

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee held at Council Chamber, blackdown House, Border Road, Honiton, EX14 1EJ on 28 January 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.00 pm

29 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

30 Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee meeting held on 30 October 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record.

31 Declarations of interest

Minute 28 Cllr Martin Wrigley – Personal interest. His house looked over the estuary. Was a member as Treasurer of Cockwood Boat club.

32 Matters of urgency

There were no matters which the officers recommended be dealt with as Matters of Urgency.

33 Confidential/exempt items

There were no matters which the officers recommended be dealt with in Part B.

34 East Devon Pebblebed Heaths visitor access consultation.

The Executive Committee considered the joint report of Naomi Harnett, Principal Projects Officer and Neil Harris, Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager. The report outlined specific mitigation measures for the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths as identified in the Visitor Management plan. Within the context of an increasing human population, it was critical that future visitor access to the heaths was planned and prepared in advance of impacts. Robust and effective mitigation enabled the partner authorities to be certain of no net impact to this highly protected site. This enabled the continued development as outlined in respective local plans and within 10km of the heaths without the risk of legal challenge. Kim Strawbridge, East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust (EDPHCT) Site Manager provided the Executive Committee with a presentation.

During discussions the following points were noted:

-) The EDPHCT team were responsible for disposing of any fly-tipping that occurred on the Heaths. Rubbish in bins was collected by the relevant Streetscene service.
-) Attempts were being made to reduce event parking at Woodbury Castle due to the small capacity of that site and issues with traffic queuing on the highway. EDPHCT staff monitored car parking hotspots.

-) Reductions in car parking spaces at Castle car park would not take place and appropriate parking spaces would be saved at Estuary View car park instead.
-) It was proposed to keep parking free of charge, improve car park surfaces and install way marked trails. There were no plans to expand the number of car parking spaces as this could increase visitor pressure on the heaths.
-) Are we encouraging cycling to the Heaths and was there bike locking available? This would be investigated and monitored as considered appropriate.
-) There were some concerns raised about height barriers, which had been have taken into account and it was recommended some height barriers were locked open. If problems arise, these barriers would be closed and any concerns about the unauthorised use of car park sites would be carefully monitored.

Kim Strawbridge, Site Manager, EDPHCT was thanked for her presentation.

RESOLVED:

1. that the proposals outlined in the Pebblebed Heaths Visitor Access Advisory Report be noted.
2. that the outcome of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths visitor access consultation exercise on the proposed changes to visitor access of the heaths be noted.
3. that the Committee will receive costed recommendations as part of the 2020-21 annual business plan and 5-year delivery programme as the next meeting of the Executive in April 2020.

35 Presentation from Stephanie Harper-Chung, Exe Estuary Officer for the Exe Estuary Management Partnership - Verbal report

The Executive Committee received a presentation from Stephanie Harper-Chung, Exe Estuary Officer for the Exe Estuary Management Partnership on aspects of the Management Partnerships work. It was noted that the Exe Estuary was a site of global significance in terms of overwintering bird populations and habitat and had various designations, including: SPA, SSSI and Ramsar sites. It was an excellent place for a variety of recreational activities and important for local businesses, tourism health & wellbeing.

The Executive Committee noted that the Exe Estuary Management Partnership co-ordinated management of the estuary on behalf of local authorities, government agencies and conservation bodies. The Partnership sought to conserve and enhance the estuary's special nature and promote sustainable uses. It was reported that the Partnership had undertaken a number of consultations and initiatives on behalf of the Executive committee, which included the wildlife refuge consultation, codes of conduct and a review of signage around the Exe Estuary.

Stephanie Harper-Chung was thanked for her rpresentation.

36 Effecting positive behavioural change

The Executive Committee received the report of the Principal Projects Manager, EDDC, and Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager concerning a review of current and potential public engagement and education. It was acknowledged that promoting awareness and understanding of key messages was an essential component of the mitigation approach.

Members noted that there was an emphasis and focus on how engagement could have a positive impact on visitor education. Education and engagement were an essential part of the projects work and engagement with schools and school children was an especially important part of this work.

During discussions the following points were noted:

-) Is there registration required for commercial dog walkers who use estuary sites (as at the Pebblebed Heaths)? Dog walkers were expected to follow the codes provided and the maximum number of dogs allowed per walker was 6 dogs per person.
-) Importance of providing a consistent message to all dog owners was emphasised.
-) Emphasis on engagement with schools; there was a significant programme of events which involved school age children.
-) There were two different types of approach used for signage on the estuary for interpretation about the area and its wildlife and information on how to share the space respectfully.
-) Concern expressed regarding the comment in the report of the likelihood of decreased improvement in reduction of disturbance events in the second year of use of wildlife refuges and reports in 2019 of frequent reports of major disturbance. How were these issues going to overcome? There were a number of incursions into these refuges mostly from water users. There needed to be more imaginative ways to overcome these problems.
-) The future engagement initiatives for Devon Loves Dogs showed little change from previous years, but this work was limited by the 0.5 FTE officer hours. It was noted that the programme of work could be reviewed in the future to try to improve reach.
-) Effect of the introduction of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan on the Exe Estuary.

RESOLVED: 1. that the review of the approach to public engagement, education and behavioural change that has been undertaken be noted.
2. that the proposals for adapting this approach to achieve greater levels of understanding and awareness of key issues be noted.

37 Dates of future meetings - The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 21 April 2020 in the Yarty Room, Blackdown house, Border Road, Honiton. Future meetings will be: Tuesday 14 July 2020, Tuesday 3 November 2020, Tuesday 2 February 2021 and 27 April 2021. (all at 2.00pm at Exeter City council offices)

Attendance List

Councillors present:

S Bond (Chairman)
Rachel Sutton, Exeter City Council
Martin Wrigley, Teignbridge District Council

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

G Jung, Environment Portfolio Holder
G Taylor Teignbridge District Council

Officers in attendance:

Ed Freeman, Service Lead Strategic Planning and Development Management
Naomi Harnett, Principal Projects Manager East Of Exeter
Christopher Lane, Democratic Services Officer
Fergus Pate
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity
Neil Harris, Habitat Regulation Delivery Manager
Anne Mountjoy, Growth Point Communication Officer
Jay Boyle, EEMP/Devon County Council
Ella Chambers,
Hilary Winter,
Chris Harradies, EDDC
Stephanie Harper-Chung, Exe Estuary Management Partnership
Kim Strawbridge, Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Manager

Apologies;

Alison Slade, Natural England
Peter Hearn, Exeter City Council

Chairman

Date: