



## Development Phase evaluation report

This project will be delivered by South Devon AONB:



With funding from:



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This evaluation was commissioned by South Devon AONB (SDAONB). It was undertaken by the Evaluation Consultant Robin Clutterbuck, and the project team.

This summary report has been compiled from these findings by independent consultants Heritage Insider.



Front cover photo: Planting wildflower plugs to take home - Plymouth © SDAONB  
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Our precious coastal insects

The geology, climate and history of the South Devon coastline makes it of national importance for invertebrates and plants. Our most vulnerable invertebrate species are at critical risk. The Six-banded nomad bee, Mediterranean oil beetle and Moon spider are all endangered and are limited to only a handful of sites.

These flagship species are in the main highly specialised, which makes them particularly vulnerable to changes in the landscape and climate. They currently survive in small unsustainable disconnected populations on coastal cliffs and slopes and in scattered pockets of disconnected habitat, but they were once much more widespread. They are part of complex ecosystems that are easily disrupted and which have been largely overwhelmed by a tide of human activity that has transformed the landscape in the last 100 years.

Until the 1930's wildflower-rich low-input grasslands were an integral part of the farming system stretching back thousands of years. Since then, at a national level, 97% of these unimproved lowland grasslands have been lost to



Figure 1 *Eucera Longicornis* © R. Skinner

coastal squeeze driven by intensification of land use or built development, and the decline continues today.

On the coast of South Devon these losses have mainly happened as agricultural practices have changed in response to national policy demands for greater food self-sufficiency.

Grasslands have been ploughed up and resown with monoculture grasses, or fertilised, or converted to arable production, with catastrophic damage to the species that once thrived there. In the places that survive, mostly too steep to plough, traditional extensive grazing by hardy breeds of livestock no longer occurs. Natural succession then allows scrub to outcompete many rare plant species, which triggers losses of their connected invertebrate species. So, even in their remaining sites, our species face loss and damage.

Meanwhile rising sea levels, and more extreme weather events, triggered by climate change mean that coastal erosion is accelerating and the cliffs that provide homes to many of our species are under threat. The wildlife of the cliffs urgently needs more space inland in which to expand and escape the squeezed coastal fringe.

The designation of many sites as SSSIs, County Wildlife Sites and Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and the wider landscape as an AONB, has slowed losses at the most diverse sites but these are now in the main isolated as wildlife oases in an agricultural desert. Without connectivity between special sites our target species face an uncertain future and this has been recognised by the government.

## 1.2 Introducing Life on the Edge

Life on the Edge (LotE) is a 5-year landscape-scale partnership project led by South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty ('SDAONB'). The project will restore resilient populations of some of the UK's most threatened insects living along 75km of the South Devon coast between Plymouth and Torbay.

LotE will target the Six-banded nomad bee which faces imminent extinction unless action is taken, and 29 other threatened invertebrates including the Long-horned mining bee, Short-necked oil beetle, and Moon spider and 30 rare or declining plant species, including Autumn squill and Goldilocks aster that are also found here. These species cling onto survival on a steep narrow coastal strip, with the sea on one side and intensive farmland on the other. They are, literally, living on the edge of the land and, in some cases, on the edge of extinction in the UK.

Saving these species and giving them a safer long-term future means expanding and reconnecting the wild coastal landscapes on which they depend. We need to create more flower-rich clifftop grasslands, scrub mosaics and strategic hedgerow connections on farmland, together with more wildlife-friendly greenspaces, churchyards, school grounds, highway verges and private gardens. The result will be a coastline and its connected hinterland that is buzzing with wildlife, packed with wildflowers and a treat for the eye for residents and visitors alike. It will also be more resilient to the effects of climate change and will ultimately lock hundreds of tonnes of carbon each year into its restored grassland soils.

It's a mission that needs the support and engagement of the whole community, from landowners and farmers to parish councils and school

children, providing opportunities for everyone to get involved and make a real difference for these extraordinary and highly vulnerable species. We'll give people the tools and the confidence to create the right conditions for the survival of these flagship species and the expansion of the habitats on which they depend.

We'll build our community's collective pride in the unique South Devon coastal landscape and its unique wildlife, boost the area's attraction for visitors and develop new opportunities for people living in nearby Torbay and Plymouth to get involved. Thanks to this, those who help bring about the rescue of Britain's rarest bee and other threatened species will gain valuable new skills and local connections, a deep sense of achievement and multiple health and wellbeing benefits.

**RECONNECT** local communities, rural and urban, and visitors to South Devon, to the protected landscape and special wildlife on their doorstep – inspiring them to discover, value and act for special species through our extensive program of activities.

**REFRESH** people's health and wellbeing, through practical tasks, regular activity groups, spending quality time with other people and gaining new knowledge about the natural world along the coast

**EMPOWER** people to make a real contribution to tackling the ecological emergency, gaining new skills, knowledge, capacity and inspiration to deliver nature recovery in their communities.

**RESTORE** resilient populations of some of the UK's most threatened invertebrates and plants to the South Devon coast:

**ENHANCE** the whole coastline of the AONB for people and wildlife

### 1.3 Developing our project

Life on the Edge ('LotE') is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund ('NLHF') and was granted a development stage to further research and refine the project plans.

The project Development Phase took place between June 2022 and July 2023.

During this period, the project team has tested activities, engagement with target audiences, gathered further baseline ecological data, and been trialling a range of evaluation approaches.

The key target audiences for the project are:

- Isolated older people, both in cities and urban areas
- Young people in Plymouth and Torbay.

The Development Phase has been an opportunity to work with these audiences and build a better understanding of their needs, barriers and wants. It has also been an opportunity to develop deeper relationships with organisations already working with each audience, for example, Devon Young Carers (supporting young carers across South Devon); Dementia Friendly Parishes (who work with older people experiencing dementia and their families); Girls Against Anxiety (who provide a safe space for women, girls and

non-binary people to talk about anxiety). This approach has been identified as a 'fast track' way of de-risking delivery phase audience development.

The programme of activities is largely aimed at these audiences, although other secondary audiences are also engaging with the project and will continue to do so into the delivery phase.

At the centre of this process was deepening and extending the outcomes agreed with the NLHF:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage.
- People will have developed skills.
- People will have greater wellbeing.
- The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit.
- Heritage will be in a better condition.
- Heritage will be identified and better explained.
- People will have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions.

## 2. Evaluation methodology

### 2.1 The evaluation process

Evaluation has been at the core of project activity throughout the Development Phase. An Evaluation Consultant, Robin Clutterbuck, was appointed to draw-up an Evaluation Framework which could be used in both the Development and Delivery phases of the project.

This has provided a logical framework; setting out the links between activities, expected outputs and outcomes for all elements of the project. This 'Theory of Change' approach can now be used as central to our Delivery Phase evaluation plan, along with a set of Key Evaluation Questions and a suite of robust yet inclusive evaluation tools.

Evaluation training and additional support was also provided by NLHF-evaluation specialists Heritage Insider in the latter stages of Development.

Working alongside Evaluation consultants, the project team has:

- **Established baseline** - Identified and collated ecological and audience baseline data and benchmarked our project against others. For example, the May 2021 Survey Monkey research involving 153 participants offered useful insights into general audiences including their knowledge of environmental issues and the way that participating in AONB activities might have encouraged them to change their behaviour in the light of their increased awareness. Additional baseline data on audiences has been completed during the LotE development phase by the People and Communities consultants, described in their 'Audience Agency Area Profiles Analysis'. This outlines features of mainly general audiences in the target areas of

Plymouth, Torbay and the South Hams. The analysis notes that evaluation of the two main target audiences will be better covered by consultation with the partner organisations.

- **Deepened audience understanding** - Assessed our target audiences / groups and the benefits (outcomes) the project is expected to generate for each audience.
- **Effective indicators** - Identified and implemented performance and quality indicators. These have included quantitative measures (eg participant numbers, volunteering hours, activities delivered, extent of habitat created/restored, skills developed) and qualitative measures (eg participant and volunteer satisfaction, delivery of the Generic Learning and Social Outcomes including for example attitudes and values, enjoyment, inspiration and creativity, knowledge and understanding, skills and wellbeing).
- **Stress-tested evaluation tools** - Identified and tested techniques for evaluation and data collection, creating an 'Evaluation Toolkit' for use by the project staff, partners and volunteers. These have been embed in the project from an early stage, with a schedule for implementation and analysis. We learnt that traditional forms and surveys can be off putting for participants and even create a barrier to engagement, especially considering those lesser seen in nature. We have therefore trialled, and will deploy during Delivery Phase a more flexible range of inclusive and participatory evaluation tools.
- **Developed capacity for impact measurement** - working closely with participative evaluation specialists Heritage Insider, we have received mentoring and training to staff, partners and volunteers in data collection techniques – this process will continue through the Delivery phase to deeply embed evaluation and learning within the project's

ethos. This will also have benefits for understanding the impact of wider SDAONB programmes - contributing towards our organisation's resilience.

The following table comprises the records<sup>1</sup> of the evaluation data<sup>2</sup> collected during the Development Phase in order to test and trial activities as part of

the engagement programme. There were a total of 5,294 participants in the trial programme giving an excellent evidence base which has heavily informed the Delivery Phase plan and helped to ensure that it is robust and has been stress-tested.

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<sup>1</sup> Collected by project staff and facilitators

<sup>2</sup> Comprising both quantitative evaluation (e.g. number of participants) and qualitative evaluation (e.g. comments entered on feedback forms or during interviews)

Key to colour coding: General audiences **Target audiences**

The numbers in the 'Activity' column relate to the LotE Sharepoint references.

Activity	Evaluation records collected	No of participants
<b>1. Public walks</b>		
- Glow worm walk 23.6.23	1 Word document incorporating 4 email replies following the event.	31
- South Down farm walk 18.6.23	18 photographed feedback cards	23
- SWCPA walks 8-12.6.23	4 hotspot walks. No evaluation	48
- Launch walks June 2022	5 walks 1 single response on Word file ref walk on 26.6.22	31
<b>2. Doorstep Arts Saturday group 14.4.23</b>	22 scanned sheets of Doorstep Arts evaluation form. Practitioner interview.	11
<b>3. Devon Young Carers</b>	Feedback from 2 events: Berry Head (4) and Wembury (10), August 2022	14
<b>4. Devon Recovery Learning Community</b>	6 walks at Bolberry. Feedback comprises 7 acrostic poems, 4 participant comments in email, 2 post-event leader forms. Group leader summative interview.	12
<b>5. Modbury HAF 19.12.22</b>	Word file with notes on 7 children + 2 workers for arts activity. v brief account of event	9
<b>6. Dementia Friendly Parishes sessions April - June 2023</b>	Craft session (3 feedback forms); Walking group, 19.4.23 (notes from verbal feedback after event); Celebration event, 2.6.23 (31 photos including feedback comments in response to question on benefits of being outdoors); Reading group, 18.5.23 (1 comment). Project leader summative interview.	99
<b>7. Play Torbay</b>	3 sessions: ASRUS, 8.3.23 (7 comments); HAF scheme, 12.4.23 (1 group leader post-activity feedback form); ASRUS Berry Head visit, 25.4.23. Project leader summative interview.	70
<b>8. Girls Against Anxiety</b>	Intro session 20.3.23 (scans of 10 responses using varied methodology also 4 comments collected by group leader); 14.4.23; 17.5.23 (8 'blob' wellbeing feedback forms + 3 leader comments); 15.6.23 (11 comments);	11
<b>9. Exeter University Drama activities 6.12.22 and 23.3.23</b>	1 group leader's feedback form	113
<b>10. Training for public and volunteers</b>		
- Oil beetles 18.4.23	1 feedback form	12
- Med oil beetle volunteer training 9.11.22	1 scan of 8 volunteer feedback forms	
- South Devon Meadow Makers 9.3.23	No feedback	73
- Butterfly ID volunteer training 27.3.22	Word. 1 feedback form	
- Hedgerow planting volunteer training event 27.3.23	Raw data from 3 scanned volunteer feedback forms	3
- Meadows volunteer training 26.11.22	4 Word volunteer forms 1 feedback email message	10
- Poms LHB volunteer training 20.6.22	Scans of 13 volunteer feedback forms	19



<b>11. Moor Meadows talk, Malborough 15.4.23</b>	42 feedback forms scanned	150
<b>12. Devon Partnership Trust team day 29.11.22</b>	Notes from focus group; excel file from online survey.	23
<b>13. LotE Mini Surveys July-August 2022</b>	Excel file with raw data from events at The Box (9-13.8.22 – *90 responses, duplicated in records in 14, below), Yealmpton Show (27.7.22), Torre Abbey (3.8.22)	120*
<b>14. Public events at The Box, Plymouth</b>		
- LotE and Buglife week activity 9.8.22	Email with numbers and edited comments relayed by group leader. 181 participants, 28 surveyed.	181
- LotE and Buglife week activity 11.8.22	Email with numbers and edited comments relayed by group leader. 230 participants, 38 surveyed	230
- LotE and Buglife week activity 13.8.22	Email with numbers and edited comments relayed by group leader. 179 participants, 24 surveyed	179
- The Wild Escape fortnight of events 1.4.23-15.4.23	Email with numbers and edited comments relayed by group leader. Also Excel file from online survey (30 responses)	2479
- LotE-led Wild Escape activities, 4 & 11.4.2023	Copies of emails with numbers from event. Also Excel file from online survey (60 responses)	737
- Earth Day 22.4.23	Email with numbers and edited comments relayed by group leader.	363
<b>15. King Edward VI Community College (KEVICC) activities</b>		
- Yr. 7 and 8 Photography Club Kingswear visit, 28.3.23	1 group leader feedback form.	16
- Year 7 project, art day 28.6.23, with exhibition	1 participant feedback form. 4 facilitators' feedback forms. Teacher interview.	150
- Year 12 BTec art project	Teacher interview.	8
<b>16. Volunteer tasks</b>		
Volunteer Pea planting task 4.3.23	Scans of 6 feedback forms	6
Volunteer Tree planting task 27.3.23	Scanned images of 3 volunteer feedback forms.	3
<b>18. Wembury Primary School activities</b>		
- Yrs 3 and 4 science project - various activities	No feedback from the school apart from evaluation interview 12.7.23. No feedback from facilitators. No feedback from children. Teacher summative interview.	60
- Exeter University Drama production 23.3.23	Feedback from Drama lecturer (noted above). Numbers included under University above (no. 9).	
<b>Total recorded on engagement programme</b>		<b>5294</b>

## 2.2 Evaluating our Development Phase journey

We finished the Development Phase by evaluating the 'journey' we had been on. To do this we did a number of tasks, namely:

- **Gathered feedback** - our Evaluator conducted independent Key Informant Telephone interviews with key individuals who had contributed to the project across the full range of activities including land management, conservation and engagement. These were recorded and notes from the interviews are in the **Appendix 1**. This has been a useful process in order to provide a range of voices in the Development Phase evaluation
- **Reflected on our own practice** - we used reflective practice in order to spend dedicated time considering what has gone well, what's been challenging and lessons learnt. This has informed our key findings and subsequent actions, see **Section 3**
- **Reviewed our data** - we dedicated time to analysing and synthesizing all the evaluation and consultation data we collected during the Development Phase. Key findings and lessons learnt from this can be found in our **People and Communities Plan**.

The remainder of this report comprises a high-level summary of the key findings of the Development Phase evaluation process.

### 3. Key findings and actions

This section provides a summary of key findings from our evaluation process and actions we have taken as a result.

In addition to those points mentioned below we identified a number of key barriers for audiences in engaging with the project and the coastline, namely; Fear of the unknown/lack of confidence; opportunities to access nature; getting to the AONB/coast; access challenges; time; companionship and eco-anxiety. These have influenced programme design across the project.

#### **Collaboration is crucial**

Our project was always planned as a collaboration but the Development Phase has highlighted the benefits and need to work in partnership to achieve our vision. The South Devon AONB team has a well-established and highly regarded reputation convening trusted partnerships and managing project delivery at landscape scale, spanning multiple disciplines - this has been an asset in cementing partnerships.

Our delivery phase will be delivered in partnership with national invertebrate conservation charity Buglife; the National Trust; the Southwest Coast Path Association and Doorstep Arts.

As discussed in **Section 1.3**, collaboration with local delivery organisations already working with the our target audiences is one of our key mechanisms for de-risking working with these new audiences.

We found a knock-on benefit of working in partnership has been that the project has helped partners to extend their own delivery. For example, both

educational partners spoke of how the project has been valued in helping them to deliver more for their learners.

**Action taken:** Partnership agreements have been drawn-up with each of these organisations and our Evaluation Plan includes annual Partnership Reviews and feedback from our partners into the evaluation process, for example, via independent key informant telephone interviews to help ensure these relationships are well maintained, and are responsive to changing needs.

#### **Evidenced pull from communities**

In consultations with local communities and local interest groups we have seen that people have a strong desire to take local action on public land or in private gardens, with some community groups, parish councils, schools and churches taking a lead.

Through our work with local interest groups and parish councils in the Development Phase we have seen people actively want to make a difference in their local areas, getting involved with project activities and in many cases being inspired by our special species and taking positive action to make a physical difference for our native pollinators.

We have been particularly struck by the positive response we have had from almost all partners as we have discussed our plans and explored how we can best meet the needs of our target groups. The theme of protecting insects on our coast is very powerful and people are inspired by and want to engage with it.

**Action taken:** The scale of need is very high, and the programme of activities that we are able to fund is necessarily limited. However, we could see that

there is potential for a much bigger intervention than we had planned at Round One. We have therefore boosted our activity plans and the budget allocated for engaging our target audiences. We will also ensure this is considered when legacy planning for our project to consider how greater need might be met in the future.

### Adapting plans

The Development Phase has been a rich learning environment in which the team have been able to ‘stress-test’ plans across the ecological and engagement programmes. This has led to adaptations to original plans to ensure they are both feasible and designed to be both effective and efficient.

For example, we met with Bridgewater and Taunton College, the National Trust and Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust on many occasions over the Development Phase to develop our plans for providing Countryside Worker Level 2 apprenticeships through LotE. Through these discussions we ascertained that the financial situation of Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust and the National Trust with regards to these apprenticeships had changed, and that the proposed timing of the apprenticeship posts was too tight.

Another example is that we learnt that making activities available in local spaces that are more familiar is an important feature as the challenge of travelling a long way from home can be overwhelming. This also builds a more sustainable base for ongoing nature connection, as it enables people to continue to access the experiences they have through the project, once it has finished. Linked to this transport came up repeatedly as a barrier for groups and for individuals seeking to access the coast. Providing this is therefore essential, especially as a pump-primer to building up people’s confidence to

travel to strange places. Once they have that familiarity with a place they are more likely to find their way back in the future.

The opportunity for us to spend time developing and evolving activities and plans has been essential to developing our high-quality value-for-money Delivery Phase Plans

**Action taken:** We have revised our Delivery Phase plans in direct response to our Development Phase evaluation findings, for example:

- We revised down planned apprentice numbers from 20 to 9. We then considered how we could deepen and expand our learning provision in other ways. This has led us to strengthen our programme of engagement with learners in other settings and build a programme that we call Learning with LotE
- We plan to use local venues embedded within communities where possible to deliver activities, as well as taking people on accompanied visits to familiarise them with the coastline. This is part of our plans to reduce barriers so that a wider range of people can participate in the programme, and benefit from their local heritage.

### Co-design gives more targeted, effective delivery

At the same time as learning about barriers people might experience in engaging with the project, we asked about how we could overcome them. We also saw and learned from many projects that are already underway, or in development, that were focused on finding solutions.

We piloted a wide range of activities during the Development Phase. These activities were designed initially on the discussions that we had held during the preparation for our Round 1 application, but they evolved during the

Development Phase as we held further discussions, got feedback on our initial activities and developed new ones in response.

This iterative process was continuing even as we reached the end of the Development Phase and a key learning point for us was that co-design is essential to success.

**Action taken:** This means that, as we progress through the Delivery Phase, we need to leave space open for people to help shape the activities we develop. We also want to leave opportunities (and resources) available for new experiments and innovations to emerge. We realised that it would be quite limiting, therefore, to set out a detailed programme for the whole 5 years.

#### **Creative approaches are powerful**

Research has shown that engaging people through the arts is a powerful way to encourage people to appreciate nature and the groups we talked to came up with lots of ideas about how to put this into practice.

They liked the idea of the AONBees, which are produced through craft activities led by an artist or craftsperson, and are then displayed in an exhibition or in community spaces around the AONB as a trail. Other approaches included taking part in or watching performances, creative writing, open air painting and photography.

**Action taken:** Our Delivery Phase plans include opportunities to work with artists and creative practitioners.

#### **Extending capacity through volunteering**

LotE has enabled the AONB staff to work with volunteers – a new area for us. Volunteer training, in particular, has been very successful. The results have been excellent, with training events fully subscribed and feedback very

positive, demonstrating new knowledge and skills learnt through their participation.

LotE has done well to attract volunteers from local communities, especially in the hotspot areas. It has been good for the National Trust to be able to tap into different volunteer groups. This wouldn't have been possible without the externally funded project.

**Action taken:** Quality, varied volunteering roles are a core part of our Delivery Phase plans.



*Figure 3 Volunteer hedgerow planting as part of the LotE Development Phase trials*

### Adequate, consistent staffing is key

Some project staff both in LotE and other organisations (e.g. Buglife) were engaged on a part-time basis. This led to constraints not only due to lack of time available to give adequate attention to the project but also to balancing different project agendas (for instance with social media posts). Obviously this challenge is not restricted to this project and is a feature of all part time work.

The Buglife project officer left 8 months into the project, making it hard for her successors to slot in and build on her work: for instance, signing up farmers and landowners. She noted that working for only 2 days a week on LotE had been difficult. Inevitably the working days get filled up with meetings, making it difficult to spend time on the actual work.

**Action taken:** Roles and resourcing have been reviewed as part of the Development Phase planning process.

### Refining our evaluation approach

The principal purpose of the Development Phase evaluation process was to test out a range of approaches to evaluation and, based on these, to draw up a defined approach to evaluating the Delivery Phase.

We were given a set of evaluation tools to trial by the Evaluation Consultant. These comprised mainly questionnaires for event participants and event leaders. However, we found it difficult to implement many of these tools in the field.

We had feedback from some participants that they found the questionnaires too bureaucratic and mechanical and completing the forms at the end of a successful event tended to deflate people's feelings. We were also advised by

organisations working with some of our target groups that the wellbeing questions were not appropriate.

For Girls Against Anxiety, this was because the participants, who were already being asked to take on new, challenging experiences, would not agree to answer questions that probed their emotions at the start of an event. Our Evaluation Consultant suggested some amendments to the questionnaire and some other non-questionnaire techniques but these also failed to gain traction.

We therefore took steps to develop our in-house evaluation expertise and to trial new and innovative tools. The Project Officer and Community Officer signed up for workshops and a 6-week intensive Evaluation Bootcamps run by Heritage Insider. These proved extremely valuable in supplementing the approaches recommended by our Evaluation Consultant.

**Action taken:** Our Area-Based Plan contains further details of how we intend to collect data and when we will report. We will secure specialist evaluation support in order to bring independence and expertise in effectively evaluating NLHF projects, train our team to further develop our capacity and provide



Figure 4 Whiteboard evaluation - one of the potential tools trialled at an LotE trial event

technical guidance, mentoring and support to the project evaluation through the 5-years of delivery (see brief provided).

In the Delivery Phase our evaluation approach will:

- Embrace more interactive, fun ways to capture how people feel about the activity and the impact it's had on them for our engagement activities
- Seek to embed evaluation within activities, rather than it being an 'add-on' at the end
- Strengthen how we capture the impact of our other areas of the project, for example, Annual Partnership Reviews and use of the Species Recovery Curve
- Continue to develop our evaluative practice, and ensure this also filters through to the wider work of the SDAONB.

**Thank you** to everyone who has generously given their time and thoughts to contribute towards this evaluation.