

South-east Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy: Summary of important points

Future access to the Exe Estuary (SEDESM page 95):

The visit rate prediction curve shown in Figure 7 estimates that, based on current houses, there are 8.8 million annual visits to the Exe Estuary from residents within 10km.

The visit rate figure of 203 household visits per year within 1km was calculated for the estuary. This implies that households within 1km visit the Exe Estuary roughly every other day throughout the year. Scaling this figure up across all 15,395 homes within 1km gives a total of 3.1 million annual household visits to the estuary from residents within 1km rising to 3.8 million with the addition of 3,138 new houses within 1km.

Given the 20% increase in housing planned for the area out to 1km around the Exe Estuary, there will be a 20.7% increase in household visits. The highest level of increase in the number of visits is within 3km and also 10km where a 27% increase in total visits is predicted.

Legal context (SEDESMS):

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Within the Habitats Regulations, local planning authorities, as public bodies, are given specific duties as 'competent authorities' with regard to the protection of sites designated or classified for their species and habitats of European importance. In recognition of these duties, Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council are working together as 'competent authorities' to secure Habitats Regulations compliance with regard to their planned growth and development.

Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations sets out the Habitats Regulations Assessment process for plans and projects, which includes development proposals for which planning permission is sought. Additionally Regulation 102 specifically sets out the process for assessing emerging land use plans.

The step by step approach to Habitats Regulations Assessment is the process by which a competent authority considers potential impacts on European sites that may arise from a plan or project that they are either undertaking themselves, or permitting an applicant to undertake. The step by step process of assessment can be broken down into the following stages, which should be undertaken in sequence:

- Check that the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site
- Check whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect alone
- Check whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect in combination
- Carry out an Appropriate Assessment
- Ascertain whether there will be an adverse effect

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The step by step process of Habitats Regulations Assessment has been followed by the three local planning authorities for both emerging land use plans and the determination of planning proposals in their respective administrative areas. In undertaking those assessments, and in commissioning specialist ecological survey and assessment work to inform their spatial planning evidence base, the local planning authorities have identified the clear need for a strategic approach to considering

potential impacts arising from residential development on the European wildlife sites in close proximity.

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The joint approach by Exeter, Teignbridge and East Devon Councils, underpinned by a comprehensive level of evidence gathering and analysis is in accordance with the principles set out in the Habitats Directive Review findings; with evidence based decisions and a proactive solution seeking an approach wherever possible, without compromising the integrity of European wildlife sites.

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Impacts relating to recreation on the Exe Estuary SPA primarily relate to disturbance (though note that some activities such as bait collection result in the removal of prey for birds and boats and other craft can cause damage to the habitat, through for example their moorings or wake).

...the Dawlish Warren SSSI condition assessment particularly highlights that bird declines at the Warren, previously an important high tide roost, may be the cause of declines across the estuary, thus indicating that suitable, good quality high tide roosting sites may be critical to the ecological integrity of the SPA.

Disturbance to wintering and passage waterfowl can result in:

- A reduction in the time spent feeding due to repeated flushing/increased vigilance (Fitzpatrick & Bouchez 1998; Stillman & Goss-Custard 2002; Bright *et al.* 2003; Thomas, Kvitek, & Bretz 2003; Yasué 2005)
- Increased energetic costs (Stock & Hofeditz 1997; Nolet *et al.* 2002)
- Avoidance of areas of otherwise suitable habitat, potentially using poorer quality feeding/roosting sites instead (Cryer *et al.* 1987; Gill 1996; Burton *et al.* 2002; Burton, Rehfisch, & Clark 2002)
- Increased stress (Regel & Putz 1997; Weimerskirch *et al.* 2002; Walker, Dee Boersma, & Wingfield 2006; Thiel *et al.* 2011)