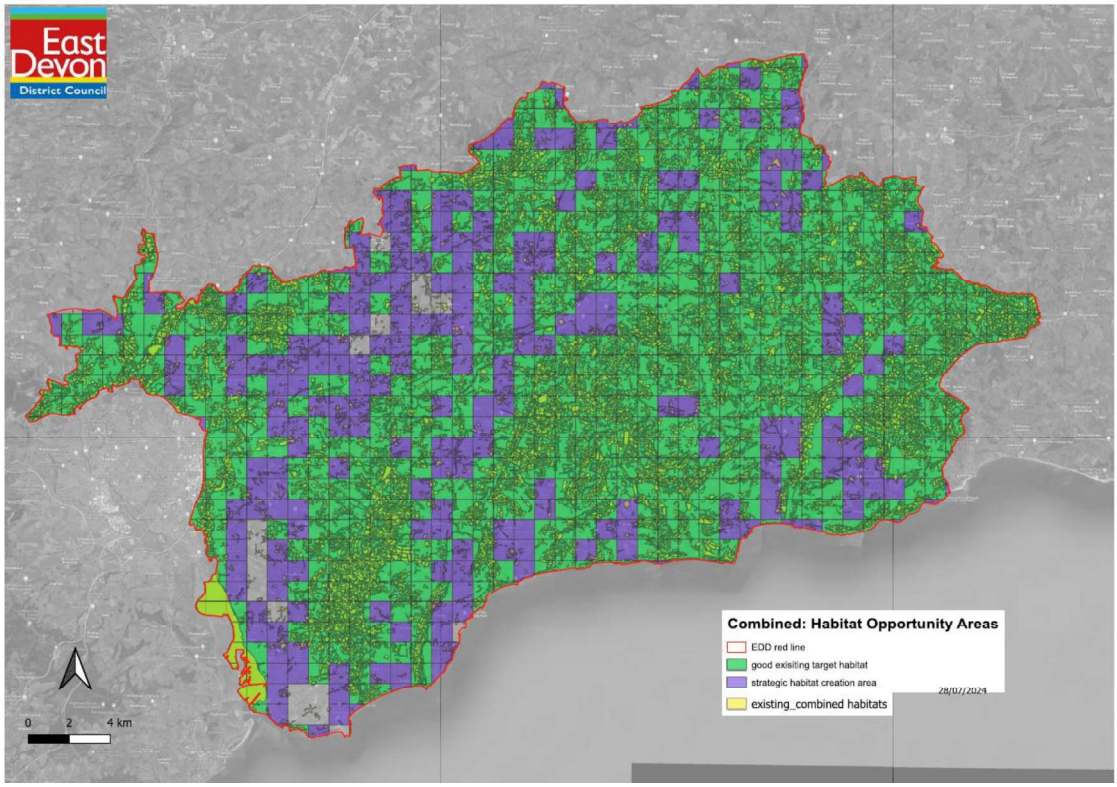
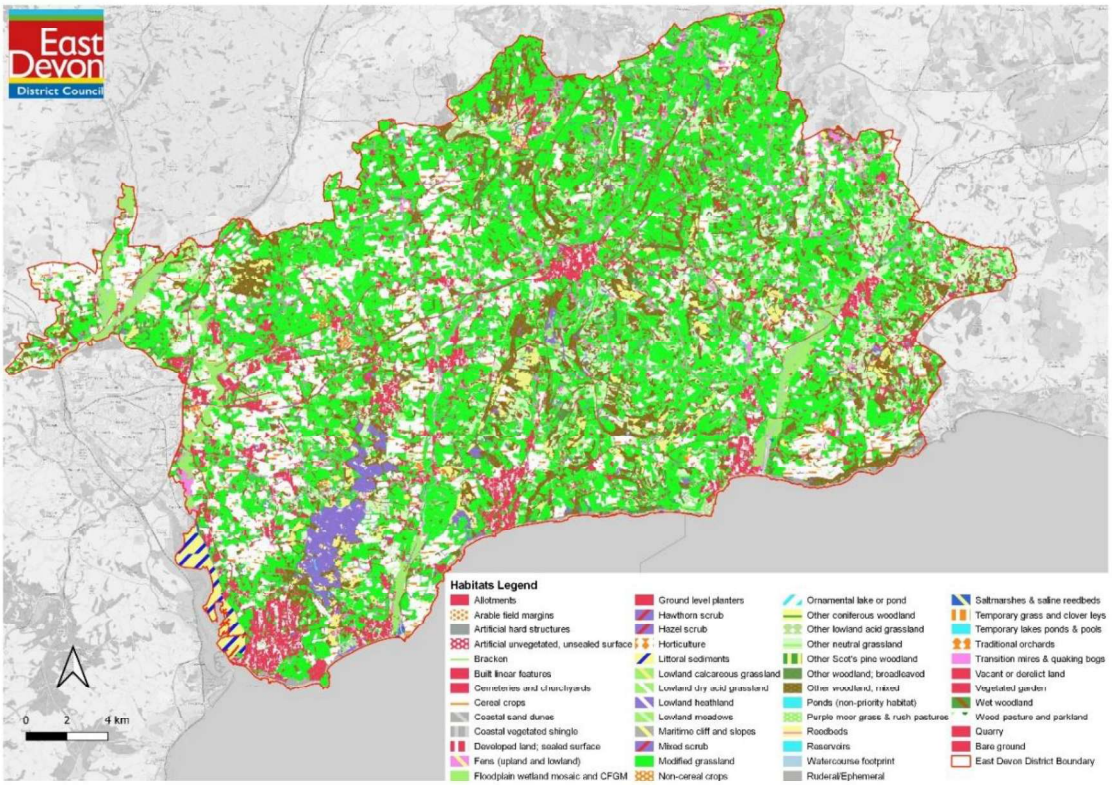
East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan 2023-2033





Foreword

As Portfolio Holder for Nature & Climate, I am delighted to present the East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan 2023-2033. Our district is blessed with a rich tapestry of landscapes, from the iconic heathlands and wetlands to our vibrant woodlands, grasslands, and coastal habitats. Yet, we are all too aware of the unprecedented challenges facing nature, both locally and globally. Declining biodiversity, habitat loss, and the urgent need to address climate change require a bold, coordinated response.

By setting out clear priorities and practical actions, we aim to not only halt the loss of wildlife, but to create a greener, healthier future for everyone. Nature recovery is not just the responsibility of a few – it is a shared endeavour that underpins our wellbeing, our economy, and our sense of place.

I am proud of the commitment shown by East Devon District Council and our partners in rising to this task. Together, we can leave a legacy of thriving habitats and resilient ecosystems for generations to come. I invite you all to play your part in delivering this vision and ensuring that nature's recovery is at the heart of our community life.

Cllr Richard Jefferies

Portfolio Holder – Nature & Climate

Executive Summary

Local Nature Recovery Plans play a crucial role in safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity at a community level. By setting out a strategic vision for habitat restoration, species conservation, and sustainable land management, these plans empower local authorities and stakeholders to coordinate action effectively. They ensure that nature recovery becomes an integral part of decision-making processes, balancing environmental priorities with social and economic needs.

Moreover, such plans help to identify key areas for habitat connectivity, address the specific challenges faced by local wildlife, and build resilience to climate change impacts. Ultimately, Local Nature Recovery Plans foster a shared sense of responsibility for the natural environment, supporting healthier ecosystems and contributing to the wellbeing of local communities.

Contents

Introduction

The East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan (EDLNRP) provides a strategic document to:

1. Identify the key habitats, species and nature recovery networks (NRNs) of importances for nature recovery in East Devon.
2. Describes opportunities to deliver on nature recovery.
3. Help fulfil the Biodiversity Reporting[1] duties for East Devon District Council (EDDC).

Vision

Our vision is to create a thriving and resilient natural environment across East Devon, where wildlife and habitats are restored, expanded, and connected for the benefit of current and future generations. We aspire to foster a landscape rich in biodiversity, supporting healthy ecosystems, sustainable communities, and an enhanced sense of place. By working collaboratively with local people, landowners, and partners, we aim to ensure that nature recovery becomes integral to our everyday lives, underpinning wellbeing, prosperity, and the sustainable management of our countryside.

Why do we need a strategy?

Background

EDDC committed to a Nature Recovery Declaration in November 2023 and embedded the commitment to deliver a strategy in the council plan. This has been influenced by the Environment Act 2021 and the new and enhanced duties this legislation has brought to local authorities.

The council has produced a number of recent strategies to influence and prioritise council decisions. This strategy aims to synergise with these other strategies to provide tangible targets to work towards Nature Recovery.

The planet is facing an ecological emergency. Globally, wildlife populations have declined by over half in the past 50 years[2] and continued ecosystem collapse poses a threat to national

[1] Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK
[2] Living Planet Report, 2022

security and prosperity[3]. Over 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, and the planet is currently undergoing the sixth mass-extinction event in history, as a result of human activities and behaviour[4]. Within the UK, 13% of England's species are under threat of extinction, with 32% having declined in number and 151 species made extinct since 1500[5].

The Environment Act 2021 has increased the responsibility of local authorities regarding biodiversity. This means that, as a public authority we must:

1. Consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration.
3. Act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives.

In addition to the enhanced Biodiversity Duty there are new mechanisms under the Environment Act, including the world's first mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements for most developments, the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), and Protected Site Strategies (PSS). These new duties can also influence the compliance of existing wildlife protection under the Habitats Regulations, Wildlife and Countryside Act, and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.

A strategy is required to provide clear objectives, actions, and targets to work towards meaningful change, a benchmark to measure change, and a tool to comply with legal duties, and demonstrate intention of working towards the vison.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are high-level statutory strategies that have been developed to cover the whole of England funded by Defra. They are required by law to identify the priorities for habitats and species in their area, the actions needed to achieve these priorities and a map that shows where actions are most needed. They are also designed to help achieve national targets, such as increasing the area of habitats and halting the decline of species abundance.

[3] HM Government (2026). Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security.
[4] Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019)
[5] State of Nature Report, 2023

Devon County Council (DCC) is the Responsible Body to produce the Devon LNRS[6]. EDDC is a Supporting Authority, contributing to the process and providing feedback.

The EDLNRP and Nature Recovery Network (NRN) mapping sit underneath and alongside the LNRS, translating its broad priorities into local opportunities. While the LNRS identifies strategic opportunities across the whole county, our plan uses local habitat data, character areas and connectivity modelling to highlight where nature recovery is most achievable in East Devon, using high-resolution mapping and local ecological knowledge.

The two approaches are therefore complementary: the LNRS provides the shared direction and statutory weight, and the East Devon plan delivers practical, place-specific action, helping ensure that local projects, land management decisions and Biodiversity Net Gain delivery contribute directly to the wider county strategy. The main difference is scale and specificity.

The LNRS sets the priorities, and our plan shows how and where to deliver them on the ground in East Devon.

Local Plan

Once adopted, the mapped High Opportunity Areas in the Devon LNRS will detail where high strategic significance can be applied to incentivise BNG delivery. The LNRS is a material planning consideration[7] but does not restrict development.

The LNRS and EDLNRP help support and inform the emerging East Devon Local Plan biodiversity polices providing an evidence base and strategic direction how development can accommodate nature recovery. In particular polices:

- Strategic Policy PB05: Biodiversity Net Gain
- Strategic Policy PB06: Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Nature Recovery Network (NRN)
- Policy PB07: Ecological enhancement and biodiversity in the built environment

As with the LNRS, the EDLNRP mapped areas do not form any statutory designation or restrict development. The mapping provides a high-level spatial assessment of the natural environment

[6] https://www.naturerecoverydevon.org.uk/
[7] https://www.naturerecoverydevon.org.uk/information/planning-and-biodiversity-net-gain/

and indicates where opportunities and actions would have benefit. It is also true that actions outside of opportunity areas and within the urban environment are equally important.

Where we are now - overview of East Devon biodiversity

East Devon has an outstanding environment. It boasts seven internationally designated wildlife sites including the largest remaining expanse of lowland heathland in Devon, habitats of international importance for rare bats, overwintering birds, rare coastal habitats and important river system.

The district supports numerous nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which form component parts of the international sites, but also as standalone sites which include rare habitats such as unimproved grassland, ancient woodland, fen habitat, and geological interest.

East Devon supports ~14% of Devon's County Wildlife Site (CWS) network which forms an integral part of the natural environment. Despite being non-statutory designated sites, they are often of equivalent value in biodiversity as nationally designated sites.

There are seven Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) for which EDDC have responsibility for their management. These are sites that are designated to integrate public access and delivery nature recovery. The Countryside Team have successfully delivered multiple achievements including successful habitat creation, enhancement, and social value through the East Devon LNR network.

The district supports numerous Priority Habitats, an ancient hedgerow network, unique and rare wildlife from carnivorous plants and ancient woodland to a wild population of beaver, rare invertebrates, and stronghold for nationally rare bat species.

Landscape is intertwined with nature. Approximately two thirds of the district are designated as National Landscapes, which have their own statutory requirements for nature recovery. The landscape is also shaped by agricultural which is vital for food production, the economy, and for landscape connectivity of the environment.

A local planning authority has a duty to shape and deliver sustainable development. While development can result in pressures on the natural environment such as direct habitat loss and degradation, it can also offer opportunities to delivery place based environmental outcomes

when integrated in the design process. East Devon has a growing community who value nature which can thrive in urban environments.

East Devon Nature Recovery Network

This strategy takes a habitat-based approach, with the key habitats considered for nature recovery mapped to form a 'Nature Recovery Network' (NRN). It provides a strategic overview of the district's biodiversity and habitat networks where habitats can be created or improved to help wildlife thrive.

It maps out the current state of nature across East Devon and identifies key Habitat Connectivity Opportunity Areas (HCOs). These are areas where creating or improving natural habitats will give the greatest benefit for wildlife and help nature thrive.

The NRN was produced using published and repeatable methodology which synergises with National Planning Policy Framework requirements. The detailed methodology and mapping report is provided in Appendix 1

The NRN identifies five habitat types and identifies areas with good coverage of these habitats and areas where habitat creations could be focused where the greatest opportunities lie and would contribute towards the Lawton principles of 'Bigger, Better, and More Joined-up'. The habitat types include:

1. Lowland Heathland
2. Wetlands
3. Woodland and Hedges
4. Species-rich Grasslands
5. Urban Fabric

HCOs are not prescriptive:

- They require on-the-ground validation;
- Local barriers and constraints (roads, settlements, topography) may alter the suitability of proposed interventions;
- They are not intended to displace productive farmland or to impede sustainable development.

This strategy provides an overview of the habitats, including case studies where EDDC have maintained, created, restored, or expanded them. It also describes the species associated with the habitats.

Extensive Pasture and Arable Land while mapped has been excluded from this strategy as there is limited opportunity for a local planning authority to influence this habitat type. A public consultation will be undertaken to help shape what is considered a priority for residents and visitors.

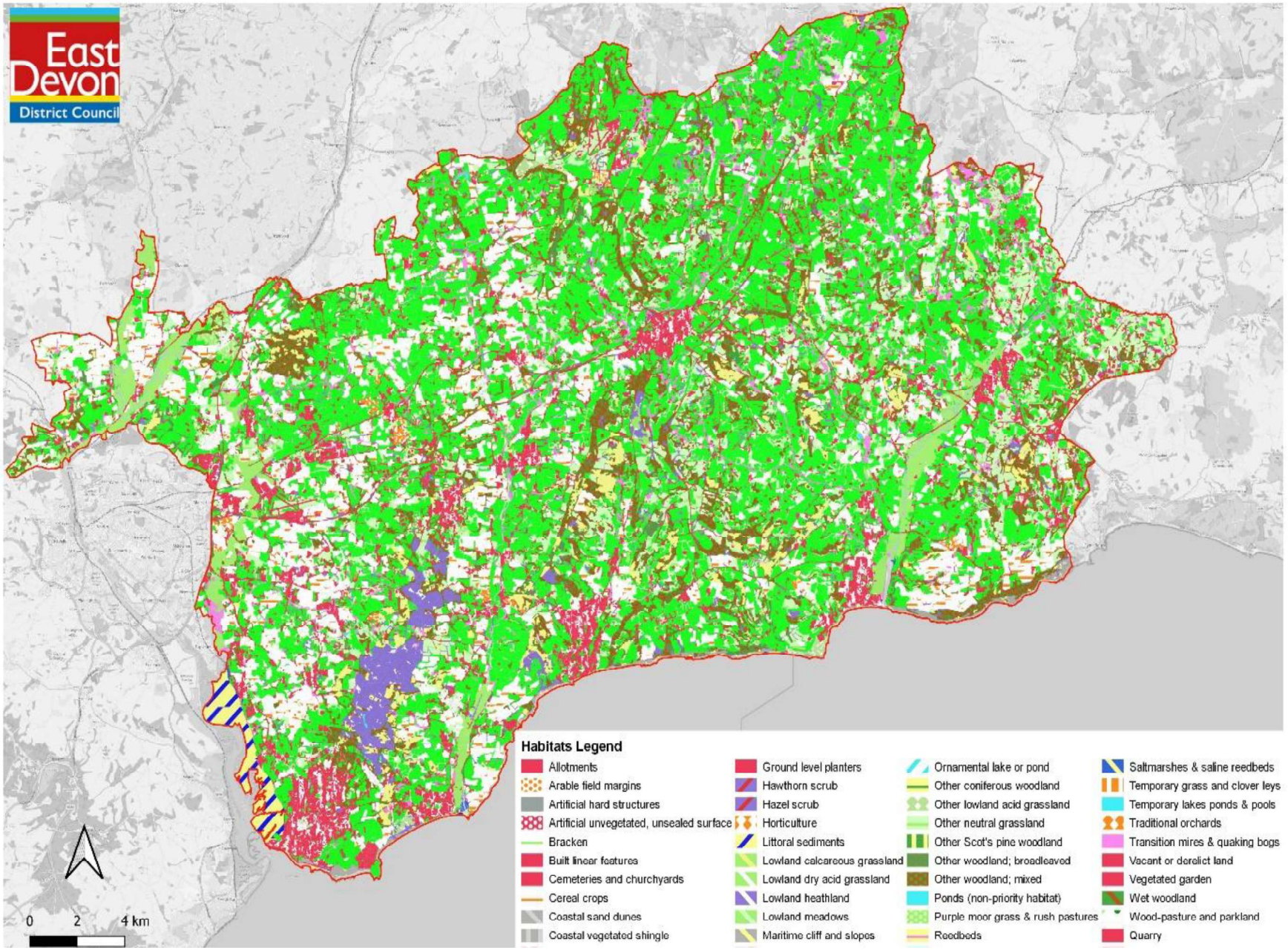

East Devon
District Council
Habitats Legend
Allotments
Arable field margins
Artificial hard structures
Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface
Bracken
Built linear features
Cemeteries and churchyards
Cereal crops
Coastal sand dunes
Coastal vegetated shingle
Ground level planters
Hawthorn scrub
Hazel scrub
Horticulture
Littoral sediments
Lowland calcareous grassland
Lowland dry acid grassland
Lowland heathland
Lowland meadows
Maritime cliff and slopes
Ornamental lake or pond
Other coniferous woodland
Other lowland acid grassland
Other neutral grassland
Other Scot's pine woodland
Other woodland; broadleaved
Other woodland; mixed
Ponds (non-priority habitat)
Purple moor grass & rush pastures
Reedbeds
Saltmarshes & saline reedbeds
Temporary grass and clover leys
Temporary lakes ponds & pools
Traditional orchards
Transition mires & quaking bogs
Vacant or derelict land
Vegetated garden
Wet woodland
Wood-pasture and parkland
Quarry
0
2
4 km

Fig 1 - UK Hab Map of East Devon

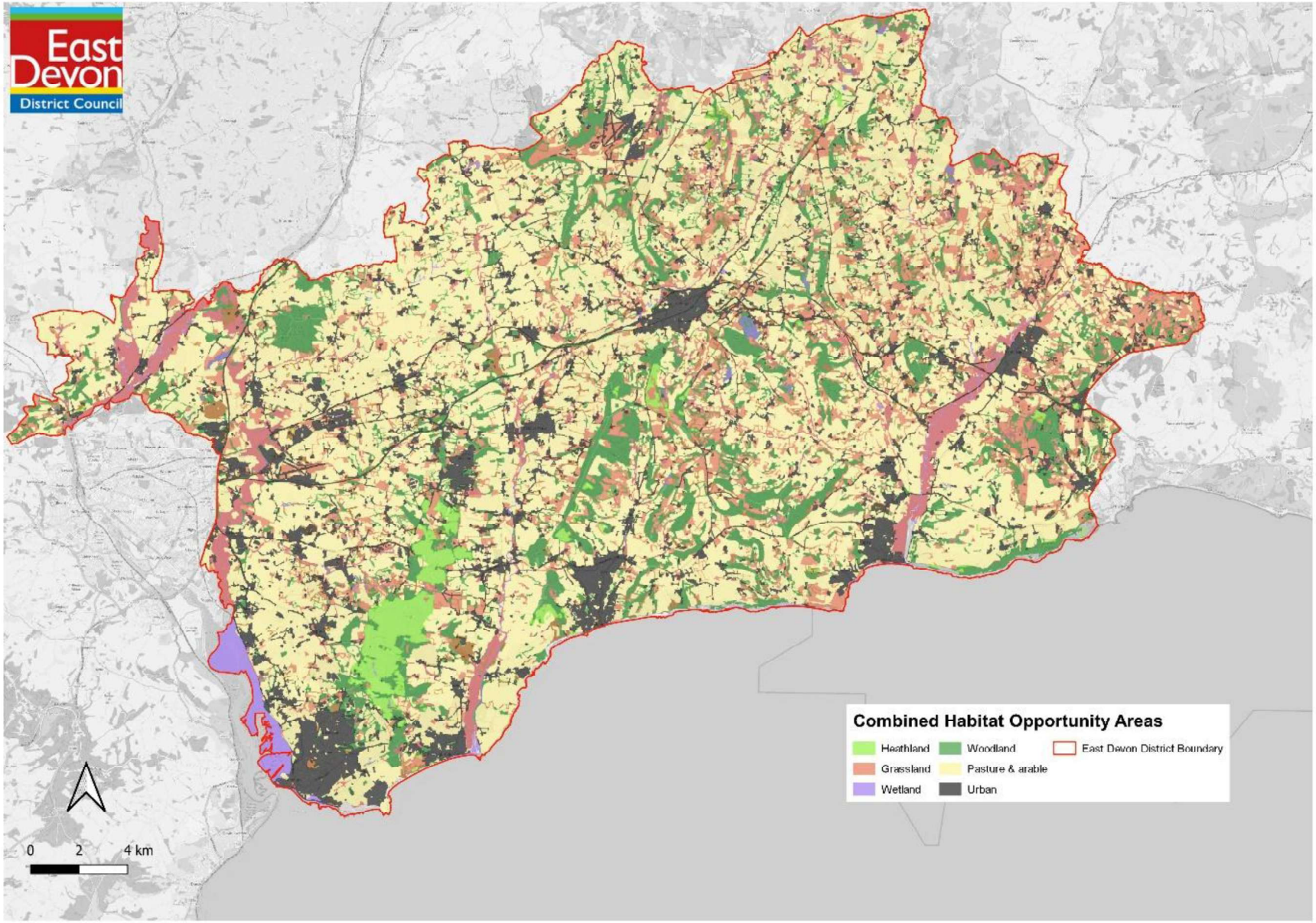
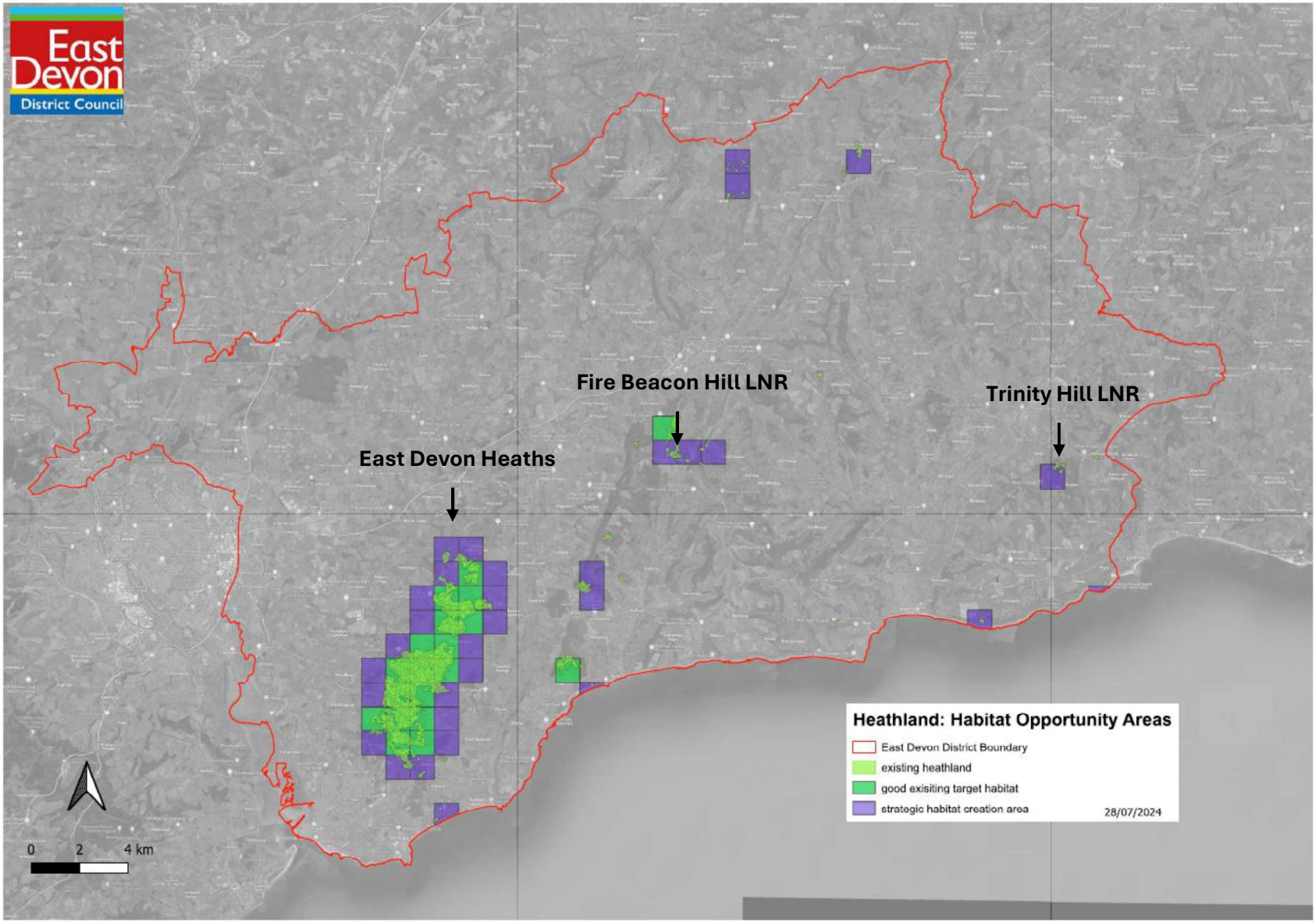


Figure 1 - East Devon Combined Habitat Connectivity Opportunity Areas

Public Consultation results -This will be added in once Draft Nature Recovery Plan has been through the public consultation.

Lowland Heathland



Description

Lowland heathland is a rare, open habitat found on nutrient-poor, acidic soils, typically below 300m altitude. It is characterised by heathers *Calluna sp.*, gorse, acid grassland, and mosaics of wet and dry heath, often interspersed with scrub, bare ground, and occasional bogs. In East Devon, the most significant area is the East Devon Heaths, which form the largest block of lowland heath in the county. These heathlands exhibit varied topography and hydrology, creating a diversity of microhabitat.

Case Study – Trinity Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Heathland Regeneration

In 2018 Trinity Hill LNR had become dominated by Purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea,* Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* and Gorse *Ulex europeus*. This was due to a cessation of grazing with cattle by the commoner and replacement with a cutting regime and summer pony grazing. Whilst ponies are regarded as good conservation grazing animals, their behaviour on this site led to focussed close grazing of a small area, rather than a more expansive foraging of the thick tussocks of *Molinia*.

In 2020 a local grazier with hardy Devon Ruby cattle was engaged to graze the site from May – September, utilising the NoFence collar system whereby the livestock's movement is controlled by a GPS collar system meaning a registered common did not need enclosure fencing to allow for livestock to move onto the site. The cattle breed has an excellent strength of mouth and will take a vast variety of plants, particularly enjoying browse of encroaching scrub. Their feeding method of wrapping the tounge around sward and tearing it was particularly effective on the tussocks of purple moor grass and they were more than happy to feed on the dead element of this deciduous grass, thus reducing the size of the tussocks.

Within three years heather had significantly re-established amongst a reduced domination of *Molinia*. Tree pipits *Anthus trivialis* had returned as a breeding species for the site; breeding Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* numbers were up and invertebrate and reptile populations had increased visibly. In 2023 a record number of 17 Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* were ringed on the heathland, with this surveying effort continuing, which has led us to realise this is also a very important site for Firecrest *Regulus ignicaulus*, Britian's smallest bird. Indeed, so effective was the grazing, that areas of the heath were deliberately GPS fenced out of bounds to the cattle to ensure that there was a mosaic of larger tussocks and longer grass which is a habitat in which Harvest Mice *Micromys minutus* have been recorded over recent years. In the winter of 2024, the first Dartford

Warbler *Sylvia undata* was recoded on site for many decades, this was trapped by the site's ringing group. In the winter of 2025 this male was joined by a second male bird. Cirl buntings *Emberiza cirlus* have been seen on site since the spring of 2023, but to date no breeding activity has been recorded.

The reallocation of staff priorities during the first series of covid lockdowns, when face-to-face work with the public was not allowed, gave the team the chance to focus on multiple groups sessions to cut and burn Rhododendron on the northern slopes of the site and for the first time this non-native invasive plant was eradicated from this side of the site.

Key locations and documents

- East Devon Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Trintiy Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Fire Beacon Hill County Wildlife Site (CWS/LNR), Farway Common
- South East Devon Wildlife Joint Habitats Sites Mitigation Strategy
- Heath, moor, bog and mire mosaics | Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) | Devon County Council

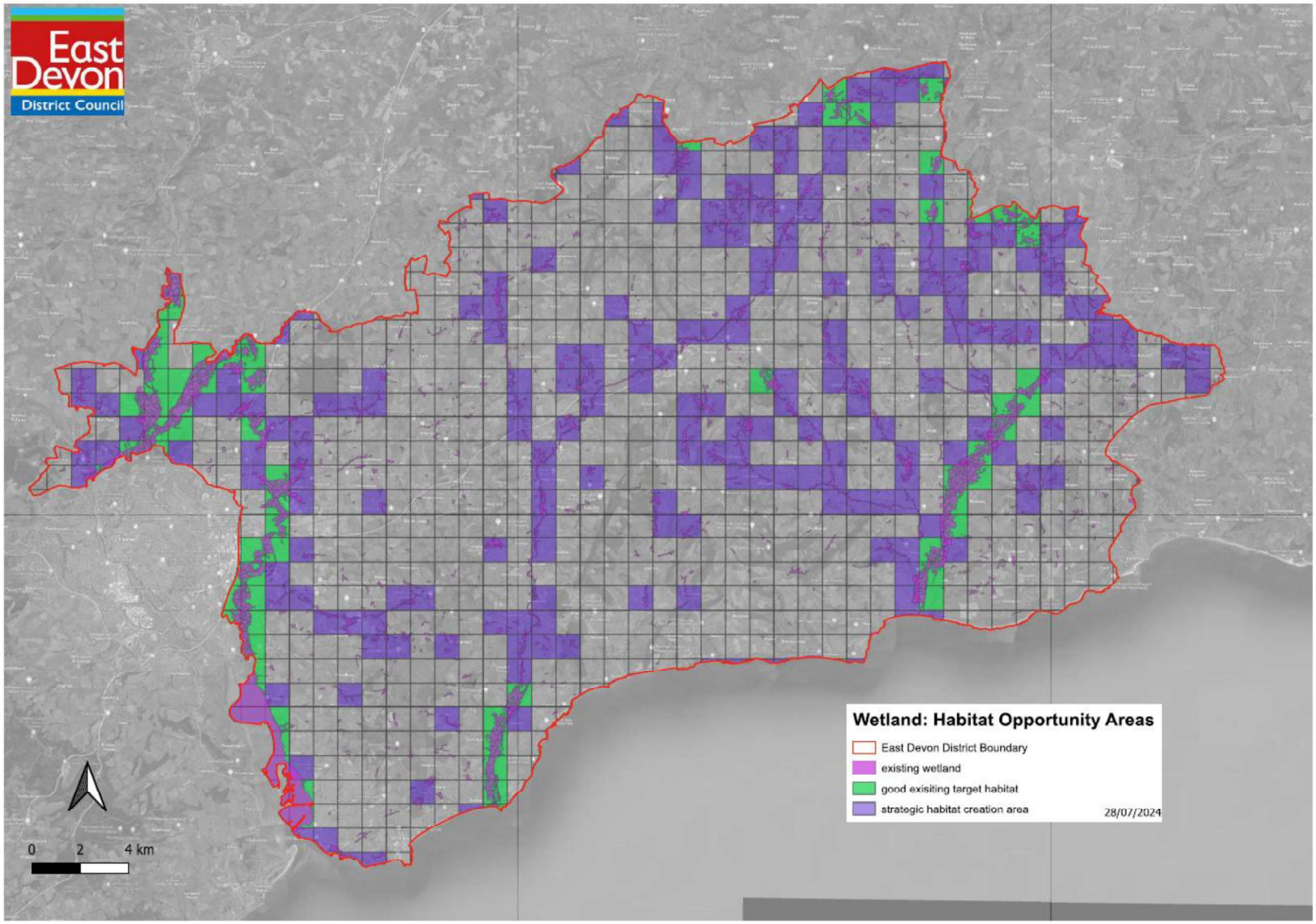
Special Species

- Tree Pipit, Yellowhammer, Cirl bunting, Dartford Warbler, Nightjar, inverts particularly Emperor moth, Adder, Viviperous Lizard, botanical interest Bell heather, ling, cross-leaved heath, milkwort, lousewort, lesser butterfly orchid, cottongrass, sundew, bog asphodel, reptiles and amphibians including adder, common lizard, grass snake,
- Publicly voted specie species is: TBC Consultation

Public Views

- TBC Consultation
- E.g. X% people regularly visit

Wetland


East Devon
District Council
Wetland: Habitat Opportunity Areas
East Devon District Boundary
existing wetland
good exisiting target habitat
strategic habitat creation area
28/07/2024
0
2
4 km

Description

Wetlands encompass water-dependent habitats found where soils remain seasonally or permanently saturated and associated features including such as rivers, springs, reedbeds, marshes, and estuaries. These areas are characterised by sedges, rushes, bog mosses, reed, and a diversity of wetland plants and invertebrates. In East Devon, the most notable wetlands occur along the main river valleys of the Axe, Otter, and Exe catchments, as well as in pockets across the district such as spring-line mires. Wetlands through their varied hydrology and soil conditions create a mosaic of microhabitats, supporting species that depend on clean water, open marsh, and damp ground which support high levels of biodiversity.

Case Study – Black Hole Marsh Creation - Seaton Wetlands LNR

The creation of Black Hole Marsh Intertidal Lagoon is the most ambitious and carefully engineered habitat restoration projects conducted by East Devon District Council's Countryside Team. Situated within Seaton Wetlands on the Axe Estuary, the lagoon was conceived as part of a managed realignment scheme designed to restore intertidal habitat lost to historic sea defences. Since its completion in 2012, Black Hole Marsh has evolved into the ecological centrepiece of the reserve, supporting significant bird species and demonstrating how engineered systems can deliver meaningful rewilding outcomes within modern constraints.

The foundations of the wider Seaton Wetlands project date back to the early 2000s. The area already included two Local Nature Reserves: Colyford Common and Seaton Marshes. However, access was limited and habitat quality varied. Freshwater grazing marsh lay beside tidal estuary habitat, separated by a defensive seawall constructed to protect reclaimed agricultural land.

The early vision was ambitious: to create a mosaic of wetland features that integrated wildlife habitat with carefully designed public access. Boardwalks, reedbeds, hedgerows, and bird hides would allow visitors to experience wildlife without undermining ecological function. While this was not "rewilding" in a purist sense, it represented a pragmatic form of restoration—designed, deliberate, and responsive to contemporary environmental pressures.

Across estuaries in the United Kingdom, defensive seawalls have historically held back tidal waters to create agricultural land and protect infrastructure. However, rising sea levels associated with climate change have created a phenomenon known as coastal squeeze. As sea levels rise, intertidal habitats such as saltmarsh and mudflat are compressed between advancing waters and fixed sea defences, leading to habitat loss.

Complete removal, or partial breaching of seawalls would restore natural estuarine gradients from freshwater marsh to open sea. Yet in many locations, infrastructure and settlements prevent such large-scale and costly retreat. Managed realignment offers a compromise: creating new intertidal habitat landward of existing defences while retaining essential protection.

Black Hole Marsh was funded by the Environment Agency as part of such a managed realignment initiative. The aim was to establish a seven-hectare intertidal lagoon behind the seawall, compensating for habitat loss elsewhere and enhancing biodiversity along the Axe Estuary.

The success of Black Hole Marsh hinged on its hydrological design. The lagoon needed to maintain a carefully calibrated brackish salinity—approximately 12 parts per thousand, midway between freshwater and seawater. Achieving this balance required innovation.

The system was designed by Environment Agency which developed a stop-go-stop tidal control valve integrated with a sluice. The valve's resting state is closed. As the tide rises, estuary water exerts pressure against the mechanism. Only when a predetermined tidal height is reached does a float lift, rotating the valve fully open and allowing water to enter.

This timing is critical. Estuarine water forms a tidal wedge, with lighter freshwater overlaying denser saltwater. If the lagoon admitted water throughout the tidal cycle, it would receive disproportionate freshwater, preventing the target salinity from being achieved. By opening only at a specific height in the tidal column, the valve ensures inflow contains sufficient salinity.

A secondary stop mechanism prevents overtopping once the lagoon reaches its designed water level. Through the interplay of sluice and valve, the site manager can influence water depth and salinity while maintaining tidal character. The result is a semi-controlled but ecologically dynamic brackish lagoon situated town-side of the seawall.

Beyond hydrology, habitat structure was meticulously planned. Excavation shaped a central lagoon with multiple low islands radiating outward like spokes from a hub. These elongated "fingers" were designed so that feeding waders would rarely disappear from view behind landforms for extended periods, enhancing visitor experience without compromising bird security.

Hedgerows and reedbeds were planted around the perimeter to screen visitors and provide additional habitat. Viewing platforms and bird hides were strategically located to balance accessibility and disturbance management. The central Island Hide—accessed via a screened wooden

bridge—generated debate during planning. Critics feared that positioning visitors within the lagoon would displace feeding birds. Experience has shown otherwise: even school groups crossing to the hide in eager anticipation have not caused noticeable disturbance.

Although entirely artificial in origin, the lagoon's sculpted islands and varied shorelines appear naturalistic. The design and excavation were executed with exceptional skill, translating ecological theory into functional terrain.

At the heart of the lagoon's design was a small amphipod: *Corophium volutator*. This invertebrate thrives within a narrow salinity range and forms a critical food source for wading birds. By creating optimal brackish conditions, it was expected that the lagoon would support dense populations of *Corophium*, in turn attracting specialist feeders.

One such species is the avocet. Large winter flocks occur on the Exe Estuary, where over 600 birds were recorded in 2012. It was hoped that a smaller number might utilise the Axe Estuary lagoon as an additional feeding site during winter migrations.

For several years, avocet presence remained sporadic. Small groups visited but did not linger. Breeding was not initially anticipated; there was no historical record of avocets nesting in Devon.

In May 2023, local observers reported avocets displaying nesting behaviour on one of the lagoon islands. The news triggered cautious monitoring and discreet protection measures in consultation with conservation partners, including the wildlife crime team of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

On 26 July 2023, three chicks hatched—marking Devon's first ever recorded successful avocet breeding event. All three fledged successfully. This 100% survival rate reflected the lagoon's secure design: predator-resistant islands, abundant invertebrate food, and open sightlines enabling adults to detect threats.

The breeding success drew immediate public interest, increasing site visiting by approximately 40%. For Seaton Wetlands, it was both an ecological milestone and a demonstration of the lagoon's functional integrity.

In addition to avocets, the lagoon has supported breeding shelduck and oystercatchers, alongside hundreds of wintering and migratory birds. Otters, fish, and diverse invertebrates further indicate ecological maturity.

The westward expansion of breeding avocets likely reflects broader climatic shifts. Warmer conditions and changing estuarine dynamics are influencing species distributions across the UK. The late nesting date and successful fledging suggest experienced adult birds adapting to new territories.

Black Hole Marsh was designed to address habitat loss caused by sea-level rise, yet it has also become a refuge for species responding to climate-driven range changes. This dual function mitigating coastal squeeze while accommodating shifting biodiversity illustrates the adaptive potential of managed realignment schemes.

Black Hole Marsh Intertidal Lagoon demonstrates that restoration within constraints can still embody rewilding principles. While engineered and regulated, the lagoon facilitates natural processes tidal exchange, invertebrate colonisation, predator-prey interactions, and species dispersal. It reconciles ecological ambition with infrastructural reality.

The project's success lies in its integration of hydrological precision, habitat design, public engagement, and long-term ecological monitoring. What began as a carefully controlled experiment in intertidal habitat creation has matured into a thriving brackish ecosystem.

Black Hole Marsh shows that even in landscapes shaped by centuries of human intervention, it is possible to reintroduce tidal rhythms, rebuild food webs, and create space for wildlife to flourish once again.

Key locations and documents

- Seaton Wetlands LNR, River Axe SAC, Exe Estuary SPA/Ramsar, Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP)
- Wild About Seaton Masterplan
- Beer Quarry and Caves SAC HRA Guidelines

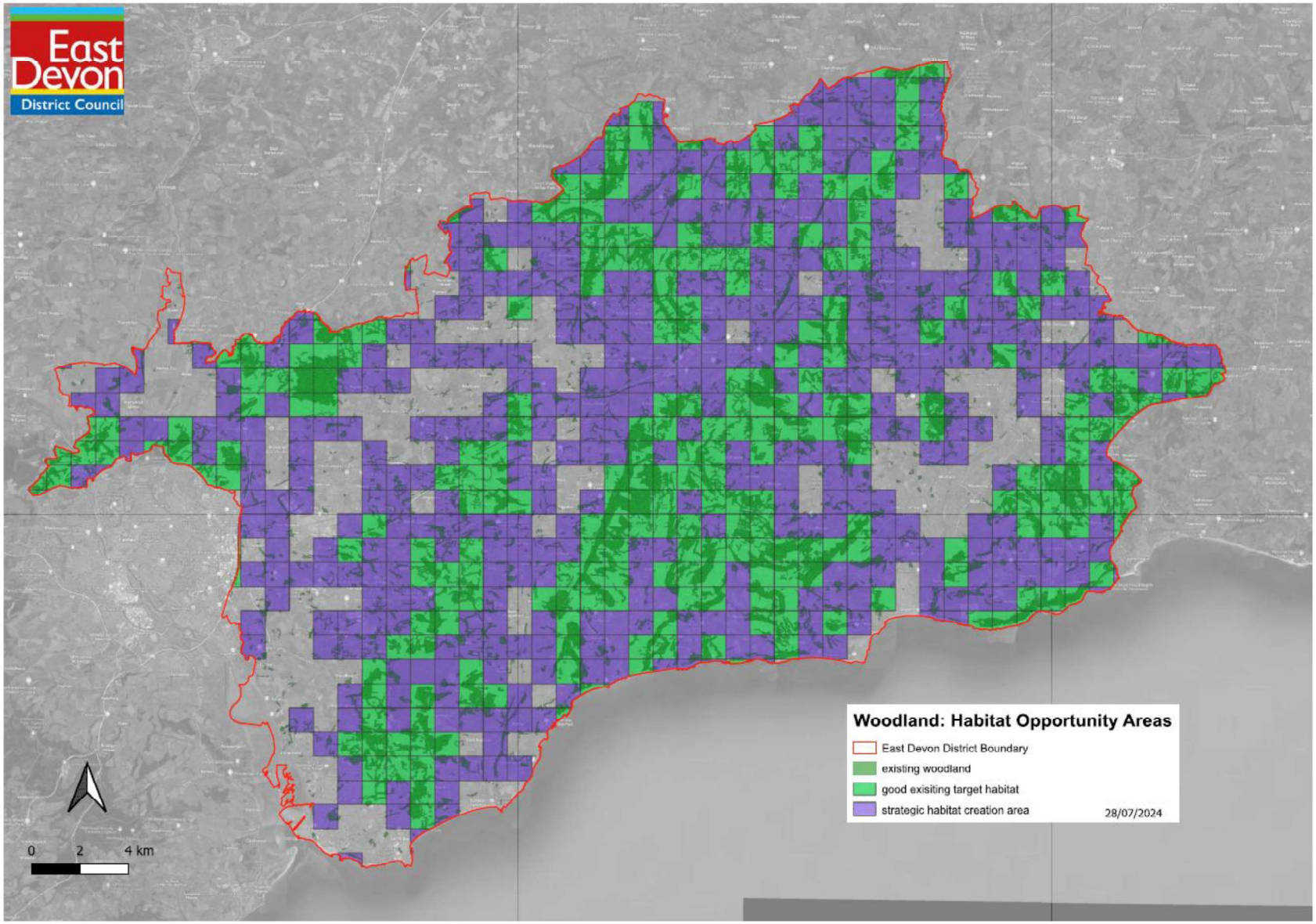
Special Species

- Otter, Water Vole, Beaver, Harvest Mouse, Grey Long Eared Bat, Horseshoe Bats, Daubenton's Bat, Avocet, Osprey, Sand Martin, Cettis Warbler, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Redshank, Black Tailed Godwit, Spoonbill, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Reed Bunting, Kingfisher, Barn Owl, Kestrel, 13-spot ladybird, grass eggar moth, , reptiles and amphibians including grass snake, common toad, and great crested newt.
- Refer to LNRS for detailed descriptions.
- Publicly voted specie species is: TBC Consultation

Public Views

- TBC Consultation

Woodland (and Hedges)



Description

Woodlands and hedges are a defining part of East Devon's landscape, forming a connected network of tree-rich habitats across valleys, farmland and hill slopes. Around 14% of the district is woodland, ranging from ancient semi-natural sites like Holyford Woods and Knapp Copse to wet woodland, coastal scrub, temperate rainforest fragments, parkland and commercial plantations. These woodlands are typically dominated by oak and ash in the lowlands, with birch, beech and pine more common on higher ground or near heathlands. Beneath the canopy, varied ground flora and structural diversity support a wide range of wildlife.

Case Study – Hollyford Woods LNR Natural Regeneration

Holyford Woods is an attractive woodland, rich in a diversity of wildlife, and well known locally for its springtime bluebells. Covering an area of 24 hectares, it is set in the valley of a small stream, Holyford Brook, that eventually joins the Stafford Brook which flows through Colyford into the River Axe. On the sides of this valley, the semi-natural woodland is dominated by oak or ash; the valley bottom contains wet woodland where alder is the main canopy tree (alder carr). For part of its course through the wood, the stream flows through a deeply cut, steep sided channel known as a goyle, a landscape feature characteristic of East Devon.

The majority of the wood has developed from open fields since the mid nineteenth century, although one area known as Holyford Copse may be considerably older, likely pre-dating 1600 A.D, and so qualifying as 'ancient woodland'. Another area of the woodland may have developed from a form of wood pasture. Plants indicative of ancient woodlands are abundant throughout the broadleaved woodland.

The majority of the wood has received little or no management for decades; there are numerous fallen trees and unusually good amounts of dead wood so that, in places, it has a natural wild character. However, two of the compartments were subject to conifer planting in the 1960s or 70s.

In 2005 a felling licence from Forestry England was granted to allow for the clear-felling of 4 hectares of non-native Douglas Fir, and the obligation to follow this with planting was withheld on the basis that natural regeneration had begun and was of sufficient density by 2015. The felling area lay on the southern side of the woods with two forest tracks running thought it and so with a contract to a forestry operator using a forester machine the value of the felled timber just covered the cost of extraction.

The ongoing management objectives of this area are:

- To allow natural woodland regeneration to occur through non-intervention through no less than 70% of the compartment
- To prevent conifer regeneration in previously felled area
- To maintain significant glades and rides through the compartment
- To maintain woodland ride through mechanical cutting in winter (not tractor and flail), and cutting by hand in summer, along either side of the main track to enable vehicle access and to prevent encroachment. This will also diversify botanical and invertebrate populations, and cutting by hand will offer greater protection to/less disturbance of animals nesting in brambles adjacent to the track, such as dormice.
- Clear-fell area of conifers that extends south-eastwards from reservoir, retaining beech trees and pollarding where appropriate
- Selective thinning throughout coniferous stand to the west of reservoir to enhance floristic biodiversity.
- Leave selected large conifers to provide windbreak, in particular (but not exclusively) the cedars at top of hillside in south-west corner of Holyford Bottom

In the preceding years 2006 and 2007 the area was a blaze of Foxgloves *Digitalis purpurea*, however by the summer of 2028 this had been replaced by bramble which continued to dominate the hillside well into 2019. In 2016 a research access strip was cut by hand in a loop through the bramble and emergent woodland, by this stage dominated by birch of wrist sized girth. This allowed a series of 20 Dormouse *Muscardinus avellereus* boxes to be placed on fencing posts to record under licence the activity of this protected species on site. Through monthly visits to the dormouse scheme it was recorded first had how the woodland transitioned from bramble scrub with occasional saplings, to the point in 2022 when the tree canopy began to shadow the bramble and outcompete it. In several areas now the dormouse access route runs through young woodland rather than scrub.

Key locations and documents

- Hollyford Woods LNR, Knapp Copse LNR, Killerton, Ashclyst Forest, Blackberry Camp, Seaton Undercliff,

- East Devon Tree, Hedge and Woodland Strategy (THaWS)

- Wild East Devon hedgerow management plan
- Beer Quarry and Caves SAC HRA Guidelines

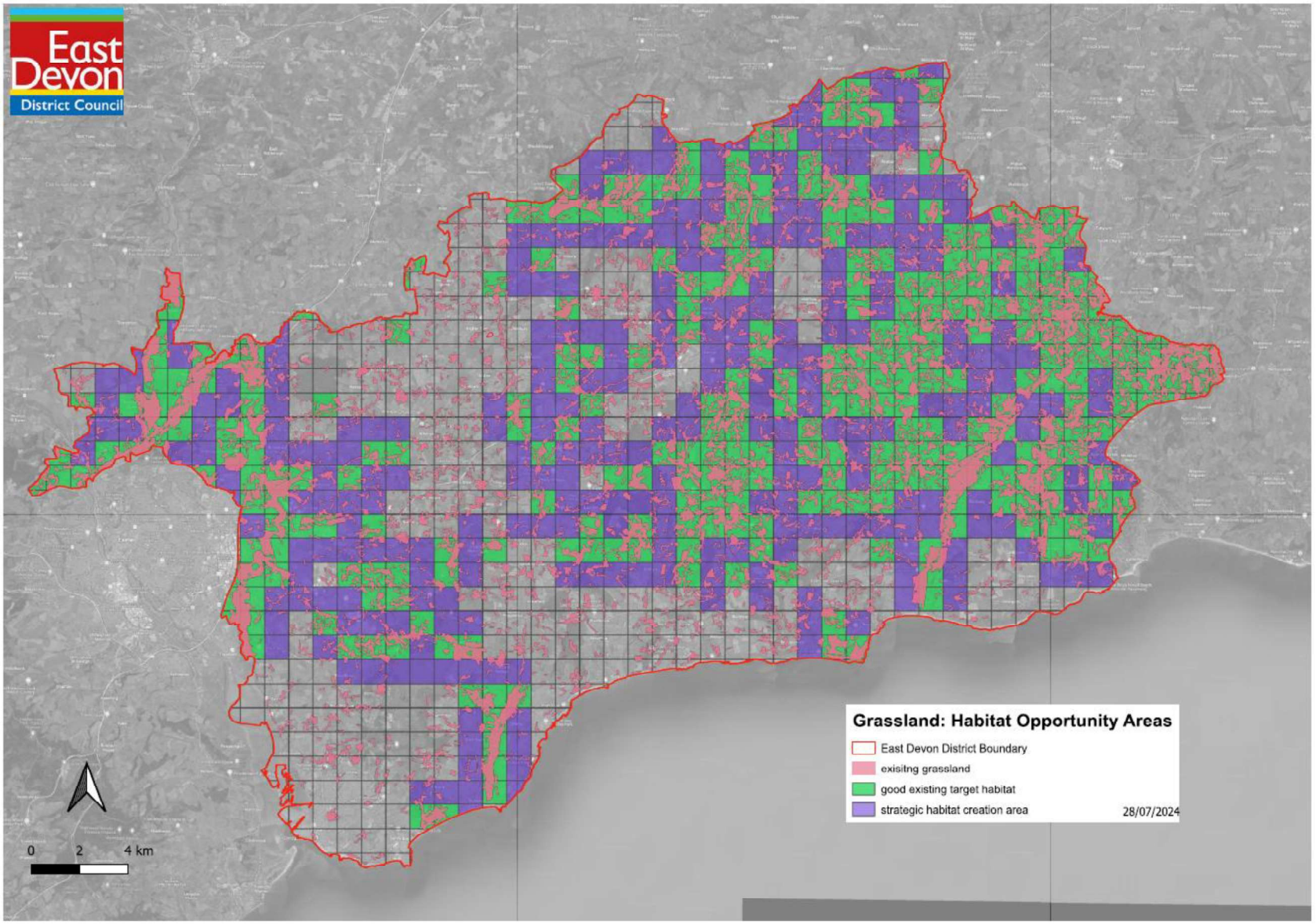
Special Species

- Bechstein's Bat, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Barbastelle Bat, Hazel Dormouse, Bluebell, Primrose, Devon Whitebeam, Lichens .
- Publicly voted specie species is: TBC Consultation

Public Views

- TBC Consultation

Species-rich Grassland



Description

Species-rich grasslands in East Devon occur as a scattering of unimproved or semi-improved meadows, coastal slopes, damp valley pastures, and historic field systems that have escaped modern agricultural intensification. These habitats are typically found on neutral, calcareous, or acidic soils and support a diverse assemblage of wildflowers, grasses, rushes and sedges, often reflecting centuries of low-input management. Many sites occupy traditional enclosed landscapes, such as former hay meadows in the Axe and Otter catchments, old orchard margins, and pasture on the fringes of the Pebblebed Heaths, Blackdown Hills, and East Devon National Landscape.

Despite their fragmented nature, these grasslands form an important component of the wider Nature Recovery Network. They act as stepping-stones between wetlands, woodland edges, road verges and heathland mosaics, supporting high densities of pollinators, farmland birds and notable invertebrates. The best examples in East Devon include remnant hay meadows within County Wildlife Sites, species-rich roadside verges, coastal grasslands around Beer and Branscombe, and the neutral and marshy pastures within Seaton Wetlands and in tributary valleys across the district.

Case Study – Peak Hill Green Hay Translocation

In the Summer of 2025 staff from the Countryside Team and Streetscene collaborated to restore wildflower rich grassland on the cliffs at Sidmouth's Peak Hill. Before the road was realigned here, the grassland now managed by Streetscene was continuous with that managed by the Countryside Team as Delderfield Nature Reserve.

Over the course of several years, the grassland at Peak Hill had become dominated by one plant, Alexanders *Smyrnium olusatrum* and diversity within the grasses had been compromised. Green hay translocation was identified as the most effective and efficient way to introduce local seeds and, with the receptor site undergoing adequate preparation, should lead to incremental improvement.

The receiver site was cut and collected on several occasions through the growing season to help suppress the Alexanders. Days before the green hay cut this mowing was combined with harrowing the site to create a tilth.

In September an Amazone mower was used in Delderfield to cut the meadow and gather the cuttings into a hydraulic hopper. These cuttings were trailered across the road where a team of Countryside volunteers were on hand to rake and spread the cuttings over the harrowed ground. This first effort, it is expected that further seed introductions will be needed in subsequent years, was left to drop its seed and then mulch down over the Alexanders, while future green hay will be collected and removed from the receiver site days after being translocated, giving the seeds the chance to fall into the turf whilst not adding nutrient load to the site.

In spring 2026 an early cut of the Alexanders will be taken, and then the grassland left for the growing season to allow the first seedlings to develop and set seed before an end of year cut and collected takes place.

Key locations and documents

- Knaps Copse LNR, Delderfield LNR, Goren Farm
- Improving Green Spaces for Wildlife - East Devon

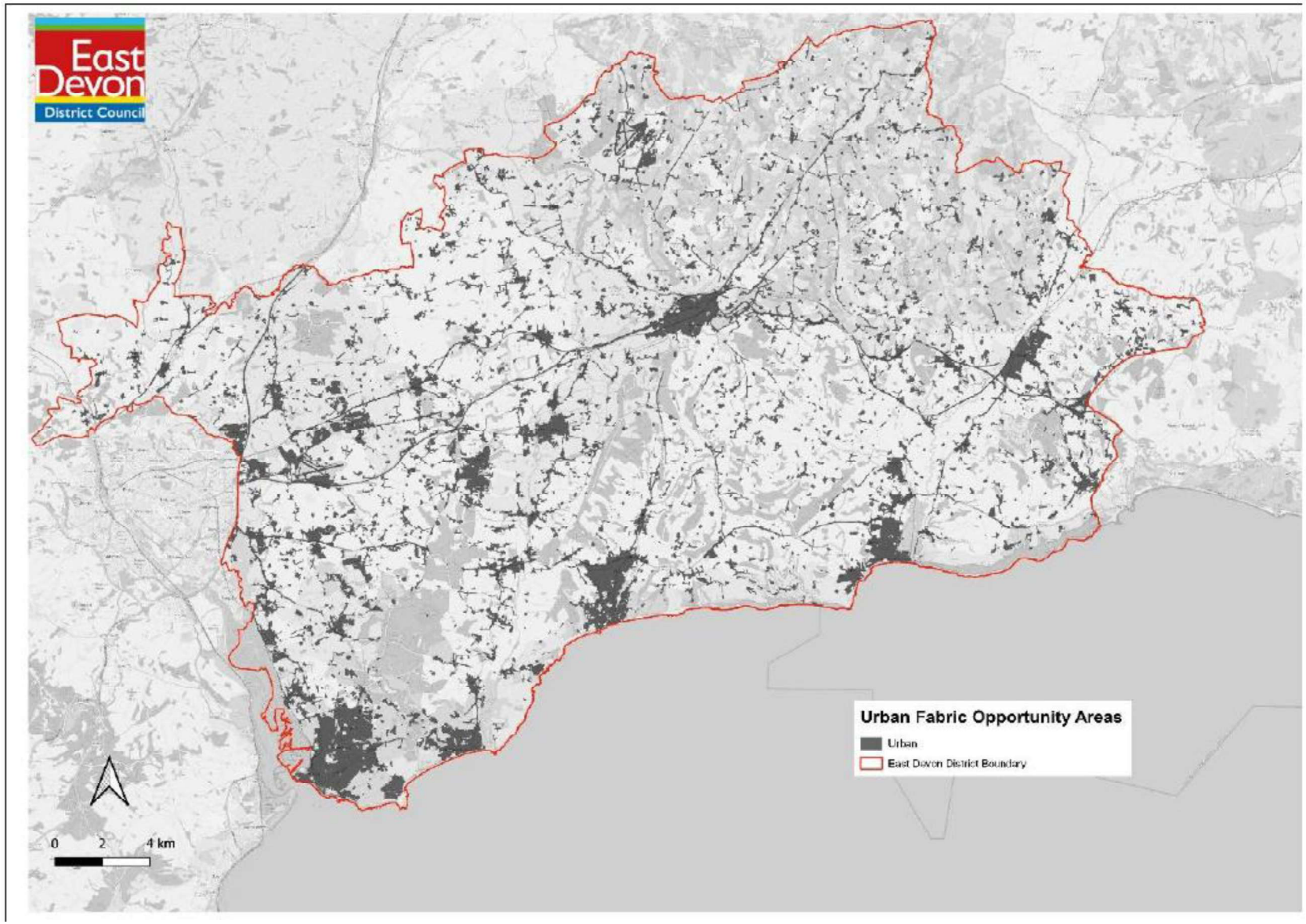
Special Species

- Greater Horseshoe Bat, Marbled White, Common Blue, Skylark, Kestrel, House Martin, Harvest Mouse,
- Publicly voted specie species is: TBC Consultation

Public Views

- TBC Consultation

Urban Fabric



Description

The Urban Fabric includes coastal towns such as Exmouth, Sidmouth and Seaton to market towns including Honiton, Axminster and Ottery St Mary, and also the district's unique villages and small settlements. While not usually associated with nature recovery urban areas support an important network of green spaces, private gardens, ponds, verges, street trees, churchyards, riverside corridors and brownfield sites.

Built environments across East Devon host a range of Priority Species, such as swifts, house martins, bats, hedgehogs, and pollinating insects. Mature gardens, old stone walls, SuDS features, ponds, school grounds, and community orchards all contribute to a mosaic of habitats. Coastal influence creates warm microclimates that support long flowering seasons and specialist invertebrates. Trees, hedgerows, road embankments and the district rivers provide linear dispersal corridors and habitats for species from these habitats.

Urban areas are also where most residents encounter nature. They provide opportunities for ecological enhancement through planning policies, BNG, council infrastructure management, and collaboration voluntary groups and town and parish councils. Measures such as pollinator-friendly greenspace cutting, community tree planting, swift brick installation, rain gardens, green roofs, and improved connectivity between green spaces can significantly increase biodiversity.

Urban nature recovery in East Devon is therefore both a critical habitat priority and a key mechanism for engaging communities, improving wellbeing, and strengthening resilience to climate change.

Case Study – Honiton Swift Action

In June 2024 EDDC Countryside Team provided Honiton Primary School with 10 new swift boxes. This installation was made possible through collaboration with the National Grid, who provided specialist access to install the boxes. The project contributed to the wider volunteer Swift Support Network in Honiton, which provide habitat and monitoring swifts. In July 2025, another 12 swift bricks were installed at EDDC headquarters at Blackdown House.

Wild Exmouth case study - TBC

Key locations and documents

- Cranbrook Country Park (Cranbrook), The Maer (Exmouth), The Glen (Honiton), The Byes, Peak Hill (Sidmouth), Seaton Wetlands, Honeyditches (Seaton), Jubilee Gardens (Beer),
- Improving Green Spaces for Wildlife - East Devon

Special Species

- Common Pipistrelle Bat, Serotine Bat, Hedgehog, Slow Worm, House Martin, Swift, Common Frog, Common Toad, Palmate Newt, Knapweed, Lichens, Traditional Fruit Trees, Badger
- Publicly voted specie species is: TBC Consultation

Public Views

TBC Consultation

Action Plan

The action plan will be informed by the public consultation. With Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on the horizon and reduced budgets and limited staff capacity, actions proposed will provide scope to pursue different projects if/when funding and/or capacity becomes available. Many of the actions will be a continuation of the work being undertaken to ensure our statutory duties are being met. Delivery of actions will rely on collaboration and partnerships.

As a local authority we are already undertaking nature recovery as business as usual (BAU) through our work with the Countryside Team. We are not just delivering habitat creation and enhancement projects but delivering social value through our network of volunteers, sequestering carbon, and ensuring sustainable development though policy and the development management process.

KEY ACTIONS

- Partnership and governance convening partner (East Devon Nature Recovery Network).
- Consider and Align with Funding Opportunities.
- Data – recording and reporting including statutory Biodiversity Reporting.
- Taking a 'Natural Capital Approach'.
- Delivering social value and carbon reduction.
- Delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) ambitions.
- Facilitation of Habitat Banks in East Devon

Heathland

- SANG delivery strategy to mitigate impacts of development and recreational disturbance.
- Trinnity Hill Heathland Regeneration.
- Clyst Valley Regional Park

Wetlands

- Wild About Seaton Masterplan Implementation.
- Nutrient Neutrality Mitigation Strategy.

Woodlands

- Delivery of East Devon Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy (THaWS) Strategy.
- Offwell Woodland Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designation and delivery.

Grassland

- Significant SANG to be provided in major developments with large areas of grassland (Cranbrook, Marlcombe, Exmouth and North of Topsham).
- Species-rich grassland creation principles.
- Streetscene - Wildlife Improvement Policy delivery
- Knapp Coppse/Delderfield green hay expansion.

Urban fabric

- Collaboration, e.g., with town and parish councils, community action groups, EDDC departments.
- Master planning Marlcombe.
- Local Plan Policy Implementation

Appendix 1 EDDC Nature Recovery Network Report (February 2026)

Refer to separate report.

Appendix 2 EDDC 2023-2025 Biodiversity Reporting Duty Report

Refer to separate report.