

Countryside Matters



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CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

None of us have lived through times like these before.

Yet amongst all the tragedy and sorrow Covid-19 has caused, we have seen people pulling together to look after each other like never before.

The pandemic has demonstrated how valuable strong, sustainable rural communities are to the people who live and work in them.

Communities across the Estate have rallied round to support their most vulnerable members, as well as those in the caring professions on the medical front line.

Their efforts have been truly inspiring, and we at Clinton Devon Estates are pleased to be able to share just some of their stories in this edition of *Countryside Matters*.

Many of our own people are themselves key workers, and the teams at Clinton Dairies quickly adapted to working with social distancing so they could continue to help feed the nation - and supply fresh organic milk to the local community.

Farming and forestry too have continued to adapt and operate through the crisis, as indeed have all business areas across the Estate.

As we report in this edition, much work has been going on behind the scenes to ensure that as the lockdown eases and the crisis passes, the Estate and the local communities we operate within are as well prepared as they can be for whatever the future holds.

Inspiring stories show how communities have risen to Covid challenge

There is little doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on all of our lives, in many different ways.

During these difficult months, inspiring stories have emerged here in Devon of the wonderful efforts of local people to support each other through the crisis. The response of our communities has been quite remarkable, with residents and staff going above and beyond to help in any way they can.

Whether it's supporting those who are vulnerable or isolating, adjusting to new ways of working to keep businesses running, or simply providing a listening ear to those who may be struggling, at times like these we are reminded of the power of community.

We already know our county is a wonderful place to live, but what makes it so special is its people. As we take time to reflect on the past few months, we wanted to share some of the uplifting stories of how people have risen to the challenges this crisis has presented. We hope you enjoy reading about the amazing efforts of those who live and work here.

Social distancing down at the dairy

For the staff at Clinton Dairy, the main focus during the Covid-19 pandemic has been to keep the business running as usual, as much as possible. As supermarkets struggled to keep shelves stocked during the lockdown, Farms Manager Sam Briant-Evans and his team worked around the clock to ensure organic milk supplies were maintained.

The Clinton Devon Farms Partnership is a Clinton Devon Estates farming business which manages two organic dairy farms, Otter Farm and Dalditch Farm. A herd of 750 cows graze locally in East Devon producing 5.4 million litres of milk each year. This goes on to supply the firm Müller and the partnership's organic milk vending machine at Otterton Mill.

With strict government guidelines to follow relating to safety and hygiene, achieving social distancing in the milking parlour while caring for hundreds of dairy cows was always going to bring its own challenges. The Clinton Dairy team had to adapt their entire milking operation to ensure they could fulfil

essential criteria, while keeping up with growing demand.

Sam Briant-Evans explains: "We essentially had to split the milking parlour in half, with one member of the team at the very front and one at the back. Each looked after a section of the parlour, wiping the cows clean and putting the milking units on them as they came in. We do this twice a day and although it's different to how we normally do things, the team have adapted very well to it. We took all of the correct precautions and followed daily Government advice to ensure our teams were safe and protected at all times. We also follow strict hygiene and sanitisation protocols."

As the lockdown progressed, demand for the dairy's organic milk grew and sales at the Otterton Mill visitor centre vending machine doubled. The refrigerated machine was set up in an effort to reduce food miles, waste, and connect the farm with the local community. It's refilled daily and holds 100 litres of milk; customers can



Clinton Dairy in the lockdown

purchase a re-useable, recyclable glass bottle, or bring their own container.

In response to demand and to support the community, the Estate took the decision to reduce the price of one litre of organic milk from £1.50 to £1.

Sam said: "We knew there were many people who might be struggling to pick up basic supplies, including elderly residents who aren't necessarily able to travel, so we thought this would be a great way to support the community. This is fresh, organic milk that has been produced by cows grazing the local countryside and it's readily available and easy to get to. We want to ensure as many people as possible can access it and benefit at this difficult time."



Estate supervisor Roger Tinson with Dianne Nancekivell at Merton post office. Below, the Malt Scoop

Support network helps people most in need

As the UK lockdown came into effect on March 23rd, Clinton Devon Estates staff in North Devon knew how much of an impact it would have on local residents, many of whom are elderly or vulnerable.

In response, they decided to form a rural support network to help those people in the community who needed additional support to help them through the crisis. Led by supervisor Roger Tinson, the team took on a number of tasks to help tenants of properties located on the Heanton Estate in Merton, which is one of three estates owned and managed by Clinton Devon Estates.

Many of the elderly residents in Merton were having to stay at home for up to 12 weeks, as they followed government guidance. Roger and his colleagues swiftly stepped in to help, along with some of those tenants who were able to leave their homes and also wanted to contribute where they could. One of the main roles the team took on was to collect and deliver essential medication and food shopping.

Commenting on the community response, Roger Tinson says: "The network here is very good and we managed to get a good system going.

"Dianne at the post office fielded any enquiries or requests through to me and we were then able to get out to people and help wherever we could. It might have been picking up a prescription or some essential food shopping, or in some cases



providing a listening ear. Becky, the landlady of our local pub the Malt Scoop Inn, also set up a charity table outside, where people could drop off or collect any items or produce that they might need. The community spirit is very strong."

Roger says for many of the elderly residents in the village, a chance to simply have a chat, while observing social distancing guidelines, was one of the things they appreciated the most at the time.

He added: "That's what they were really missing, personal contact.

"For many of them, a bus trip to the shops is the highlight of their week and they missed that terribly. A lot of people forget not everyone has the internet so this can be really difficult for them. We will continue to do all we can for as long as we are needed."



Another fresh delivery

Tom takes to the road

Following the temporary closure of our Budleigh Salterton Farmers' Market, Wildlife Ranger Tom Garner wanted to find a way to still be able to reach people.

He decided to launch a home delivery service which would allow the community to buy our award winning Clinton Venison, which is usually sold at the monthly market.

Regular customers snapped up the range of venison sausages, burgers, roasting joints and steaks, which are popular for their flavoursome meat which is low in fat, high in protein and rich in essential minerals such as iron and vitamin B12.

Tom said: "A lot of our customers are elderly or were unable to leave their homes so the home delivery service is the perfect way for us to support them. I know most of our customers and many of them are like friends now, so it was fantastic to be able to take our services out on the road. I contacted our current customers to let them know our plans and we sold out almost immediately - sales went through the roof."

Clinton Venison is produced from wild deer from the Estate in East Devon. Wild deer numbers need to be managed for the good of the woodland and the health of the animals themselves.

Tom added: "We do everything in-house and our product is unique in that it's sold within a few miles of where it was culled and produced.

"We are not driven by demand as the meat we have available to sell can vary from month to month, dependent on the management of the deer. At the end of the day, it's a wild product we are selling."

Residents have come up trumps and gone above and beyond for the NHS

As Coronavirus changed life as we know it, residents in the East Devon village of Beer proved how their unbreakable community spirit would help them to cope with the crisis.

At the beginning of the UK lockdown, 35 residents stepped forward to become 'street co-ordinators', each taking on responsibility for a street or group of homes, supported by more than 100 volunteers.

They would make regular support calls to vulnerable people who were having to isolate, collect medication, drive people to medical appointments and deliver donated food and essential items.

Resident Lee Reeve's garage affectionately became known as 'Lee's Emporium', a place to drop off or collect donated items. It is community spirit like this which gained Beer the title of runner-up in Channel 4's Village of the Year in 2018.

Networker Annie Boalch of the Beer Action Group was one of the organisers. She said: "This crisis really has brought out the best in people and it's all of these amazing volunteers who made it happen."



Beer resident Sarah Taylor



Some of the Beer Men's Shed team who are growing vegetables on an allotment donated to them by Clinton Devon Estates

"We set up an online meeting hub which different groups such as the choir were able to gather in, while a weekly newsletter helped to keep everyone up-to-date on what was going on. Beer has such a good heart - we all know we are lucky to live here."

Those handy with a needle and thread were also busy with over 100 people helping to make more than 1,200 scrub bags for hospital, ambulance and care home staff. Scrubs are placed in the bags after a busy shift so they can be washed at a high temperature, while avoiding contamination with other clothes.

Another resident, Jean Bartlett, made masks for the street co-ordinators, in a project led by Kim Vine who runs The Cloth Shop.

Wendy Egerton, who co-ordinated the bag scheme, said: "We thought, what can we do that will make these wonderful people's lives safer and more comfortable at this time? The bags contain comforters which NHS staff can wear to prevent their ears getting sore from the masks they have to wear."

"We also include face creams, body lotions, perfume or aftershave as a little extra treat. Beer residents have come

up trumps and gone above and beyond for the NHS."

Another key focus of villagers has been to protect the mental health and well-being of residents at such a difficult time.

The lockdown forced the closure of the popular Beer Men's Shed, a community space for men to meet, converse and create things. Clinton Devon Estates stepped in to provide a rent-free allotment for the group, so they could continue to meet and work on a project, while maintaining social distancing guidelines.

Beer Men's Shed chairman Chris Pickles said: "There are many reasons why men come to the Shed, but one of its main aims is to help reduce loneliness and isolation."

"During the coronavirus crisis, feelings of isolation can be severe and I don't think you can overstate that. Clinton Devon Estates have been a fantastic support to us since we launched the Shed last year. This allotment, which they so generously donated, is perfect for us and it's in a super spot on the cliffs. We have been turning over the land in preparation for planting things. The idea is that fellas can come along and do what they want. That might be



Some of Beer's residents who are producing scrub bags and comforters. Above, from left are Heather Morley, Wendy Egerton, and Bramble and Leona Reeve. Right: Anne Boalch

picking up a gardening tool or simply stopping by for a chat over a cuppa."

Kate Ponting, Countryside Learning Officer at Clinton Devon Estates, said: "We already knew Beer was an amazing place and so many in the village pulled out the stops to help each other or by sewing for those further afield – their community spirit is everything!"

"The standout thing has been that, as well as meeting practical needs they have also been proactive in meeting the well-being needs of local people too.

"It has been so lovely to follow what is going on and see how the village has found ways to continue the social calendar, albeit at a distance, to ensure everyone can stay well connected and cared for."



ESTATE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES DURING THE CURRENT COVID-19 CRISIS

PROTECTING LIVES

ENSURING THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF OUR EMPLOYEES, THE CLINTON FAMILY AND WIDER COMMUNITY

- Working from home where possible
- Social distancing
- Supporting physical and mental wellbeing

INCREASING RESILIENCE

REDUCING THE IMPACT ON OUR BUSINESS AND ENHANCING OUR ABILITY TO RECOVER ONCE THE CRISIS IS OVER

- Supporting our people and our customers
- Security
- Organisational learning
- Investing in new ways of working

STOPPING AND SLOWING EVERYTHING ELSE

INTELLIGENTLY ALLOCATING OUR RESOURCES TO WHAT MOST MATTERS

- Deferring activity where savings can be achieved without undermining our core business

RECOGNISING WHAT IS IMPORTANT

KEEPING OUR FOCUS ON THE REAL PRIORITIES

- Producing food and timber
- Providing safe spaces for our tenants to live and work
- Fulfilling our statutory responsibilities
- A positive cashflow and managing risk
- Improving environmental outcomes

DOING OUR PART FOR WIDER SOCIETY

SEEKING TO HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THOSE DISADVANTAGED

- Providing resources from the Estate and Charitable Trust
- Supporting Government agencies and Local Authorities
- Supporting individual employees who wish to help others during the crisis

STAY SAFE STAY HOME



CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

clintondevon.com



Estates' essential forestry work continues during Covid-19 crisis

While the UK was in lockdown during the coronavirus crisis, essential timber harvesting work continued at Clinton Devon Estates to maintain vital supplies to industry.

Those involved in the supply chain of wood for key goods were designated as key workers, and the forestry team at Clinton Devon Estates were working hard to keep the business running as usual.

John Wilding, Head of Forestry and Energy for the Estate, says: "UK Forestry is critical in the supply of a number of products and that is especially clear at this time. It's the everyday items which are in greater demand that can easily be taken for granted. As soon as loads are at the forest roadside ready for collection, they are gone.

"Our timber goes on to supply manufacturers, sawmills and wood processing industries to make vital products such as packaging, biomass fuel and pallets for transporting goods that are moved by lorry, including medicines and food. These are all important items but with pallet wood in particular it is imperative we keep that supply chain going. The run on supermarkets saw an

unprecedented demand for pallets, as stores were restocked, which stretched the sawmill supply chain"

The Estate's 1,900 hectares of sustainable, high quality and multi-purpose woodlands deliver bio-diversity, recreational and landscape benefits, alongside the production of timber. Managed woodlands account for 17% of the Estate area in East and North Devon, comprising a rich mixture of both commercial conifers and native broadleaved species, which provide a wide range of habitats for many plants and animal species.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the forestry team have had to adapt their working routines to ensure they are meeting social distancing guidelines.

John said: "There have had to be changes made for everyone's safety. For example, one of our sub-contractors is alternating his time between two vehicles so only one person is needed onsite. He'll drive the harvester some of the time, and then the forwarder, which transports the felled logs to a roadside collection point. Chainsaw use has also been minimised to reduce the risks even further."

Solving the rural housing crisis: a landowner's legacy

Large rural estates have a pivotal role to play in easing Britain's rural housing crisis. For Devon's largest private landowner, Clinton Devon Estates, supporting the growth of sustainable communities has driven their business approach for generations.

Recent statistics published by the Institute for Public Policy Research show the average rural house price is around £87,000 more than the urban average and just eight per cent of housing stock is affordable compared with 20 per cent in urban areas.

In the 1800s landowner Mark Rolle, the current Lord Clinton's predecessor, was behind the building of many farms and cottages which still define the character of East and North Devon today. His legacy lives on in Clinton Devon Estates, a land and property management company responsible for 25,000 acres, run by a professional estate management team who promote and support sustainable development, a vibrant rural economy and space for nature and recreation.

Leigh Rix has been Head of Property and Land for Clinton Devon Estates for more than a decade and explains that the Estate's business approach is all about producing a balanced scorecard. He says: "The family, trustees and executive team at the Estate believe that it's not only possible for landowners to be part of the solution to the rural housing crisis, but that it can be done in a way that supports society and respects the environment.

"With the government's pledge to build a million new homes in the next five years, there's a real opportunity for rural landowners to promote responsible development.

"A sustainable community is one that respects the history and landscape of a location, while incorporating features to meet the population's future needs and we need to be providing the right kind of homes in the right places for a variety of ages, needs and incomes.

"We regard our developments as legacy projects, and the team keeps a close eye on the quality, design, energy efficiency and connectivity of all new homes built by the Estate. What one community needs may be different to another, so we place great emphasis on fully understanding their priorities and concerns."

A scheme for 48 homes in the seaside town of Budleigh Salterton came to fruition in 2015,



Mark Rolle, 1835–1907

delivering 40% affordable housing including social rented and shared ownership. From the outset of the project the Estate team formed a partnership with Cornerstone Housing Association to ensure the proposals were developed around the needs of local residents.

Leigh Rix recalls: "On day one of the public exhibition, the first people through the doors of the Public Hall at 9 o'clock were young parents keen to know how they could put their names down for one of the affordable new homes."

Providing affordable housing was central to the project in a town renowned as much for its Arts and Crafts architecture as it is for its attraction to retirees. But there was a sticking point. The proposed site was situated on land used for allotments which the Estate had leased to the town council for many years.

Initial concerns were alleviated when a much-improved and expanded network of fruit and vegetable patches was included in the masterplan for the two-and-a-half-acre site. The number of plots was increased from 56 to 87, reducing the long waiting list for allotments. New sheds and water supplies were also installed.

The designs followed extensive consultation with allotment holders, town councillors and local residents, resulting in a clear understanding of local priorities. The Horizon development went on to win the national What House? Award for Best Partnership Project recognising the efforts of



Estate land wa

the Estate, the affordable the Devon-based homebu

The Estate team is keen to communities wherever p councillors in the East De Beer - Channel 4's Village 2018 - issued a call for la Clinton Devon Estates pl residents in the Neighbou

The site is adjacent to 10 provided to English Rural the Estate in 2004 for aff people. There will be 30 r development in Beer, 13 allocated as affordable.

On a much larger scale, P a 264-home joint venture Wimpey, delivering 25% a through social housing pr



s identified in the Beer Neighbourhood Plan for new homes

housing provider and builder Cavanna Homes. To support its possible, and when parish Devon fishing village of e of the Year runner-up in and for new homes, a ot was selected by local urhood Plan. homes, on land Housing Association by rdable housing for local new homes on the new of which are being

Plumb Park in Exmouth is with homebuilder Taylor affordable housing provider Live West. It is

the Estate's most ambitious development project to date and is designed around a hilltop park, known locally as Donkey Hill. The scheme incorporates space for allotments and orchards and provides pedestrian and cycle links, connecting the development to the town, a retail and business park and the coast. It will produce a biodiversity net gain through new hedgerows, wildlife corridors and extensive grass planting.

Clinton Devon Estates' development company Littleham 2010 speculated over half-a-million-pounds on surveys and reports to inform a planning application to East Devon District Council, without any guarantees of winning consent. Mr Rix recalls: "Planning consent was granted in 2015 and the first homeowners moved-in in 2018. It was a long and costly journey from concept to delivery and it takes a strong vision, determination and a professional team to stay focused on the goal which has always been to



Plumb Park in Exmouth



New bungalows in Merton

deliver a legacy project that will contribute significant social and ecological benefits."

In contrast to East Devon, the housing need in the North Devon village of Merton was for smaller properties for the retired generation. The Estate responded by building four, two-bedroom bungalows to enable some long-standing tenants to downsize into comfortable, manageable homes, while freeing up larger properties for families.

Although the Merton homes have been retained by the Estate, generally the team acquires the planning consent for its schemes and either sells the sites with consent to local housing developers, or looks for a joint venture agreement. When contemplating schemes, landowners and developers alike must work within the parameters set by local authorities which determine the percentage of affordable homes required. Back in East Devon, for example, in Sir Walter Raleigh's home village of East Budleigh, the council specified that a site recently put forward by the Estate requires 66 per cent affordable housing, resulting in planning consent for three social homes and two open market properties.

Ideally, the Estate would like to prioritise rural key workers, such as those in agriculture, forestry or conservation, for its rural affordable housing, but it does not have the freedom to select its tenants on new developments where the affordable housing allocation is agreed as part of a planning consent.

Mr Rix concludes: "While the Estate's trustees would like to provide much more affordable housing for rural key workers, the current rules inhibit us from doing so. Britain's rural communities will only be truly sustainable if we can prioritise rural affordable housing stock for those who also work in the countryside."



Pebblebed Heaths are providing space for exercise when people need it most

Kate Ponting, the Clinton Devon Estates' Countryside Learning Officer, has never seen so many visitors drawn to the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths

For many local people, the commons are the go-to place for regular "air and exercise".

The value of this space – to escape from a troubled world, clear the head and experience nature – has become even more important since the Coronavirus outbreak.

The health and wellbeing value of the Pebblebed Heaths has long been recognised.

Work undertaken by Exeter University in 2018 estimated that the heaths receive more than 400,000 visits annually.

Thanks to the amount of exercise visitors enjoy, the economic value of the heaths to people's health and wellbeing has been calculated at more than £450,000.

As the lockdown eased, Clinton Devon Estates were committed to keeping the heaths as accessible as possible,

to allow daily exercise for local communities, if safe to do so, an approach fully supported by the local police.

The period between mid-April to mid-May was probably the busiest month ever seen on the commons. The Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust (PHCT) team carefully monitored the situation and were prepared to close the car parks across the commons, should government advice or public behaviour dictate that this was necessary.

Fortunately, it hasn't been, but visitor numbers remain unusually high.

Up-to-date information posters are displayed in car parks, reminding the public of government messages on how to keep safe, along with specific messages relevant to exercising on heathland.

The commons are sufficiently large with generous enough car parking that it is possible for the site to accommodate large numbers of visitors spread throughout the day without undermining the rules on social distancing. However, if a car park is overcrowded, we would encourage visitors to use one of the many alternatives.



The Coronavirus outbreak has also introduced many new people to countryside areas for the first time, with riverside footpaths and other walking and cycling routes also seeing increased use.

This presents an opportunity to encourage a wider appreciation of the landscape, but occasionally a few reminders are necessary as well. After such a long, dry spell, fire continues to represent the biggest risk to wildlife and visitor safety on the commons and would also have devastating impact should it threaten woodland, farmland or rural properties.

Barbeques and other fires are not permitted in the countryside – and all litter must be taken home.

The Otter Estuary is also managed by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust team. This wildlife area supports significant populations of bird species with its reed-beds an important breeding site during the warmer months. Keeping dogs under control, noise down and stopping at the viewing platforms and bird hide, is actively encouraged, which ensures that recreation and wildlife don't conflict.

When the Otter Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest was first designated in the 1980s, paddle boarding was yet to become widespread in popularity.

Kayaks and canoes were occasionally seen on the estuary, but it is only in the last few years that activity of this sort has reached levels that are likely to have a more significant impact on the site's wildlife.

As elsewhere, there is a Public Right of Navigation on tidal waters.

This includes seas, estuaries and tidal rivers – up to their historic Normal Tidal Limit, which on the Otter is close to White Bridge.

Launching within the reserve, including from Lime Kilns or the Donkey's Turn is not permitted. Access is from the beach only.

Our staff have supplemented the existing signage, including some at the bottom of the reserve, to make the significance of the site clear and help visitors make responsible choices.

Keep at least 2m
from anyone not from
your household



Keep car park entrances
and tracks clear for
large emergency
vehicles



If the car park is
full please use an
alternative one;
don't park on roadside
verges

If you touch gates or
dog bins wear gloves
or clean your hands



If you don't want
to use the dog waste
bins provided, please
take the waste
home

Please help us keep people safe and care for the heaths

PEBBLEBED HEATHS VISITOR GUIDANCE

Keep dogs under
close control at all
times & do not allow
them to approach
other people



Never have
a BBQ or fire



Do not camp overnight
in a tent or van

Follow the Pebblebed
Dog, Bike and Horse
codes

<https://bit.ly/2YZcy0y>



To keep up to date with news from the
heath follow us on facebook. To report
any site problems please call 07976062715
or email mail@pebblebedheaths.org.uk



Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper, left, with Clinton Devon Estates' John Wilding

Natural England Chair hails results of Otter beaver trial

Tony Juniper, the chair of Natural England, visited Clinton Devon Estates to see for himself what impacts beavers are having on the local countryside.

The Estates are a partner in the River Otter Beaver Trial, along with the Devon Wildlife Trust, the University of Exeter and the Derek Gow Consultancy.

Beavers were discovered on the River Otter near Ottery St Mary in 2008, the first breeding wild beavers to be found in England for 400 years, and in 2014 Natural England approved a five-year monitoring trial of the beavers.

How they got there remains a mystery. At the beginning of the trial there were two families in the Otter but there are now known to be eight family groups living along the river.

The trial has now been extended until the Autumn to allow more time for the results to be studied by Defra and Natural England.

The River Otter Beaver Trial Science and Evidence Report found that the mammals bring 'measurable benefits to people and wildlife'. It concludes that other wildlife has greatly benefitted from the beavers' presence, while their dam building activities have also helped reduce the risk of flooding to some flood threatened communities.

A family of beavers have constructed six dams upstream of East Budleigh, with the result that peak flood flows through the village have been measurably and significantly reduced.

Mr Juniper said: "It is fantastic to see the successful reintroduction of these wonderful and fascinating creatures.

Natural England has licensed this trial and I commend the work of the Devon Wildlife Trust in helping to show how beavers can have such a transformative positive impact on the natural world, while at the same time bringing practical benefits for people.

"This is a massive step towards boosting the richness of wildlife around the River Otter, reducing pollution, mitigating flooding and making this landscape more resilient to climate change."

Dr Sam Bridgewater from the Estates said: "The beavers have proved to be a welcome addition to the local wildlife and their ecological impacts have been very positive. Most of the time you would never know they were there until you came across a dam or were lucky enough to spot one in the water or on the riverbank.

"The study found that with careful and considerate management, beavers and humans can happily live side by side. There has been a small number of incidents where they have had a negative impact on agricultural drainage, for instance.

"Generally, farmers like water to flow away quickly from their fields, whereas beavers like to dam it up so they have deeper, slower-flowing water to inhabit. All the issues such as this have been overcome thanks to the goodwill of local farmers."

The full report can be found on the [University of Exeter website](#).

Plans for future of Lower Otter estuary to go on show online

Proposals to restore the Otter Estuary to a more natural condition, closer to that which existed two hundred years ago, will be submitted to East Devon District councillors later this year following the approval of a major funding bid.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project has been awarded around £8.5 million as part of Project PACCo – Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts. The Otter Estuary is one of two pilot sites for PACCo: the other is in the Saône Valley in Normandy.

PACCo has a budget of €25.7m, including €17.8m from the European Regional Development Fund via the Interreg France (Channel) England Programme.

The funding will support the Lower Otter Restoration Project's aims of climate change adaptation by working with natural processes to provide benefits for people and wildlife. Sea defences at the mouth of the River Otter, built 200 years ago to claim fresh farmland from the sea, along with other man-made alterations to the river over the centuries, mean the Otter is no longer as naturally connected with its floodplain as it once was.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project was conceived in 2013 to recreate a more ecologically healthy environment in the face of more extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels expected under climate change. There is a significant risk that a major flood or extreme tidal event could lead to catastrophic failure of embankments, with unpredictable environmental and social impacts. Recent years have seen part of the South West Coast Path that runs along the embankments closed to the public for significant periods due to erosion caused by such events.



Dr Sam Bridgewater

Funding for the £12 million Lower Otter Restoration Project is also being provided by landowners Clinton Devon Estates and the Environment Agency.

Dr Sam Bridgewater, head of Wildlife and Conservation at Clinton Devon Estates, said: "The European funding approval is a major milestone for the project and we are on the verge of another as we are submitting our final planning application to East Devon District Council for consideration.

"Before the coronavirus emergency we had planned to hold an exhibition in Budleigh Salterton so that local people could see the latest proposals. Because that's no longer possible we will host a virtual exhibition on the project website once the planning application documents are ready.

"To reach this point the project partners have consulted extensively with the local community over the last seven years, with their input and responses helping us shape the direction of the restoration project.

"To continue with this community involvement, we would like as many



people as possible to visit the online exhibition. Together with the Environment Agency we will be happy to answer any questions people may have about the planning application and proposals.

"East Devon District Council, the local planning authority, will consider the views of local people as part of its normal planning process, which will include formal means to comment on the application. The proposals will also be available to view on the council's planning website in due course.

"If the council approves the proposals, we will be able to give a clearer idea of when the construction would be likely to start and finish - at the moment we think it would take about two years."

The benefits of the project include:

- A more ecologically healthy estuary by reconnecting the river to its floodplain



The Lower Otter meets the sea at Budleigh Salterton

New pitch proposals approved

Plans for a new home for Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club as part of the wider Lower Otter Restoration Project have been approved.

The proposals were drawn up on behalf of landowner Clinton Devon Estates in conjunction with the cricket club.

The planning application, approved by East Devon District Council, includes a main cricket square, junior pitch, single-storey timber-clad pavilion, and equipment store.

The 3.5-hectare site, currently largely agricultural land, is on the northern edge of the town off the B3178 East Budleigh Road.

The new main cricket square would include 13 wickets, one of which would be an artificial surface, and the project has been designed to meet the requirements of both the club and the ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board).

Dr Sam Bridgewater, from the Lower Otter Restoration Project, said: "Should the Lower Otter Restoration Project proceed, a new home will need to be found for Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club, a long-term tenant of Clinton Devon Estates.

"The project is proposing a way of managing the Lower Otter estuary in a more sustainable way, which would involve restoring large parts of the land around the mouth of the river to a more natural, wetland environment. This would improve the local ecology, and help the Otter Valley respond more naturally to the effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels and more extreme weather.

"Should the project proceed - and we do not yet have all the necessary permissions in place - it would also involve finding a new home for the cricket club.

"We know that a good cricket pitch takes a long time to be ready for play. We applied for permission for the new ground when we did so that, if the wider project were to go ahead, the facility would be ready for its new occupants in good time."

Should the wider Lower Otter Restoration Project proceed, the club could be looking forward to being able to move in for the start of the 2022 season.

This would mark a big change for the cricket club, having played at Ottermouth since the 1930s but it would provide a facility that could benefit the local community all year round.

- The creation of approximately 60 hectares of rare inter-tidal and wetland habitat which would attract a wide range of wildlife
- Improved public access, including securing the future of the South West Coast Path along its current route
- Preventing potential pollution from a former landfill tip through erosion
- Securing access for nearby residents and businesses, particularly along South Farm Road
- Securing a long-term future for Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club.

Dr Bridgewater added: "We already have planning permission to provide a new home for Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club, off East Budleigh Road. The existing facilities are frequently impacted by flooding. We will be in a

position to implement this move if permission is also approved for the wider project. The wider PACCo initiative is also supporting similar proposals in the Saâne Valley in Normandy.

"As the projects develop, we hope that other coastal areas facing similar issues will be able to learn from the work we have done and better understand their own options in the face of a rapidly changing climate."

Mike Williams, from the Environment Agency, said: "PACCo is an extremely exciting project, which will deliver real benefits for people and wildlife on the ground, and help others to build on our success elsewhere. We must all find ways of adapting to climate change if we are to manage our estuaries and coasts successfully in the future."

The project website can be found at: lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk



Bicton Arena could host the Bicton Horse Trials (2) in July, subject to the easing of Covid-19 restrictions

Getting back in the saddle

Helen West, the Bicton Arena Manager, looks forward to being able to welcome back competitive sport here in July

Based on "Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's Covid-19 recovery strategy", we are working towards being able to recommence competitive sport from 4th July. With this in mind we have much to plan, without even considering the additional Covid-19 measures we will need to put in place. I thought it might be interesting to explain a little about what goes on behind the scenes prior to running a Horse Trials at Bicton Arena. To do this, I will take a look back to earlier this year when we were all stations go prior to our April event.

In March I put out cross country fences and set the tracks for Bicton (1) Horse Trials. This is one of my favourite parts of my job as course designing is one of my passions. I usually have a pretty good idea of what I will be designing as I have spent endless hours watching fences and pieces of ground ride, as well as walking different bits of ground and looking for new ideas. I then go for a walk with my trusty "Cross Country App" which maps my route and I can simply drop a pin at each point I envisage having an obstacle. I then sit down with my laptop and edit the tracks.

Once I've established where I am going, what the distance will be and the number of jumping efforts, I make fence lists. Whilst I am formulating these lists, the danger is that I start getting creative and inventing new fences which need to be built!

When I meet Matt Lynch, my cross country builder, with the telehandler to physically place the fences, if I realise

that something will not work, I will change it. This is one of the things I feel very strongly about as a course designer; you must keep your mind open. Placing the cross country fences is something I really enjoy. I am not so sure Matt does, as apparently I can be quite demanding. If I want it moved two inches to the left and then change my mind and go six inches to the right, this is not unheard of!

I love the ideas that come into my head when I am out in the park placing fences. This is something that will never happen behind a laptop screen. I am so spoilt at Bicton as the Grade I Listed parkland is so beautiful and we are blessed with topography and natural features that other venues do not possess. It does however mean I have to be more mindful of where fences are situated. The inclines and declines can make a big difference and the other thing I must be very mindful of is running across a camber. It is really unbalancing to run on a horizontal slope, especially for the younger horses and less experienced riders.

Dressing the fences is one of my favourite parts of the build process. A relatively boring, bland fence can look entirely different with greenery, flowers and props. It is also an essential course design tool as we can help horses judge their take off point with appropriate colour to provide face edge visibility, dressing and trees in their eye line. Wood coloured edges have very little visibility for horses, so you will often see that we have painted the leading edge blue or cream (which they pick out well).

I have focussed on cross country course design here, given that one of the first events we look set to recommence with will be Bicton Horse Trials (2). It seems fitting to give an insight into what I look set to be doing again shortly, providing the easing of restrictions continues in the way it is expected.

Ben and Sam join the team at Clinton Devon Estates

Clinton Devon Estates has strengthened its senior management team with the appointment of Ben Rudkin as Chief of Staff and Sam Briant-Evans as Farms Manager of the Clinton Devon Farms Partnership.

The land and property business, with headquarters at Bickton Arena in East Budleigh, owns and manages 25,000 acres of land across North and East Devon.

Both Ben and Sam will be supporting Clinton Devon Estates' 2030 strategy which focuses on delivering a range of environmental, business and community initiatives to generate a vibrant and sustainable future in the county and beyond.

Estates Director John Varley said: "With declarations of climate emergency and a growing need to achieve a carbon net zero future, large rural estates such as ours have the ability to deliver ever-more effective landscape scale projects that can make a real difference to the environment and to the people who live and work in our rural communities.

"From traditional activities such as farming and forestry to looking at new ways of generating sustainable and renewable energy and providing space for nature and for people to enjoy, we want to lead the way in this new era," he added.

Ben brings a wealth of experience in operations and business improvement and management. He said: "Increasing operational efficiency and a focus on continuous improvement has been a key element of my previous roles, and something I intend to focus on as we continue to drive the business forward.

"We have an exciting agenda in place, which focuses on land use, good governance and investment for the future. Bringing together the extensive skills and experience of the Estate team will enable us to deliver our ambitious strategy over the coming years," he added.

Sam Briant-Evans will manage the Clinton Devon Farm Partnership's two organic dairy farms in East Devon, Otter farm and Dalditch farm, where a herd of 750 cows graze locally and produce 5.4million litres of milk each year.

Sam said: "I am looking forward to managing a profitable family business in a way that's sustainable and in touch with the environment.

"At a pivotal time for the industry, we are working towards achieving the government's objectives to reward farmers for the public benefits they provide.

"As an Estate, we are well placed to get involved in our communities with the various initiatives we lead on and will look forward to learning more about the funding available," he added.

Sam is employed by Europe's leading farming company Velcourt Limited, which was appointed by The Estate in 2017 to manage the farm's operations.



Clinton Devon Estates Chief of Staff Ben Rudkin, above, and Farms Manager Sam Briant-Evans, below





CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

Rolle Estate Office,
Bicton Arena,
East Budleigh,
Budleigh Salterton,
Devon EX9 7BL

mail@clintondevon.com