



SOUTH EAST DEVON  
HABITAT REGULATIONS  
PARTNERSHIP

# South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

*2019/20 Annual Business Plan – Annual Report*

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Growth, Development & Prosperity,  
East Devon District Council  
July 2020



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.

<b>Public Document:</b>	Yes
<b>Exemption:</b>	None
<b>Review date for release</b>	None

## Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the progress made in delivering the 2019/20 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.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Medium.

This report is an update on the progress made in delivery of ongoing mitigation measures set out in previous annual business plans and ongoing measures established in the Plan. It is important that progress continues to be made, or this would put the delivery of the partner Authorities' Local Plans at risk due to the continued legal duties under the Habitat Regulations.

### 1. Summary/Overview.

1.1 The 2019/20 annual business plan (ABP) was approved at the meeting of the Executive Committee in the King Charles Room at Teignbridge District Council, Old Forde House, Brunel Road, Newton Abbot on April 29<sup>th</sup> 2019. Additional recommendations relating to staff resources were approved at the July 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive.

1.2 The measures were debated and endorsed by the Officer Working Group. The plan outlined the delivery of ongoing measures established in previous ABPs as well as a range of additional measures. In total, the plan earmarked expenditure of an estimated £216,256.

1.3 Projects included the continued funding of keystone mitigation measures such as the Delivery Manager, Habitat Mitigation Officers and Project Officer (Devon Loves Dogs (DLD)). Other significant measures approved as part of the plan included a visitor impact survey at Dawlish Warren, an all-sites visitor questionnaire and development of educational resources for schools visiting the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths.

1.4 The sudden and unexpected impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the ability of mitigation staff to carry out normal operations. Due to the lockdown and social distancing guidelines announced in March 2020 it was no longer possible to conduct regular patrols onsite or engage in our usual public engagement activities. This is an issue shared by the other mitigation approaches across the UK.

1.5 Thanks to ongoing support from our Communications Officer, we have continued to distribute our key messages via social media channels. Work is in progress to determine if, how and when it may be possible to resume some site-based activities whilst adhering to social distancing guidelines. The safety of our staff is paramount and any return to site based duties will only be considered following stringent risk assessment with the Corporate Health and Safety Officer.

1.6 Tables 1 & 2 report the status of mitigation measures identified in the 2019/20 ABP.

**Table 1. 2019/20 Annual Business Plan – ongoing mitigation measures.**<sup>1</sup>

Site	Measure	Status
Cross Site	Delivery Manager	Completed (ongoing)
Cross Site	Two Habitat Mitigation Officers	Completed (ongoing)
Cross Site	Warden vehicle	Completed (ongoing)
Cross Site	Dog project	Completed (ongoing)
Exe Estuary	Wildlife refuge monitoring	Initiated (ongoing)
Exe Estuary	Patrol boat	Completed (ongoing)
Pebblebed Heaths	Dog bins	Completed (ongoing)
SANGS	Dawlish Countryside Park	Completed (ongoing)
SANGS	South West Exeter	Initiated (ongoing)

**Table 2. 2019/20 Annual Business Plan - “new” mitigation measures.**

Site	Measure	Status
All	Visitor counts & surveys	Initiated (on hold <sup>2</sup> )
Dawlish Warren	Vegetation monitoring	Completed (ongoing)
Dawlish Warren	Regular newsletter	Initiated (ongoing)
Dawlish Warren	Reed screening between Bight & Golf Course	On hold <sup>3</sup>
Exe Estuary	New interpretation boards	Delayed <sup>4</sup>
Pebblebed Heaths	Signage	Initiated (ongoing)
Pebblebed Heaths	Visitor access improvements consultation <sup>5</sup>	Completed

<sup>1</sup> Staffing and associated resources re-approved by HREC July 2019

<sup>2</sup> It is not currently possible to conduct effective questionnaire work due to social distancing guidelines and increased risk to both surveyor and public.

<sup>3</sup> Certain measures at Dawlish Warren are under review, see separate 2020-21 ABP report.

<sup>4</sup> EA Tidal defence scheme underway at the Imperial Recreation Ground until summer 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Although not specifically outlined in the 19-20 ABP, this work emerged as a result of the preliminary survey report and represents a significant outcome in terms of time and process.

1.7 Tables 3 & 4 reflect the status of mitigation measures from all previous annual business plans.

Table 3. Initiated/completed/in progress.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Status</b>
Exe Estuary	Codes of Conduct	Completed
Exe Estuary	Procurement, installation, maintenance of buoy markers.	Completed
Exe Estuary	Update signs at public slipways	Completed
Dawlish Warren	Visitor Management Plan	In progress
Dawlish Warren	Petalwort monitoring	Completed
Dawlish Warren	Changes to car parking management	Initiated (ongoing)
Dawlish Warren	Carry out audit of information boards	Completed
Dawlish Warren	BBQ info at local retailers	Completed
Dawlish Warren	Regular Warren Newsletter	Completed (ongoing)
Dawlish Warren	Monitoring of vegetation change	Completed <sup>6</sup>
Pebblebed Heaths	Maps highlighting sensitive areas	Completed <sup>7</sup>
Pebblebed Heaths	Codes of conduct	Completed
Pebblebed Heaths	Boardwalks/ Path surfacing	Initiated (ongoing) <sup>8</sup>
Pebblebed Heaths	Educational work with schools	Completed (ongoing)
Pebblebed Heaths	Interpretation Boards	In progress <sup>9</sup>
Pebblebed Heaths	Changes to car parks (preliminary survey)	Completed

<sup>6</sup> Initial survey work is complete and will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

<sup>7</sup> Measure dependent on other outcomes from car parking and promoted routes, in progress.

<sup>8</sup> Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust continue work with a contractor to complete schedule of priority works.

<sup>9</sup> Preliminary illustration work completed, final delivery dependent on other visitor access improvements.

**Table 4 – mitigation measures carried over from previous business plans**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Status</b>
Dawlish Warren	Removal of Dog Control Order	On hold <sup>10</sup>
Dawlish Warren	Changes to car parking management	On hold
Dawlish Warren	Byelaw preventing fires and barbeques in buffer zone	Under investigation <sup>11</sup>
Dawlish Warren	Monitoring of accretion and erosion	On hold <sup>12</sup>
Exe Estuary	Updates of the Exe Estuary leaflets	On hold <sup>13</sup>

## **2. Progress.**

### **2.1 Habitat Regulations Delivery Manager.**

2.1.1 The Delivery Manager continues in post, working to organise and implement the approved Annual Business Plans, report progress to the Executive Committee, co-ordinate delivery of the Strategy, liaise with the Officer Working Group and undertake ongoing review of the Strategy. Progress is marked by the recruitment and retention of key staff, work on the Exmouth tidal defence scheme (TDS), increased support to the Executive Committee, activities to induct the new representative from Natural England and the completion of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths visitor access improvements consultation.

2.1.2 Staff were instrumental in achieving improvements to TDS activities. Although the TDS is not part of the mitigation Strategy, part of the scheme involved substantial construction works adjacent to the wildlife refuge at Exmouth. The Environment Agency (EA) started work on the TDS in July 2019 to improve flood defences in 3 main areas, including the Royal Avenue and Imperial Recreation Ground (see “Area A” in Figure 1, below).

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<sup>10</sup> District-wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) regarding dogs enacted by TDC in April 2019. This measure postponed until the effect of the PSPO is known.

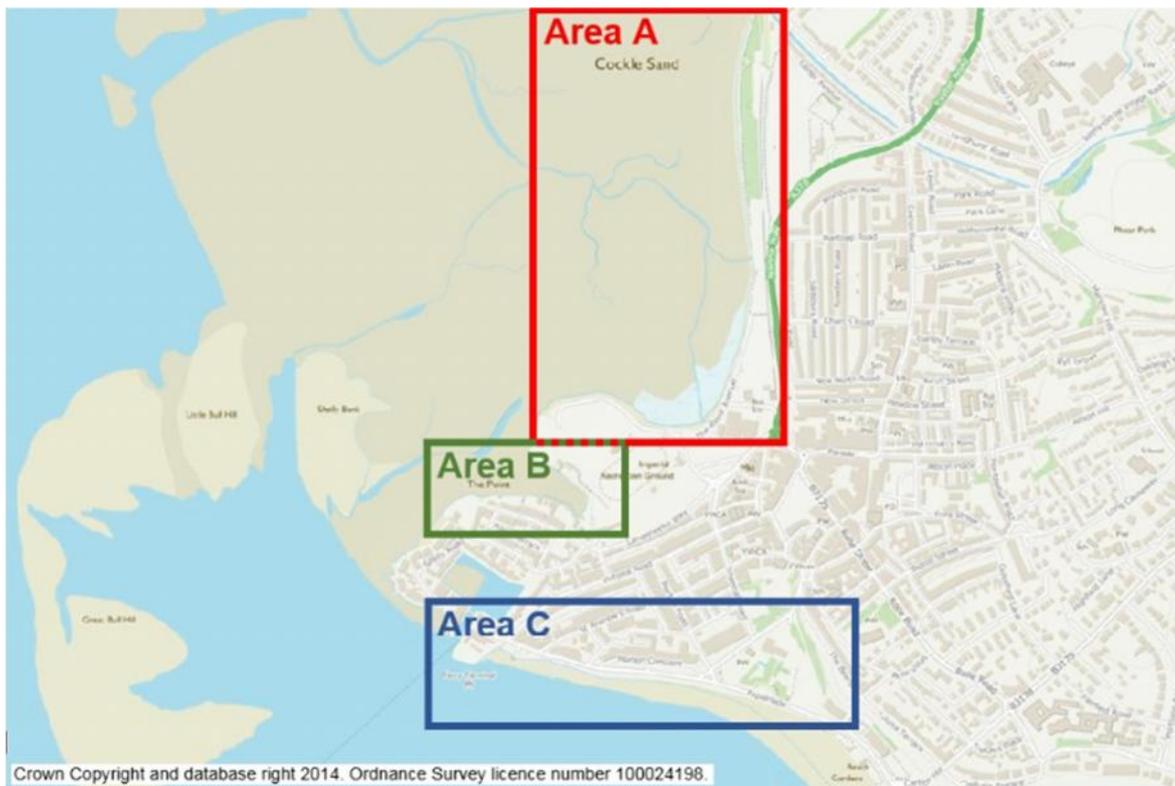
<sup>11</sup> Pursuing with TDC Legal department. Evidence gathering still underway, no recent incidents reported.

<sup>12</sup> This is undertaken by the Environment Agency as part of the Beach Management Scheme until at least 2021. Recommend reviewing this measure after that time.

<sup>13</sup> The Exe Estuary Officer was able to source alternative funding for the leaflet updates. This funding reserved for future reprints of leaflets and/or codes of conduct.

2.1.3 Unforeseen issues arose in delivery of the scheme which resulted in sea wall construction works in Area A being delayed through late summer. With work initially proposed to continue throughout the wildlife refuge period, the Delivery Manager and HMOs worked in liaison with Natural England, the EA and the contractor (Team Van Oord) to establish a successful mitigation strategy for the works. This included delaying the works most likely to cause significant noise and visual disturbance, screening other work areas, reducing noise from cement delivery trucks using acoustic barriers, along with survey effort to monitor the effectiveness of the mitigation. The results of the survey are reported here as Appendix A.

Figure 1. Exmouth tidal defence scheme map.



## 2.2 Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs) and Exe wildlife refuges.

2.2.1 The main focus of the day to day duties of the HMOs remains public engagement and education across the 3 protected sites. Close working with project partners has continued to develop and mature, which is ultimately providing a more effective presence on the ground and a more informed approach to engaging with visitors.

2.2.2 On 15<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the second year of the Exmouth wildlife refuge was initiated, supported by the HMOs, DLD Project Coordinator, other members of the EDDC Growth Point team and the EDDC Countryside team. With new posters and visitor engagement initiatives on site at the Imperial Recreation Ground, as well as articles for the local newspaper, the HMOs reported an increase in positive engagements with people on site.

2.2.3 Despite these considerable efforts, an increased number of disturbance events on the water were reported by the HMOs, the surveyor monitoring the wildlife refuges and members of the public (when compared to the previous year). The results of the second year of monitoring will be reported in summer 2020 but as a result of the perceived increase in disturbance, work is already underway to revise our approach to the refuges for autumn 2020.

2.2.4 Figure 2, below illustrates one of the new engagement initiatives in use, whilst Appendix B contains the design for new posters on display in the public toilets at the Imperial Recreation Ground.

Figure 2. Nature watch feather flag invitation.



2.2.5 Appendix C lists the HMOs key achievements and areas of work during the 2019-20 annual business plan period.

2.2.6 When complete, the results of the visitor access and behaviour monitoring survey (currently on hold due to social distancing requirements) will be used to further understand and refine the awareness of, reach and effectiveness of the HMO presence on site. These roles remain one of the most effective means of delivering key messages to the people using these areas. The Covid-19 pandemic dictates that we must now completely reassess working practices, to enable our officers to continue their work, whilst keeping themselves and the public safe.

### 2.3 Dog project and Pebblebed Heaths codes.

2.3.1 With DLD now in its' third year of operation, membership continues to increase. Ongoing partnership work has developed into a productive, well-established and coordinated scheme of regular events and guided walks across the region. This is particularly evident with organisations such as the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, the National Trust and the Forestry Commission, all of whom have maintained their input and realised mutual benefit.

Figure 3. Commercial dog walkers licence, Pebblebed Heaths



Figure 4. DLD members on a “Waggy Walk” with Forestry Commission.



2.3.2 A new Citroen Berlingo has been purchased through the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) vehicle framework. This model was chosen as it fits all the necessary equipment but is no bigger than an average family car. As well as these practical benefits, the livery works well to advertise the scheme across the region. An electric version was researched but due to the lack of recharging points at this point in time, a small (1.5l) diesel engine was selected. To greatly reduce emissions and remove harmful pollutants, the vehicle uses an additive called Adblue which makes it one of the cleanest diesel engines on the market.

Figure 5. New DLD van.



2.3.3 Membership of DLD now stands at 600, with more members joining each month. There are 885 followers on Facebook (a very significant increase of approx. 89% since last April) and 653 on Instagram (increase of 40% in the same period). The website is regularly updated with new events and information about walks, although as the role is part-time there continue to be constraints on the time which the Project Coordinator has to do this.

2.3.4 DLD has also benefitted from the input of additional staff resources to help with additional business development and social media. Prior to lockdown, DLD made excellent progress from the work of an intern who specialises in social media.

2.3.5 As a result of this additional resource, contact with businesses who have signed up to the scheme has been refreshed and the DLD business listings page on the website has a wide range of potential partners who have all agreed to promote the four paws code. Staff are also in sponsorship talks with companies manufacturing compostable dog waste bags and nutritional dog treats. This is aimed at ensuring a responsible environmental footprint as well as reducing scheme costs for items provided to members for free.

2.3.6 Social media interaction has been significantly increased due to the benefit of 1 day a week extra staff resource. Whilst this is (unfortunately) temporary, it does reflect how much more potential the scheme could achieve if further staff

resource could be allocated over and above the current part time post. Changes recorded in the period from 6<sup>th</sup> Feb – 4<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020 are listed below.

<b>STATS</b>	<b>FACEBOOK</b>	<b>6th Feb - 4th Mar</b>
<b>Actions on page</b>	5	<i>up 25%</i>
<b>Page Views</b>	308	<i>up 40%</i>
<b>Page Likes</b>	60	<i>up 22%</i>
<b>Post Reach</b>	11,347	<i>up 22%</i>
<b>Post Engagement</b>	1,505	<i>up 25%</i>
<b>Videos</b>	487	<i>up 436%</i>
<b>Page Follows</b>	65	<i>up 25%</i>

#### **TWITTER**

<b>Tweets</b>	19	<i>up 137.5%</i>
<b>Tweet impressions</b>	11.6k	<i>up 66%</i>
<b>Profile Visits</b>	197	<i>up 101%</i>
<b>Mentions</b>	30	<i>up 328.6%</i>
<b>Follows</b>	431	<i>up 9</i>

2.3.7 Also shown in Appendix D, 2888 people have been recorded at the 55 events, pitstops and guided walks organised by DLD in the year since March 2019, which represents an increase of 44% from the previous year. This has enabled 2069 information packs to be distributed, including key information such as the “four paws” code and how to join the scheme, an increase of 21%.

## **2.4 Pebblebed Heaths visitor access improvements and other work.**

2.4.1 As reported to the Jan 2020 meeting of the Executive<sup>14</sup>, a public consultation on proposed visitor access improvements was held for 6 weeks between September-November 2019. Held in partnership with the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, this included 2 public events at popular sites on the Pebblebed Heaths and an open evening at Exmouth Town Hall. An online questionnaire was created and a communications plan was implemented to ensure wide coverage of the consultation across a range of media.

Figure 6. Public consultation on the heaths.

<sup>14</sup> East Devon Pebblebed Heaths visitor access consultation, January 2020



Figure 7. Open evening, Exmouth Town Hall



2.4.2 Other work on the Pebblebed Heaths has been the creation of illustrations for eventual use on new interpretation boards which will be installed as part of the proposed improvement works. Additionally, the site manager and HMOs have worked with consultants to create a pack of 10 bespoke educational resources for schools which can be downloaded as required. As can be seen in Figure 8, below, they are designed to help schoolchildren think about what impact people have on heathland and what action they can take to prevent it.

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Figure 8. Educational resources – worksheet example.

teacher resource

EARTH STUDIOS

PEBBLED HEATHS  
CONSERVATION TRUST

ACTIVITIES

**Earth Studios - Natural Sculpture**

Key Stage 1 Key Stage 2

**AIM** To learn about the work of environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy and create a natural sculpture.

Show examples of the work of Andy Goldsworthy.

Look at the use of colour and shape.

Discuss how he only uses natural materials, for example, using thorns/thin twigs to join leaves together/ scraping the bark off twigs to reveal variations of colour.

Pupils can work in small groups.

Encourage them to think about the material they would like to use and the location of the sculpture (colour of the ground, height, position - floor, in a tree etc).

Themes may be given to support other school based art work. Encourage the children to look at all the artworks - visiting the outdoor art gallery they have all created.

You may choose to limit the materials used, for example, only 2 colours or different types of leaves.

**Shadow Drawings**

Key Stage 1 Key Stage 2

**PROPS** Clipboards and white paper and pencils or charcoal.

On sunny days when shadows guaranteed - using a sheet of white paper or the white postcard.

Place sheet behind a plant to get the shadow of the plant on the sheet.

Draw round the outline of the plant.



**Pebblebed Postcards**

Key Stage 2

**AIM** To create a 2D landscape using natural materials.

**PROPS** Small blank postcards or similar sized pieces of card (A6), red Triassic soil on pebblebed heaths, charcoal, twig paint 'brushes', water, antiseptic hand wash.

Find a suitable site that has an interesting natural landscape.

Show the children the charcoal and discuss what it is and how it is formed.

Demonstrate a few drawing techniques on the blank piece of card using the charcoal.

Look at the landscape around you and ask the children to find a viewpoint that they like.

Challenge the children to find other sources of colour from nature - grass, petals, earth.

Give all the children a piece of charcoal and explain that you would like them to draw the landscape using the charcoal and the other colours they have gathered from nature.

When they have finished ask the children to write their names on the back in pencil.



**END OF ACTIVITY SESSION** Discuss the beauty of the landscape - why do they like it?

What might be a problem? Litter, fire?

What would they do if they were responsible for the land - make it a nature reserve? Build new houses? How could they protect the wildlife? Why is wildlife important?

Ask each child to make a promise, on what they have discussed. For example, to always pick up litter, help nature or never light fires on the heath.

Ask them to write it on the back of their natural paintings.

Collect in the postcards and store them away. At the end of the year, give them back out/post to each child as a reminder of the session they had and the promise they made.



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Natural England comment:

We note the good progress being made with a wide range of mitigation measures. To be effective in mitigating recreational pressure on the protected sites, most of the measures depend on ongoing public relations and promotion by the team. Their presence on site and on social media remains essential.