

# Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery – Stakeholder Communication Advisory Group

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 | 1.30pm – 3.30pm in person, East Budleigh Village Hall, East Budleigh

## Attendees:

Bruce McGlashan (BM)	River Otter Fishing Association
Bruce Pearson (BP)	Prospective LR Project
Cllr Charlotte Fitzgerald (CF)	East Devon District Council
Clare James (CJ)	Clinton Devon Estates
Danuta Joyce (DJ)	Colaton Raleigh Parish Council
Derek Wensley (DW)	East Budleigh Parish Council
Edward Fane-Trefusis (EFT)	Clinton Devon Estates
Geoff Yung (GY)	East Devon District Council
Geoff Porter (GP)	Otter Valley Association
Haylor Lass (HL)	Otter Valley Association
Janice Papworth (JP)	Colaton Raleigh Parish Council
Jim Carter (JC)	East Budleigh Parish Council
Kendal Archer (KA)	Clinton Devon Estates
Kirstie Ellis (KE)	Clinton Devon Estates
Mish Kennaway (MK)	Tale Valley Trust
Paula Fernly (PF)	East Devon District Council
Cllr Rosemary Walker (RW)	Newton Poppleford Parish Council
Sam Bridgewater (SB)	Clinton Devon Estates
Stephen Powles (SP)	Prospective LR Project

**Apologies:** Keith Wood (BS Town Council), Melanie Martin (EDDC), Sarah Slade (Devon Countryside Access Forum), Cllr Chris Burhop (Newton Poppleford Parish Council)

## Summary of key points

*Full notes included in Appendix 1.*

1. SB gave an update on the progress of the project so far, confirmed TOR and Governance arrangements and outlined potential project aims and ideas.
2. While there is huge potential (super NNR idea) for landscape enhancements for people and wildlife there is also a need to manage expectations to ensure that communities are clear what can be achieved and what limitations there are.
3. It is key to link into other projects, particularly those upstream of our project area, and to recognise that some of the things we can achieve will be impacted by actions higher up the catchment and plans need to be risk assessed, and future proofed where possible, against climate change impacts.
4. Project delivery activities are still very much in the planning stages with a lot of work over the summer to develop baseline information and look at potential enhancements for wildlife and people. There are project resources available to draw in expert support for this. Good data is also key and there are projects currently in progress that can support this (EA's CROC and NE LNR plans) as well as information from previous ELMs trials.
5. Baseline offer for landscape enhancement is focused on CDE's Home Farm and anything outside this area will be in negotiation with tenant farmers, but they are broadly supportive (all tenants had to submit project support forms as part of the application) and there is a list of possible starting points from previous ELMs trials work.
6. By the end of this 2-year development phase we need to firm up on those plans and submit the following documents to Defra:
  - a. Land Management Plan
  - b. Project Governance Plan
  - c. Monitoring & Evaluation Plan
  - d. Stakeholder Engagement Plan
  - e. Site Access Plan
  - f. Business Model (Green/Blended Finance plan)
7. Additional representation at the SAG was suggested to include a tenant farmer representative as a key group and potentially additional local cycle / footpath groups (e.g. Sustrans). Working with young people through schools and groups is important and education on key issues is critical (e.g. wildlife and responsible dog walking).
8. Communication should be through as wide a range of channels as possible and not limited to internet / electronic communication. Parish Councils can support this.
9. Emerging concerns and priorities include tackling grey squirrels, soils erosion, access – linking towns/ residential areas (shared use). Improving disabled access, car parking. Nature areas and flood risk.

## Actions

1. KE to set the next meeting at the end of the day and consider alternate meetings being evening vs daytime.
2. KE to investigate a representative tenant farmer to attend SAG.
3. KE to log specific issue of Western footpath for consideration.
4. KE to review access groups and invite Sustrans and/or local groups to the next meeting and engagement events.
5. KE to collate feedback and circulate notes and presentation.

6. KE to circulate meeting dates for September over the summer once initial assessment works are underway.

## **Appendix 1: Meeting notes in full**

### **Admin: Welcome, Previous minutes, Governance (TOR and Chair)**

SB outlined project progress so far and introduced KE as the newly appointed Project Manager. He outlined the agenda and raised the point of having an independent Chair. This was to be discussed formally and agreed at the end of the meeting, but for this meeting PF was agreed as Chair. All were in agreement.

KA gave apologies received.

SB asked if those present had a preference daytime or evening meeting. Group acknowledged it was difficult to find a time to suit everyone.

PF suggested evenings could be difficult for Cllrs as they already have many evening meetings and that a daytime meeting was more manageable.

JP felt that evening meetings were preferable, but if the meeting was in the daytime, first thing or last thing was more manageable.

**Action:** KE to set the next meeting at the end of the day and consider alternate meetings being evening vs daytime.

Prev actions:

1. Budleigh Traders have been contacted, they could not make today but will send a rep in future.
2. Experts with relevant specialisms will be seconded in as and when recommended/ needed.
3. Cllr Jess Baily has been invited but has yet to respond.

SB gave an overview of Project Governance as a reminder. Outlined Advisory Groups (Technical Advisory Group; Green / Blended Finance Advisory Group; Stakeholder Communication Advisory Group (SAG)). Project Management Team is KA, KE, SB and Project Board will include representatives from Defra and John Varley from CDE.

The purpose of the SAG is to encourage engagement and contribution from community on ideas and aims for project. It was noted there is a need to manage expectations as what we can achieve will be dependent on funding and land ownership.

BM raised the point that we need to be mindful that what we can achieve will be impacted by issues further up the catchment and that we need to link up with other projects further upstream where relevant.

DW asked why Tenant farmers are not included here as they are a key stakeholder. SB indicated they were being engaged via a separate meeting, but that we would welcome a representative tenant at this meeting.

**Action:** KE to investigate a representative tenant farmer to attend SAG.

DW asked what level of support there was already from tenant farmers, given their power to veto any activities on the land they manage. SB outlined that tenants had already been engaged and all

had signed support forms for the project (which were needed for the project application stage), but there will need to be further discussions with individual landowners once we had clearer plans on the ask for each area.

SB – so far we have held initial Technical and Blended Finance Advisory Group meetings, and this is the first Stakeholder Communication meeting. We will be meeting with tenants on Wed 24<sup>th</sup> April.

### **The Project: Objectives, Programme, Resources**

SB outlined possible plans for the project (see presentation) and outlined the Outputs for the Development Phase which are the six key plans which lay out our ambition for the 20–30-year delivery or implementation phase:

1. Land Management Plan
2. Project Governance Plan
3. Monitoring & Evaluation Plan
4. Stakeholder Engagement Plan
5. Site Access Plan
6. Business Model

Project resources are available to provide baseline information and advice on future plans to develop these outputs (see presentation) and procurement is in progress for contractors to deliver these aspects of the project.

SB clarified that Natural Capital Accounting Support related to enhancement of ecosystem services e.g. soil carbon, flood risk management, and SOM is Soils Organic Matter.

HL raised that many of these issues are catchment wide so interventions need to be targeted correctly to have impact. E.g. value of controlling invasive non-native species (INNS) within the project area if spread outside is not managed.

BM queried the 2-year timescale and how that related to Development vs Delivery. SB confirmed 2 years is to develop plans for the project. Implementation will take place over a min of 20 year following the 2-year development.

SB – the basis of the project ideas come from the super nature reserve concept. Linking up existing NNR sites and implementing actions to enhance what is good about landscape and remove/stop what is bad.

SB showed a map of the project area showing current land use – NNR, estuary and heaths, plus existing woodland and a photograph across the Otter Valley. This shows a good landscape, but there are issues such as INNS (e.g. Himalayan balsam), a lack of pollinators and connectivity, flooding, issues with access / footpaths. The River Otter is moving (eroding banks etc) and this creates issues for existing infrastructure and footpaths and requires longer term thinking to provide a solution.

Landscape recovery aims to maintain food production but provide a better landscape for nature and ecosystem services. Initial plans include flood plain restoration over 9km of river and 9km of tributaries and woodland creation plans. However, details of how this is done and what it looks like are still being developed and we will have more information after the ecological and hydrological surveys.

PF asked if slides would be shared, SB confirmed they will be circulated with the notes of the meeting.

BM asked if floodplain restoration would include tackling barriers to fish and SB confirmed consideration of these issues will be included, but we need to consider the full impact of activities (benefits and issues).

JP indicated that EA flood maps are out of date so would provide limited information. SB confirmed we will have access to best data available and will expand on that later in the meeting.

PF checked that SWW will be included in consultation / project development.

CF asked if parts of the Western footpath (southern end) was within the project scope, e.g. pursuing options for a joint footpath/cycle path here. SB indicated he had not initially expected this to be, but PM Team will log this and consider options for that and other footpaths / cycle paths within scope of plan.

**Action:** KE to log specific issue of Western footpath for consideration.

SB indicated that new information / datasets will be available from the Local Nature Recovery Strategy work (E.g. curlew and grey partridge numbers and distribution) and there is other work being undertaken currently that will further inform landscape recovery plans. For examples the EAs Climate Resilient Otter Catchment (CROC) project which is currently in progress modelling data on contribution to flow of water through catchments, looking at how to slow flow and reduce flood risk. There will be additional modelling as part of this project.

CDE also have data from previous ELMs trials. This work identified options for landscape improvement and what tenant farmers might be able to deliver. This work has not been started but plans are available, and it potentially identifies easy wins and individual activities could be aggregated to deliver large scale outcomes. We will use this to initiate discussions with tenants for this project and build on these ideas.

SB highlighted that the initial project offer will include areas on Home Farm, where we can achieve significant areas of floodplain restoration and ideas include flood meadows, riparian corridors for example. It also includes areas on Otterton Hill which are currently grazed but could be woodland or lower intensity grazing/meadows.

DW asked how this links into the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI). It all links in. Nationally some farms are expected to take on single / simple options through SFI which other will have bigger targeted interventions through Countryside Stewardship. Where there is scope to achieve landscape scale change some of these incentives might be linked together as part of the landscape recovery plan.

SB indicated we will be linking with and sharing knowledge and ideas with other projects, for example the Round 2 Luppitt LR area and Round 1 Killerton, Axe and Dartmoor LR projects.

BM asked who was leading the Luppitt project (Gavin Saunders) from the Blackdown Hills National Landscape)

BM asked if existing uses (e.g. fishing and shooting could continue under landscape recovery and if they would have an opportunity to input to plans. SB confirmed there is no intentions to ban activities, but that we would work with these groups to maximise landscape and nature conservation outcomes from these activities. E.g. cover crops supporting wild birds.

JC asked if our plans would consider the future impacts from climate change and how this might be reflected in the species to be planted or how we might manage fire risk. SB confirmed this will be factored in and what we do will need to survive what the climate is predicted to be in 40 years' time. KA confirmed that Defra expect each LR project to risk assess our plans in light of climate change.

GY asked if we have a baseline assessment for existing habitats and species within the project area. SB confirmed that the Estate already has good records, and existing data will be improved by work on Nature Recover plans to take place during this summer, as well as our own ecological consultant's work. However, we need to understand that we will not be able to measure change in every species and so will look at key and indicators.

GY also asked if the project will provide better flood resilience. SB confirmed this will depend on the plans developed though our assessment work, but that if so, we will work with EA to develop a methodology to measure this.

### **Stakeholder engagement and communication**

SB highlighted lessons learnt from the LORP and presented an overview of our planned engagement model. He showed an existing list of stakeholders and asked how we can improve on how we engage and with who.

CF felt that a tenant farmer representative for this group was a good idea. CF also asked for notification to the whole group if/when planning applications are submitted even if not on the doorstep, so that the group can input.

PF suggested we invite representation from walking and cycling groups on the SAG, including Sustrans. SB indicated that the Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) are on this group, but we are happy to include others.

**Action:** KE to review access groups and invite Sustrans and/or local groups to the next meeting and engagement events.

DW highlighted that the community want better access but landowners might not and asked how this project can work to bring groups together to solve some of these issues. It is key to ensure expectations are managed, but real change can be achieved. He also highlighted the need for some area for wildlife to have no access to increase wildlife benefit.

PF raised the need for balance - we should be aspirational.

JC indicated the two major issues they face are dogs and footpath maintenance issues.

BM highlighted that access can be managed to ensure sustainable and wildlife friendly use is prioritised (e.g. through use of infrastructure).

GY/PF – EDDCs biggest access issue is dog walkers and education of dog walkers is critical.

GP asked if potential impact on tourism more widely than just access would be included. SB confirmed that is part of the reason for inviting Budleigh traders to join the group and they will be looking at socio-economic impact more generally.

JP requested that we remember not everyone is on internet and ensure we use a range of channels for communication. E.g. Local papers, parish magazines etc. JP also suggested leaflets would be useful so Parish Cllrs can be ambassadors and circulate information to local communities. They can also be distributed in community shops / village halls.

JC suggested working with children through schools / education events can be a useful and effective way to engage parents.

DJ indicated the list of organisations to include seemed comprehensive and said that local volunteer groups are useful to share information and keen to be involved in supporting the project.

SB indicated that there will be a need for general community events, and we aim to develop graphics to show potential landscape visions.

PF said there were good examples of this from Connecting the Culm (Blackdown Hills National Landscape and Killerton are both involved)

HL requested we ensure there is plenty of notice for community events to enable PCs to share information and get messages out in time.

### **Capturing stakeholder priorities and concerns.**

SB introduced an exercise to start to capture priorities and concerns.

PM Team will collate and feedback (below). Emerging themes, squirrels, soils erosion, access – linking towns/ residential areas (shared use). Improving disabled access, car parking. Nature areas.

SB asked if most people in the room felt footpath issues were more about maintenance of the existing FP network or whether new FT length was needed. In general, the group felt there was a good existing network, but maintenance and some connectivity was most important.

Needs thinking around our ability to deliver access. What can we do – DCC responsible for the maintenance and new footpaths. This project, reducing risks to future change relating to FP (future proofing footpaths). Can risk points be reduced through use of farmland?

#### *Group exercise feedback:*

	<i>People</i>	<i>Nature</i>	<i>Landscape</i>
<i>Initial concerns / worries?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased tourism with random parking in Colaton Raleigh down by the river – emergency vehicles not able to get through.</li> <li>Flood reduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disturbance of spawning areas for fish. Particularly Sea Trout.</li> <li>Crop / slurry management – agricultural policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased disturbance (particularly from dogs) to riverbank / river in section from Colaton Raleigh to Newton Poppleford</li> <li>Planning management</li> </ul>
<i>What's good about the landscape that you want to keep?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer groups.</li> <li>Access (e.g. footpaths) – but needs more management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beavers</li> <li>Restricted access to upper sections – wildlife</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landscape variety.</li> <li>Sections of the river are natural</li> </ul>
<i>What aspects of the landscape needs improvement?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect the brook that runs through Colaton Raleigh so that the water flows easily into the River Otter and doesn't back up and flood the village.</li> <li>Divert the River Otter footpath to make it less susceptible to the river changing course.</li> <li>Cycle trails to help connectivity to population centres.</li> <li>Cycle path from Budleigh to heaths.</li> <li>More access – cycleways / footpaths</li> <li>Improved disabled access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invasive species control (balsam, mink, signal crayfish)</li> <li>More homes for Nature – wildlife corridors / access limitation</li> <li>Lots of areas for pollinators</li> <li>Keeps some areas [just] for nature.</li> <li>Hedgerows – habitats for wildlife</li> <li>Woodlands – more and need to be maintained.</li> <li>Control of grey squirrels (2)</li> <li>Tackle grey squirrels</li> <li>Incorporate new ponds in fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More natural channel particularly Colaton Raleigh section to Otterton</li> <li>Some cattle access to bank leading to rapid erosion.</li> <li>Restore Colaton Raleigh stream to Otter and Colaton Raleigh</li> <li>Reduce storm flow in rivers.</li> <li>Reduce silt run-off (i.e. maize run off</li> <li>Build in climate resilience both flood and water temp / quality (e.g. shading)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaky dams on Otterton Brook</li> <li>• Better managing slurry</li> <li>• Stopping the growth of maize</li> <li>• Trees in hedgerows</li> </ul>	
<i>Key priorities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flood resilience.</li> <li>• Flooding</li> <li>• Access to river and crossings (paths and bridges)</li> <li>• Car parking</li> <li>• Involving younger people</li> <li>• Connected footpaths to avoid busy / dangerous roads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil erosion</li> <li>• Environmentally friendly farming practices - priority land management, slurry spreading next to river, soil quality.</li> <li>• More hedges, especially along river</li> <li>• Management of hedges (e.g. cutting frequency).</li> </ul>	
<i>Opportunities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different tourism</li> <li>• Extending the holiday season</li> <li>• Farm education facilities</li> <li>• Access – make better / wider use of what already exists e.g. multi-use paths/ byways, multi group access.</li> <li>• Cycle path – disused railway.</li> <li>• Improve access under Newton Poppleford Bridge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joining up 3 important habitats</li> <li>• Cleaning upriver quality</li> <li>• Re-wild Anchoring Hill in Otterton</li> <li>• Improve Colaton Raleigh Orchard (plus more orchards)</li> <li>• Connect biological corridors.</li> <li>• Fishing counter at Otterton weir</li> <li>• Removal of weir on Budleigh Brook, obstacle on Back Brook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future resilience</li> </ul>
<i>Risks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating [reaching] people that are not on the internet.</li> <li>• Dogs' behaviour</li> <li>• More visitors / tourism verses car parking spaces / narrow roads / access points</li> <li>• Community understanding of the project – integration of Landscape recovery, countryside stewardship and sustainable farming incentive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More visitors / tourism verses impact on natural environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for fixed assets</li> </ul>
<i>What does success look like?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One brand [?]</li> <li>• Maintaining access for fishing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better fish / invertebrate populations, particularly to support under pressure salmonids.</li> <li>• Better understanding of fish populations in the river</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maize growing [tackling?]</li> <li>• Climate change [adapted too?]</li> </ul>

#### Other comments

- Additional stakeholders: 1) Shooting Group; 2) One of the members of local syndicate (fishing) - at least consult / ask. BM can advise them of project but good to involve directly.

For next steps the PM team will collate feedback and tender for a consultant to support the development of the engagement offer for the 2-year development phase and plan for implementation.

**Action:** KE to collate feedback and circulate notes and presentation.

SB asked is a wider community communication event would be valuable over the summer. The group felt this type of event would be valuable but should be planned once we have more to show the wider community in terms of possible design and landscape change ideas. Depending on



project progress we will plan the next SAG for September with the view to organise a wider community communication / consultation event in late October (subject to progress).

**Action:** KE to circulate meeting dates for September over the summer once initial assessment works are underway.

**AOB**

GP asked if we could circulate notes / slides from other Advisory groups as well. Minutes and papers will be added to the project website once it is live.

PF suggested a short video about the project and plans would be useful.

JP suggested an ambassador for project would be valuable.

MK informed the group he worked on a red squirrel conservation project and had some useful thoughts / methods for control of grey squirrels and is happy to work with partners on this.

**Meeting feedback: Responses (forms completed) = 9**

Before today, were you aware of the Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery Initiative?				
Yes	9		No	0
Today, how happy are you with the way we are engaging and communicating with you on the Heaths to Sea initiative?				
Very unhappy	Somewhat unhappy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Somewhat happy	Very happy
0	0	0	2	6
Today, how supportive are you of the project?				
Very unsupportive	Somewhat unsupportive	Neither supportive nor unsupportive	Somewhat supportive	Very supportive
0	0	0	0	9
Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings in the working day – please can these be early or late and not cut through the middle of the day.</li> <li>• A short video that would work on your website + for social media.</li> <li>• Guest: Looking good to me so far!</li> <li>• Guest: Fascinating meeting. Appreciate ‘separating’ landowners/tenants from ‘stakeholders.’</li> </ul>				