

# Exmoor National Park

## Partnership Plan 2018-2023

### Mid-term progress report



November 2021

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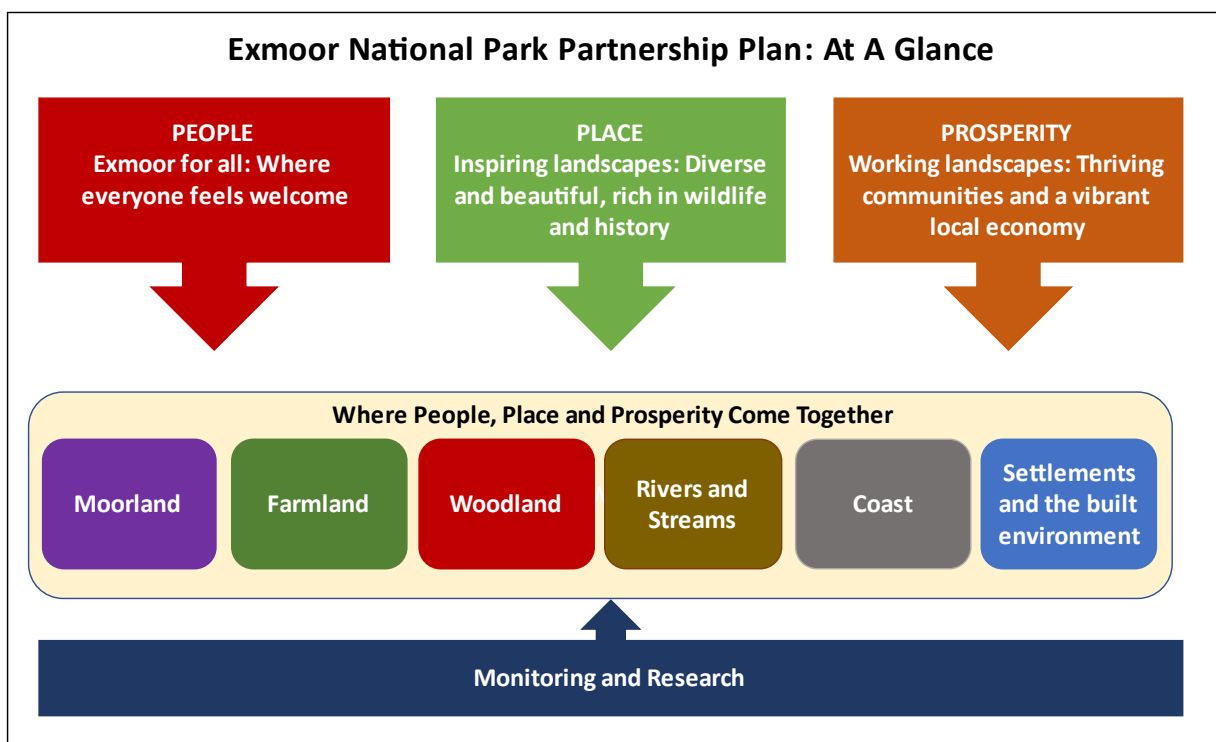
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## PROGRESS IN DELIVERING EXMOOR'S PARTNERSHIP PLAN

### Introduction

Exmoor is a special place, protected for the nation as a National Park. In 2018, Exmoor National Park Authority (Exmoor NPA) and partners prepared a five-year Partnership Plan setting out our joint Ambitions and strategies required to maintain the special qualities.

We are now mid-way through the five-year Plan period, and it is time to take stock of progress. When the Plan was prepared, no-one could have anticipated that within two years the whole country would be in lockdown due to the Covid pandemic, and the impacts that this would have. During this period, there has also been greater recognition of the nature crisis and climate emergency, and the UK left the European Union. Although many of our Ambitions have unsurprisingly been affected by all these external factors, there has still been an amazing amount achieved in partnership, and some great stories to tell. We have selected some of the highlights to share below. We will also review progress with our Partnership groups, who will help to shape the priorities for the remaining Plan period.



## People: Exmoor for All, Where Everyone Feels Welcome

Since 2018 there have been many fantastic examples of more people enjoying Exmoor, being inspired by its amazing natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage, and building deeper connections by getting involved with some great volunteering projects. The benefits of being connected with the natural environment are well known, and during the Covid-19 pandemic the value of our National Parks in providing a 'Natural Health Service' was emphasised more than ever. Our first-class rights of way and access network provide unrivalled opportunities for people to explore and enjoy Exmoor, and support a thriving tourism industry. The Covid pandemic has hit the tourism and hospitality sectors particularly hard, and we are working closely with partners to support Exmoor's businesses and communities to recover from this.

### *The Exmoor experience*

**Ambition: More people enjoy Exmoor, are inspired, get involved, and learn about its special qualities**

## 1. Exmoor Hosts National Parks' 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party



In July 2019, Exmoor hosted HRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall and representatives from the UK National Park family for a Big Picnic to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the founding Act of National Parks. The event showcased Exmoor's produce, crafts, young people, cultural offer, dynamic farming businesses and partnership working.

Coverage of the event can be watched on Youtube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qgrbAQxSo4&t=5s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-674ib3E8c&t=34s>



## 2. Get Involved and volunteering



*Above: Volunteers at Wimbleball –  
Courtesy of ENPA*

Exmoor NPA's Get Involved volunteering programme continues to play a key role allowing people to enjoy and help look after Exmoor National Park. We have 300 registered volunteers, with a strong focus on working with other organisations to broaden the scope and number of volunteering roles available across Exmoor. Most recently GI introduced the mobile app iNaturalist which during lockdown proved an ideal platform to engage and train volunteers in species ID, now a key tool in delivering Exmoor NPA's invasive species project.

## 3. Helping People to Feel Welcome



*Above: Saxon Harepath, Courtesy of  
Exmoor Society*

The Exmoor Society runs a very popular annual walks programme, which is free and open to all. In 2019, it ranged from a blistering sally across the High Chains, seeing bats on a summer evening, meeting five different Knights, and Murder and Mystery at Wheal Eliza. Other popular themes included Hope Bourne's Withypool, compass skills on North Hill, Porlock coastal wildlife, and Historic Lynton. Despite Covid restrictions, some walks took place in 2020 and the normal programme of walks is back on for 2021.

## 4. Having FUN on Exmoor



*Above: Walk at Webbers Post – ENPA  
"I was worried before I came but I've had  
an amazing day and feel happy" Child, 10*

Being outdoors is good for both physical and mental health, and is even more important following Covid restrictions. The FUN project (Families United through Nature) provides opportunities for families who need support, confidence building and ideas for parents to get outdoors with their children, offering tailored, supportive and small group experiences that have suited children with a wide range of needs including autism, sensory processing disorders, ADHD and children who just need space and affirmation. Practical assistance including the provision of transport, wellies and raincoats

helped to break down some of the barriers to accessing Exmoor. Free picnic lunches were provided through the FairShare scheme with the support of Quantock Food Cupboard.

## 5. New Ways to Learn on Exmoor

**An online resource** to teach A-level students about coastal management in Porlock Bay received a prestigious Silver Award at the annual Geographic Association Publishers' Awards ceremony in April 2019. The resource challenges students to reflect on how interaction between the landscape and humans has shaped the coastline over millennia.

Funding from Forest Holidays supported three new schools (2 from Bristol and one from Barnstaple) to come and experience a residential stay at Exmoor NPA's Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning for the first time. This was a great experience for both the young people who came, and our Education Team, confirming how outdoor learning can inspire and engage young people about the natural world.

The Covid pandemic was a real challenge, but despite restrictions educational day visits continued. Exmoor NPA's education team also turned online to provide teaching sessions to support our local schools, as well as developing an Exmoor Curriculum for Somerset Schools that can be delivered on school grounds.

### *Well-managed recreation and access*

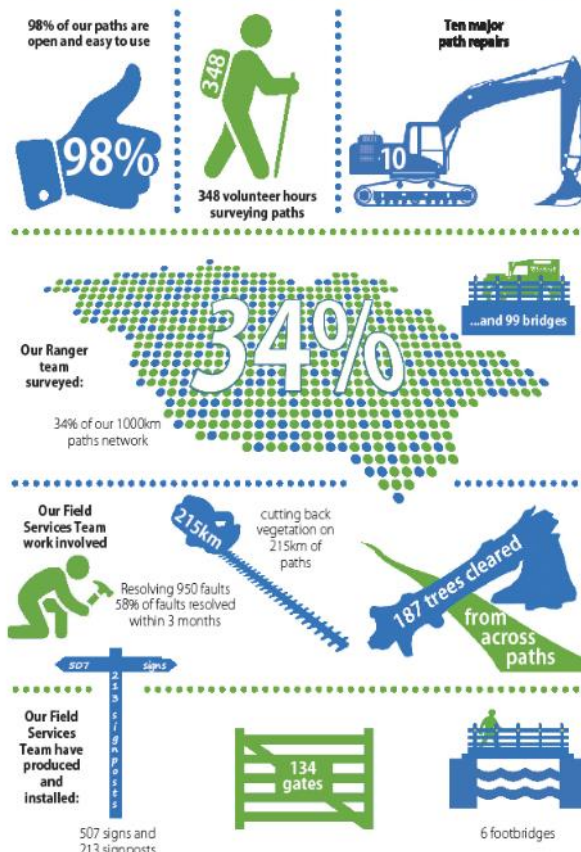
**Ambition: Exmoor has a first class rights of way network. Our paths, open access and recreational facilities are enhanced to offer more and better experiences for people who want to explore and enjoy the National Park**

## 6. A First-Class Rights of Way and Access Network

Exmoor has a fantastic network of paths for people to explore. This provides unrivalled opportunities for walking, riding, cycling, or just enjoying the view.

Exmoor leads the way in the proportion of rights of way that are open and considered easy to use, and we were delighted by the best ever result of 98% of paths open and easy to use. All this is possible thanks to the hard work and investment that goes into maintaining our very high-quality network of paths and recreational facilities. But it is no easy task. Keeping them in top condition requires significant levels of resource each year. This was made even more challenging by the pandemic, which required staff to work remotely and prevented them from sharing vehicles. However, the team managed to keep largely on target with inspections, repairs and improvements.

### Summary of Rights of Way Report 2020/21



## 7. England Coast Path Minehead to Combe Martin



*Above: Walking the England Coast Path –  
Courtesy of ENPA*

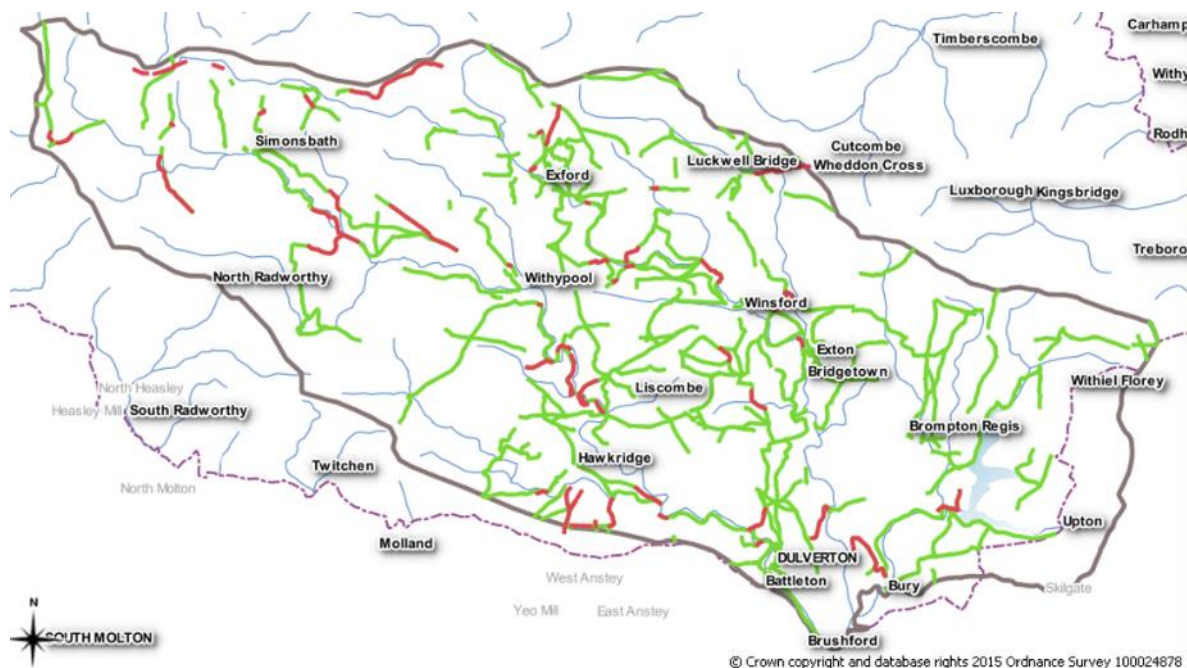
With the highest cliffs in mainland Britain, Exmoor's dramatic coastline is part of what draws many people to the National Park. The South West Coast Path has been a popular and spectacular route for decades and will now also become part of the new England Coast Path. Changes to the route have been agreed in a few key areas to open up new sections, and improve views, bringing walkers closer to the sea wherever possible. Work is now underway with

landowners, to make these improvements to public access and enhance the experience of this much loved and iconic coastline.

## 8. Improving Rights of Way to Help Water Quality

Exmoor's extensive network of rights of way is a great asset for enjoying the National Park. But they can also be erosion pathways leading to sediment and chemicals running off into rivers. The Headwaters of the Exe project funded by South West Water and Exmoor National Park Authority helped to protect water quality in Exmoor's rivers by improving path surfaces and drainage.

Running from 2016 to 2020, the project was able to complete a total of 6 km of continuous restoration, with overall improvements to 17 km of paths, in high priority areas of the Exe catchment. Restoration focussed on paths considered to pose the greatest risk to water quality and was undertaken by local contractors and Exmoor NPA.



*Above: Map of Rights of Way Surveyed (green) and Restored (red)*



During 2018 ENPA teamed up with the Commando Helicopter Force to move 60 tonnes of local stone needed for repair work along the Two Moor's Way near Simonsbath.



*Above: Before and After photo of the right of way restored with the help from the Commando Helicopter Force – courtesy of ENPA*

## 9. Reinstatement of Woodside Bridge

Through close working with the Lyn Community Development Trust, a successful CareMoor campaign was developed to reinstate Woodside Bridge near Lynmouth. The target of £60,000 was agreed and between 2017-19 partners campaigned heavily with the target reached in 2019. The new bridge was installed in spring 2020 and although the celebrations were reduced due to Covid restrictions, the bridge was officially opened is now ready for 2021 spring and summer season.



*Above: Woodside Bridge part funded by donations to CareMoor – courtesy of ENPA*

[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/caremoor/what-we-fund/access/fundraising-for-woodside-bridge](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/caremoor/what-we-fund/access/fundraising-for-woodside-bridge) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV7ok0DplZ8>

## 10. How Do You Solve A Problem With A Footpath?

Following a right of way on an Ordnance survey map can be challenge – but occasionally, historical discrepancies between the map and the line used on the ground can cause confusion. Over the last three years Exmoor NPA has been able to solve some of these anomalies from the past. One example is the definitive line of the public footpath between South Huckham and Widlake near Exton, which had not been passable for many years. A better route was identified with the landowners, which would be easy to follow and convenient for walkers to use, but also in the best place for the management of the land. It



took some time to find a route that was acceptable to all three landowners and was a bit like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. Once the new route had been proposed, a consultation was carried out to ensure that all parties were happy with it – a public path order then moved the legal line to the new route. Finally, a series of practical improvements were made to make the new route a clear and convenient line for walkers to use.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total over past 3 years
<b>Number of RoW network faults resolved</b>	834	799	950	2583
<b>Total number of major works completed</b>	6	5	10	21
<b>Number of legal orders/events made</b>	44	43	26	113



*Above: Ground works provided a level route across a steep slope – courtesy of ENPA*



*Above: Difficult stiles were replaced with gates in several locations – courtesy of ENPA*



*Above: Signposts were installed along the new route to ensure it is easy to follow – courtesy of ENPA*

## 11. Mending The Chains on Exmoor

Under the flag of the British Mountaineering Council's national Mend Our Mountains campaign, £6,000 was raised towards the restoration of the popular permitted bridleway which runs east to west across The Chains on Exmoor. The route forms part of the Tarka Trail and is also well used by groups visiting the Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre. The path had become wet and muddy, and as this got worse, the route became wider as walkers and horse riders tried to negotiate a suitable route, threatening the sensitive ecology of the area.



*Above: Before walkers struggled to find a route through the mud*



*Above: Helicopters lift in the stone – Photo credit Kevin Wills*



*Left: Repair work in progress*

## 12. Making Exmoor Accessible to All

The National Trust teamed up with Countryside Mobility South West to introduce two new accessible routes starting from the Heddon Valley, suitable for all-terrain mobility scooters and pushchairs. The routes to choose from are a 2 mile circular route to Heddon's Mouth, or a 5 mile linear route to Woody Bay. Both routes take in the beautiful woodland, wildlife and clifftop views along the West Exmoor coastline, enabling people of all abilities to enjoy and explore Exmoor.

## 13. New Footpath Unveiled in Memory of Exmoor's First Ranger

Exmoor National Park Rangers from past and present gathered on North Hill for World Ranger Day on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019 for the unveiling of a new 1.5 mile circular route in memory of Exmoor's first ever ranger – Jim Collins. The walk, which starts and finishes at the car park



near the old tank training grounds on North Hill near Minehead (grid ref: SS953474), was one of Jim's favourites for its breath-taking views across Exmoor and the Bristol Channel. Jim was a real trailblazer and evidence of the work he started can be seen all over the National Park. It is very fitting that Jim is now commemorated as part of Exmoor's much celebrated rights of way network, which he helped create.



*Above: Jim's path – photo courtesy of Dan James (ENPA)*



*Above: A New signpost to mark the route – photo courtesy of Dan James (ENPA)*



## 14. Helping people to enjoy Exmoor safely

The Covid pandemic presented some unique challenges, but also some great opportunities to engage with people new to visiting Exmoor. The changing situation with a series of lockdowns and the lifting of restrictions required a flexible response. During the first lockdown in March 2020, Exmoor NPA Rangers assisted with delivering school meals and drug prescriptions to vulnerable people across Exmoor. The team also worked closely with the police to ensure people were staying at home, and with landowners worried about rights of way passing close to their houses. Early May combined with warm weather, saw a huge influx of people to sites such as Bessoms bridge to have BBQs and swim. Rangers and other staff assisted in trying to keep on top of the litter situation and engage with people, while also working with the concerns of local communities. As summer progressed, there was a shift towards family groups coming to Exmoor for day visits and holidays, many of whom had never visited before. This was a great opportunity to engage, give information and hopefully encourage people to visit again.



*Above: An ENPA ranger out with emergency services during the Covid-19 lockdown*



**Ambition: The tourism economy is vibrant, innovative and growing, and celebrates Exmoor's distinctive character**

## 15. Exmoor 'Dream Discover Explore' brand



The Exmoor brand is used to raise awareness of the National Park, and to drive a high quality of provision. This helps lengthen the season and build the capacity and resilience of the tourism industry. Exmoor NPA and Visit Exmoor encourage businesses to use the brand and the Exmoor story via newsletters, workshops, social media campaigns and a series of short films. During lockdown, the #VirtualExmoor campaign helped people to stay connected to the National Park, and culminated in a successful #ExmoorDay social media campaign.

*Left: Dream, Discover, Explore brand stickers – courtesy of ENPA*

## 16. National Park Experience Collection

Exmoor was one of nine National Parks to develop brand new bookable visitor experiences that bring these special landscapes to life. Funding from Visit England enabled seven lead businesses (often working with other partners) to be coached in the development of quality authentic Exmoor experiences. The Collection has been heavily promoted to the international travel trade via a printed and online guide and digital campaign. The second stage of the project, started in 2019, saw the Collection being adapted to appeal to a domestic audience and to enable direct consumer booking. Five additional experiences were developed during 2020 and added to the Collection in early 2021. The authentic experiences are now available to book online through the National Parks website and partner Visit Exmoor.

<https://www.nationalparkexperiences.co.uk/>

## 17. Eat Exmoor

The Eat Exmoor project is a collaboration between Exmoor NPA and Visit Exmoor to promote the use and purchase of local food and drink products. A Local Food and Drink Marketing Toolkit and Local Producers Database have been central to the work with tourism businesses to encourage the use and promotion of local produce. This involved working with 20 local retailers to develop and use 'Produced in Exmoor' and 'Buy Local' branded point of sale and marketing materials. The Exmoor Hill Farming Network and Exmoor farmers helped put together a campaign to promote the environmental, animal welfare and human health benefits of grass fed Exmoor lamb, and a public register of Grass-fed lamb suppliers was

created. New partnerships have helped to promote local produce such as Edible Exmoor, and Visit Exmoor worked with Yeo Valley and media partners on a printed local food guide and London based media event showcasing Exmoor producers.

The Exmoor Lamb Film can be watched on Youtube <https://youtu.be/vKgdlNQMSYM>



*Above: Eat Exmoor lamb tasting event and Buy Local promotion at community shops – courtesy of ENPA*

## 18. A Warm Welcome at Exmoor's National Park Centres



*Above: Dave Wilde receiving his award. - Photo courtesy of Dan James (ENPA)*

The three National Park Centres in Dulverton, Dunster and Lynmouth, provide information and inspiration for many visitors to the National Park. Staff provide a warm welcome and bespoke information to customers and have developed further in depth resources to help unpack the special qualities of Exmoor. A new online shop was launched in April 2021, widening access to many of the resources to additional online customers.

In April 2021 the Lynmouth Pavilion centre was awarded Gold in the Devon Tourism Awards and went on to take Gold in the

regional South West Tourism Awards for 'Visitor Information Service of the Year'.

## 19. Exmoor's Ten Explorer Routes

In line with the findings in local tourism research indicating an increased interest in shorter distance walks, a package of ten notable shorter length Exmoor walks was researched and developed during 2019/20. Each 'Explorer Walk' has its own short film to introduce visitors to Exmoor's diverse landscapes. During late 2020 the packages were printed and have now been made available through National Park Centres and our on-line shop and promoted via [www.exmoorwalks.org.uk](http://www.exmoorwalks.org.uk).



A formal launch with a promotional campaign gained significant press and TV coverage and positive feedback from users and businesses alike. [https://youtu.be/9lqPd\\_rMd\\_o](https://youtu.be/9lqPd_rMd_o)



## 20. Visitor Research

Visitor surveys are held every couple of years to provide qualitative views from visitors, building on long term data held to provide an overview of trends. Alongside this, quantitative data is also collected annually. The findings of both are positive, Exmoor has a 'world class' net promoter score of over 70% with 99% of visitors describing their Exmoor experience as good or very good. Visitor volume and value has grown by 15% and 17% (allowing for inflation) respectively between 2009 and 2019. In 2020 the usual bi-annual visitor survey had to be deferred due to Covid. In its place a virtual visitor survey was conducted to ascertain future intentions of previous visitors in relation to visiting Exmoor post-Covid. All of this data is used by the National Park and partners (including individual businesses) to monitor and plan for the future.

<https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/info-for-tourism-providers/tourism-research>

## 21. “Reaching Out” To New Audiences

Exmoor National Park was awarded funding from Forest Holidays to enable schools that have not previously had the opportunity, to experience a supported residential stay at Exmoor NPA's Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning in the wilds of upland Exmoor.

The Exmoor NPA Education team reached out to schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium and those from more urban locations with a high Black and Ethnic Minority community. Schools that did not have a strong Outdoor focused curriculum or a history of taking their pupils on residential visits were also targeted. Three schools were selected: Yeo Valley Primary School, Barnstaple; The Kingfisher School, Bristol; and St Barnabus VC Primary School, Bristol. The schools were funded to come on a three day stay at Pinkery. All the schools had a chance to discover what a National Park is, and why Exmoor is one; experience spending time in Exmoor's landscape; develop skills and confidence; and to spend a night away from home (for many for the first time).

Because the schools had little recent experience in residential or the countryside in general, the trips had to be planned carefully to provide reassurance and support to both children and teachers. For example, for Yeo Valley, the option to come on a day trip to Pinkery helped to break down barriers and remove possible anxiety about the overnight stay. For St Barnabus, the predominantly Muslim pupils had very little concept of what Exmoor was like, or what might be there. Many of them were of Somali background and had very little idea of what to expect, for example some were concerned that there might be lions and other dangerous wild animals on Exmoor. The Education Team visited the school many times to talk through the trip and provide reassurance to the children, and importantly their parents. It was also important to talk through issues of particular religious or cultural concern such as halal food, and clear separation of boys and girls. It also became clear that as many of the children had no regular experience of “countryside”, they often had no suitable clothing.

All the schools enjoyed their stay, experienced new things (for example seeing cows or the sea for the first time) and grew in confidence in the outdoor environment. It is hoped that the schools will want to embed outdoor learning into their curriculum and begin to use their own local natural green spaces more frequently, as well as have the confidence to visit Exmoor and other National Parks in the future.

Feedback from a parent of one of the children from Bristol: *“I want to thank the team for what's been an amazing trip for our school. \*\*\* had such a wonderful time, home tired, muddy, bag of wet clothes but has not stopped talking about his adventure. He loved it all, the place, the quiet, the food, the bed, the films, the staff, the sea, the minibus, the activities but most of all the sunrise over the hill out of his window. Thank you for giving him this opportunity.”* Above: Residential trips to Pinkery – Courtesy of ENPA



## Place: Inspiring Landscapes

Since 2018 concerns over the climate and nature crises have led to increasing efforts to restore nature, reduce carbon emissions, and build resilience to the changing climate in ways that align with National Park purposes. There have also been many projects to celebrate and conserve Exmoor's natural beauty and cultural heritage, encouraging people to connect with and care for these special qualities.

### *Celebrated landscapes*

**Ambition: The natural beauty, distinct character and diversity of Exmoor's landscapes are celebrated, conserved and enhanced**

## 22. White Rock Cottage & Ashcombe Gardens Restoration

Over the past eight years Exmoor NPA has been restoring part of the heritage of the Exmoor Forest, in the heart of the National Park. A project led by the National Park Authority, and further funded by the Western Somerset LEADER Programme and CareMoor for Exmoor, rescued White Rock Cottage, a rare survival dating back to the nineteenth century when the entrepreneurial Knight family owned the Forest and set out to tame its wilderness. Works to repair the building took a year to complete, revealing what is thought to be the original appearance of the building, once again linking it to the designed landscape in which it sits. The work was further fuelled by the discovery of a wealth of letters in a loft in Kidderminster in 2016, detailing the transformation of the 16,000-acre estate from moorland to farmland and revealing its unique social history.

Works to open up the associated historic Picturesque garden landscape in Ashcombe have progressed steadily with a group of dedicated volunteers and forestry contractors guided by the Ashcombe Gardens Restoration Plan. In 2020 around 30% of the tree cover in the valley was removed due to ash dieback. Replanting in response to that and to re-establish the planting scheme of the historic garden was begun in March 2021. Together, the buildings and gardens are helping to reveal the human story of how this moorland community shaped the face of Exmoor. The Simonsbath and Exmoor Heritage Trust has been set up to manage the buildings and help them to become part of community life once again.



*White Rock Cottage pre & post restoration – ENPA*



## 23. Understanding Place

The Exmoor Society's Resource Centre in Dulverton has an archive collection to explore, an extensive library of Exmoor books in one place, a display area to browse current issues and a work space for study with free wi-fi. Since 2018, it has increased the number of people using it to look at old photographs, a slide collection showing changes to the moor over 60 years, searching for family history or old houses, or even finding evidence for disputed issues. Well-known Exmoor names and their work are popular such as Victor Bonham Carter, the writer and farmer, Hope Bourne, an early nature writer living in the wilds and an artist with her lively pictures and sketches for all to see. Over 60 editions of the Exmoor Review, press cuttings and the history of the Society can be researched as well.

***Wildness and tranquillity with dark night skies, and sensitive development***

**Ambition: Exmoor is somewhere you can experience tranquillity, openness, wildness and dark night skies. Development is sensitive to the National Park's special qualities and conserves its scenic quality and setting**

## 24. Exmoor's Dark Skies Festival

Exmoor is one of the best places in the country to enjoy star-gazing, with 92% pristine dark skies, and minimal light pollution. This resulted in the National Park being designated as the first Dark Sky Reserve in Europe. In 2017 the first Dark Skies Festival was held to celebrate this stellar sky-scape, and this has now become an annual event. Over 6,000 people have enjoyed planetarium sessions at local schools and joined in with poetry and



children's story writing competitions. Events were hosted by partners such as the National Trust, South West lakes Trust at Wimbleball Lake, Exmoor Pony Centres, as well as local businesses. Despite the Covid-pandemic the 2020 Festival went ahead in between lockdowns with fewer and smaller events but with interest still being very high. Links with Devon Dark Skies Week added a wide range of virtual sessions to reach a wider audiences.

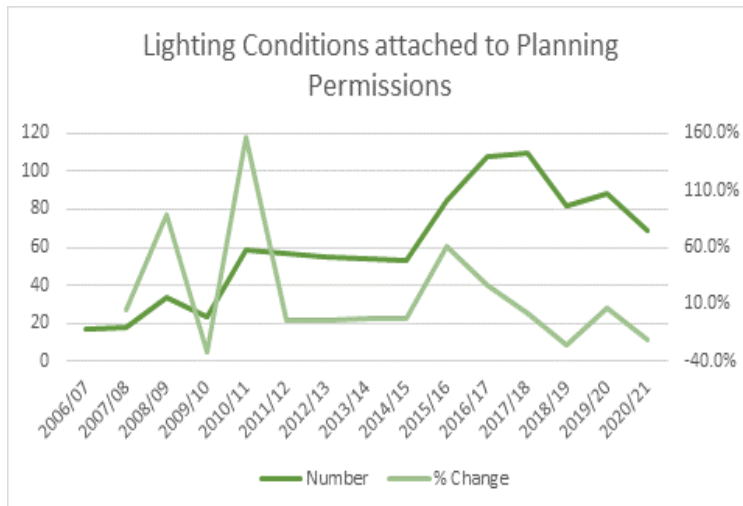
## 25. Astro Tourism Project

Designation as a Dark Skies Reserve has created many opportunities for Exmoor's businesses. To help local businesses to benefit from the Reserve, the Exmoor Dark Sky Friendly business scheme was launched in autumn 2020, supported by the Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership. Since then, 18 business have achieved accreditation with the scheme, receiving training from a dark sky consultant, and a further 6 businesses are in the pipeline.

A free downloadable Astronomer’s Guide to Exmoor was published in spring 2021. Our first Dark Sky Discovery Hub - a collaboration between Wild About Exmoor and Exford Bridge Tea Rooms - opened in 2021. A new Dark Sky Discovery Trail was launched in autumn 2021 [Dark Sky Discovery Trail | Exmoor Walks](#). More can be read about the outcomes of this project at [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/stargazing](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/stargazing).

## 26. Protecting Exmoor’s Dark Skies

Exmoor’s designation as a Dark Skies Reserve means that we need to take care that these dark skies are protected from light pollution. The Local Plan, adopted in July 2017 includes



policies promoting good lighting management and design, and protecting the core of the reserve from permanent illumination. Since then, 349 lighting conditions have been added to planning permissions to ensure that development does not detract from enjoyment of the dark night skies.

## 27. Encouraging High Quality Design

Good design is an important element of ensuring that development within the National Park contributes positively to the character of the built and natural environment. A Design Working Group of National Park Officers, Authority Members and external practitioners was set up to promote sympathetic design that contributes to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park, and reinforces local character and distinctiveness. A design seminar was held in November 2018 in Dunster Tithe barn with a keynote address from Merrick Denton-Thompson, Former President of the Landscape Institute and a series of design showcases by local architects and self-builders.

*Right: Design Seminar held in Dunster Tithe Barn in 2018  
– Courtesy of ENPA*



## *Valued historic environment and cultural heritage*

**Ambition: Exmoor's historic environment is better understood, cared for and protected. Its cultural heritage and rural traditions are valued for their place in telling Exmoor's story and shaping its future**

### 28. Historic Buildings Festival

Over 1,000 years of history is wrapped up within the diverse range of Exmoor's historic buildings. Thatched cottages and village churches might be the structures that immediately spring to mind but the array of historic buildings goes far beyond this. Whether it's the medieval hall houses in Dunster that provide a remarkable window onto life in the town right back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or the industrial structures that form the West Somerset Mineral Line, all of these buildings have a story to tell, and they have all shaped the landscape that we see today.



To celebrate this diverse heritage, the first 'Exmoor Historic Buildings Festival' was held in September 2019 with a range of walks, talks and practical demonstrations. Guest speakers and skilled craftspeople shed new light on how these structures came into being and what they can teach us about how our ancestors used to live and work, including a 'cob' class given to pupils at Dulverton School. Over 500 people attended 17 events showing that there is a strong interest in the built heritage of Exmoor. Another festival is planned to take place in 2022.



*Above: Dulverton cob class – Courtesy of ENPA*

*Right: A guided walk in Wootton Courtenay was one of the events – Courtesy of ENPA*





## 29. Monuments Management Scheme

Historic England provided £60,000 funding to carry out works to 16 scheduled or listed sites across the National Park. These sites included everything from prehistoric stone settings to a medieval packhorse bridge.

The majority of the funding was for Barlynch Priory, just to the north of Dulverton. The priory was founded around 1180 by William de Say, the local Norman landowner, and was in the first wave of monasteries to be dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536. After the Canons and pensioners left, anything of value was sold and the lead was stripped from the roofs and the site became a farmstead and a ruin. Ivy was causing significant damage to the structure and once carefully removed it was clear that much of the stonework was loose and at risk of failing. Over summer of 2020, mindful of the changing Covid-19 restrictions, local contractors carried out major consolidation works, repointing the masonry and stabilising loose stonework. The walls were then topped with a turf capping to protect the wall heads from the worst that Exmoor weather can throw at them. Some trees near to the ruins were removed as they were ailing or risked causing damage.

In September 2020 a Covid-safe open day was held with the help of volunteers, and further open days to this privately-owned site are planned. New interpretation panels and a leaflet have been produced for visitors.



*Above: Repair works to Barlynch Priory – Courtesy of ENPA*

### 30. North Hill on the Radar

The past military significance of North Hill is not always apparent to visitors today. Used for training since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1942 it became one of only five tank training grounds across the country. Farms were evacuated and civilians kept out. Canadian and British troops trained here but by the end of 1943 it was heavily used by American forces in preparation for the invasion of Europe (D Day), and closed in November 1944. On the hillslope below the tank training ground, a top-secret radar station was also built in 1942 but operated completely separately.

As part of Heritage Open Days in September, Exmoor NPA and the National Trust jointly hosted events to highlight this period in North Hill's history. A group of historic military vehicle enthusiasts convoyed from Minehead and displayed their vehicles on site. Guided walks explored the tank training grounds and the only surviving building at the radar station. A popular volunteer led programme of guided walks also operated throughout 2018-9.

The military base within Moor Wood is now managed under a new management plan as an open space within the woodland, aiming to keep the concrete and brick Nissen hut bases free of damaging vegetation under their canopy of pine trees.



*Above: Military vehicles at North Hill on the Radar 2021 – Courtesy of Tim Parish (ENPA)*



## Rich in wildlife

**Ambition: Exmoor is richer in wildlife. Habitats are in good condition, expanded, connected, and support a greater abundance of species**

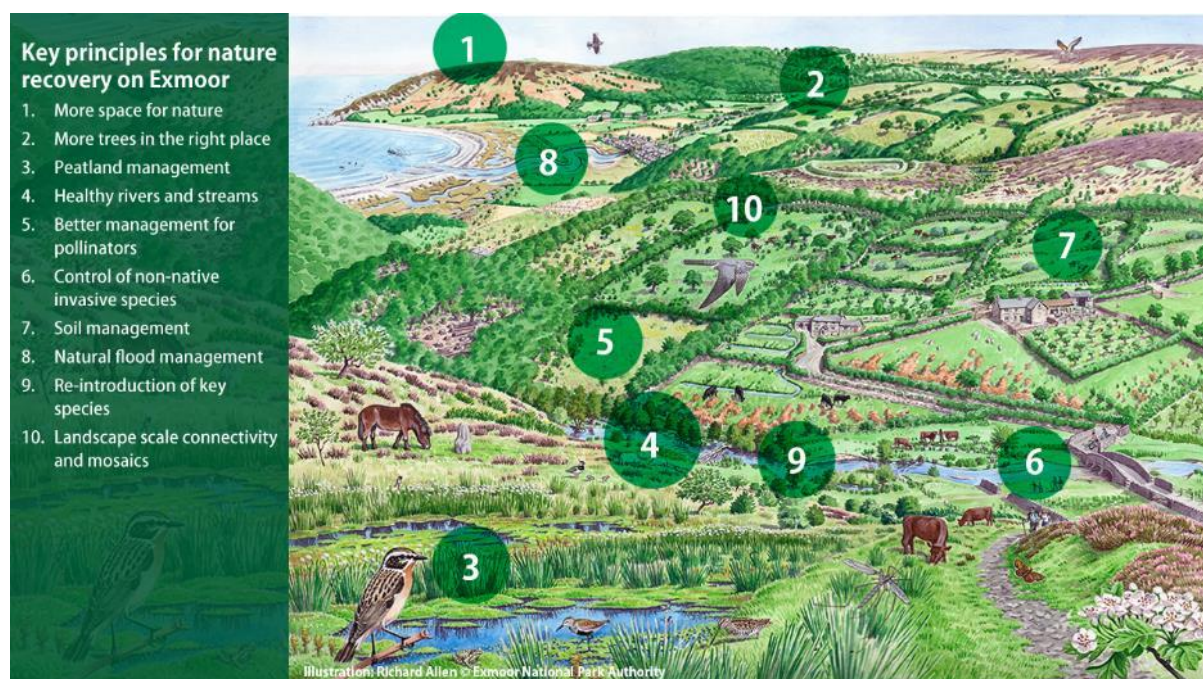
### 31. Exmoor Nature Recovery Vision

In November 2020, Exmoor National Park Authority Members adopted a Vision to work with landowners, partners and communities to help ensure that at least 75% of the National Park is in “nature rich condition” by 2050. [Exmoor National Park’s Nature Recovery Vision](#) sets out vital changes needed to reverse wildlife decline, restore natural processes and boost resilience to climate change. By 2030 the aim is to increase the area for nature on Exmoor in line with targets set out in the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) and the [Wildlife Trusts’ 30 by 30 campaign](#), and with the government’s [national ‘Nature Recovery Network’](#).

A key ambition is to tap into the huge opportunity for more farmland to be managed for nature and climate while still supporting viable farm businesses. Many Exmoor farmers already farm sustainably with unimproved grasslands, hay meadows, pollinator margins and restored hedgebanks at the very core of their businesses.

More nature-friendly farming could deliver vital improvements to soil, air, water quality, habitats and wildlife on Exmoor, while helping farmers capitalise on the government’s promise to better support these kinds of public goods following transition to the new environmental land management scheme.

The Vision has been drawn up by the National Park Authority’s [Nature Conservation Advisory Panel](#). Ongoing wider consultation with the Exmoor Hill Farming Network and other key local partners is helping shape the plans and how they can be implemented.



Above: A Vision for a nature-rich Exmoor. Illustration: Richard Allen © Exmoor National Park Authority



### 32. Restoring Exmoor's peatlands

The Exmoor Mires Partnership is a restoration programme targeted at over 3,000 ha of moorland as part of South West Water's [Upstream Thinking](#) Catchment Management Programme, which enables issues at source in the catchment to be addressed rather than investing in storage and treatment works further down the river.

The Exmoor Mires Partnership is working with landowners and moorland users to re-assess the way bogs are regarded and managed. With the support of this partnership, hundreds of kilometres of old ditches and abandoned peat cuttings are being blocked up, gradually restoring their ecological and hydrological functions. The end result will be wetter, healthier peatlands, which supply a wide range of ecosystem services.

### 33. Exmoor Non Native Invasive Species (ENNIS) Project

Invasive non-native plants occur along many important watercourses and wildlife habitats on Exmoor. They can have a major impact on nature conservation, archaeology, access and flood defence.

For many years Exmoor National Park has been at the forefront of the response to invasive species, and in March 2019 the ENNIS project was set up to help control the spread of invasive non-native species on Exmoor. The project is trialling innovative approaches and working with local communities and volunteers to tackle species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, montbretia, skunk cabbage and signal crayfish. Funded by the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development and Defra's Water Environment Grant, it is a partnership of Exmoor NPA working with the National Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England and Nicky Green Associates.



*Surveying Signal Crayfish – courtesy ENPA*

In 2019 Exmoor NPA purchased its own Rootwave Pro machine to progress its innovative trials on the organic control of knotweed. This technology forces electricity through the plant, raising temperatures and boiling plant cells. The ENNIS project has been carrying out rigorous trials to test whether this is an effective method for invasive species control. Other innovations include a trial of American signal crayfish control on a short stretch of the river Barle above Withypool, using a combination of trapping and male sterilisation techniques. This is needed to avoid the damage caused by signal crayfish tunnelling into riverbanks, affecting water quality, hydrology, and geomorphology, and the outcomes of the trial will be of significant interest nationally. Work is also underway to treat skunk cabbage at an early stage of invasion across the National Park, before it becomes a major threat.

### 34. All the Moor Butterflies

The All the Moor Butterflies Project (2017-2020) improved the fortunes of some of Exmoor's rarest butterfly species, whilst also offering opportunities for new and existing audiences to get involved with their conservation. The project worked with 146 landowners across 201 sites on Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor.

Project staff carried out 841 site visits, giving advice to landowners and farmers to help them care for the rare butterflies and moths on their land. The project focused on two key areas on Exmoor: Heddon Valley, home of the high brown fritillary butterfly, and the Holnicote Estate; one of only four strongholds for the heath fritillary in the country. The project delivered vital conservation work to safeguard these special species, and engaging people with their conservation.



*Above: Heath Fritillary Butterfly – Alan Barnes*

### 35. Conserving Exmoor's Rich Lichen Communities

Faced with threats to the future of the region's important lichen communities, the national charity "Plantlife" and Exmoor NPA are delivering a 3-year programme of activities funded by Heritage Lottery.



Practical conservation works included pollarding of oaks in Hawkcombe Wood to help consolidate rare "dry-bark" lichen communities. This involved detailed base-line surveys looking at light levels and canopy density and will involve repeat surveys over the coming years. Events for woodland owners and managers have been held to explain the processes and help understand how simple practical measures can improve conditions for lichens.

A simple Rapid Woodland Assessments tool has helped owners, managers and others to understand the lichen interest in their woods and what measures can be taken to improve conditions. Despite some cancellations due to Covid-19, the Plantlife team ran a number of lichen identification and training events for schools, volunteers, woodland owners and professionals, with over 1,300 participants.

### 36. Beaver re-introduction



The National Trust is trialling two enclosed releases of beavers on the Holnicote Estate. Beavers are native to the UK and were once an important part of the ecosystem, before they were hunted to extinction in the UK in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. They are nature's water engineers and create remarkable wetland habitats that benefit a wide range of wildlife and could form an important role in reversing declines in nature.

There is also increasing evidence that beavers can play a role in helping manage flood risk, helping with drought resilience and improving water quality.

## Prosperity: Thriving Communities and a Vibrant Local Economy

One of the aims of the Plan is to ensure that Exmoor's close-knit rural communities can flourish both socially and economically. Exmoor's unique landscapes and special qualities are inextricably linked to the key industries of tourism, farming and food. Since 2018 there have been many successful projects to support the future of these key sectors. The Covid pandemic has had a major impact on the local economy and communities, and partners have worked together to support local businesses through this and to build a green recovery. Exmoor's response to the climate emergency is also highlighted below.

### *Working landscapes*

**Ambition: Exmoor's land-based communities and businesses are supported to provide healthy food and good quality timber, and ensure that Exmoor's landscapes continue to be well managed and cared for**

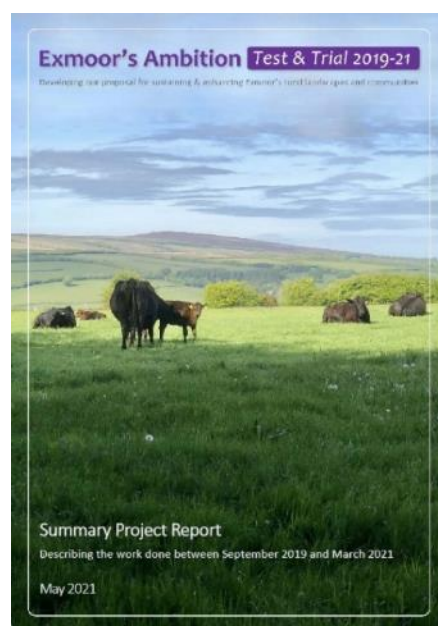
### 37. Exmoor's Ambition for the Future of Farming

Following the vote for the UK to leave the European Union in 2016, the Exmoor Hill Farming Network, Exmoor NPA, Exmoor Society, Natural England, RSPB and private landowners got together to develop Exmoor's Ambition, a transformative proposal for sustaining and enhancing Exmoor's farmed landscapes and communities after Brexit.

This led to Exmoor being one of the first places to carry out Tests and Trials to contribute to the design of the government's new flagship Environmental Land Management (ELM) programme. The project involved 26 farmers and woodland managers to explore how information on 'natural capital' combined with the land managers' own knowledge of the land could guide the future scheme and demonstrate how public money could reward environmental 'public goods'.

Mapped information on environmental and cultural assets was collated a farm scale and across the whole National Park. This was used to help work out the public benefits that are delivered by each holding and presented in a way that could form the basis of an agreement. The information was used to test a landscape scale approach of what the ELM scheme can deliver and where.

The project also explored potential payment rates for public goods, looking at natural capital valuations and the likely costs of delivery. Crucially these reward levels were tested with the participant farmers to gauge how viable they might be to ensure a sustainable future for Exmoor farming and the benefits it offers.





### 38. Headwaters of the River Exe Project

The Headwaters of the Exe catchment management programme, which began in 2015 as part of South West Water's Upstream Thinking, has implemented considerable beneficial changes for water quality across the upper Exe catchment. Funded by South West Water and Exmoor NPA, it was guided by a steering group of land managers, Exmoor Hill Farming Network, Exmoor Rivers and Streams Group, Exmoor Society, South West Water, Exmoor NPA, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

The programme of work undertaken was broad and included working with land managers, restoring rights of way and supporting non-native invasive species control. It promoted sustainable land management including resilience to climate change, improving riverine habitats and raising awareness of the landscape and ecological value of rivers.

60 advisory visits were made to local land managers, including 10 woodland units and shoots, followed up by Water and Environment Plans for each holding. A programme of 22 events and demonstrations was delivered, reaching 700 farmers, foresters and shoot managers. A total of 28 capital grants were agreed for works to improve water quality, with a total value of £125,667 which included significant match funding provided by the beneficiaries. In addition, a pesticide amnesty secured the removal of 192 litres and 5.5 kg of pesticides, as well as 2,500 litres of sulphuric acid silage additive, from the catchment.

Rights of way across the catchment were assessed by Exmoor NPA and a total of 6 km of restoration was carried out, with improvements to an overall distance of 17 km of paths which posed a high risk to water quality.

Support was provided for control of invasive non-native species, enabling additional work to be undertaken, including a trial for controlling invasive plant species on organic land.

Monitoring for the programme was overseen by the University of Exeter working closely with the partner organisations, with Riverfly monitoring undertaken in partnership with the River Exe and Tributaries Association.

The Programme continues with the help and support of the farmers and land managers in the catchment area. It is hoped that, by providing an innovative approach to improving raw water quality, Headwaters of the Exe will have a lasting legacy.



*Above: Before (left) and after (right) photos of sections of restored path adjacent to the River*

### 39. Game shoots on Exmoor

Game shooting provides a large contribution to Exmoor's local economy and the Greater Exmoor Shoots Association is currently exploring the scale of its economic impact. Public concerns were raised over the impact of game shoots on Exmoor's special qualities, leading to discussions and investigations with game shoot managers, the Local Access Forum, Natural England and others.

Natural England completed a national evidence review in November 2020, which found that the negative ecological effects of gamebird releases tend to be localised and that there are minimal or no effects beyond 500m from the point of release. The subject is highly complex, and the NE Review did not consider landscape and recreational impacts, either positive or negative, which remain poorly understood. Some work to better understand the impact of game shooting on Exmoor's landscape has been led by Exmoor NPA's Landscape Officer, funded by Natural England. In 2021 the Government introduced a General Licence arrangement for releases of common pheasant and red-legged partridge within European protected sites and within a 500m buffer zone around the sites.

During 2020 the ability to continue engagement with gameshoots was limited due to Covid-19 restrictions and the impact of lockdowns on the industry. As we emerge from these restrictions Exmoor NPA will continue to work with game shoot managers and others through a strategy of better information, encouraging good practice and improved communication.

#### ***Strong local economy***

**Ambition: The local economy is more sustainable with increased innovation, entrepreneurship and improved economic prospects**

### 40. Rural Enterprise Exmoor

In the autumn of 2019 partners from the District and County Councils, and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership came together to support Exmoor NPA's Rural Enterprise Exmoor programme. Over 100 businesses attended a positive launch event and over the following 9 months an audit of business activity across the moor was undertaken, revealing a 60% increase in the known businesses operating within the. During this period the largest business survey of its kind on Exmoor was undertaken to ascertain business views regarding the unique challenges and opportunities of doing business within the National Park. The research report, published June 2020, was used as the baseline to build upon a new Vision for Rural Enterprise on Exmoor in 2030, published in 2021. The overall aspiration is for Exmoor to have: *an economy building community wealth, sitting lightly in its environment and creating opportunities from its special qualities*. To read the Vision and for more information about Rural Enterprise Exmoor visit the website [Exmoor - Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision \(exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk\)](https://exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)



## 41. Supporting Young Entrepreneurs

The Exmoor Society's Pinnacle Award was set up to encourage young people to start or develop a business with the support of a £5K grant. In 2020 it was won by Caroline Westcott, who had just made a career change to become a professional chef, when the Covid pandemic struck. Her entrepreneurial idea was to become more flexible and resilient to change by developing a cold food storage capacity to cater for larger numbers of people at out-door and private events. She will source local food and employ local people as well as being part of the local community.

## 42. Tourism Recovery Plan

Spearheaded by Exmoor NPA and Visit Exmoor, a group of ten tourism bodies and stakeholders including District Councils and local tourism associations met regularly during the Covid 19 pandemic to ensure there was a clear understanding of the effects on the local tourism economy. By working together, Exmoor has a stronger voice and has been fully represented in recovery work and grant administration. Tourism partners from all areas within Exmoor contributed to the Exmoor Tourism Recovery Plan with commitments from all partners to work towards joint goals and focus efforts on support for local businesses. A detailed Action Plan was created to maximise the potential of the area's tourism offer as restrictions were lifted. More details and the full Recovery Plan can be found at [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/info-for-tourism-providers/exmoor-covid-19-recovery-plan](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/info-for-tourism-providers/exmoor-covid-19-recovery-plan)

## 43. CareMoor for Exmoor

CareMoor is Exmoor NPA's donation scheme supporting work to conserve the landscapes, habitats, footpaths and heritage of the National Park. From 2018-2020, over £100,000 has been raised from a variety of campaigns, appeals, events, legacies, and business schemes. Highlights include a major campaign to reinstate Woodside Bridge near Lynmouth. Funds raised by CareMoor have enabled us to partner with Devon Environment Foundation and Devon Community Foundation on the creation of a new tree nursery on Exmoor.

Partnerships with local tourism and food businesses and event organisers have continued to raise funds and awareness of CareMoor and a new Donate a Gate dedication scheme was launched in 2019.



*Left: A gate from CareMoor's Donate a gate scheme – courtesy of ENPA*



## 44. Connecting Exmoor

An estimated 90% of all premises in the National Park can now access superfast broadband thanks to 'Connecting Exmoor and Dartmoor', the largest wireless broadband rollout in the UK to date, providing superfast broadband to remote communities. The project was led by the County Councils working together on the Connecting Devon and Somerset project in partnership with the National Park Authorities.

The initial funded phase of this work has been completed and combined with traditional 'Fibre to the Cabinet' rollout via Openreach. Further work is being undertaken to extend this coverage both commercially and through gainshare programmes whereby once uptake of publicly funded schemes reaches a given point operators provide funding for further rollout and investment in the area. Lynton and Lynmouth has recently benefitted from a BT led scheme to provide 'Fibre to the Premises'.

### *Thriving communities*

<b>Ambition: Exmoor's local communities are thriving with strong connections to the National Park</b>
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## 45. Self Build Housing: Justin's Story

All over the world self-build is a mainstream build method - but, not here in the UK. This is being changed on Exmoor through the efforts of local self-builders who are demonstrating that Self-Build is a viable solution to housing need.



*Above: Justin and Linda Tyers self-build home – Photo credit Simon Maxwell*

A recent affordable self build project in the National Park cost £67,000 to build - yet it doesn't look anything like what is usually envisioned as affordable housing. Wholly appropriate to the National Park rural environment, it demonstrates that there is a route to young adult rural home-ownership that is truly affordable, and results in a dwelling local people can be proud to call 'home'.

The owners of this example build, Justin and Linda Tyers, are keen to encourage others to adopt their build 'philosophy' and are working to support other local Self-Builders. Justin is aware that self build is incredibly daunting, and that no amount of written advice helps. "But I know that it's possible - at one time I couldn't hang a shelf," he says. "There is no need for previous experience - with Self Build you learn as you go. Self-builders strive for much higher quality, and experience shows that they achieve it, too."

Justin is currently working to help and guide other self builders to take advantage of opportunities within the National Park to make building land available, with a target price of £10 - £12k per plot, to local people who need a home.

### ***A valued asset***

**Ambition: Exmoor is celebrated for the value it brings to the region and nationally**

## 46. Exmoor's Natural Capital Assets

In their everyday lives, people unintentionally damage the natural environment. Too many visitors in a place such as Exmoor may disturb sensitive wildlife habitats, or cause footpath, bridleway, and verge erosion. Farmers can accidentally pollute rivers by runoff from fertilisers applied to crops. In numerous such cases damages need repair. But crucially, nowadays it is understood that the wellbeing of people in both present and future generations also depends on taking steps to improve the natural environment.

New ways to help thinking about how to achieve that objective have evolved. A key concept is 'natural capital', meaning all of nature's resources people use for their benefit, and therefore value. It includes the world's physical features such as water, geology, soils, land cover and all living things. Associated in the UK particularly with Professor Dieter Helm, he challenged the Exmoor Society to investigate how the natural capital concept could be applied in Exmoor National Park.

The result is a ground-breaking study, 'Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital' [ES Register Report Final 290618 \(exmoorsociety.com\)](https://www.exmoorsociety.com/ES_Register_Report_Final_290618). Natural capital assets were defined and recorded for farms in three areas, then linked to the services ('ecosystem services') people value. Valuing services will be a basis for measuring Exmoor's natural capital from which the services derive. Unusually, the study included cultural aspects of Exmoor people value, such as perceptions of wildness, tranquillity, scenic beauty and historic environment. Exmoor can again lay claim to innovative analysis to inform rural policy.

## 47. Local Natural Capital Accounting



An Exeter University research team, led by Brett Day, has been working with Exmoor National Park as part of the NERC-funded [SWEEP](#) programme (South West Partnership for Environmental and Economic Prosperity), to develop a set of Natural Capital Accounts

for Exmoor National Park. Natural Capital Accounting aims to calculate the total stocks and flows of natural resources in any given area as well as the goods and services it provides to people, such as food and timber production, clean water and air, recreation and leisure opportunities, health and wellbeing services.

Previously used mainly at a national level, the team drew on existing Natural Capital Accounting methodologies to critically assess the merits and limitations of applying these at a local, National Park scale. It was felt that whilst the produced Natural Capital Accounts had great potential to provide a framework for classifying, quantifying and valuing Exmoor's ecosystem services, there were various limitations that needed to be addressed. A key concern was the lack of data available for natural capital stocks and ecosystem services at the National Park level. This resulted in gaps in the accounts, or figures based on assumptions, both of which limited their potential usefulness to support decision making. The [full](#) or [extended summary](#) report can be found on the SWEEP website.

The key outcome of the project, therefore, was a set of powerful lessons learnt and recommendations that have been shared with Defra. It is hoped that this will help inform ongoing discussions and guidance to improve the effectiveness of Natural Capital Accounting as a management tool for environmental organisations, such as Exmoor National Park, helping them to deliver their ambition to 'better understand, harness and value the full benefits of its ecosystems so as to secure greater investment to maintain and enhance them for the future' (Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023).

## 48. Exmoor's Response to the Climate Emergency

The UK's Protected Landscapes are a national asset in the fight against climate change. This was recognised in the Landscapes Review by Julian Glover<sup>1</sup>, which stated that Protected Landscapes should "be at the forefront of our national response to climate change".

Nationally, the National Park Authorities prepared a Delivery Plan for Climate<sup>2</sup> which sets out commitments for National Parks to lead the response to the climate emergency.

Exmoor's response is twofold. Firstly, the National Park Authority declared a climate emergency in 2019, and agreed to work towards the Authority being carbon neutral by 2030. An assessment of the Authority's carbon footprint has been carried out, and an action plan agreed for achieving the carbon neutral target. As buildings are the main source of carbon emissions, efforts have been targeted at reducing energy demands through energy efficiency measures and increased renewable energy generation. At Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre, ambitious plans are underway to decarbonise the buildings and establish

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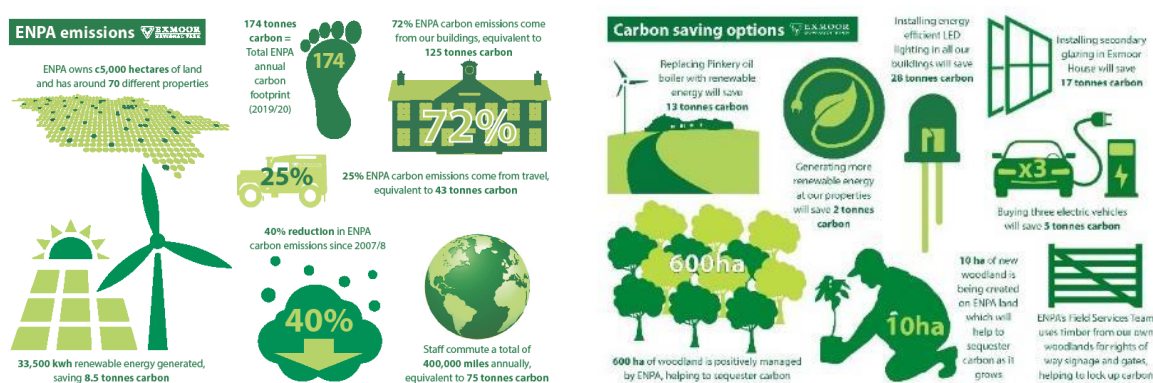
<sup>1</sup> [Landscapes review: National Parks and AONBs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Delivery-Plan-for-Climate-Leadership-FINAL.pdf \(nationalparksengland.org.uk\)](#)



Pinkery as a centre of excellence for low carbon building and renewable energy, where children on school residentials and other visitors can learn about the climate emergency and how we are tackling it. [Exmoor - Key Documents \(exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk\)](https://exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)

Responding to the climate emergency on Exmoor is something that requires action across the work of the Authority, and from all our partners, local communities and businesses, land managers and farmers. There is much that is already happening, particularly in relation to nature recovery, and the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme, but also more that needs to be done for example in relation to greening travel and reducing emissions from agriculture and domestic energy. The national ambitions for responding to the climate and ecological emergencies, as well as for a green recovery following the Covid pandemic, provide a new stimulus and sense of urgency for renewed collaboration and action within the National Park.



## 49. Exmoor's Role in Carbon Offsetting

While reducing emissions is the primary goal in responding to the climate emergency, it is not possible to remove all emissions, and so there is also need for carbon offsetting. As part of this, Exmoor NPA is undertaking a 'land visioning' exercise across its 5,000-hectare estate (around 7% of the National Park). Working together with local partners and neighbouring landowners the NPA aims to build a pipeline of projects to deliver enhanced benefits for climate, nature and people.

This includes work to establish a new tree nursery near the Exmoor NPA depot at Exford which, together with the 12 hectares of new woodland being created on Exmoor NPA land at Bye Hill, will be used as a hub for community events and training to inspire nature connectedness and teach basic skills in creating and managing woodlands for climate resilience.

The ongoing Exmoor Mires Partnership has succeeded in rewetting 2,500 hectares of peat bog, which over time will draw down carbon from the atmosphere, create a haven for wildlife and contribute to improved water quality and regulation. The work continues and the potential to carry out further sensitive restoration on Exmoor is being investigated.

## 50. Hearing Young People's Views on the Climate Emergency

Today's younger generations are the ones who will have to face the consequences of the changes in climate that are already being seen, and which will intensify if global action to cut emissions is not hard and fast enough. This is leading to increased 'eco-anxiety' amongst children and young people.



Exmoor NPA's Education team are leading a series of climate change engagement activities with young people to gather their views on climate change: what they see as the key issues and what needs to be done globally, nationally and locally. Pupils have been taken on a journey of learning, initially through gathering views in an online survey, then via a series of workshops with over 400 Year 10 pupils in secondary schools around the National Park, and then a focus group with pupils enabling more detailed discussion. This culminated in a residential stay at Exmoor

NPA's Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre for 11 Young Rangers who took part in practical climate response activities such as gathering tree seeds.

The views of these young people will inform future climate action, and Exmoor NPA is working on plans to ensure that young people's voices continue to be heard and listened to in these important decisions for everyone's future on Exmoor, and beyond.

## 51. Plastic Free Exmoor



Every day 8 million pieces of plastic pollution find their way into our oceans, around 89 per cent of this is from single-use plastic. Exmoor is aiming to become the UK's first National Park to receive Plastic Free Communities Status.

The ambition is to drastically reduce the consumption of single-use plastics throughout the National Park, starting with Exmoor NPA signing up to the '[\*\*Plastic Free Communities\*\*](#)' campaign, coordinated by Surfers Against Sewage. The three National Park Centres at Dunster, Lynmouth and Dulverton carried out an audit of their current plastic use and identified single-use plastics to eliminate including: plastic bags, plastic bottles, clingfilm, and plastic covers on greetings cards. Alternatives to plastic are available in the shop including hessian or cotton bags, reusable water bottles, waxed food covers, biodegradable dog poos bags, and shampoo bags. Many of these items are made locally, supporting local businesses in the process.

Local communities and businesses are also getting involved. Porlock Vale was the first community within the boundaries of the Park to be awarded plastic free status. 20 businesses across Exmoor have been recognised as SAS Plastic Free Champions, having found clever ways of cutting single-use plastic from their trade. They join Dunster First School, Lyn Climate Action Group and other local groups who have pledged to encourage community action and spread the plastic free message.

## Where People, Place and Prosperity Come Together

The Ambitions of the Partnership Plan are not considered in isolation. We also look at how they come together in relation to the special landscapes of the National Park.

### **Moorland**

**Ambition: The extent of Exmoor's open moorland is retained and restored. The habitats within it are enhanced and the area and quality of heather is increased**

### 52. Graze the Moor Project

Graze The Moor is an innovative grazing project based on Molland Moor (681 hectares). The Exmoor Society's Brian & Mary Chugg Conservation Award 2020 was given to the project group as an exemplar of partnership-working between the owner and tenant farmer, Natural England, ENPA, Environment Agency, expert consultants and academics. The project was set up to seek solutions on a formerly heather-dominated moor that had been encroached, in many areas, by purple moor grass.



*Cow and Calf on the Molland Estate – Photo credit Christina Williams*

The Project Report ([https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/265370/200429-GtM-Final-Report.pdf](https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/265370/200429-GtM-Final-Report.pdf)) shows that, through introducing an experimental moorland system including over-wintering of cattle, there is evidence of over 75ha of heather regeneration, increased breeding birds population, no loss of farm profitability compared with conventional upland beef and sheep farming. However, there was an increase in heather beetle attacks contributing to ongoing heather loss. The project funding ended in 2019 but the landowner, Christina Williams, hopes to continue the monitoring for the next few years. With the future of agri-environment schemes unknown at present it is uncertain whether winter grazing will be allowed to continue.

### 53. Exmoor Mires Restoration

Peatland restoration has been underway on Exmoor for over 20 years to reverse the damage caused by historic drainage and reclamation. Since 1998, a total of over 2,600 hectares has been restored, including around 700 hectares since 2018 during this Partnership Plan period. The work has been led by the Exmoor Mires Partnership, on land owned by Exmoor National Park Authority, and several private landowners.



One of the areas recently restored is 40 hectares on South Regis common. Peat cuttings and ditches were blocked and bunds created to capture water, protect the peatland edge and restore a more natural hydro-ecological system. Willow bundles were planted in gullies and water flow pathways to slow flows, capture sediments and create a wet scrub/woodland habitat. Over time, this peatland restoration will support nature recovery, improve water quality through reducing sediments entering the rivers, reduce flood risk, and help to capture carbon.



*Above left: Bunds that capture water, sediment and create a seasonal wetland habitat. Above Right: Planting of willow bundles to slow flows and create a wet scrub/woodland habitat. Pictures courtesy of Exmoor Mires Partnership*

## 54. Exmoor Mires and the Historic Environment

Funding from Southwest Water has enabled further historic environment research to be carried out as part of peatland restoration works. In 2019 a drone survey across Humber's Ball, Halscombe Allotment and Hawkridge Plain created a 3-D record of the archaeological features including extensive peat cuttings. A previously unnoticed shallow pond was found next to a bronze age barrow, perhaps explaining why it was named 'Flatpool barrow' on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps. A row of stones was discovered on the edge of Humber's Ball, another of Exmoor's prehistoric stone settings previously hidden by vegetation.



On Codsand Moors, geophysical and measured surveys were carried out of the field banks, terraces, enclosure and hut circles that survive as low earthworks within the existing fields. A small trench was excavated in collaboration with the University of Brighton across one of the stony banks and samples taken from the soil beneath. Initial analysis suggests a prehistoric origin but work is ongoing.

*Above: trench excavation of stony bank - courtesy of Exmoor Mires Partnership*

Research into the Knight archive of documents is adding fascinating detail to our knowledge of the historic features on the moors. For example, between 1835 and 1840 over 110km of surface drains were hand dug on the Chains, the North Forest, Prayway and Lanacombe, most of them by just two men, William Rawle and Richard Bale.

## 55. Exmoor ponies



*Left: Exmoor Pony on Molland Moor – ENPA*

Exmoor ponies are one of the National Park's most iconic species, superbly adapted to survive in the wilds of Exmoor's moorlands. Despite nearing extinction after World War II, conservation work and a careful breeding programme has brought them back from the brink, although they are still classed as an endangered species due to the limited gene

pool. There are around twenty different herds that run on the various commons of Exmoor, each belonging to a moorland owner and two of which are owned by Exmoor NPA.

In order to try and support the ongoing breeding programmes and ensure a sustainable and viable population of Exmoor ponies for the future, the Exmoor Pony DNA Whole Genome Project was set up, led by the Defra Chief Vet, and working with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, Moorland Exmoor Pony Breeders Group, Exmoor Pony Society, local vets, and Nottingham University. This is a pioneering research programme which aims to characterise the full genome of the Exmoor pony and to measure genetic variation within sub-populations of the Exmoor Pony breed. This will help with the management, understanding and breeding of this iconic moorland pony. Sadly technical setbacks and the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted on the project and it's future is currently unknown.

## 56. Red deer



Red deer are the largest wild land animals in England and have survived on Exmoor since pre-historic times. Exmoor was once a Royal Forest with strict Forest Law which protected the deer in order to maintain a supply of venison and a hunting ground for the king. There are about three thousand deer on Exmoor, living on moorland and farmland, and using the woodlands for cover.

*Left: Red Deer – Courtesy of ENPA*

Exmoor Deer numbers have been stable for several years, but there are increasing concerns locally over the number of deer and their impact on grazing for livestock, and also deer health, particularly in relation to bovine TB and ticks. Work is ongoing to monitor and investigate these issues with the Exmoor and District Deer Management Society, and in discussion with the Exmoor Parish and Consultative Forum, although progress has been hampered by the Covid pandemic.

Fallow deer numbers are continuing to increase on the eastern side of the National Park. The Monksilver and District Deer Management Society recorded a 72% rise in numbers between 2020 and 2021.

**Ambition: Exmoor's distinctive farmed landscapes continue to be conserved and enhanced as part of an active farming system delivering a healthy natural and cultural environment**

### 57. Exmoor Hill Farming Network

The EHFN was established in early 2014 to improve the sustainability of Exmoor's farming businesses and tackle rural isolation. Seven years on, Exmoor Hill Farming Network now operates as an independent, farmer-led Community Interest Company, supported by funding from the Prince's Countryside Fund, Exmoor NPA and North Devon Council. The Network supports around 330 farming businesses, with 565 members, by providing information, training, demonstrations, grants and opportunities to upland farmers across Exmoor.

Farmers are central to delivery of many of the Partnership Plan Ambitions, and the Network works with Exmoor NPA and other partners to deliver activities that support Exmoor's farmed environment. These include being co-contractors on projects such as Exmoor's Ambition Test and Trial, the Environment Land Management Advocacy Project, Headwaters of the Exe project and Natural England's Exmoor Coastal Streams Facilitation Fund. The Network facilitated engagement by farmers with the Exmoor Nature Recovery Vision and is working closely with Exmoor NPA over Defra's agricultural transition plan, including the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

Training for farmers covers topics such as farm-related legislative requirements, personal health and wellbeing, and business and environmental management. The Network also provides an advertising service for farmers' goods and services through regular email updates, which has led to many members finding work experience or permanent employment on Exmoor. Collaboration on the Exmoor Lamb Register enables 13 farm businesses to sell direct from their farm to the consumer. In total, since 2018, 198 farming businesses have been directly supported and 140 events have been arranged, attracting over 1,000 attendees.



One of the aims of the Network is to encourage the next generation of farmers, so it is particularly encouraging that there are now 80 'Next Generation' members under 40 years old engaging with Network activities.

*Left: Next Generation Group or—  
Courtesy of Exmoor Hill Farming  
Network*



## Woodland

**Ambition: Exmoor's woodlands are diverse, well-managed, productive and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park**

### 58. Expanding Exmoor's Woodland Resource

Exmoor National Park has 9,500ha of woodlands, equivalent to 14% of the National Park. This includes 3,327ha of ancient woodlands and over 1,657 veteran trees. Exmoor NPA owns and manages around 570ha of this woodland, and is working with partners to increase coverage to 17% in line with the UK government's independent Climate Change Committee. As part of this, the biggest woodland creation project to have taken place in the National Park in the past 15 years is taking shape at Bye Wood, near Winsford. The vision is to create a unique and sustainable woodland in 2021/2 using only the best environmentally-friendly practices.



Artist's impression of Bye Wood painted by Leo Davey

Bye Wood will include planting 13,000 trees over 12 hectares, using only locally sourced wood. Careful structural planting will support tree growth and resilience to a changing climate, and sustainable organic and physical methods of planting will be used in preference to chemicals. Tree guards will be plastic free. The new woodland will nurture new wildlife habitats and include community areas to connect people with nature.

An exhibition of 60 works by the Arborealists, a group of internationally acclaimed artists who share a passion for trees, is being hosted at Lanacre Barn Gallery, near Withypool over the autumn 2021. The works on display will explore Exmoor's most important woodlands throughout the seasons. More details at [www.moorlandart.com](http://www.moorlandart.com)

### 59. Hedges

There are 6,600km of hedges within the National Park (1.28% of the national total). The oldest date back to Saxon times. Sensitive, traditional management is crucial to rejuvenate the hedgerows which are iconic features of the Exmoor landscape, reflecting our cultural heritage, supporting an incredible range of wildlife, and storing 1 million tonnes of carbon.

**The Exmoor Hedge Competition** is run by Exmoor National Park Authority with the Somerset and Devon Hedge Groups, through the generous sponsorship of the Exmoor Trust [www.exmoortrust.org.uk](http://www.exmoortrust.org.uk). The competition is aimed at the landowners, managers and contractors who carry out the high-quality hedgelaying work for the benefit of Exmoor's farming, wildlife and landscape. Sadly, because of Covid restrictions, the competition did not run in 2020 and 2021, but it is hoped it will resume in 2022.

Exmoor ran one of the Defra Tests and Trials as part of the preparation of the three new schemes that will reward environmental land management, paying ‘public money for public goods’. Hedgerows were a component of this work and the hope is that future schemes will provide a strong mechanism to support the sympathetic management of hedgerows as an important part of Exmoor’s landscape character and wildlife habitat.

*Right: Exmoor Hedge – Photo credit Tom Hynes*



## 60. Ash Dieback

Exmoor is home to between 600,000 and 800,000 ash trees, and over the last few years many of these have been affected by ash dieback, a chronic fungal disease originating from Eastern Asia and brought to Europe on imported trees. It is estimated that around 95% of the population of ash trees are likely to be severely affected, and the progress of the disease across the Exmoor landscape has become increasingly apparent.

Landowners across Exmoor including Exmoor NPA, the National Trust and local Estates and farmers are having to assess the impact of the disease on their woodlands, with the priority being to fell affected trees near footpaths, roads and buildings so they are not a danger to the public. The remaining trees will remain and the disease allowed to run its course. Whilst the majority of these are expected to die, those that survive may possess useful inheritable resistance.

The loss of so many trees will obviously impact on the National Park’s landscape but there are also potential benefits including the creation of deadwood habitat and gaps in the canopy allowing light to reach the woodland floor and enabling the regeneration of other trees and under storey plants, including the younger generation of ash seeded from the resistant parents which will grow in time to provide the ash trees of the future.



*Photo: ash dieback – courtesy ENPA*

**Ambition: Exmoor's rivers, streams, and their associated valleys are in good condition. Their native flora and fauna thriving, and flood risk is reduced**

### 61. Restoring Exmoor's Rivers and Streams

The Holnicote Estate on Exmoor is one of five areas participating in a national partnership between the National Trust and Environment Agency to develop healthy rivers and catchments, rich in wildlife, enjoyed, and cared for by all. The Riverlands project is using innovative river restoration techniques to reconnect rivers and streams with the surrounding landscape, restoring lost complexity and abundance and delivering multiple benefits for people and nature. One example of this kind of approach can be seen at Mud Pool Meadow on Selworthy Farm, where the river and floodplain were reconnected by filling in sections of manmade ditch and modifications to the topography to create a system of multiple channels. This has created wetland in the winter and lush and diverse sward in the warmer months. The site is being allowed to develop naturally and grazing will be undertaken in a way that helps to maintain the diversity of habitat and wildlife within the site.

Benefits from this approach include deposition of sediment and formation of rich soils, reduction in downstream diffuse pollution, recharge of local groundwater, reduction of the impact of drought and flooding, improved soil quality and organic matter leading to increased carbon sequestration and an increase in biodiversity and abundance of wildlife.



Photo 1 – Mud Pool Meadow aerial shot pre-restoration. Image shows conventional NFM approaches applied such as ponds and scrapes. These had little overall impact on the flow of water across the site or habitat development. Water flow is confined to drainage ditches and a single channel stream that flows along woodland edge.



Photo 2 – Demonstrates the reconnection of the aquatic and terrestrial habitat. This photo was taken at low flow and even with this small amount of water across the site the shallow flow pathways are complex and connected. The longer and more complex vegetation can be seen which provides habitat for a host of wildlife. Photos – courtesy NT



## 62. Exmoor Rivers and Streams Group

The Exmoor Rivers and Streams Group (ERaSG) is a grouping of representatives of the main Exmoor river associations along with river owners. It is an interest group primarily focused to work with the National Park Authority at all levels to enhance the status of rivers through advice and an involvement in riverine ecology, planning, publications, riparian activity, access, SSSI matters, pollution control, surveys of aquatic insect life and juvenile fish stocks and numerous other issues effecting the wellbeing of Exmoor's rivers and streams.

ERaSG has contributed several publications to Parklife and the Exmoor Magazine and to visitor centre displays and has advised on the planning of hydropower plants on both the East Lyn system and the Barle. It has liaised closely with and lobbied Natural England and the Environment Agency over a wide range of river-related issues. The group has been instrumental in supporting managed permissive access for canoeists ensuring that fish spawning gravels are protected yet providing fast water at the appropriate times of the year and river flow. Dialogue continues with Exmoor NPA with an important focus being the need to appreciate that rivers are the epitome of wildlife corridors and that this aspect must be considered both inside and outside of the National Park in the interests of Exmoor's vulnerable yet iconic migratory species.

## 63. Improving Fish Passage on the River Exe

A project launched by the River Exe and Tributaries Association and Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) aims to tackle the weirs on the Exe which disrupt fish and eel migration. This includes existing weirs along the length of the Exe, and new proposals such as the Tiverton Weir Hydro scheme. Within the National Park, work is being planned for Bridgetown Weir, and the weir at Hele has breached and should not now pose a migration threat. WRT is involved in plans for restoration of the historic weir at Dulverton which will require a fish pass and leat screening. There is ongoing monitoring of fish movement on Beasley Weir and hydro scheme. Research has identified that the average loss of smolts migrating to sea to be 2% at each weir, which has a cumulative impact because of the 20 weirs on the Exe system. There is also disruption to adult salmon reaching their spawning grounds.

## 64. Supporting Salmon on Exmoor



The River Exe and Tributaries Association is working with South West Water and the Environment Agency to improve mitigation for the impact of the operation of Wimbleball dam on salmon. The blocking of access to spawning grounds upstream of the dam and the artificial flow regime downstream have resulted in significant lost smolt production. Westcountry Rivers Trust is helping to improve natural recruitment in other tributaries by

pollution control, spawning gravel rehabilitation and other habitat improvement.

*Above: Little Exe – a good section of habitat for juvenile salmon – courtesy of ENPA*

## 65. Improved River Monitoring

The River Exe and Tributaries Association and Westcountry Rivers Trust are using GIS mapping to collate information on river management along with survey data including pollution and riverfly monitoring. It is hoped that this will become a significant source of management data into the future. Work planned on redd identification, riverfly surveys, and electrofishing have all taken place despite Covid restrictions, albeit at reduced intensity.

## 66. The Taw, Mole, and Bray River System

Access to the critical spawning gravel areas in the moorland headwaters of the rivers Taw, Mole and Bray is supported by periodic maintenance and clearing of all fish passes. This allows free upstream and downstream access of migratory salmonids and other aquatic species (such as eel, brook and sea lamprey) to the Exmoor areas of this river system.

In conjunction with the Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) the River Taw Fisheries and Conservation Association (RTFCA) funds and conducts an annual programme of gravel washing which includes sites on the Mole and Bray. This work is to mitigate the damaging effects of agricultural pollution and promote successful fish spawning and the protection of the nursery areas.

In partnership with the Environment Agency and WRT, RTFCA carries out a programme of Salmonid Fry Index Survey across the sites on the Mole and Bray. These surveys are designed to monitor the health and productivity of the catchment.

### **Coast**

<b>Ambition: Exmoor's stunning coast is better understood, enjoyed and conserved</b>
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## 67. Exmoor Coast Project: Reconnecting a Landscape

This National Trust's project aims for the coastline in the future to be more sustainable, richer in wildlife, where both locals and visitors can truly be immersed in wild Exmoor Coast.



National Trust land buffers both ends of Exmoor's coastal woodland. At Countisbury there are gaps between the coastal woodland and the inner valley woods and missing stepping stones between these site as well as Heddon Valley and Combe Martin. On the Holnicote estate there are missing links between the coastal stretch and other estate woods such as Horner. There is a significant opportunity to create connections across the landscape to boost these nature corridors, through creating a patchwork of woody habitats across the coastline, critical in creating more space for nature, improving water storage, carbon sequestration and improving the condition of our habitats.

*Above left: Tree planning at Cloud Farm – courtesy of National Trust*



Over the next 6 years the Trust has ambitions to plant 100,000 trees across their Estate. On a smaller scale, volunteers are helping to re-establish lost orchards including at Kipscombe Farm and Cloud Farm campsite. This tree planting ambition forms part of a wider holistic view of habitat creation, improvement and management. Natural processes will be used alongside Ranger led interventions to create a mosaic of habitats, including wetland, improved grassland, meadows, improve heathland and woodland across the landscape.

*Left: Kipscombe Orchard – courtesy of National Trust*

### ***Settlements and the built environment***

**Ambition: The local distinctiveness and historic character of Exmoor’s settlements and built environment are conserved and enhanced**

## **68. Conserving Exmoor’s Built Heritage**

There are 744 listed buildings in Exmoor National Park. These buildings are a key component of Exmoor’s landscape. Once every few years a condition survey is carried out to ensure they are all being well cared for. The last survey took place in 2012/13 and so a resurvey was required which took place over 2018/19. This identified a number of trends which are recorded in a [new report](#) on listed building condition issues. Identifying these trends has allowed for a more targeted response to the issues that owners of listed buildings on Exmoor face. The main finding from the survey was that there is limited knowledge around what listing means and so a new ‘listed buildings owners guide’ is currently in production. Those buildings identified as being at greatest risk, either through neglect or unauthorised works, are being targeted for repair to ensure their future survival.



*Above: Exmoor’s historic buildings and settlements are unique and face a number of threats – Courtesy of ENPA*

The 16 Conservation Areas in National Park are constantly monitored to ensure they stay in good condition and that their character is retained. The spread of uPVC windows is causing considerable harm to the character of these settlements and so the use of additional planning controls (though Article 4



Directions) is being considered. It is also proposed that new Conservation Areas are created in the coming years as many of Exmoor's historic settlements have little in the way of protection or recognition.

Many important historic buildings in the National Park have no protections as they are not listed. Funding was recently revived from Government to begin works to develop a 'local list' of building that are nominated by the local community.

## 69. Early Dunster Project

The Early Dunster Project, sponsored by Historic England was launched in Dunster in 2018. Work progressed well until the first Covid lockdown in 2020, which put a stop to surveys being carried out. Nevertheless, desk top research and some limited surveying work outside of lockdown has been possible. Resulting information and drawings are still being prepared. In view of the early dates of the properties, the work is very complicated.



In September 2020 the group staged a very successful series of webinars together with an on-line exhibition. Information from this event can be viewed online (<https://sanhs.org/early-dunster-project/autumn-2020-event-archive/>). The findings of the project are also being displayed at Dunster Museum.

*Report by Mary Ewing*



*Above: Dunster has a remarkable number of early buildings – Courtesy of ENPA*