

The Lower Otter Restoration Project

Briefing for
councillors

December 2020

For further information visit

www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk



CLINTON DEVON ESTATES



Pebblebed Heaths
CONSERVATION TRUST



Environment
Agency

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THE Lower Otter Restoration Project was established in 2014 to address the challenges of climate change and failing sea defences in the lower River Otter. Risks include rising sea levels, greater intensity of storms and more frequent flood flows in the river, all increasing over-topping and erosion of the embankments and likelihood of failure.

Over the past seven years, the Environment Agency, the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust and Clinton Devon Estates have worked alongside a stakeholder group of representatives from East Devon District Council, Budleigh Salterton Town Council, Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club, Colaton Raleigh Parish Council, Devon County Council, East Budleigh with Bicton Parish Council, East Devon AONB, Natural England, Otterton Parish Council, Otter Valley Association, Granary Lane residents and South West Water to examine the benefits and practicalities of realigning the estuary with its natural floodplain.

In September 2020, a planning application was lodged with East Devon District Council seeking consent to breach the River Otter embankment, Little Bank and Big Bank in a managed way, reconnecting the natural floodplain, creating intertidal saltmarsh, mudflats and freshwater habitat at Big Marsh, and new freshwater habitat at Little Marsh. Work associated with the application includes the development of a new footbridge, raising South Farm Road and provision of formal car parking. The Budleigh Brook will be released from its aqueduct and realigned in the floodplain.

It is to be expected that a project of this scale and significance will generate a large number of comments to the local planning authority, as well as in the media, online and through direct representations to parish, town and district councillors.

Many of these comments have touched on the desirability of the scheme and what it should or

should not be delivering. The notes below reference and respond to some of the concerns raised to date during the planning application process, and complement the pre-existing Frequently Answered Questions (FAQs) produced by the project team (Appendix 1) and available on the project website.

The FAQs also try to highlight the importance of the decision that is about to be made, what will be potentially gained or lost as a result of it, and the reality of the future of the lower Otter valley if the scheme doesn't proceed.

What is this project really about?

At its heart this project is about adaptation to climate change and strongly supports national and local policies related to preparing for inevitable change. This includes East Devon's Climate Change Strategy (priorities 6,7,8,9 &10) and Devon's Climate Emergency Declaration (points 2,4,7 & 9) (Appendix 2).

It is recognised nationally and internationally that coastal communities must adapt as sea levels rise and storm events become more frequent, as we have seen in the South West. It is broadly accepted that the current generation has a moral obligation to protect the interests of those who will follow.

The UK Government's recent policy statement sets out a long-term ambition to create a nation more resilient to future flood and coastal erosion risk and is supported by the Environment Agency's National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy, which has a long-term vision of a nation ready

for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project will:

- Improve the ecological functionality of the river and allow it to adapt to climate change;
- Restore some of the UK's most biologically important and threatened wetland habitats;
- Ensure the long-term viability of Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club;
- Protect a threatened South West Water combined sewage outfall;
- Safeguard access for walkers along part of the South West Coast Path;
- Raise a public highway so it is not threatened by tidal inundation;
- Reduce modifications in the lower Otter valley;
- Protect an old municipal tip, situated in the floodplain, from erosion;
- Reconnect the Budleigh Brook and the lower River Otter to their natural floodplains.

What are the alternatives?

We recognise that the lower Otter valley is already much loved, scenic and biologically rich. However, in the likely absence of very substantial public funding to raise and protect the 200-year-old embankment in perpetuity there are only two alternatives for the valley's future.

The first is the current proposal: a managed transition to inter-tidal habitat with community assets protected to the best of our ability and protected species impacts and habitat losses mitigated.

The second is an unmanaged transition to inter-tidal habitat with none of these protections in place.

Acting too late, or not acting at all, in the face of climate change will be more costly to East Devon and its communities than early action.

The change from a tree-rich pastoral landscape to an estuarine one will not be to everyone's

liking. However, the change is inevitable. The reality of this is evidenced from a near catastrophic breach to the embankment in autumn 2018. Without the last-minute intervention of the Environment Agency the bank would have failed and the lower Otter valley and its infrastructure, Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club, agricultural land and South Farm Road would already be tidal. In addition, access along one of Devon's busiest footpaths would likely have ended. This is the reality the valley faces.

The timing imperative

Although coastal communities throughout the UK have been challenged to adapt to climate change, adaptation is difficult and costly; schemes are not progressing as quickly as they need to. Arriving at consensus, change acceptance, change management and resolving complex problems caused by the management decisions of past generations is notoriously problematic. This project is only possible because of a unique combination of three factors:

- 1) There is a single willing landowner,
- 2) The Environment Agency has a legal requirement to provide compensatory habitat related to flood defence works on the Exe Estuary and hence has been able to invest in the costly technical investigations required to assess the feasibility of the scheme,
- 3) The availability of time-limited European Interreg funding that makes the project financially feasible to deliver. Despite Brexit, European funding will be honoured if the scheme is able to begin imminently and be completed by March 2023.

Phasing of project works is tight and complicated. Any delay in initiation past spring 2021 and the scheme will not be able to meet its commitments to the European funder. It may therefore not progress at all. This is a time constraint placed on the project by the funding programme and not the project partners.

The Interreg funding scheme officially closes at the end of June 2023, with all project work to be completed by end March 2023. Work must begin spring 2021 to meet those deadlines, which means the planning application needs to be approved by January 2021.

What will happen if the scheme doesn't begin spring 2021?

The Environment Agency's legal obligation to provide compensatory habitat for maintaining and improving flood defences around the Exe Estuary will remain, but local alternatives have been exhausted and the likely scenario is that localities beyond East Devon will be investigated. In this eventuality, the known risks and impact of unmanaged climate change in the Otter Valley must be accepted by society.

In the event of a breach of the embankment in the lower Otter valley the Environment Agency would not have a statutory duty to repair it. Local authorities and communities would therefore need to prepare for this eventuality.

Most likely we would see a very wet, tidally inundated and poorly drained area with more limited biodiversity value. Access and infrastructure would be severely disrupted.

What about parking and traffic?

Lack of parking has long been recognised as an issue in a number of villages associated with the Otter Valley, including Otterton. There have been concerns voiced that the project will worsen the situation and result, for example, in an increase in parking at Otterton with comparisons made between the Lower Otter Restoration Project and the development of Seaton Wetlands. The latter has resulted in a demonstrable increase of visitors to Seaton. However, to directly compare the Otter with the Axe is not appropriate.

Seaton Wetlands were intended by EDDC to be an attraction, hence the construction of covered bird hides, education and visitor

centres. There was little infrastructure on site to begin and the site was developed with the specific intention of creating an attraction for both locals and those from further afield. It is also highly promoted as it was designed to be part of Seaton's regeneration and has been marketed as such.

Unlike Seaton, designs for the Lower Otter Restoration Project have purposefully not created significant new visitor infrastructure such as education and visitor centres. It will not make the lower Otter an additional *draw above what it is already*. There will be viewing platforms only. It has also been designed so that access will be encouraged to be from EDDC's very significant Lime Kiln car park at Budleigh Salterton, closest to the largest area of restored estuarine habitat.

The South West Coast Path is already busy – one of the busiest in Devon – and the lower Otter valley site, the Jurassic Coast and Budleigh Beach are already much loved and visited. The project is adapting the valley to a rapidly changing climate and changing the habitats present. It will take around five years for the full range of inter-tidal habitats to develop. The site will have greatest wildlife interest in the winter months. In the long term, any new visitors will be attracted to the site during the winter months when Lime Kiln car park has significant capacity.

In the middle of the scheme there is currently informal parking on the verge of South Farm Road and also parking illegally encroaching into the Otter Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to the east of the river. The former disrupts agricultural and business traffic; the latter degrades the statutory features of the conservation site.

As part of the scheme, existing informal parking will be replaced by formal parking with a similar capacity, as compared with pre-2020 levels, reducing the impact on the SSSI and to road traffic. Statements have recently appeared saying that such parking provision is insufficient

based on parking counts conducted during the Covid outbreak. Such a baseline comparison is not reasonable. During 2020 every single car park related to green space throughout the UK has been under unprecedented pressure. This is not an indicator of longer-term use.

Otterton Parish Council is requesting that the scheme resolves its existing parking problem through the provision of additional car parks. However, the scheme is not creating a visitor attraction, but modifying an existing one. Land to the west of Otterton has been highlighted by the parish council as being suitable. This lies within a functional floodplain and parking there would no longer be considered appropriate, for ecological, water management and health and safety reasons. Even summer seasonal parking would not be safe; the infamous Boscastle flood, for example, was during the summer and the Otter valley is known to flood at all times of the year. There is currently no safe pedestrian access into Otterton from west of the river over Otterton Bridge.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project has endeavoured to resolve many of the existing issues facing the lower Otter valley resulting from climate change. However, it cannot reasonably be expected to resolve existing shortcomings in visitor infrastructure outside its remit and which it is not exacerbating.

From the beginning of the scheme parking at Otterton has always been considered outside of scope by the project team, with this view being recorded in the Stakeholder Group meeting minutes. At no time has there been a promise to resolve existing parking issues at Otterton.

However, Clinton Devon Estates is on record as being committed to working with the parish council and other authorities to see what solutions might be possible outside of the project. This will not be simple due to suitable limited land availability outside the floodplain. Most land is also under long term pre-existing occupation.

The causes of the problem are also complex and include issues relating to Ladram Bay, residential parking on the street as opposed to driveways, the popularity of Otterton Mill, the presence of beavers and the existing popularity of river walks. If a solution is possible it could involve the use of existing green space within or adjacent to the village. This will impact on residents. Regardless, any such consideration should include EDDC and DCC and take a long-term view of sustainable transport in the area. A simple ready-made solution to the west of the village is not ecologically appropriate, safe or within the gift of the project to deliver. The correct solution may also not rest with the landowner. It could include such concepts as park and ride facilities and improved public transport.

Consultation

The scheme has also been criticised for a lack of engagement and consultation. We believe our intention to communicate and engage has been genuine, prolonged, transparent and thorough with actions taken to promote the planning application evidenced in Appendix 3. The project website saw more than 2,000 new visitors between October 7 and November 20, 2020. In addition, the Non-Technical Summary of the Environment Statement outlines some of the key consultation events held. Of these, the Stakeholder Group has been particularly important.

Appendix 1: Frequently asked questions with responses

Produced by Environment Agency, the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths and Clinton Devon Estates

Q1. What does the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) involve?

A1: The project will restore the Lower Otter Valley to more natural conditions, closer to those that existed two hundred years ago. The restored site will require less future management against the impacts of climate change.

To achieve this we will make a 70-metre breach in the embankment that currently separates agricultural land and Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club from the river and estuary. With the embankment breached, land in the floodplain as far north as Big Bank (and up to Little Bank on bigger spring tides) will flood at high tide, draining again at low tide.

This will create approximately 55 hectares of mudflat and saltmarsh, and create a new wildlife reserve of international conservation value. The breach in the embankment will be bridged to allow continued access along the South West Coast Path. Improved and raised access will also be created on the footpath on the western edge of the marsh below South Farm Road (this is currently part of a planning permission granted to FAB Link). The western footpath above South Farm will be subject to flooding on some spring tides. South Farm Road will be re-aligned to the south and raised to safeguard the future access of the businesses and residents of the South farm community.

An old refuse tip which currently lies in the floodplain and presents an environmental liability will be protected from erosion, with an additional pedestrian access route also

created. This will replace the impassable and disused existing public right of way spur immediately south of the tip. Further sections of the embankments known as Big Bank and Little Bank will be lowered to allow floodwater to pass and better connect the River Otter to its floodplain.

Under the scheme Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club will be relocated to a new site outside the floodplain (this is covered by a separate planning application, which has already been approved).

Q2. Why are you doing this?

A2: Although much loved in its current form the Lower Otter Valley is heavily modified by human hand. Several embankments, a road, a disused municipal tip, an aqueduct and an old railway line are artificial structures restricting natural processes and water flow. They are becoming ever more difficult and expensive to maintain, impede the ability for flood water to ebb and flow and reduce habitat quality and biodiversity. The River Otter itself is now disconnected from its floodplain.

Current climate scenarios predict a rise in sea level of between 1.01m and 1.35m by 2117 and increasing storminess with flood flows in the river becoming more frequent. This is causing more frequent over-topping and erosion and is likely to lead to embankment failure. In 2018, for example, the embankment was within one tidal cycle of breaching catastrophically and it was only due to rapid and expensive public agency interventions that it was repaired. The footpath was closed for six months during those repairs.

At present, ground to the west of the embankment mainly drains to the sea through a pipe that takes flow from the 'trunk drain' at the west side of the floodplain. This

ends close to the low tide mark on the beach and is prone to blocking with shingle. The outfall is regularly cleared, but sea level rise will make clearance harder in the future. Another small outfall drains into the estuary but this is at a higher level and is frequently tidelocked.

This project recognizes these risks and seeks to deliver a more sustainable way forward by adapting to climate change and managing the area by working with natural processes, rather than trying to control them. As a result we believe the project can deliver real benefits for wildlife and societal health and wellbeing.

Q3. When will work start and how long will it take?

A3: Should planning permission be granted in early 2021 preparatory work will begin in spring 2021 with main construction works starting summer 2021. There will be very dramatic landscape changes in the first phase of the project as vegetation is removed and temporary access roads are built to facilitate works. Works will be completed by March 2023 with all temporary infrastructure removed at this time.

Thereafter we anticipate that it will take a period of around five years for the new habitats to develop and the site to make its full transition from terrestrial to inter-tidal ecology. This is based on experience from other similar schemes such as at Steart on the Somerset coast. The greatest habitat changes will be seen in the first few years after the breach is made.

Q4. Who is involved and what's in it for them?

A4: The scheme is a partnership initiative between Clinton Devon Estates (the Estate) and the Environment Agency. Clinton Devon Estates has a long history of good stewardship of its land, enabling public access and management for habitats and species. It believes that climate change is real

and threatens coastal communities and that early adaptation to climate change is more cost effective and can bring greater societal and wildlife benefits than delayed adaptation or inaction. The Estate wishes to be recognised for its support of wildlife. As a result of this scheme, a wetland reserve of international significance will be created.

This will enhance the Estate's environmental reputation. In addition, the Estate's management of the land in the Lower Otter Valley will become more sustainable with associated businesses protected. The Estate supports local businesses including those at South Farm, Otterton Mill and the King's Arms in Otterton, all of which are tenanted enterprises. We believe that this project can help support the wider local economy going forward, including those businesses already operating.

The Environment Agency's involvement in the project stems from a need to provide compensatory habitat for losses identified in the Exe Estuary Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy. The Exe Estuary is a Special Protection Area (SPA), designated under the European Union (EU) Birds Directive and an internationally-designated Ramsar site. Part of the Exe Estuary is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated under the EU Habitats Directive.

Maintaining and improving existing flood defences will result in the loss of European designated intertidal habitat caused by coastal squeeze (the loss of existing intertidal habitat as a result of rising sea levels that drown out the habitat).

This will adversely affect the integrity of Exe Estuary SPA and Ramsar site. Under the Habitats Regulations, it is therefore a statutory requirement for the Environment Agency to create habitat to compensate for that lost. The partnership with Clinton Devon Estates was created due to the synergy of both organisations' objectives, with the scheme enabling the aspirations of both organisations to be fulfilled.



Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club

Q5. What is the cost of the scheme and where is the money coming from?

A5: The cost of the scheme will be about £15 million with the majority of costs relating to infrastructure removal/adaptation/relocation, raising of South Farm Road, installation of new footbridge, earth moving to create new habitat area and the protection of the disused municipal tip.

Funding will come from the Environment Agency and Clinton Devon Estates with the project also supported by the European Interreg VA France Channel England programme through a project called Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts (PACCo). Within this project the Lower Otter Valley is partnering the Saône Valley in Normandy, France.

The objective is to demonstrate that early adaptation to climate change is desirable, brings greater benefits to society than inaction and to create a model of adaptation for other estuarine areas to follow. While Britain is no longer a member of the European Union (EU), during the transition period up to the end of December 2020 the

UK remains a participant in EU-wide programmes in the same way as we did when we were a member. We were therefore able to apply successfully for funding under the programme. Regardless of our status in Europe and associated trade deals, this funding will be honoured until March 2023. The total value of the PACCo project is €25.7million, with a contribution from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of €17.8m. The Lower Otter Restoration Project will receive around £8m through PACCo.

Q6. Besides the currently proposed scheme, and 'doing nothing', have any other solutions to the estuary's management been considered?

A6: The idea for the Lower Otter Restoration Project initially rose from a desire by the landowner, Clinton Devon Estates to manage the Lower Otter Valley as sustainably as possible in the face of a rapidly changing climate. A report was commissioned in 2009, which was carried out by Haycock Associates. It suggested a number of future ways of managing the Lower Otter and was presented to many interested parties on completion. It

was out of that presentation that this scheme arose.

Other ways to address some of the issues have been suggested; dredging the river channel for instance, or carrying out works to improve drainage from the southern marshes. These different options have been reviewed and discounted as part of the project development on sustainability, technical, legal or funding reasons. Within the existing scheme a list of options was developed including full-scale restoration, assisted natural recovery and partial floodplain restoration. An options appraisal concluded that the preferred option for the scheme was the restoration of the floodplain associated with Big and Little Marsh. This process was guided by consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees.

Q7. What engagement has been undertaken to date?

A7: There has been extensive stakeholder consultation and public engagement alongside professional engineering and environmental work throughout the design of this scheme. This has helped to identify the preferred option and contributed to the detailed design.

A Stakeholder Group, set up in 2013, provided an interface between the project team and interested parties, including community representatives. This group was involved in the development of the short list of options.

In 2014 a public consultation was held with events taking place locally at community centres and at parish and town council meetings. These have been held to highlight the issues, understand stakeholder and public perceptions of the problems, assess their reaction to outline proposals and options, gather information on alternative strategies and to ensure the local community has had a chance to help shape the broad form of the project. Since 2015 an essential component of the scheme's communications work has

been through its website (www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk). This website places key documents in the public domain, including the project's rationale and vision, minutes of the Stakeholder Group meetings, the Risk Register, factsheets and proposed timelines. It also advertises key engagement events, with outcomes from public consultation available for viewing.

A long list of options was discussed with specialists from the Environment Agency and the Estate on 7 March 2017, and with the Stakeholder Group on 15 March 2017. With the exception of the Granary Lane resident group, the main stakeholder groups gave their conditional or tentative support for floodplain restoration through managed realignment. From here, a Short List of options was developed, and a public exhibition was held on 5 July 2017 at the Temple Methodist Church hall in Budleigh Salterton to seek the views of the local residents on LORP options. The exhibition was attended by 144 people and 105 feedback forms were received, which helped inform the outline design of the scheme. 73% of responders were supportive of LORP objectives and 62% were most in favour of the option that has become the preferred option. This option, restoration of Big and Little Marsh floodplain, was subsequently taken forward for design development, with an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) being carried out alongside the design stages. During this process, the project team has continued to engage with key stakeholders.

Q8. What will happen to the wildlife and landscape that is there already?

A8: Restoring the floodplain of the River Otter to a condition similar to that previously found prior to the construction of the embankments will involve very significant landscape change. The largely pastoral aesthetic, which has dominated the valley since the early 1800s, will be replaced by an inter-tidal or estuarine

landscape of mudflats, saltmarsh, reedbed and, at its upstream limits, grazing marsh. This is the habitat that dominated prior to the 1800s and the many human modifications. There will be very significant habitat changes resulting from the scheme. This includes loss of grazing marsh, grassland, trees and hedgerows. However, these losses will be offset by the multiple beneficial effects from the creation of new rare and declining saltmarsh and mudflat habitats within the floodplain and the natural transition from intertidal to coastal grazing marsh higher up the valley. Those hedgerows, trees and areas of scrub lost under the scheme will be compensated for through the creation of new areas. In the long term the initiative will restore the natural ecological order of the estuary.

The biodiversity, marine ecology and fish impact assessment has identified that without mitigation there is potential for the scheme to impact on species protected by legislation. Some of these impacts will be avoided through mitigation including making changes at design stage to avoid the impact and putting in place measures to protect areas of habitat. Mitigation for protected species will be undertaken in accordance with legal requirements and seeks to enhance the integrity of populations where possible to do so.

By reinstating natural processes to the Lower Otter Valley we expect significant long term benefits for species and habitats with an uplift in overall ecological value. One group of species we expect to benefit significantly are wading birds.

Q9. Might the project harm the beavers?

A9: No. The River Otter beavers are thriving and the decision by Defra to allow them to remain is one of the great wildlife success stories of recent years. Clinton Devon Estates is proud to be part of the River Otter Beaver Trial. Although beavers have been seen within project areas to be impacted by tidal inundation we do not expect local populations to be impacted adversely by the

scheme. Beavers have been known to occupy salt water and inter-tidal environments but only for short periods of time - usually whilst passing from one site to another. They need a source of fresh water to live.

We anticipate that there may be minor movement of local beavers as the site finds its new ecological equilibrium and the beavers find the habitats of greatest value to them. Such habitat is plentiful throughout the catchment. The scheme is based around the principles of supporting natural processes and ecological recovery. This is the same philosophy that drove the River Otter Beaver Trial.

Q10. Will I still be able to walk along the embankment?

A10: Yes. We know how highly valued the path along the embankment between Lime Kiln car park and White Bridge (Footpath 1 and 2) is by residents and visitors alike. It is one of the busiest footpaths in Devon, with up to 250,000 visits a year. If the embankments breach accidentally, as they almost did in 2018, it may be difficult for Devon County Council to find funds for repairs.

As part of this project we will put a footbridge over the planned breach to safeguard this access. If the path on the embankment has to be closed to allow works to proceed, diversions will be put in place to ensure continued pedestrian access up the valley and along the South West Coast Path.

Q11. How would the project impact on access along South Farm Road for businesses and residents?

A11: Access to South Farm and the South West Coast Path will be secured against future climate change under the scheme. At present the road floods and is in a deteriorating condition. Under the proposals it will be raised with separate pedestrian access added. In initial discussions with residents and businesses at South Farm the risk of tidal flooding of the road was emphasised should the embankments fail

accidentally. This project presents an opportunity to prevent and mitigate this eventuality in advance. There is a clear desire from all parties for access that does not flood. During works, access to South Farm will be maintained, with the existing road kept open whilst the new one is built. There will have to be a short period of closure when the new road is connected to the old road, but we will reduce the period of this closure as much as possible.

Q12. Will it make flooding to properties worse?

A12: No. Although the project is not primarily intended to reduce flood risk it must nevertheless demonstrate through a comprehensive flood risk assessment that it will not increase flood risk. There are a very small number of locations where the depth of flooding is slightly increased under some extreme circumstances when climate change is taken account of; the project will seek ways of ensuring that no properties are adversely affected.

Q13. What will happen to the cricket club?

A13: The Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club has flooded many times in the past and this will continue if it stays at its current site. Climate change means flooding is likely to be more frequent.

Under the scheme the club will be relocated out of the floodplain. Planning permission has already been granted for this. This move provides the club with a secure long-term future, free from flooding. Although this was a separate planning application, funding of the new club ground and facilities depends upon being able to deliver the allied broader scheme of which it is a part.

Q14: What does the project mean for local farmers?

A14: The Estate sees both farms impacted by the project (South Farm and Pulhayes Farm) continuing as key agricultural businesses. However they must adapt to climate change.

The project will mean significant changes to the floodplain land and necessitate a change in land management practices. Agreements have been reached with the tenant farmers for the release of land significantly impacted by the scheme. Continued support will be given to them as required.

Q15: Could the project attract mosquitoes which pose a risk to health, and could toxic material leak from the former landfill site?

A15: Experts from Public Health England (PHE) believe that increased health risks from this scheme associated with biting insects is low if there is careful design and management. The type of habitat created under the scheme is generally unsuitable for invasive mosquito species.

Research conducted at the site showed no current evidence of *Aedes detritus*, which is the common nuisance species associated with brackish habitat. *Anopheles claviger* was common and associated with the flooded grassland and freshwater ditches. This species isn't associated with nuisance biting. If the intertidal zone is regularly flooded and drained then mosquito suitability will remain low. The key factor that will determine future mosquito pressure related to habitat changes is drainage. The project is therefore acting on information supplied by PHE and also the outputs from the Wetlands LIFE project to help guide detailed design, thus minimising the likelihood of increased risk from mosquitoes.

Surveys, including water and gas samples, have been taken from, within and adjacent to the old tip. In addition trial pits have been excavated to establish the content, condition and stability of the tipped material. There is no evidence of any toxic materials currently leaching from the site into the surrounding environment. Under the scheme part of the western section of the tip will be removed. The sides of the remainder of the disused tip will be protected by a combination of rock revetment, erosion protection matting and extended side slopes depending on the speed

of flow in each area. Due to the extent of the tip it will not be possible to remove it in its entirety.

Q16. Won't this attract a lot more people – how will they be managed?

A16: The project seeks to adapt an existing tourist attraction to climate change, not to create a new one. A Visitor Management Strategy has been developed under the scheme. This balances the needs of wildlife and people so visitors can enjoy the area and its wildlife with minimal impact on the local environment.

The design of the scheme includes provision for new low key visitor infrastructure such as viewing platforms, whilst minimising the potential for disturbance to the new habitats and associated wildlife. Information for visitors will be provided at key entry points with these being focused at the south and middle of the scheme.

Wildlife interest in the site will be greatest in the winter months when the migratory wading birds are present. This is when existing car park capacity at Lime Kiln car park is under-utilised. Under the scheme current informal parking along South Farm Road and that which illegally incurs into the existing SSSI will be designed out. A new car parking area will be provided.

An increase in visitor numbers, while requiring management, will benefit many local businesses and is expected to lead to increased employment opportunities for local people. The strategy is available on the project website:

www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk/resources.html

Q17: What is the relationship of this project to FAB Link?

A17: The FAB Link project is a proposal to build an electricity interconnector, subsea and underground, between France and Great Britain via the island of Alderney. The project is being jointly developed by RTE and FAB Link

Limited, with support from the French and UK governments. The point where the cable will come ashore at the British end is in Budleigh Salterton, at Lime Kiln car park. There is geographical overlap between FAB Link and LORP in three places.

At present there is no certainty that FAB Link will progress. If approvals and finance for FAB Link are agreed, the project is expected to start construction in early 2023, meaning that the majority of Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) will have been completed before FAB Link commences. The LORP project team is working with FAB Link to ensure the two projects can both be successfully delivered.

We are still discussing the preferred solution for the footpath at the western side of the floodplain between Granary Lane and South Farm Road. FAB Link has planning permission to raise this footpath, but LORP will need to implement works that allow FAB Link to install their cables and maintain public access in the interim. However, because the solution for this area is not yet agreed, it is not part of this planning application. There will need to be a subsequent planning application or amendment to cover these works.

Q18: What happens if you don't get planning permission?

A18: If planning permission is not granted the scheme will not be able to progress. Should council officers or members require further information before making a decision, we will provide it as swiftly as possible.

Q19: Why aren't you having an exhibition in a hall?

A19: Given the Coronavirus pandemic and current government guidelines associated with this public health situation we must explain our proposals online rather than in person. During the consultation phase we hosted an on-line exhibition of the application. This saw 2,167 new unique visitors and 9,617 page views of the LORP website were recorded during this time.

Appendix 2: The climate emergency

East Devon Climate Strategy

Priority 6: Remain aware of climate change projections and the implications for the district.

Priority 7: Advise communities to improve resilience and preparations for climate change and protection against extreme weather.

Priority 8: Continue to respond to weather and climate change affecting the district.

Priority 9: Continue to manage the risk of coastal and fluvial flooding and improve flood resilience.

Priority 10: Consider the effects of climate change on policy, decisions, projects and infrastructure.

Source: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/3721242/climate-change-plan-on-a-pageacc.pdf>

Devon Climate Emergency Declaration:

Point 2: We are aware of the significant implications of climate change for Devon's communities; it is already affecting our environment, infrastructure, economy and health & wellbeing. If not addressed, the impact on future generations will be profound and the ability to meet the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals will be severely compromised.

Point 4: We will lead in the global response to climate change through our collective action, innovation and influence.

Point 7: Additionally, we will work to understand the near-term and future risks of climate change for Devon to plan for how our infrastructure, public services and communities will have to adapt for a 1.5-degree warmer world.

Point 9: We challenge every organisation, business, community and individual to do the same.

Source: <https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/devon-climate-declaration/>

Lower Otter £15m restoration plans take major step forward'

[illegible]

For ways to manage the area to a sustainable way for people and wildlife in the face of climate change, we have a lot to learn.

"We have worked very closely with a wide range of stakeholders, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Audubon Society, and the U.S. Forest Service. We are grateful for their input over the years."

"We have also been a public collaborator to share these plans with local people who understand the area and have a lot of knowledge about it," says Goff.

"This end goal will be to coordinate our proposals on the project website and hope to be able to answer any questions people may have online."

The creation of new habitats and the restoration of old ones will be achieved by breaching the embankment that currently separates the river from the Bullhead Suburban Cricket Club estate. The new habitat will be relocated to an area that is currently agricultural and forestry.

This will allow a much greater area of original floodplain to flood at high tide and drain at low tide, creating a new habitat for native and migrating birds. There will also be areas of re-wilded and planted areas, and the creation of the new site will be considered a victory (see www.bullhead.org.uk/interactions).

Importance of the project is being worked in partnership and




The Lower Oyster Estuary in Bodleigh Salterton


It given the go-ahead, the following will take place:

- Brooches in the embankments and improvements to the lower level paths across the brooches.
- Removal of 300m of South West Road highway and replacement with a highway section south of the existing, raised about 2.5 metres higher.
- Creation of a new 26m span highway bridge.
- A new footbridge carrying the South West Coastal Path.
- Removal of a small section of the existing landfill site to create the new South Farm Road highway bridge. Installation of additional edge protection and capping to the landfill site.
- Creation of a new parking area.

- Creation of three bird sanctuary islands
- Red-tail Hawk to be reintroduced and the aqueduct to be removed
- Planting of new and improved foliage
- Installation of six new public viewing areas
- Existing footpath to be improved and raised in height
- Installation of public information and warning signs
- Diversion of existing footpath running to south of the landfill onto the landfill

East Devon District Council will make the final decision.

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Press release

Environment Agency submits final plans for Otter Valley project

A ground-breaking project to help the lower Otter Valley adapt to climate change and create an internationally important wildlife reserve has been submitted to planners.

Published 8 October 2020
From: [Environment Agency](#)

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"I want to angry local"
Increased mum opens up on agony of losing her baby girl

10:00PM EST

Five crews rescue
helpless dog submerged in 'water-filled' ditch

10:00PM EST

Devon pupils leave cold
for homecoming

10:00PM EST

Farby fix up by TWO
magical Christmas lights trails

10:00PM EST

Future of controversial plans will be decided tonight

10:00PM EST

[Home](#)
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[ExterLive](#)

Devon could get new £15m nature reserve using EU cash

The plans would help protect the Lower Otter Valley from rising sea levels at a time when the 200-year-old flood defences have started to fail

[SHARE](#)

[By Howard Lloyd](#)
10:00PM EST

[NEWS](#)

Environment AgencySW @EnvAgencySW · 8 Oct
We've submitted plans for an exciting project to help the Lower Otter Valley adapt to climate change. If approved, the £15 million EU funded scheme will create a stunning new nature reserve. Working with @ClintonDevon and others, lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk



- Stakeholder Engagement Group – meeting held by Zoom 15 September
- Membership includes local residents, interested groups and councillors.
- Parish newsletter article issued in September for October editions of Woodbury News, Otterton Parish News, East Budleigh New, Colaton Raleigh/Newton Poppleford News, Tipton Times and Otter Valley News.
- Two page feature in Jurassic Coast Trust Newsletter – summer edition.
- Presentation to Exe Estuary Management Forum 21 September.
- Website (www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk) updated 6 October with planning details including diagrams, graphics and images, environmental statement, plus links to the full planning submission on EDDC website.
- Environment Agency news release issued 7 October to local media contacts and social media via Twitter: 'radio.devon@bbc.co.uk'; 'Daniel.Wilkins@archant.co.uk'; 'kirk.england@bbc.co.uk'; 'Adrian Campbell' <[adrianrobertcampbell@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:adrianrobertcampbell@[REDACTED])> 'spotlight@bbc.co.uk'; 'wmnnewsdesk@westernmorningnews.co.uk'; 'martin.hesp@[REDACTED]'; 'newsdesk@devonlive.com'; 'paul.greaves@reachplc.com'; 'daniel.clark@reachplc.com'; 'hamish.marshall@bbc.co.uk'; 'westcountry@itv.com'; 'news@radioexe.co.uk'; 'anna@radioexe.co.uk'
- Coverage to date: Western Morning News (Saturday 10 October), Exmouth Journal online, East Devon Watch online, Devon Live website, gov.uk,
- Also mentions on various Facebook community groups
- Posters – put up locally 10/11 October.
- Direct letter – mailed to Granary Lane residents w/b 19 October.
- Direct email – sent to email list collated from attendees at previous public exhibition events w/b 19 October.
- Bespoke responses to individuals ongoing.

Appendix 3 (continued): Stakeholder Group

The Lower Otter Restoration Project Stakeholder Group has met 10 times between January 2016 and September 2020. Minutes are available on the project website at www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk/resources.html

In addition to the Environment Agency, Clinton Devon Estates and the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, the Stakeholder Group consists of representatives of:

East Devon District Council (Budleigh & Raleigh ward); **East Devon District Council (Environment Portfolio holder)**; East Devon District Council Countryside Team; **East Devon District Council Engineering Team**; Budleigh Salterton Town Council; **Otterton Parish Council**; Colaton Raleigh Parish Council; **East Budleigh with Bickton Parish Council**; Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club; **Devon County Council (Exmouth & Budleigh Salterton Coastal)**; Devon County Council Public Rights of Way Officer; **East Devon AONB**; Natural England; **Otter Valley Association**; Granary Lane residents; **South Farm residents and businesses**; Pulhayes Farm; **The FAB Project**; South West Water.

Appendix 3 (continued): Dissemination of information online regarding the project

In addition to publicity surrounding the submission of the planning application, there has been extensive media coverage locally over a number of years, as highlighted on the project website at www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk/news.html.

In the PDF version of this document, coverage can be viewed by clicking the links. Please note some online publications have updated their platforms and removed older links:

Estate considers valley flooding retreat plan

8 September 2010: An east Devon estate may have to make a managed retreat from some land because of future rising water levels, it says.

[BBC News](#)

Preserving beauty of the South West Coast Path

28 July 2014: At this time of year, whilst walking along the South West Coast Path, you can't help but be struck by the beauty of nature.

[Western Morning News](#)

(Link no longer active)

Town's cricket club would have to find a new home

26 October 2014: Plans to allow the River Otter to reclaim more of its natural flood plain have moved a step forward following public consultations.

[Express & Echo](#)

(Link no longer active)

Otter Estuary project offers 'multiple benefits'

2 May 2015: Support from the public will be a major help to a project planning big changes to the Otter Estuary, the proposers have said.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Budleigh Salterton: Meeting to discuss cycle path

6 July 2015: Budleigh Salterton residents facing the prospect of a cycle track being built behind their homes are hopeful their concerns will be listened to.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

River Otter plan: 'Low risk' of pollution

30 November 2015: The risk of 'toxic' landfill substances being released by plans to revamp the Otter Estuary is 'low', and more surveys will be carried out.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Otter flooding project: funds to be sought

24 October 2016: A controversial project which could see the Otter Valley flooded may have moved a step closer.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Otter flood project: 'No significant cliff impact'

01 November 2016: A report has been published exploring the possible effects of the Lower Otter Restoration Project on cliffs in Budleigh Salterton.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Budleigh residents to have say on Otter project

30 May 2017: Budleigh residents will have a chance to have their say on controversial plans which could see the reintroduction of tidal flooding to the River Otter. [Exmouth Journal](#)

'Catastrophic breach' could happen

1 June 2017: A plan to restore the estuary around the River Otter to stop a 'catastrophic breach' of the 200-year-old sea defences is being formulated.

[Devon Live](#)

(Link no longer active)

Restoring East Devon river to stop 'catastrophic failure'

8 July 2017: Full scale restoration of the River Otter could cost up to £40million it has been revealed. It is one of four options at a public exhibition. [DevonLive](#)

(Link no longer active)

River Otter realignment could cost up to £40m

10 July 2017: The cost of a project to secure the future of the Lower Otter Estuary could rise to as much as £40million, according to new plans.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Funding bid for River Otter project is rejected

24 April 2018: A funding bid for a project that could help avoid a 'catastrophic breach' of the sea defences in Budleigh has been rejected.

[DevonLive](#)

River project to turn clock back 200 years

14 June 2018: The Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) has revealed its latest plans for the estuary as part of proposals to restore it to its historic channels.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Agency committed to £9m River Otter anti-flood scheme

6 August 2018: The Environment Agency says it is "completely committed" to a £9m scheme to help restore the River Otter in Budleigh Salterton.

[BBC News](#)

Plans submitted for cricket club's new home

26 February 2019: Plans which would see Budleigh Salterton's cricket club relocated have been submitted.

[Exmouth Journal](#)

Plans for new home for cricket club revealed

12 March 2019: After nearly 100 years at their Ottermouth home, Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club could be on the move.

[Devon Live](#)

Floods force Devon outfit into relocating

15 August 2019: Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club are set to relocate as part of a £9m scheme to help restore the River Otter.

[The Cricketer](#)

Appendix 3 (continued):

Dissemination of information - Examples of press coverage

Plan to restore floodplain to protect town

BY DANIEL CLARK

A £9million scheme that would see the restoration of a floodplain has been chosen as the favoured option to help avoid a 'catastrophic breach' of the sea defences in Budleigh Salterton.

As a result, a new home would need to be found for Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club, which is set to support the proposals.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project wants to restore the estuary to a more natural state, reducing the impact of climate change while creating new habitats for wildlife.

The project, led by landowner Clinton Devon Estates and the Environment Agency, considered four options which were presented to the public at an exhibition last year.

Feedback showed that option three was preferred. It would see the Big and Little Marsh



Dr Sam Bridgewater

floodplain restored and breaches would be created in the Little Bank, the Big Bank and the River Otter Embankment, allowing water to flow through. There would be new floodbridges ensuring continuity of existing access.

Now, following further extensive surveys, the project team has decided to take that option forward.

The project's Dr Sam Bridgewater said: "Option one was the most expensive and it was felt

that the cost, estimated at £20million or more, was too high.

"Option two has been discounted because of uncertainties over how the river would respond to being left to adapt naturally, and option four did not achieve the major aims of the project, which include delivering sustainable management of the estuary and minimising the extent of environmental benefit through habitat creation.

"Our contractors have done extensive computer modelling of the effects of option three and the predictions are very positive: water levels and flood risk would be no higher than they are now, and new intertidal and freshwater habitats would be created.

"This option, which would cost between £8million and £9million, allows us to secure and improve access and amenities, including Budleigh Sal-

MP on fact-finder to learn more about restoration projects in River Otter

East Devon's MP Sir Hugo Swire was on a fact-finding visit to the Budleigh area on Friday.

He met with Natural England - the Government's adviser for the natural environment in England - to discuss its plans and ongoing work within East Devon.

The discussion focused on the one-hour walk that runs alongside the River Otter from Budleigh Salterton up to Otterton Mill, which also follows the route of the South West Coast Path.

During the walk, Sir Hugo Swire met with the Lower Otter Restoration Project and habitat creation.

The project is exploring how the downstream part of the River Otter, its estuary, and its immediate surroundings can be preserved and improved for future generations in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

It is maintaining the possibility of a managed restoration scheme, where the Otter meets the sea near Budleigh.

Commenting on the project, Sir Hugo said: "The Lower Otter Estuary is a beautiful place providing habitat for a large variety of wildlife.

"It is just one of the reasons why I am keen to support the Government's 25-year environmental strategy, so that

PAUL STRANGE

and Simon Hartman

we can leave our planet to our children in a better state than we found it."

Other topics covered during the discussion included erosion, development pressure in East Devon, and neighbouring plans and their influence.

"It is organisations like Natural England that continue to educate the public about the importance of our natural environment," added Sir Hugo.

"I look forward to working closely with them as we continue to ensure that East Devon is maintained as a beautiful place to live, work and visit."

Speaking after the visit, Wesley Smyth, Natural England's area manager for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, said: "It was great to see Sir Hugo Swire how Natural England is supporting and leading innovative and forward-looking investments in our natural environment."

"Initiatives like these will help deliver the Government's recently published 25-year environmental strategy."



Sir Hugo Swire, MP for East Devon, and Wesley Smyth, Natural England's area manager for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, during their fact-finding walk along the river Otter.

Exmouth Journal, February 8, 2018

Express & Echo, June 28, 2018

Options for Otter estuary restoration

FULL scale restoration of the River Otter could cost up to £10million it has been revealed. It is one of four options that were revealed at a public exhibition in Budleigh Salterton as methods to stop a 'catastrophic breach' of the falling 200-year-old sea defences.

The shape of the estuary today is the result of hundreds of years of human intervention, and it is now suffering from poor drainage, flooding and erosion. The 200-year-old sea defences are falling and are becoming increasingly hard to maintain.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project is investigating the possibility of restoring the estuary to a more natural state, reducing the impact of climate change while creating new habitats for wildlife and improving water quality.

Four options have been revealed as public consultation on the project has begun.

Option one - full scale restoration - (estimated cost

ing the old municipal tip and embankments. South Farm Road is raised on a bridge, the South West Coast Path diverted, and the cricket field moved off site.

Option two - assisted natural recovery (estimated cost £8-12). This option is similar to option one, but does not involve creating a new meandering channel for the River Otter. Instead, it removes obstructions, such as the embankments and part of the old municipal tip. South Farm Road is raised, the South West Coast Path diverted, and the cricket field moved off site.

Option three - big and little marsh floodplain restoration (estimated cost £8-9m). This option is similar to option two, but keeps most of the embankments where they are. Breaches in Little Bank, Big Bank and the River Otter Embankment allow water to flow through the line of the embankments. South Farm Road

the north of South Farm Road. It stops the flow of salty water under South Farm Road towards the north using one-way valves. South Farm Road is raised and the cricket field moved off site.

The principal partners in the project are Clinton Devon Estates, which owns the land around the estuary, and the Environment Agency.

Dr Sam Bridgewater, Clinton Devon Estates' head of wildlife and conservation, said: "In coming up with the four options, we have ruled out a number of alternatives which are either impossible to fund, or the partners feel do not meet our requirements to safeguard the future of the estuary for the benefit of local people, wildlife and the environment.

"At present, the long-term future of the cricket club, part of the South West Coast Path and access to homes and businesses in the South Farm Road area are under threat from the impacts of flooding and poor



WESTERN MORNING NEWS

Saturday, June 13, 2020

Restoring a

Devon river

to the way it

used to be

WMM REPORTER

CONSERVATIONISTS are aiming to turn back the clock by 200 years to restore and reform a wide range of habitats in Devon.

Proposals have been unveiled to restore the river Otter to a more natural state, closer to the way it was in the early part of the 19th century. The plan, unveiled at a public exhibition in Budleigh Salterton, aims to restore the river to a more natural state, closer to the way it was in the early part of the 19th century.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project has been revealed around 15 options as part of a public exhibition in Budleigh Salterton. The project is led by Clinton Devon Estates and the Environment Agency.

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the north of South Farm Road. It stops the flow of salty water under South Farm Road towards the north using one-way valves. South Farm Road is raised and the cricket field moved off site.

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Talks that Budleigh Salterton residents are seeking

Exmouth Journal, July 2, 2015

Exmouth Journal, December 10, 2015

Appendix 3 (continued):
The Project Website: www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk

The website was launched in June 2016 to serve as a central public-facing resource for the Lower Otter Restoration Project.

It has been regularly updated since it was launched as and when new material has become available.

It contains resources such as minutes of meetings of the Stakeholder Group, background reports, details of public events and exhibitions, maps, photographs, the project issues log, details of funding, press releases, contact information and more.

As the Covid-19 pandemic meant a proposed in-person public exhibition had to be excluded, the website was used as the primary vehicle for sharing the proposals with the local community. A suite of new pages was added early in

October 2020, to reflect material which would have been on display at a physical public exhibition, and visitors were given a direct link to the application on the East Devon District Council planning website to offer comments.

Industry-standard analytic software has been used to measure site visitor numbers.

Given these statistics, as shown below, we are confident that the project website attracted more than 2,000 visitors, the great majority of whom had not visited the site previously.

The compares favourably with the number of people (144) who attended the last physical project exhibition in 2017. That exhibition generated 105 feedback forms. The application itself has attracted more than 500 online comments.



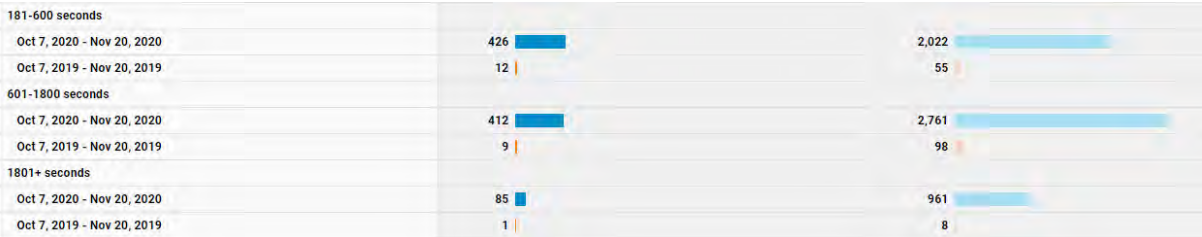
ABOVE: The number of visitors to the project website between October 7, 2020 (date of issue of news release) and November 20, 2020 (EDDC deadline for public comments).



ABOVE: The number of visitors to the project website between October 7, 2019 and November 20, 2019, to serve as a baseline comparison.



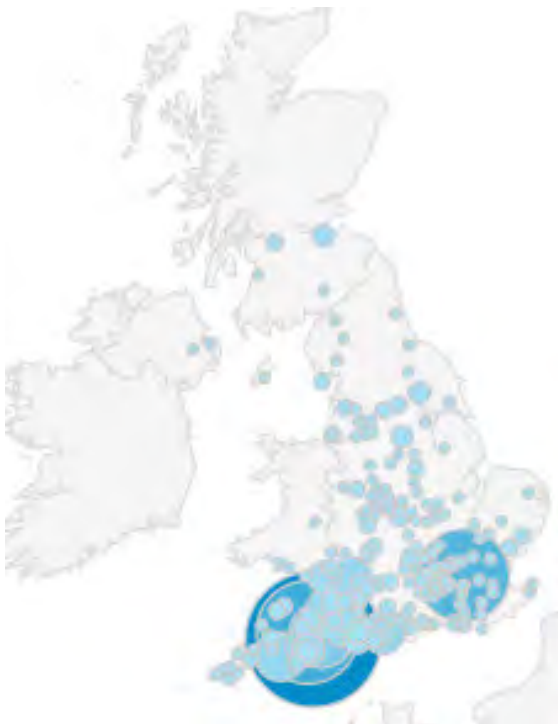
ABOVE: A statistical comparison between the two date ranges.



ABOVE: This chart compares how long people spent on the website. We can see that in the 2020 timeframe, almost 1,000 pageviews lasted for at least 30 minutes (1,800+ seconds), and more than 2,700 pageviews lasted between 10 minutes and 30 minutes.

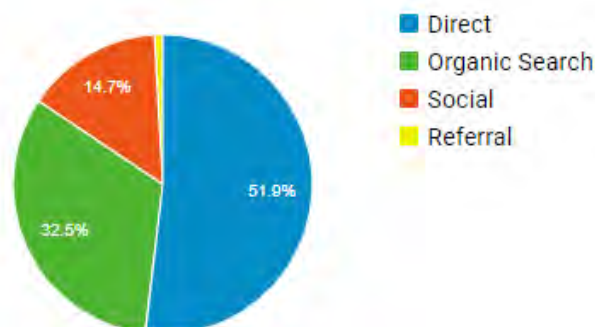


Click [here](#) or on the image above to visit the project website



The map on the left shows the concentration of website visitors across the country. As we can see from the dark blue circle, the greatest concentration is from the South West of England, centred on Exmouth which, for the purposes of website visitor location, includes Budleigh Salterton and surrounding areas. This map is based on the IP address of the visitor, calculated by the analytic software. Please note that this only gives a geographically valid location for fixed line or wi-fi broadband users. People viewing the website on mobile devices not connected to wi-fi can be allocated IP addresses not linked to their physical location.

Top Channels



This chart shows how people found the website.

Direct means the user typed the name of the website URL into their browser.

Organic search means the user 'googled' or similar to find the site.

Social means the user clicked a link seen on Facebook or Twitter.

Referral means the user clicked a link not on social media, for example Devon Live.

