsh intertidal scheme and the provision of access and interpretive infrastructure. To create a discovery trail around the town and provide marketing support to businesses within the town to benefit from this proven tourist driver. To work with the town's museum to update its natural history collection and utilise their exhibits and information in interpretive work throughout the town.

Officer: James Chubb, Countryside Manager

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### 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** Medium Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information** <https://wildeastdevon.co.uk/media/ulfoxxdu/wild-about-seaton-masterplan-final.pdf>

[Seaton Marshes Cabinet paper item 37](#)

**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

### Background:

When permission was granted by East Devon District Council to expand two Local Nature Reserves on the Axe Estuary, with the vision of developing a regionally-significant nature reserve, the future aspirational goal for visitor numbers was set at 70,000 per year.

In 2025 the site's footfall surpassed 124,000 visitors and the reserve still maintained a sense of wildness and welcome.

In March 2025 Environmental Engagement Consultant, Dominic Acland, submitted his report commissioned with funding from the 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.

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	

The report was adopted by ELT in April 2025 and published on the EDDC website.

## Wild About Seaton

Subsequently the project has identified where to develop habitats, access provision and infrastructure on EDDC land to the south of the lower Axe Estuary, allowing for public access to the nature reserve directly from the town of Seaton.

A nature-themed discovery trail has been developed and proposed which would form a loop starting and finishing in the long stay car park, heading north through the wetlands, moving up to the Tram Depot, through the new development to the seafront, and then up the High Street at The Wave sculpture to the town's Museum.

In October 2025 the partnership submitted an Expression of Interest to NHLF with the aim to put Seaton's natural heritage at the heart of the town's regeneration by:

- Developing Seaton Wetlands as the town's flagship site for nature connection, with a new visitor welcome hub, bird hide and accessible paths leading from the town's main car park, linking to the restored Sheep's Marsh, Salt Plot and Church Plot
- Reconnecting Sheep's Marsh to the Axe estuary to restore 10ha of saltmarsh habitat, & creating 12 Ha of freshwater grazing marsh at Salt Plot
- Supporting Seaton Museum to make its natural history collection more accessible, tell the stories of Seaton's connections with nature over the centuries, and further develop its valued role in the community
- Bringing together local community organisations to organise a programme of activities that engage people with and celebrate Seaton's natural heritage, supporting learning and volunteering
- Working closely with the newly formed Wild About Seaton Partnership to oversee the project, embed it in the community and ensure it meets local needs
- Developing a marketing and interpretation handbook for partners to use in telling the stories of Natural (Wild About) Seaton, and creating marketing strategy for the site and the town
- Creating a team of staff, trainees and volunteers to deliver the project.

The EOI estimated that the total project cost of this three year project would be in the region of £1.5m. This expression of interest was supported by the Lottery and, since then, the partnership has been working up a formal application, again supported by consultant Dominic Acland.

The deadline for application round is May 31<sup>st</sup> 2026, with a decision being made by August 2026.

A stakeholder group consisting of representatives from the following businesses and organisations was formed and has been working up the project bid:

Name	Organisation
Kate Hind (Stakeholder group Chair)	Devon County Council
Dominic Acland	NHLF Consultant
Carl Northcott	Seaton Chamber
Wendy O'Neil	Seaton Museum & Seaton Tramway volunteer
Rosie Hawkins	East Devon Tourism Network
Lesley Clarke	Chair, Axe Vale & District Conservation Soc
Doug Rudge	AVDCS
Tom Sunderland	Natural England
Paul Wright	Seaton Museum
Steve Waite	Seaton Tramway
Jenny Nunn	Seaton Tramway
Amelia Davies	EDDC Engagement & Participation Officer
Sam Scriven	Principal Officer World Heritage
Dan Wynn	East Devon National Landscape
Laura Hewlett	Seaton Museum
Sally King	Dorset CC
Jo Cairns	Museum Development Officer SW

With Cabinet's authority the full application will request a revised figure of £1.92m with match funding contribution from EDDC and partner organisations of cash and in-kind contributions.

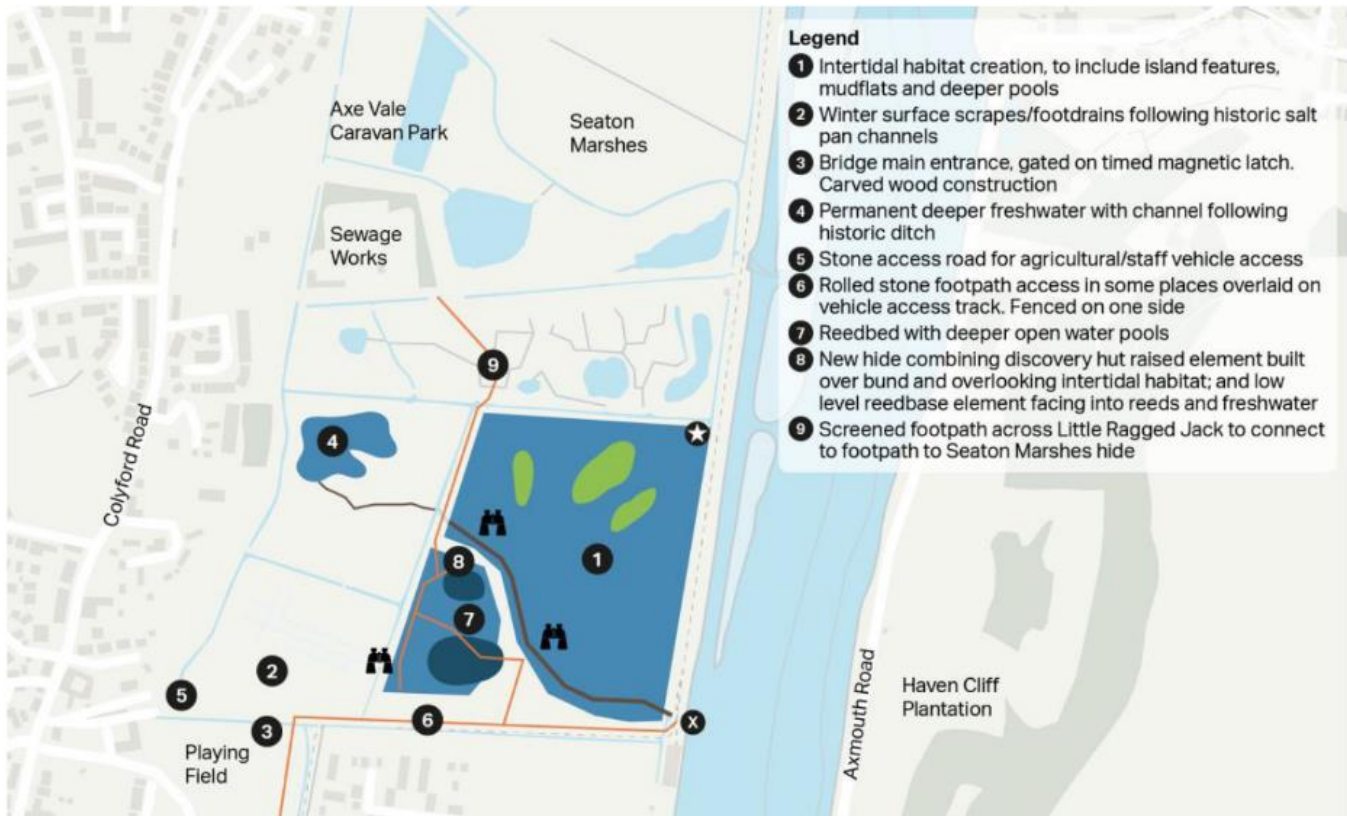
Currently significant match funding has been identified and provisionally committed to the project, inclusive of an in-principal contribution from EDDC's carbon reduction budget of £50,000 as the creation of intertidal mudflats is an extremely efficient model for carbon sequestration.

If successful, remaining match funding will be secured in the development phase of the project and would be sourced from stakeholder commitments to in-kind time and services, cash contributions from partner organisations and volunteer in-kind time.

If successful, the project would be funded for an initial 18 month period in which a project officer and engagement officer would be recruited, funded by the project. These roles would

- continue to develop the project themes
- secure remaining match funding
- secure permissions
- tender and award contracts
- develop a project timeline and timetable for funding drawdown
- work within the local community to garner support and participation in the themes of the project
- Liaise with schools and youth groups to further develop the Wild About Seaton educational outputs

There would then follow a three-year delivery phase of the project, whereby engineering works would be undertaken to create new habitats and infrastructure illustrated below. These would effectively recreate the impact of what is currently thought of as Seaton Wetlands (which are accessed from the informal reserve car park behind Seaton Cemetery), shifting the focus to the south of the site, accessed from the town itself and connecting the Wetlands more strongly to the community.



Entering the nature reserve across a gated bridge, Seaton's dog-free playground and skatepark areas act as an extant dog exclusion for the reserve which would intend to continue its dog-free status.

The Wild About Seaton Discovery Trail would be an app based map and information system, using technology currently in use at Devon County Council's Stover Country Park.

Wild About Seaton would develop its own branding and town signage, along with a stand alone website and marketing storybook and training for local businesses to help them maximise their business impacts from the project. Wild About Seaton will be a significant driver of tourist visits, complementing the Jurassic Coast brand and helping secure the economic regeneration of Seaton.

The project would fund the development of the museum's natural history collection within the museum, and also provide intellectual access to its collection throughout the various outputs of the project, such as the town discovery trail, and the interpretation features throughout the newly created nature reserve and access paths.

### Financial implications:

The total project cost for the Wild About Seaton scheme is currently estimated at £1.92m, for which a full application will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The application proposes a match-funding requirement to be met through a combination of cash contributions and in-kind support from East Devon District Council (EDDC) and project partners. To date significant match funding has been identified and provisionally committed, including an **in-principle contribution of £50,000 from EDDC's carbon reduction budget**, reflecting the significant carbon sequestration benefits associated with the creation of intertidal mudflats.

### Legal implications:

If the Council is successful in securing the funding, a Grant Agreement will need to be approved by the legal team.