



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

2019-20 Annual Business Plan and 5Yr Delivery Plan

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Exeter
City Council



Legal comment/advice:

There is no direct legal comment to be made at this time, each and any individual issue will need to be considered as it arises.

Finance comment/advice:

The financial implications are set out in the report.

Public Document:	Yes
Exemption:	None
Review date for release	None

Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Approves the 2019-20 Annual Business Plan (Appendix A) and the commitments and actions set out therein.
2. Notes the updated 5 Year Delivery Plan also shown in Appendix A.
3. Approves adjustment of the Habitat Mitigation Officers contracts to permanent status to align with the funding allocated in the mitigation Strategy.
4. Approves the retention of the Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordinator for 5 years from November 2019 and funding for a used vehicle from May 2019 as outlined in section 2.
5. Approves redirecting the funds outlined in section 3 to cover the associated costs of (4) above.
6. Receives a further report on funding the Delivery Manager role and specific accountancy / monitoring officer resource at the next meeting.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: High.

If the 2019-20 Annual Business Plan is not approved there is a high risk that the delivery of the South East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy would be significantly compromised or delayed. This would put the delivery of the partner Authorities' Local Plans at risk due to their continued legal duties under the Habitat Regulations.

1. Summary.

1.1 This paper sets out the principles for the projects which have been recommended as a priority by the Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager, in conjunction with the Officer Working Group. These projects are contained within the attached Appendix A as the Annual Business Plan (ABP).

1.2 Following the request for a rolling 5 year Delivery Plan from Natural England, this has been incorporated into an updated 5 year plan, also contained within the attached Appendix A. This sets out an indicative programme for the medium term.

1.3 It is important to note that a number of measures included in the 5 year plan are dependent on the success (or otherwise) of established measures, such as the Exe Estuary wildlife refuges. The 5 year plan should be read in this context, as an indicative guide, rather than a prescription.

1.4 As with preceding plans, using the balance of receipts and income forecast from signed planning permissions, measures from the mitigation Strategy ("the Strategy") are allocated according to the available budget, logical progression of related projects and, where still appropriate, delivery timescales as recommended in the Strategy.

1.5 Measures recommended in the 2019/20 ABP seek to maintain and build on the projects delivered in the preceding plans. The timing of delivery of these projects is guided by the updated 5 year Delivery Plan and where there is logic or merit in the sequential, co-ordinated delivery of mitigation projects, seeks to build on work already completed (or due for completion).

2. Devon Loves Dogs.

2.1 Continued funding towards maintaining the role of the DLD Project Coordinator is considered by the OWG to be more straightforward. The scheme is nearing its second year of operation and is enjoying growing success, in terms of new members, additional followers on social media and increased partnership working. The Strategy clearly identifies a long-term vision for the scheme, allocating funding for running costs of £2K per year over the full 80 year period. The benefit of communicating key messages directly and positively to a key user group is reflected in a growing membership base and requests for help from other organisations across the region.

2.4 In order to undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the available options and review the scale and scope of DLD, we have asked The Fruit Tree (a business consultancy based in Exeter, specialising in social enterprise) to assess whether and how expansion of the project might be achievable. This could include the opportunity for development of a commercial model to be offered to like-minded organisations outside of the core Habitat Regulations areas.

2.5 The results of the work by The Fruit Tree will be reported to a future meeting of the Executive. However, it is clear that it will take time and resource to pursue any kind of sustainable commercial model and therefore it is recommended that the DLD Project Coordinator role is also extended for at least another 5 years, at an estimated cost of £95,650 (including salary, pension/NI and additional overheads).

2.6 The large gazebo used at events attended by the DLD coordinator is currently transported in the potholders' car, along with all the other display material and literature. The DLD equipment is stored in two locations, and this inevitably leads to time lost at the start and end of each day when moving these items to and from the car, as well as the inconvenience caused by this arrangement. Various options, including hiring a storage unit, have been considered but discounted due to cost.

2.7 For the reasons given above, it is recommended that sufficient funding is made available for the purchase, maintenance and running costs of a quality, used van (Citroen Berlingo or similar) over the next 5 years. Soft market research has indicated this would be achievable at an estimated cost of £18,000 across the period, including purchase, tax, fuel, insurance and maintenance.

2.8 The work of the DLD Project Coordinator is necessitated by the obligation to mitigate development. Resourcing this role for the next 5 years at an estimated cost of £113,650 should therefore be considered as an ongoing cost of Strategy delivery as a "Cross site" (non-infrastructure) measure.

3. Reviewing specific measures.

3.1 In considering the additional costs of extending the DLD role, it is also possible to identify savings to cover them by amending measures within the mitigation Strategy. These are:

- Achieving £120K by reallocating the visitor survey monitoring allocated in the Pebblebed Heaths Visitor Management Plan (PBH VMP), which was a duplication of the same monitoring allocated in the Strategy.¹

3.2 By redirecting the funds as outlined above, it is possible to realise £113,650 towards the additional funding recommended over the next 5 years. It is further recommended that the remaining £6,350 is retained as contingency, to cover any unforeseen expenditure such as major repairs to the vehicle.

4.0 New measures for 2019/20

4.1 As delivery approaches a fourth year of operation, it is recommended that the next ABP includes a focus on visitor survey monitoring across the sites. This enables early understanding of the effect of measures implemented in the first three years on visitor access and behaviours. The results of this monitoring can be used to inform future delivery and whether any amendments to the current approach are necessary.

4.2 As well as new counts of visitor numbers and collation of existing data such as car park counts across the Pebblebed Heaths, detailed visitor questionnaires would establish where visitors are coming from. Importantly, we could also establish whether they are aware of the sensitivity of the protected sites, Dawlish Countryside Park, Devon Loves Dogs, the Habitat Mitigation Officers, various codes of conduct etc.

4.3 The 2019/20 ABP also recommends that funding is approved for new signage on the Pebblebed Heaths to direct people around promoted routes and reinforce positive messages about behaviour on the heaths. Given the work in progress to deliver a holistic car parking strategy to manage visitor access on the heaths (expected to complete summer 2019), the next ABP is an appropriate time to bring forward these measures.

¹ Note that £180K is allocated in the PBH VMP. This would see the retention of £60K of that funding to contribute to region-wide visitor survey monitoring. This is to balance the rebasing exercise in July 2017, which discounted the monitoring allocated in the original Strategy by £60K to partially address this issue of double funding between the Strategy and PBH VMP.

5. Further Considerations.

5.1 In the 2019/20 financial year there will be further decisions for the Executive Committee to make regarding the retention of staff, as the initial fixed term contract for the Delivery Manager expires during this period.

5.2 There has been some debate at the officer working group as to whether the funding for the Delivery Manager role, as well as proposed accountancy and housing monitoring officer input, should be met from developer contributions or from the core budgets of the partner authorities. To allow time to fully explore the issues raised by members of the group, specific recommendations regarding these roles will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

5.3 It is intended that the 5Yr Delivery Plan will also be updated at this point, as required.

6. Conclusion.

6.1 This paper seeks approval for the 2019/20 Annual Delivery Plan in the context of an updated 5 year Delivery Plan. Given the pressure on Community Infrastructure Levy and wider budgets, significant consideration has been given to finding the most cost effective way forward. The recommendations identify the need for additional and secure resources to progress key areas of work.

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Natural England comment:

We agree that continuation of the HMO roles is essential to the delivery of on-site mitigation measures and support the funding of these for the next 5 years or until such time as the GESP mitigation contributions are able to meet this funding shortfall.

As briefly discussed at the OWG there is scope to expand the DLD project to additional areas of Devon where strategic approaches to recreational impact are in development – Plymouth sound/Tamar, Braunton Burrow and Taw-Torridge estuary.

Our advice would be that funding from this mitigation strategy should be agreed for the year 2019-20 and then reviewed, annually if necessary, until such time as the capacity and funding from other contributors covers the on-going costs.

We advise that the HREC ensure that sufficient contributions are collected through the extension of the mitigation strategy to cover the impacts of the proposed GESP allocations to meet all of these staffing costs into the future, avoiding the necessity to further deplete the funds available to deliver other agreed mitigation measures.