

## **Habitat Regulations Executive Committee**

### **Staffing requirements of the South East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy: Appendix C**

#### **Staff capacity and associated requirements**

##### **1. Two Habitat Mitigation Officer Permanent Positions**

1.1 The HREC approved making the two current temporary Habitat Mitigation Officer (HMO) posts permanent. These positions were originally recruited as fixed term roles on three year contracts (due to end during October 2019). At the last HREC meeting, April 2019, it was approved that the HMO contracts could be changed to permanent status to align with the funding allocated in the mitigation strategy

1.2 The decision to change the HMO contracts was subsequently called in by Teignbridge District Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the grounds that no performance reviews or job evaluation changes had been evidenced and ongoing funding may not have been secured or agreed.

1.3 The two HMO roles are identified in the Mitigation Strategy, which refers to the positions as 'two wardens' and identifies a need for the roles to continue on a permanent and ongoing basis. On the basis of that evidence developer contributions continue to be collected in order to fund the roles on a permanent basis. Sufficient funding is available.

1.4 East Devon District Council is the host authority responsible for employing all South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership Officers. In the first instance temporary positions were created in order to trial the effectiveness of the roles. This is considered to have been successful (see below), hence the decision to make the HMO positions permanent. As the roles have not changed no job evaluation exercise is required.

1.5 Standard East Devon District Council human resources policy where a fixed term contract over two years is extended, is to make the contract permanent. This is because after two years the employee has the same statutory rights as a permanent member of staff anyway. There is no difference in the fundamental terms or conditions of the contracts and no difference to the employees' rights as they relate to redundancy.

1.6 All South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership Officers participate in annual 'performance excellence reviews' and have done so since their employment started. This includes assessing performance relative to set objectives. They also meet with their line manager (the Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager) on a monthly basis in order to review ongoing performance.

1.7 The HMOs help to promote the importance of the European Sites, working to educate and inform members of the public on a daily basis. The partnership approach of the HMOs also includes close work with the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) team, the Exe Estuary Management Partnership, the Royal Yachting Association Green Blue, and liaison with conservation/land management teams across the region (EDDC, TDC, RSPB, DWT and Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust).

1.8 The HMOs continue to keep a record of their interactions (conversations) with visitors. This shows that they have had 1875 engagements with over 3600 people since November 2016. These roles remain one of the most effective means of delivering key messages to the people using these areas. The HMOs ensure that visitors to the protected sites received key messages about the importance and sensitivities of these areas.

## **2. Retention of the Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager**

2.1 Funding for the Delivery Manager role expires in March 2020. The Mitigation Strategy identified funding for this role for a period of 5 years. However, there is a clear ongoing requirement for the role.

2.2 The Delivery Manager oversees the continued delivery of the Strategy, co-ordinates projects, works with partners, reports to the Committee, ensures ongoing delivery of operational measures, undertakes line management of mitigation staff, and works to refine/inform the evolving approach.

2.3 Given the way in which the Strategy has developed, establishing measures still subject to review and the continuing requirement to deliver mitigation, it is recommended that the Delivery Manager role is extended for at least another 5 years. According to East Devon District Council human resources standard practise, this will entail making the contract permanent, given the length of time already in post.

## **3. Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordination**

3.1 The Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordinator position is about communicating positive messages to dog owners; highlighting the breadth of dog walking alternatives to the European Sites and promoting responsible dog walking.

3.2 The Mitigation Strategy anticipated that this work would continue indefinitely but sought to assign it to the Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager in the longer term. Practical experience since the Mitigation Strategy was prepared has shown that the time and resource implications of this arrangement would not be manageable as there is no spare capacity. Best practice observed through the Habitat Regulations Partnership's national networks and the Dorset Dogs programme has highlighted the importance of employing a dedicated Dog Project Coordinator.

3.3 Funding of the Project Coordinator post for five years will leave time for a review of the Mitigation Strategy as part of Greater Exeter Strategic Plan process. The updated Strategy will be able to take into account whether to collect developer funding for the Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordinator position beyond 2024.

3.4 The duplicate visitor survey funding from new development (see section 3, below) would also cover the estimated £18,000 cost of purchasing, running and maintaining a vehicle that would be used to transport the Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordinator to the European sites as well as to community engagement events across the area over a five year period. It would also be used to store and transport the large branded gazebo which is used at events along with other display material.

3.5 The current approach, whereby the post holder uses the family vehicle places a strong reliance on the good will of the Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordinator in making a lot of storage space at home available. The combined cost of the current approach, as well as travel to appropriate alternative storage facilities, is estimated at around £4,500 per annum.

3.6 The proposed budget for running and operating a new vehicle over five years is less at £3,000 per annum. This arrangement would also free up Project Coordinator time to spend with the community rather than loading vehicles. This is because the vehicle would also provide storage and would not require loading and unloading at each end of the day. It is estimated that this takes at least an hour per day. The calculated cost of the vehicle excludes the residual value that it might attract at the end of the five year period.

3.7 The working area of the Devon Loves Dogs Project Coordinator extends across and beyond the 10km mitigation Strategy 'zone of influence'. Besides the current arrangement and the proposed purchase of a used van, three other alternatives have been considered.

- 1) Public transport to travel to the various Devon Loves Dogs events would not be feasible owing to the weight and bulk of the equipment carried by the officer.
- 2) Because of the distance and range of apparatus involved it would not be possible for the officer's duties to be undertaken on foot or by bike.
- 3) Hiring a vehicle over five years would cost approximately £20,000, excluding fuel and insurance and would not address storage requirements

3.8 The DLD scheme is nearing its second year of operation and is enjoying growing success with a 400-strong membership, increasing number of followers on social media and expanded 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.

3.9 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.

#### **4. Funding for dedicated Monitoring Officer and Accountancy support**

4.1 In the context of pressures on partner authority resources, it is further recommended that other costs associated with the administration and accountancy requirements of the Strategy are partly borne by developer contributions. This would address ongoing difficulties in collating housing completion and finance data, which pose a considerable risk to the future governance and operation of the Strategy.

4.2 To date, accountancy and monitoring support has largely been provided on a hidden/un-costed basis, particularly by EDDC. The work of the Delivery Manager requires regular input of various Monitoring Officers and Accountants and is necessitated by the obligation to mitigate development. Resourcing these roles should therefore be considered as part of the costs of Strategy delivery and incorporated as “Cross site” (non-infrastructure) measures. This will help to formalise the arrangements for compiling the required management information to enable the implementation of the Mitigation Strategy.

4.3 Dedicated resources will ensure:

- Ongoing and regular input from an accountant required to liaise with Delivery Manager to ensure robust financial management and planning, reporting to OWG/HREC. 0.2 FTE input anticipated.
- Ongoing and regular, co-ordinated input from a monitoring officer required to liaise with Delivery Manager to ensure robust housing completion/allocation monitoring data is provided to inform financial forecasts and numbers of homes built (to compare with mitigation provided). 0.2 FTE input anticipated.

4.4 This will provide resources to each of the three local authorities.