

## **Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery**

### **Stakeholder Engagement Programme Community Consultation**

#### **Responses from consultation February – March 2025**



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## Introduction

This report presents the findings of the initial community engagement programme conducted between February and March 2025 related to the Heaths to Sea initiative (<https://www.heathstosea.com/>). It provides background to the project, outlines the initial engagement approach and summarises the findings and responses. A summary of the key findings is provided in the main report with the detail relating to specific responses to certain questions provided in Appendix 1. Full details of concerns are listed in Appendix 2. Where responses have been received in writing, or when it was possible to write these down or paraphrase them during face-to-face public engagement events, these have been presented in full. Although some responses expressed concerns regarding land use that were out of the ability of the heaths to Sea project to influence, for transparency these have nevertheless also been included. Although for the most part it has been possible to gauge the broad degree of support or concern relating to different aspects of the project from all engagements and responses, in some cases the views expressed were of individuals and not necessarily shared by others in the community.

## Highlights

- Nine drop-in sessions at eight community coffee shops or events
- Two well-received walks with the East Devon Ramblers, with subsequent requests for future walk & talks about the Heaths to Sea Project
- Over 185 people engaged with face-to-face, and 55 survey responses received
- Broadly positive public support for landscape recovery – <5% of those engaged with at the drop-in sessions expressed negativity about the project. From survey results, 98% supportive in some capacity.

## Summary of responses

At both the drop-in sessions and walks, the majority of people engaged with expressed support and encouragement for the overall aims of the Heaths to Sea Project. There is widespread support for nature-restoration initiatives, though the level of understanding on what this means varied amongst the public, making understanding our audience and knowing where to pitch the level of information shared critical. The changes to the Otter Estuary, with the new saltmarsh habitat and public access, have been repeatedly praised and has potentially supported the positive reception received by the Heaths to Sea Project. As encouraging as this is, there is some confusion with some of the public viewing Heaths to Sea as another part of the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) and not understanding why an additional project is necessary; our response to these conversations was to explain the broader, bolder ambitions of Landscape Recovery, and how we are building upon the success of the Otter Estuary to effect positive improvements for people and nature on the land between all three areas of the National Nature Reserve.

While the feedback received was supportive in the majority, there were some major points of concern related to:

- Potential impacts of the project on fish populations
- Potential of the project to increase flooding
- The current status and future maintenance of Public Rights of way and existing permissive access
- The impact of the project on the existing landscape aesthetic
- The impact on the environment of widespread maize growing

- Whether the Estate could be trusted to deliver a project of this nature and whether greenwashing was involved
- The need for good leadership for the Heaths to Sea to succeed
- The need to continue growing food in the landscape

## Background

A dedicated six-week Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery public engagement campaign took place in February and March 2025. The programme of engagement followed an initial Stakeholder Engagement Workshop held in October 2025, with representatives from 35 different organisations and groups, including community groups, businesses and policy makers. This community engagement campaign was set-up to raise awareness about the project amongst the wider public and provide an opportunity for anyone who lives, works in or visits the project area to feed in their thoughts or raise their concerns about the project aims and outcomes. It was also intended to sense-check the outcomes from the workshop.

The public engagement campaign was designed in conjunction with independent Stakeholder Participation experts [Dialogue Matters](#) (who delivered the Stakeholder Workshop), with input from the project's Stakeholder Communication Advisory Group. A series of nine engagement sessions were held in eight different community hubs, either local coffee mornings or events in village halls or at local cafes. At these engagement sessions, at least two members of the project team were available to answer questions and discuss the public's thoughts and concerns about the project. A display outlining the project aims, project area covered, and artist impressions of potential project outcomes was present. Additionally, two walks were run by the project team with East Devon Ramblers, to explain the project aims and explore land-use in the project area. The face-to-face events were accompanied by a community survey which was also available online for the six-week period.

The events were promoted via local Whatsapp community groups, Facebook pages, and with articles in both the February and March editions of all local parish newsletters in the project area. Three rounds of social media engagement on Clinton Devon Estate's Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn promoted both the survey and the drop-in sessions over the six-week period, tagging local communities Facebook and Instagram accounts for further sharing. All Stakeholder Communication Advisory Group members were also asked to promote via poster or social media amongst their contacts and respective village community groups. Several posters were put up around the four villages (Newton Poppleford, Otterton, Colaton Raleigh and East Budleigh) and in Budleigh Salterton, and ten posters focusing on the online survey were put up in Clinton Devon Estates managed car parks.

For the community survey, both paper and online versions of the survey were available. Paper surveys were available for collection and return from the four village stores and Budleigh Salterton Library. Each location had 20 copies, with East Budleigh and Budleigh Library receiving a further ten each. The link to the online version was published as a QR code on our website, all handouts, posters and images for social media posts. At each drop-in engagement, both paper surveys and a QR code to the online survey were actively promoted, the project team encouraging the public to write down their thoughts into a written record.

## Engagement response to drop-in sessions and walks

Over a total 27 hours of engagement, the project team spoke with more than 140 people. A further 47 individuals were engaged with through collaborative walks with the East Devon Ramblers.

Overall, discussions at the drop-in sessions were positive. During these, the project team tried to record initial impressions of public support or otherwise, where people expressed clear views when talking with the team. Initial impressions were noted down for an estimated 55% of those engaged with at the drop-ins. Of these:

- 73% of people were openly supportive of the project's broad objectives when first approaching us.
- 27% didn't feel they knew enough about the project or nature recovery in general when they first engaged but by the end of the conversation were generally positive.

However, beyond these recorded initial impressions, the project team estimates that the majority of the public engaged with were supportive of the project. Less than 5% of all engaged came with a negative view around a particular aspect of the project or did not express any form of support for the project, even after discussing their concerns. These negative views were usually less about the wider project objectives, reflecting instead concerns regarding a specific topic or location of interest to them e.g. the level of development in the wider area or changing existing landscape aesthetics such as a sight line to the river or fears that land management changes might impact fishing. A few individuals were opposed to change in general and displayed negativity over how the landscape has changed since they were children.

The length and depth of conversations varied between events. Conversations usually started with a brief overview of the project by a team member followed by a personalised Q&A. Generally, the highest engagement with in-depth conversations was found at the villages' Saturday coffee mornings where conversations generally lasted 10-15 minutes per person/group. At Budleigh Riding School's Oak Lodge Cafe, Sir Walter Raleigh Pub and Wesley's café we had fewer attendees to the Heaths to Sea drop-in, but this allowed for deeper conversations lasting over 30 minutes in many cases; although the attendance was lower, those who did come to see us had come specifically to talk with us about the project and discuss their concerns or aspirations. The Otterton Spring Show had the least in-depth conversations but highest engagement rate: 31 people over 2.5 hours, though conversations were often less than five minutes, due to the nature of being in the foyer of the Village Hall as people were entering and leaving the Show.

At each event, there were at least three people who had come specifically to talk to the Heaths to Sea Project team, either to find out more or raise their concerns. In most cases, they reported hearing about the event from a local Whatsapp community group, Facebook or Parish newsletter. No attendees referenced the posters specifically as the reason for coming.

Of the two walks with the East Devon Ramblers, one was a flat 'easy' four-mile circular route from Newton Poppleford to Colaton Raleigh, walking down the old railway track and returning up the existing public footpath. There were 35 attendees (not including the two project team members). The second walk was classed as 'moderate' 7.5-mile circular route from Otterton, up the riverside footpath to Colaton Raleigh footbridge, up Passeford Lane, through Mutters Moor and back down the coast path by Peak Hill. This walk was attended by 19 walkers (not including the team) of which five had been present on the previous short walk. During both walks, Dr Sam Bridgewater gave informative talks at key points along each route, explaining the project aims, pointing out key species, talking about the

history of land use and showing how human activity had shaped the valley's environment. Both walks were positively received with supportive feedback from those attending.

### Engagement response: Community Survey

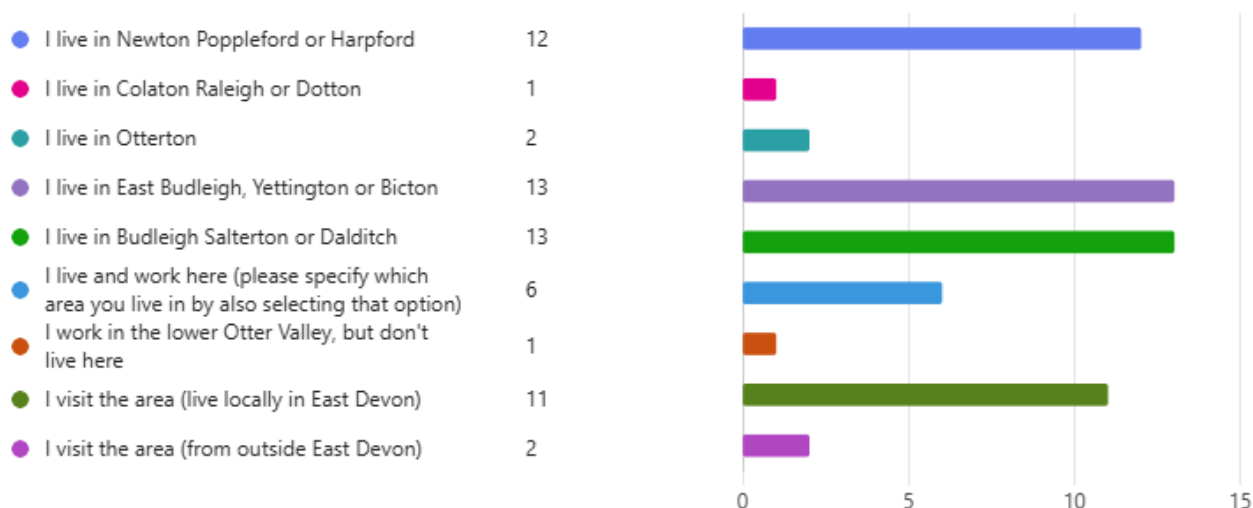
In total, 55 survey responses were received of which 40 were online and 15 were returned paper surveys, the results of which were uploaded to the online version for easier analysis. Uptake of copies of the paper surveys was good: from the events, 49 paper surveys were taken, and >100 were taken in total from the Village Stores and Budleigh Salterton Library (of all put out, only 13 surveys were not taken). However, out of the >149 paper surveys taken, only 15 were completed and returned, a 10% return rate.

#### Q1. What is your relationship to the lower Otter Valley?

All 55 participants responded to this question. Just under a quarter of all responses came from each of Newton Poppleford / Harpford, East Budleigh/Yettington/Bicton, Budleigh Salterton/Dalditch and visitors who live outside the project area but within East Devon. Responses from Colaton Raleigh and Otterton were poor, with one and two surveys completed respectively. Two responses came from people visiting the area from wider Devon or further afield.

Six respondents (11%) also stated they worked within the project area, in addition to living here (two in East Budleigh, two in Budleigh Salterton, one in Otterton and one in Newton Poppleford). One respondent stated that they worked in the project area but didn't live here, however they didn't indicate whether they lived locally (East Devon) or further afield.

*Figure 1 Number of survey respondents by their home parish*



**Q2. What do you value around the lower Otter Valley and/or what do you think is working well for people and nature? e.g. a favourite view or place to visit, a route you enjoy walking/cycling, a positive project or action you've seen for nature...**

51 respondents (93%) answered this question. Most answers held multiple points which have been grouped into 5 main categories. Several concerns were also raised. **Full details of responses can be found in Appendix 1 with concerns provided in Appendix 2.**

<b>Category of responses</b>	<b>Summary of responses</b>
<b>Public access</b>	Answers referred to enjoying walks (the majority) and the provision of good public access, with many respondents stating the importance and enjoyment of walking dogs. Cycling, running, horse riding and swimming were also mentioned as loved activities. The beauty of the area, the wildlife and the ability to relax were cited as important.
<b>Scenic views</b>	Answers generally highlighted enjoying the scenery and beautiful vistas.
<b>Wildlife and nature restoration</b>	The existing value of nature and the ability to see wildlife was emphasised as important with the Lower Otter Restoration Scheme often cited as an important project improving the natural environment of the local area.
<b>Public education efforts</b>	Positive comments were received on existing interpretation and environmental education/engagement.
<b>Loved locations</b>	These included: the Otter Estuary; local lanes; the River Otter; Woodbury Castle; the Pebblebed Heaths
<b>Concerns</b>	Too many people, busy roads & car parks and too many cars

### Q3. The vision for Heaths to Sea landscape recovery is:

***For this diverse landscape to be nature rich and ecologically healthy whilst also supporting food production, net zero, timber and access needs.***

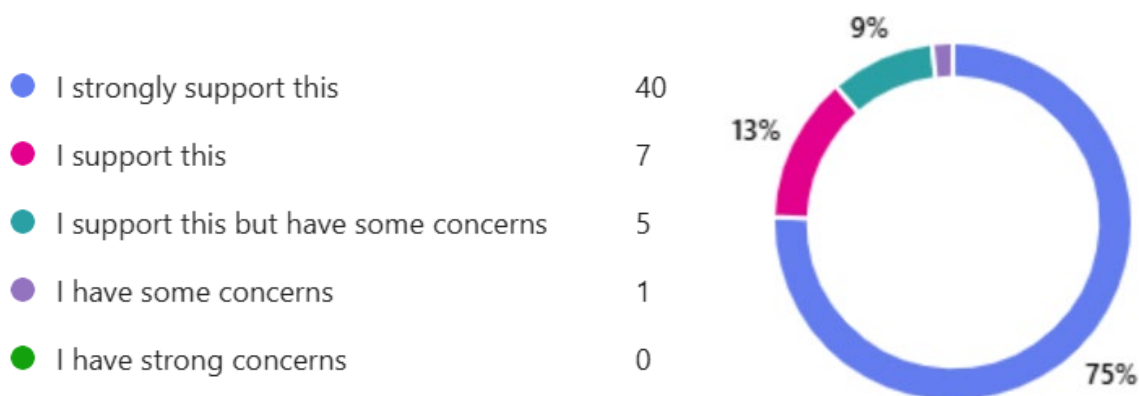
***By working together this initiative will:***

- 1. Deliver an accessible, nature-rich landscape that is resilient to climate change.***
- 2. Support East Devon's net zero and food production ambitions.***
- 3. Drive a stronger, greener and more sustainable economy.***

### Do you support this vision?

53 respondents answered this question. 98% of all respondents were supportive of the Heaths to Sea vision, with 75% strongly supportive, 13% supportive and 9% supportive but with some concerns expressed. Of all respondents, only one person registered concerns without any form of support, and this was targeted at maintenance of the Otter Estuary.

*Figure 2 Level of support for Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery by survey respondents*



### Q4. Do you have concerns about the vision and what would need to happen for you to increase your support?

Though 45 respondents (85% of all survey responses) answered this question, 16 stated that they had “no concerns”. The remaining 29 respondents raised concerns in this text response question, even though only five had stated in Q3 that they “support the project but have some concerns”, one of whom did not then state their concerns here. Nineteen respondents were still “strongly supportive” of the project, whilst four were “supportive”. One person submitted an answer to Q4 but did not answer Q3.

Concerns listed included: maintaining productive landscapes including food production; the number of housing developments in the local area; the impact of intensive farming on the environment; the need for leadership and good communication; increased flood risk resulting from landscape recovery; too many people in the area; footpath maintenance; the impact of dogs on wildlife. **Full details of the responses relating to concerns is provided in Appendix 2.**



**Q5. These priorities for landscape recovery in the lower Otter Valley were identified by representatives from 35 different community groups, businesses and statutory agencies in the lower Otter Valley at an initial project stakeholder engagement workshop in October 2024. How would you rank these priorities? (1-most important, 10-least important)**

**Main priorities listed:**

- Greater wildlife diversity and connection/connectivity
- Maintaining food productivity while enhancing nature
- Participation, engagement and education
- Managing public access
- Improved water quality
- Tree planting and cover
- Re-naturalising the river and flood management
- Improving the health of soil
- Project funding and financial sustainability
- Clear plan explaining the progress of landscape recovery

51 out of 55 respondents answered this question. When looking at the rankings, there is no clear order of priority accepted by the majority of respondents. However, the priority *Greater wildlife diversity and connection/connectivity* is widely considered the most important, with *Clear plan explaining the progress of landscape recovery* as the least important. Instead, rankings are varied, and the additional responses in Q6 suggest that the public considers these priorities as a cohesive whole, rather individual foci.

The table below pictures how often a rank (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> etc) was assigned to a specific priority. For each ranking, green depicted the most popular priority and red depicts the lowest priority.

<b>No. of respondents who put this priority in each ranking</b>	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Greater wildlife diversity and connection/connectivity	20	8	5	5	5	2	2	2	0	2
Maintaining food productivity while enhancing nature	9	7	6	4	6	5	6	1	6	1
Improved water quality	5	8	8	12	6	4	3	3	1	1
Re-naturalising the river and flood management	2	8	5	9	9	6	8	3	1	0
Managing public access	4	5	9	5	7	3	4	3	4	7
Tree planting and cover	2	3	4	3	10	9	11	2	3	4
Improving the health of soil	0	3	6	6	3	10	9	5	6	3
Participation, engagement and education	2	4	2	5	1	4	4	13	8	8
Project funding and financial sustainability	5	2	3	0	1	4	2	14	13	7
Clear plan explaining the progress of landscape recovery	2	3	3	2	3	4	2	5	9	18

**Q6. Are there any priorities you think are missing from this list, or anything more you think could be done to promote nature recovery? If so, what are they?**

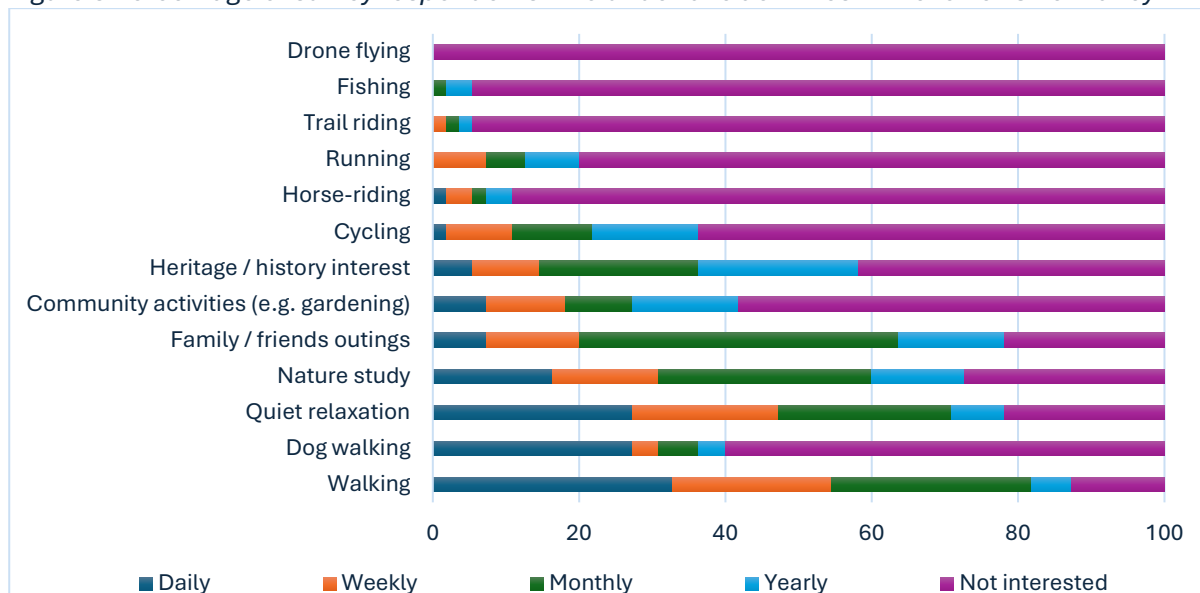
30 respondents (55% of all survey responses) answered this question, with five expressing they had no additional priorities and eight stating that all the priorities in Q5 are of equal importance or work as a collective, though four of these also contained additional suggestions for project priorities.

In total, 21 of the answers received were pertinent to the question, and some suggested multiple priorities. These answers were broadly themed around: improving and maintaining access and making it safer; maintaining good communication and supporting environmental education; limiting disturbance and visitor impact; controlling invasive species; supporting environmentally friendly farming; preventing inappropriate development. **Full details of the responses to this question can be seen in Appendix 1.**

**Q7. What activities do you do in the lower Otter Valley landscape?**

All 55 respondents answered this question. Walking was highlighted as the most popular activity, with 33% stating they walk daily, 22% weekly and 27% monthly. Specifically, dog walking was undertaken by a third of respondents, with 2/3 stating they have no interest. At least monthly, 70% of respondents spend some time in the lower Otter Valley for quiet relaxation time and 60% spend time in nature study. A small proportion of respondents spend time cycling, horse riding, or running in the valley. Only 5% respondents fished, either monthly or yearly, and no respondents fly drones.

*Figure 3 Percentage of survey respondents who undertake activities in the lower Otter Valley*



**Q8. What other activities, if any, that are not listed above do you do in the lower Otter landscape? And how often?**

14 respondents provided additional activities, which are as follows:

- Bird watching and photography (2)
- Wild swimming (e.g. in river/ managed lakes) or Sea swimming (2)
- Caring for ancient buildings and roadside hedging
- Foraging
- Kayaking
- Sitting on the bench at South Farm Rd car park and watching the world go by.
- Otter and Beaver spotting
- Picnicking
- Volunteering with DWT
- Working on an allotment

Additionally, two survey responses took the opportunity to state they are actively against drone flying and one raised an issue with trail riding and cyclists not giving way to walkers. Two also stated they would like to do these activities but don't yet or they are not sure how to be involved.

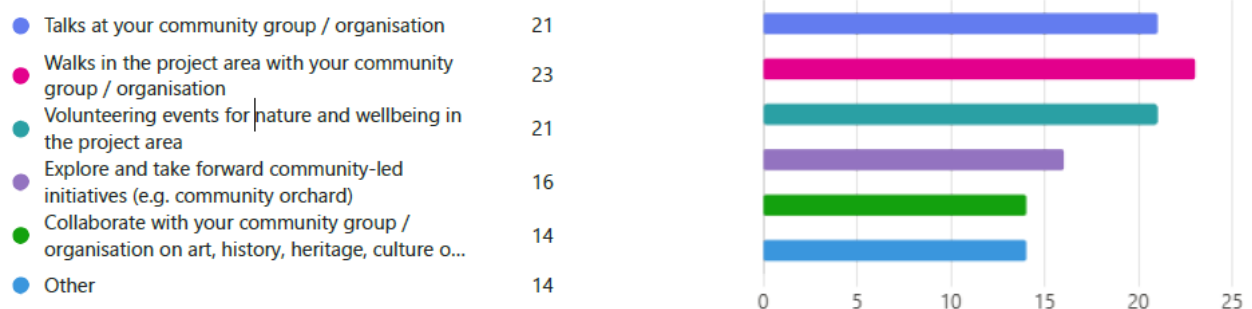
**Q9. How can we best involve you in the development of the Heaths to Sea Project and landscape recovery in the lower Otter Valley?**

46 respondents answered this question. 42% of respondents showed interest in volunteering opportunities. Talks at, and/or walks with local community groups were also favoured, with 38% of respondents choosing these options. 25 – 30% showed interest in active project collaboration between the project and their community group or taking part in a long-term community led initiative.

14 answers listed a series of another routes of involvement or used the 'Other' as an opportunity to comment. Some answers made more than one point.

- All options appeal (2)
- Anything that keeps people informed (articles in press, talks, walks, visits etc) (4)
- Local school engagement (1)
- Too old to be involved or already volunteering as much as they can (3)
- Guided bird/nature walks or foraging walks (2)
- Monitoring opportunities e.g. disturbance on wildlife from increased visitor numbers (2)
- Reporting on deforestation plans, fallen trees and bank erosion (1)
- Ensuring talks and walks aren't just for community groups but open to individuals as well (1)

*Figure 4 Number of survey respondents and their preference of involvement*



**Q10. We would like to ensure you can remain informed about the project. Which communication channel(s) do you use most often to keep up to date with activities happening locally? Please be specific e.g. name of Facebook group, newsletter, or location of notice board.**

46 respondents answered this question, making a total of 70 suggestions. Local parish newsletters, Facebook groups, and local noticeboards were the most popular options for information sharing.

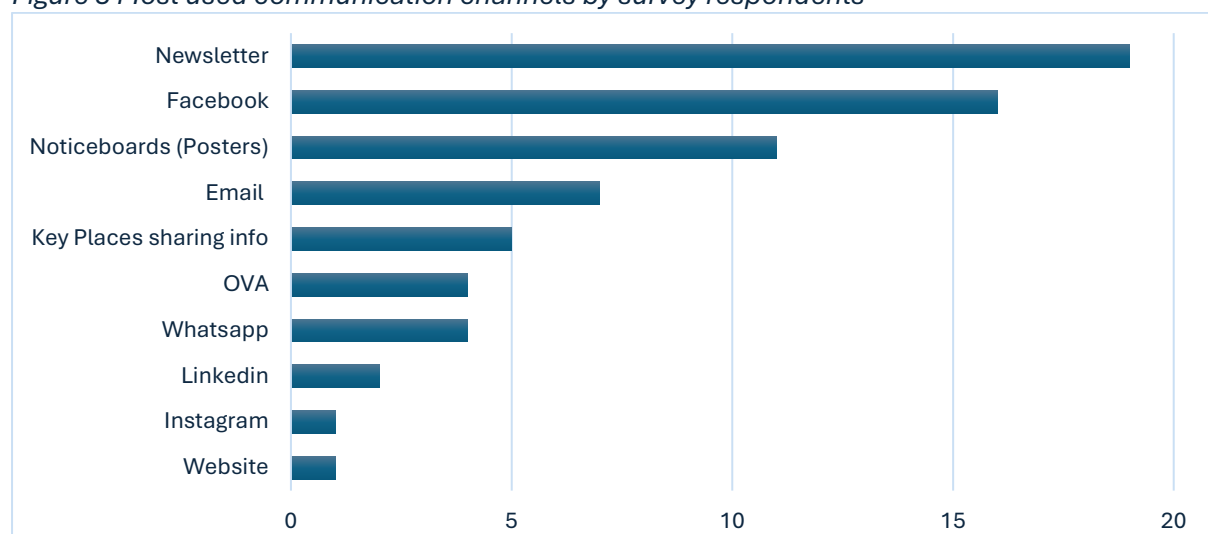
Facebook pages or groups named: Budleigh Past & Present, Budleigh Salterton Town News (x2), Friends of Common, Woodbury Community, Friends of Otterton, Newton Poppleford Community Group,

Newsletters named: Budleigh Town News, East Budleigh Parish magazine (x2), Newton Poppleford Parish magazine (x3).

Notice board locations named: Budleigh Salterton Public Hall, Lark Rise Newton Poppleford, Tennis Courts Newton Poppleford, East Budleigh Community Shop, on the Floodplain, Seaton, posters on streetlights.

The only Whatsapp group referenced is East Budleigh's Village Events group.

*Figure 5 Most used communication channels by survey respondents*



**Q11. Is there anything else you'd like to know or feedback about the Heaths to Sea Project?**

There were 18 responses.

- Question regarding plans for any cycle paths and a request for a good accessible footpath to Colaton Raleigh from Newton Poppleford. (2)
- Request for sharing specifics of project actions and timescales. E.g. where would a new footpath / woodland be put? (2)
- Wanting reassurance that Heaths to Sea will not go back on the LORP Flood Risk Assessment and that flood risk will not increase as remaining field drainage will be up to task. (2)
- Regular updates and accessible communication about the project. (5)
- Ensuring the project does deliver for nature and is managed by those with experience in the natural environment over qualifications (2)
- Assurance that public views are taken into account. (1)
- Concern about increasing visitor numbers as a result of new housing developments nearby (1)
- Complaint about use of trans identity labels in the demographic questions (2).
- Offers of assistance for communicating the project further afield (Plymouth and Exeter). (2)

## Demographics

Figure 6 Age Range

Under 18	1
18 - 24	0
25 - 44	7
45 - 64	14
65 - 74	17
75 - 84	16
85+	0

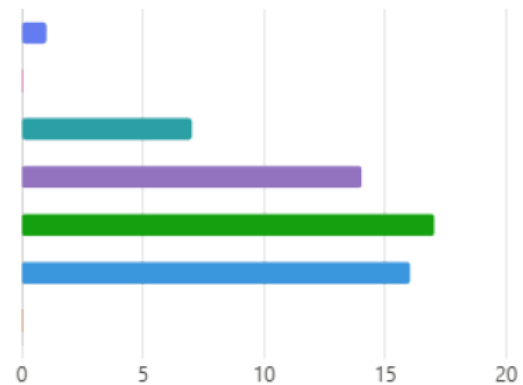


Figure 7 Ethnicity

White - British	54
White - Other	0
Black - British	0
Black - Other	0
Asian - British	0
Asian - Other	0
Arab - British	0
Arab - Other	0
Mixed Heritage	0
Prefer not to say	0

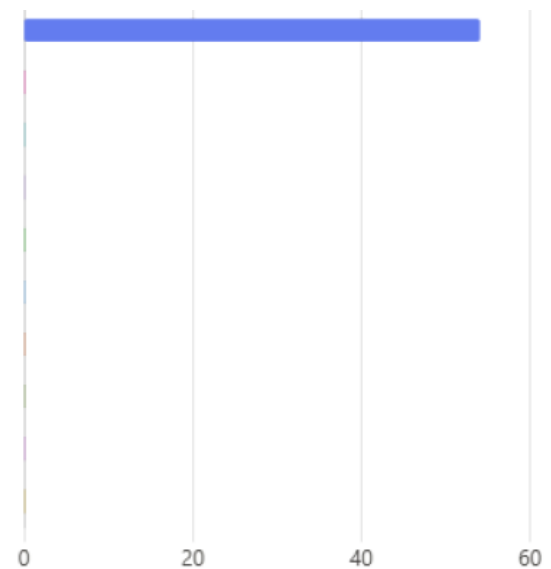


Figure 8 Gender identity

Female	34
Male	16
Transwoman	0
Transman	0
Non binary or questioning	0
Don't know	0
Prefer not to say	1

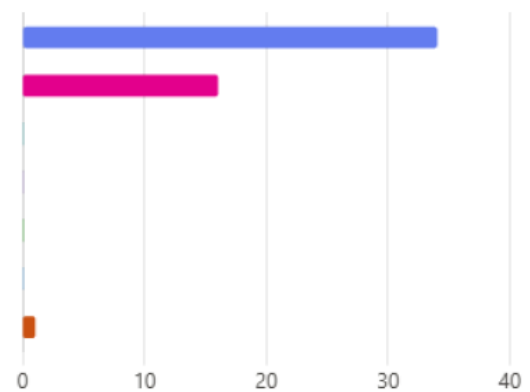


Figure 9 Employment Status

Employed (part or full time)	15
Self-employed	6
Unemployed	0
Retired	34
Fulltime caring for children	0
Student	1
Unpaid carer	0
Prefer not to say	0

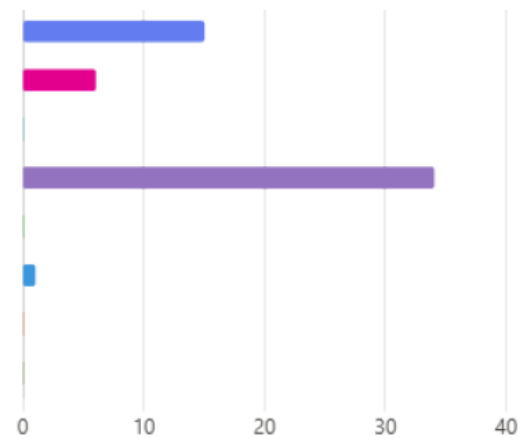


Figure 10 Sexual orientation

Straight or Heterosexual	44
Gay or Lesbian	1
Bisexual	0
Pansexual	0
Asexual	0
Queer	0
Other	0
Do not know or questioning	0
Prefer not to say	6

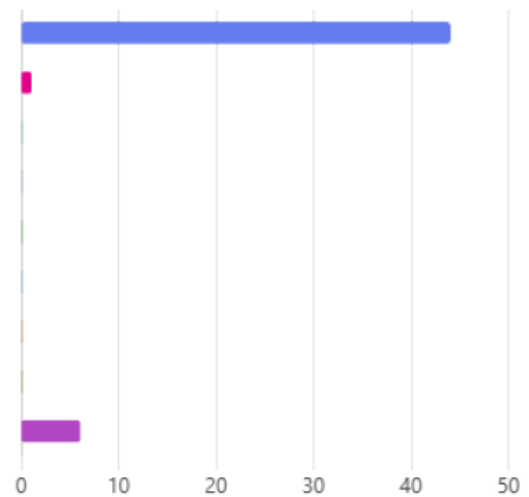
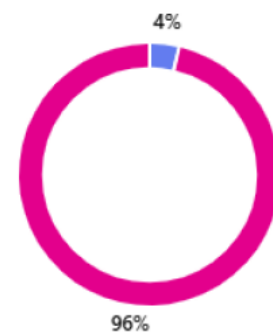


Figure 11 Health condition

Do you have a disability or health condition that might be a barrier to engaging with or accessing the countryside?

Yes	2
No	53



## Appendix 1. Detailed engagement responses

**Q2. What do you value around the lower Otter Valley and/or what do you think is working well for people and nature? e.g. a favourite view or place to visit, a route you enjoy walking/cycling, a positive project or action you've seen for nature...**

Loved locations

- Otter Estuary (6 mentions)
- Riverside footpath (5)
- Woodbury Common (4)
- Woodbury Castle (3)
- Squabmoor Reservoir (3)
- River Otter (2)
- Wheat Hill (1)
- Anchoring Hill (1)

Public access – 39 answers refer to enjoying walks or hikes, eight talk about cycling, four about running and one about swimming and one about horse riding in the area:

- Being able to access footpaths to walk from Newton Poppleford to Budleigh Salterton
- Easy access to the Otter riverside path
- Favourite walks along the SW Path
- Great for dog walking
- I appreciate the improvement of access for pedestrians between Lime Kiln carpark and South Farm Road though hope most wild walks retain their natural state
- I enjoy the walks around the lower otter valley (especially since the major works) and riverside walks in the north
- I enjoy walking my dog around the lower Otter Valley
- I live in Woodbury and often walk or cycle over the common to the Otter estuary
- I love that there are so many footpaths to walk from Newton Poppleford
- I love the walking and countryside around Newton Poppleford especially the ability to walk from the village to a destination with a pub such as Colaton Raleigh and Otterton
- I love walking by the river Otter with my dog
- I love walking my dogs in the area
- I love walking the paths, and the new pathways around the Lower Otter also make great places to run
- I value the improved pedestrian access and circular walking route from East Budleigh to the sea
- I value the rights of way network for hiking and the quiet lanes for cycling
- I walk it a lot and don't get tired of it
- I walk with the Newton Poppleford wanderers, we all very much enjoy the outdoors and countryside around
- It offers the local people the chance to still walk the same route as they did previously, with added the added benefit of a circular route around



- It is a great place to walk, relax, meet people, observe nature
- It's good to see mostly "natural" areas with good walking routes around the heathland
- Love the walking along the river and think that has Woodbury Common - top of Wheat Hill and Reservoir (Squabmoor)
- Lovely choice of places to walk
- Many early doubters are now firmly in the favour of the new estuary landscape, and it's certainly got a lot more people out walking and exercising their dogs
- Nature, walking, cycling, access to beach/shore and to heathland
- River walk Otterton to Budleigh, lanes around East Budleigh
- Riverside walks
- The estuary walk from Otterton to Budleigh Salterton is a favourite
- The space to walk up the valley to Otterton
- Short walks most days with friends and family
- Value being able to walk (with dog and family) in a variety of locations and habitats, especially alongside the river, in the woodland and heaths
- Walks along the river
- Walking and observing wildlife
- Walking
- Walking anywhere be it river, heath or countryside
- Walking the footpaths in the area
- Walking the river and the unspoiltness in general of the area
- We enjoy walking along the Rr Otter from Otterton to Budleigh Salterton
- We enjoy walks around the new paths around the Otter Estuary
- We love walking from the Jubilee field on the West end of Budleigh to Otter Mouth and down what we call the 'Yellow Brick Road' - the new path up the estuary to have coffee or lunch at the Cricket Club, then home up the Old Railway track
- Cycle a route in preparation for Nello bike ride to Budleigh and beyond
- Cycling in Bicton and Newton Poppleford
- I enjoy riding my bike on bridleways in the area
- Value the open access for cycling on so much of the area
- We enjoy cycling around the little lanes in the Pebblebed Heaths core block
- Excellent place for running
- Love running from Otterton Mill over to Budleigh via footpaths including newer ones at back of LORP and over top road and back down road when not too muddy
- Its brilliant! I enjoy horse riding (over Woodbury Common), as well as running from Budleigh out to Squabmoor Reservoir, through Woodbury Common, to Budleigh Golf Course and back into Budleigh
- Swimming in sea throughout the year, love cold water swimming when water/sea is clean enough

Scenic views – seventeen answers highlight enjoying the scenery, beautiful vistas and landscape:

- A scenic place to walk
- Views over the commons
- Compared to the Sid Valley, its relatively unspoilt landscape
- Each footpath has its own best view but going south from the village I love the views across the river to Bulverton Hill, going east over Bulverton Hill then it's Keble's Seat
- Enjoying views of the landscape
- Enjoyment of nature - wetland birds and views
- Enjoying the beautiful scenery
- Favourite views: top of anchoring hill, River Otter, Wheat Hill, Squabmoor Reservoir
- I love all the views across the river and fields to the hills
- I grew up in Budleigh and have always loved the landscape and the freedom we have to access so much of it
- I value the landscape
- I value the special quality of the landscape of the lower Otter Valley
- My favourite place is by the new footbridge as it gives great views over the scrapes and all the way up the valley
- Scenery
- Such vibrant and beautiful scenery
- The whole valley is special. I walk it a lot and don't get tired of it.
- Wonderful views up the valley

Wildlife and nature restoration – fifteen answers refer to wildlife or birdlife and eight specify the improvements to the estuary and the wetland creation:

- Bird life etc
- Bird sightings are useful
- Bird watching, landscape
- Diverse wildlife
- Enjoy the varied wildlife in and around the estuary
- I enjoy bird watching around the Otter Estuary
- I'm pleased to see new bird boxes put up, living hedgerows planted and new islands built
- It is a great place to walk, relax, meet people, observe nature
- Love the areas of relative wilderness and opportunities to see wildlife
- Nature, walking, cycling, access to beach/shore and to heathland
- Protecting wildlife and habitats
- The countryside, wildlife and access to it
- We enjoy looking at the variety of Birds
- Enjoyment of nature - wetland birds and views
- We value the clean air, the openness, the wildlife
- Big marsh restoration
- I really like the new wetlands at Budleigh Salterton so it would be great if the new Nature Recovery Project is as beneficial
- I value the LORP for the opportunity it gives bird life to refuel and rest

- I value the return of the lower otter to floodplain and more natural system and potential to reduce flooding
- Many early doubters are now firmly in the favour of the new estuary landscape, and it's certainly got a lot more people out walking and exercising their dogs
- Returning the Otter floodplain to its original purpose recently is a great thing, especially for flood mitigation and wildlife habitat
- The lower Otter valley project is very exciting and will bring in many new nature enthusiasts to the area
- Wetlands

Public education efforts:

- Good efforts to educate people about wildlife (including stopping dogs disturbing birds nesting)
- Signage encouraging people to be considerate visitors (for example, around Woodbury Castle and surrounding areas)
- Signage is good to reinforce site as a nature reserve

A few concerns were raised in this section and have been collated in Appendix 2.

**Q6. Are there any priorities you think are missing from this list, or anything more you think could be done to promote nature recovery? If so, what are they?**

Managing public access. Six answers expanded on this priority from Q5:

- Improving routes for walking, cycling and horse riding and improving access by public transport, increasing areas of public access
- Maintaining and improving the footpath network
- Monitoring of misuse (e.g. dirt bikes / off road vehicles) in wildlife and public walking areas.
- More access for those with mobility issues to enjoy (or ideally more/better cycling access).
- Pathway for pedestrians from Newton Poppleford to Colaton Raleigh
- The most important thing to me is the provision of a decent footpath from Newton Poppleford to Colaton Raleigh. Can you reopen the old railway line?

Participation, engagement and education. Three answers expanded on this priority from Q5:

- Continue liaising with schools in the area. If the young support these issues, there is long term success.
- Education in schools.
- Trying to communicate to a wider audience (i.e. not preaching to the converted) to persuade them to take part in events, tidy-ups, nature walks. Offer more educational walks e.g. with bird, farming, wildlife and botany experts.

Limiting disturbance of nature:

- Ensuring site remains disturbance free for birds and other wildlife and ensure dog free zones.
- Prevention of overuse of commons.
- Prevention of overuse of the commons
- Some higher islands in the lagoons. High-tide proof refuges
- Stop people throwing litter in the hedges and grasslands - bad for wildlife and is bad for environment as whole. Stop people letting dogs defecate everywhere.
- The only thing I can think of is stopping dogs getting on the marsh. I still see it every time I visit.

#### Invasive species control:

- Control of the grey squirrels to increase opportunity for tree establishment.
- Eradicating invasive plants like Himalayan Balsam

#### Supporting environmentally friendly farming:

- I think you haven't specified it directly (although partly in improved flood management / water quality / healthy soils / food productivity while enhancing nature) but being specific about farming in a way that is as good as it can be for the environment (pesticide-free, fertiliser-free, soil-friendly, ideally no monocultures, and if animals have to be involved - avoiding River Wye-style pollution downstream). I think 'enhancing nature' doesn't quite encompass that. "Environmentally considerate food production" might be better?
- Supporting diverse agroforestry, organic methods of farming. Therefore, the farm run-off would not be so detrimental to the rivers. It used to be lovely to see the cows standing in the river - now they are not allowed - they're fenced off - I bet they miss that - it's their river too!

#### People:

- Again, no mention of people locally. More focus on people especially local residents and improving access, amenities and housing.
- Probably more of a council issue but increased contributions from 2nd/3rd homeowners since these properties are often not used and in my experience the owners are not much interested in connecting with / contributing to the community.
- Support farmers to sell local/community to buy local
- Working with the town of Budleigh Salterton to ensure the residents are included and the town prospers.

#### Maintenance:

- Maintain the man-made estuary, keeping drains open, etc.

#### Development

- Maintaining dark sky areas.
- Preventing new multiple building developments.
- Prevention of housing on agricultural land.

## Appendix 2. Detailed Concerns

**Q2: What do you value around the lower Otter Valley?** *In addition to the answers shared in Appendix 1, these concerns were raised during this question:*

- It would be nice if the paths that are regularly submerged were made higher and the muddy bits made more sandal-friendly (and buggy / wheelchair friendly!)
- I hope [Pebblebed Heaths] will remain protected against housing development due to the richness of its natural habitat
- I hope the new hedgerows [at Otter Estuary] are kept below eye level so we can continue to enjoy the views
- I sincerely hope farmers receive greater support to go organic.
- I think that there is a large discrepancy between too many people on Woodbury Common and nature preservation and recovery. All areas of Otter valley and Woodbury Common have become too busy over the past year.
- Of course, the best views used to be from the old railway line!
- Pebblebed Heaths remaining protected against housing developments
- Roads too busy for daily cycling
- The best views used to be from the old railway line!
- The Lower Otter Estuary is a lovely resource for tourists and residents. It would be nice if it had a closer relationship with the town of Budleigh.
- Too many cars parked on the road, especially with building works in the area
- Used to cycle daily but too busy now
- Used to love cycling along river but now can't which is a shame! I think that there is a large discrepancy between too many people on Woodbury Common and nature preservation and recovery
- Water cleanliness very important

**Q4. Do you have concerns about the vision and what would need to happen for you to increase your support?**

**Concerns listed related to this question in detail by theme:**

Land productivity maintained in a sustainable manner:

- A need to maintain a productive landscape
- Stop putting agricultural land up for housing - it is impossible to have enough food production when so much agricultural land has been put forward for housing.
- Need to stop putting land up for housing as this is damaging to agricultural land and food production. Furthermore, the more housing means the more people and cars ruining the common and diverse nature within it.
- The impact on agricultural land and farming from restoring floodplains
- The vision sounds great! I always feel a bit concerned when thinking about timber production - many because typical timber forests are awful monocultures - and I think people would like reassurance that timber production, and the process of cutting the trees down, will be minimally disruptive to ecosystems... although I worry that the two aren't fully

compatible. Also, I hope you have soil and downstream considerations for food production (to avoid polluting rivers and soils). I'm hoping that, with this vision, you really are thinking of radically reimagining the way of farming and producing timber on these landscapes, to be net positive for the environment as a whole - if so, that would be incredibly radical and exciting, well done for doing this!

- Farming to be small scale, diverse and organic. We are guardians over the animal and flora welfare and our responsibility to defend and speak up for. Free roaming cattle etc at Woodbury Common - with cattle grids as on Dartmoor.
- Getting the balance right between the farming needs and those of nature.

Need for appropriate communication:

- Greater communication and many in older generation locally don't use social media
- Keep in touch with me and let me know how I can help
- Farmers would have to support those ideals and so should the public who enjoy these areas. I think this means an ongoing dialogue between us all.

Need for appropriate leadership (on project, local government and National Government levels):

- Sounds good. Let's hope it happens
- The vision is likely to be blurred by external factors, notably the impacts of climate change and changes in government policy and funding.
- When the LORP project was being undertaken I was shocked that Chris Packham had to step in to point out the bad timing of habitat removal. How can we trust fully when such a basic error may have been allowed?

Flood risk and maintenance of re-naturalised floodplain and estuary:

- Any increased flood risk
- I am concerned about re-naturalising the river. LORP built a 10ft high road right across the river and kept the rubbish tip so naturalising the estuary is prevented. Also, contrary to the video LORP did NOT reconnect the lower Otter River to its floodplain. It let the sea into the floodplain and depends on its bank being maintained at 3.2m. For the footpath and flooding this must be maintained.
- I understand that the Environment Agency is not committing to maintaining the estuary. There has been a study by Exeter University of 1,600 wetlands across 61 countries around the world and their conclusion was that biodiversity is greater in wetlands that are unprotected (i.e. managed).
- Need more attention to flood risk and especially farming practices that increase the risk (e.g. growing maize with worse runoff from the fields).

Impact on local communities:

- Concern about any disruption during works (although appreciate most is a slow process).
- In achieving a sustainable economy, the use of the space for local people is lost

- No mention of people i.e. encouraging a landscape supporting resilient local residents and capacity for visitors.
- This project will have a big impact on the local towns.

#### New or improved public access:

- Circular walks
- Footpaths and cycle tracks to be maintained, connected up so that they go somewhere!
- Good and safe access to footpaths
- Is there enough emphasis on access for walkers and cyclists?
- My only concern is what will be done to provide suitable pedestrian access. The footpath along the old railway line was brilliant, wide easy path with beautiful views that allowed us to walk from Newton Poppleford to Colaton Raleigh and then on to Otterton but since the old railway line was closed the only footpath is very narrow and depending on time of year either muddy or overgrown.
- Pathway for pedestrians from Newton Poppleford to Colaton Raleigh
- Reduced public access (w/ dogs) and any reduced cycling access.
- The only real concern I have is about access as I love walking. Years ago, I loved walking the old railway line from Newton Poppleford but since that closed only footpath available is narrow and overgrown in summer.
- Too many people crowding the 'east' path and people cycling despite notices forbidding it and graffiti on our 'brand new' bridge.

#### Protecting sensitive nature from human activity:

- Anything to reduce the negative impact of dogs on wildlife and landscape.
- Concern about impact on farmers and cattle grazing landscape.
- Ensure freedom for responsible dog owners is not restricted because of the irresponsible few.
- Ensure visitors to the area respect the environment and do not encroach on protected areas.
- I think there is too much interference to force areas of nature recovery e.g. tractors and burning on Woodbury Common - more harmful to the environment than the recovery work it's trying to do.
- Need to stop putting land up for housing as this is damaging to agricultural land and food production. Furthermore, the more housing means the more people and cars ruining the common and diverse nature within it.
- Too much promotion of commons use has made it too busy to support wildlife effectively! By putting in massive carparks it has taken away from the wild nature feel of the area and made it like a town park!!
- Wildlife should be the number one priority for the site.

#### **Additional points of concern raised through discussions during the engagement process:**

##### Water Management

- Two people pointed out that no land in the Otter Estuary is currently out of reach of high tidal floods and were concerned that one bad rain or spring tide could wipe out all nesting birds.
- A local fishing syndicate has concerns about how land or river management changes would affect trout fishing below Otterton and have requested specific details of what Landscape Recovery activities are being planned to occur in that area of the river. They are concerned that the LORP has negatively impacted sea/brown trout numbers, with speculation that the lack of breach between the river and top of the Estuary may cause trout to get trapped in the tidal estuary rather than finding their way upstream although there is no clear data to support this. An additional complaint was made that local beaver activity caused tree debris to block the river and reduced effective fishing areas. A request was also made for no beaver dams to be allowed within 0.5 miles of tributaries to prevent siltation damaging spawning pools of the trout and reducing egg survivability.
- One couple raised concern about flood management between Newton Poppleford and Tipton St John, with hopes that Heaths to Sea would be addressing this. As this is just outside the project boundary we will not directly be doing so, but it is within the Climate Resilient Otter Catchment Project whom we are working closely with.

#### Land management

- A group of horse-riders and walkers made complaints regarding the state of tracks on the Heaths after logging/forestry activities took place, with comments that the heavy machinery was wrecking the tracks by creating very rutted, uneven, muddy tracks which hadn't been smoothed out post logging operation and that they were being forced to choose alternative routes for horse-riding, cycling or walking for their safety. Further concern was raised about woodland management resulting in greater water-run off, further damaging the tracks. This raised the point that the Estate needs clearer messaging around the why's, when's and how's of woodland management.
- One person voiced concern that most conservation projects aren't adjusted for warming climate, as the climate will warm faster than ecosystems can reestablish themselves. They are hoping that Heaths to Sea Project is factoring this in, assessing species vulnerability to climate and making sure any plant or animal species we return or introduce to the land are resilient and able to cope for the forecast two-to-four-degree hotter climate we shall have in 20 years' time. If we do not factor this into our plans, an inadvertent species simplification rather than diversity may occur. A suggestion of reviewing species mixes in south France current climate as equivalent to where our climate will be in 2045.
- In an isolated case, an objection was raised against any further tree planting in the floodplain, with the view that over the last 50 years, too much planting had occurred, obscuring the villagers view of the river.
- A handful of people focused on the negative impact of cows and maize management, causing polluted runoff from the fields and reducing the water quality. They would like to see this addressed through the project.

#### Access

- Public access close to the river (the ability to see the river and use it) remains a popular topic, with multiple people raising this.



- Several comments were made querying why the old railway track is not open for public access. A few can remember when they used to be allowed down it before it was closed to the public during a foot and mouth outbreak 20 years ago.
- One person identified two footpaths between Newton Poppleford and Colaton Raleigh (CR Footpath 1 & 3) as being in a 'poor state of repair and overgrown' and 'narrow and either muddy (winter) or overgrown (summer)'.
- The disrepair of the railway bridge in Harpford Woods was raised by a group of local cyclists, questioning the structural integrity of the bridge.
- A group of horse riders raised concerns over the potential for (and occurrence of) injury from the riding gates/narrow metal fencing installed on the Heaths carparks. They have stated that though the aperture is wide enough for a horse, it doesn't account for the riders' legs in addition to the horse's girth.
- Two local walkers stated that footpaths and farm tracks are not wider enough for the modern-day tractors and handlers, and therefore during the hedge-cutting season, the vehicles unevenly wear the tracks, causing deep ruts and unsafe surfaces for pedestrians.
- Several people mentioned the issue of dogs not being under control on footpaths, causing problems for other walkers, and further bank erosion issues where dogs enter the river.
- Roads too busy for daily cycling
- Too many cars parked on the road, especially with building works in the area
- One person raised a point that disused railways can be compulsory reinstated by government and the infrastructure in most cases is owned by Department of Transport /Historical Railways Estate. Clinton Devon Estates has ownership of the railway infrastructure.

#### Other

- Negative public perceptions about Clinton Devon Estates
- One person expressed concern that the landscape recovery project is 'green washing' so that Clinton Devon Estates can undertake less environmentally friendly activities elsewhere, not least more housing developments. That there will be no overall improvement in nature, just displacement of it.
- One person suggested the need for a public engagement sign at the Otter Estuary Car Park (South Farm Road) to engender positive attitude towards paid car parking by raising awareness about where car park money will go, allowing people to feel they are contributing to nature restoration rather than paying a corporation: how much of their charge will go toward work to manage Otter Estuary and what type of management work that will be. A sign to this effect is already on the pay-and-display board in the car park.

#### **Additional issues raised not directly related to Heaths to Sea**

##### Housing:

- At every drop-in session, public concern over proposed local housing developments, particularly any near the Pebblebed Heaths, was raised. Specific concerns raised:
- Clinton Devon Estates and EDPHCT position on the proposed developments and why the Estate is not objecting.

- The impact further housing developments will have on the Pebblebed Heaths, including the increase in traffic and the negative impact of noise / air pollution, increase in people on the Heaths and impact to local horse-riding businesses.
- Increasing population density of the area, with additional developments bringing too many new people and vehicles in the area and the existing road network not being sufficient to demand.
- The ability of South West Water sewage infrastructure to cope with an additional demand without major renovation.

#### Water Management

- Multiple people shared their frustration at the level of investment by South West Water to update or add additional sewage infrastructure, especially in light of increasing water bills and proposed new housing developments.
- One person expressed that there may be tidal / salt water intrusion above the existing Otter Estuary area which could contaminate the freshwater aquifer for which SW Water have boreholes along the river.
- Two people pointed out that no land in the Otter Estuary is currently out of reach of high tidal floods and were concerned that one bad rain or spring tide could wipe out all nesting birds.