



Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study

Clyst Valley Regional Park Masterplan
Entered by East Devon District Council

Sponsored by

STRIDE TREGLOWN

1.



TETRA TECH
Planning

1. Project Background

The 'West End' of east Devon is undergoing major development, with potentially 26,600 jobs created and 20,000 new homes built in the next 20 years. The first new town since medieval times at Cranbrook, Devon is presently home to 5,000 people. Cooperation across authority boundaries has been crucial to deliver 'good growth', for example, through the establishment of a Habitats Regulations Committee to mitigate impact on three European protected wildlife sites.

The concept of the Clyst Valley Regional Park originates from a 2009 Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for the Exeter & East Devon Growth Point. East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Teignbridge District Council and Natural England, working in partnership with Devon County Council, sponsored the GI Strategy written by LDA Design. A concept diagram in the strategy shows the 'clyst meadows' as a "well defined network of accessible seminatural greenspaces and less accessible biodiversity rich areas...creating a strong buffer between [Exeter] and the countryside".

In 2013, a GI Board guided delivery of the projects within the strategy and a GI Project Manager was appointed. Devon Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and the National Trust joined the Board, which was chaired independently. In 2014, the Regional Park gained traction with grants from the Heritage Lottery and partners. 'Great trees in the Clyst Valley' was born, with the aim of encouraging the public to explore, record and restore the heritage of trees in fields, hedges, parks and orchards across nine priority parishes.

The Regional Park is protected from development through Strategy 10 in East Devon District Council's Local Plan. Land is allocated totalling 2,338 hectares, which is roughly half the size of Exeter. All of this is in private ownership. Strategy 10 acknowledges that: "Developer contributions, the Community Infrastructure Levy and other agricultural-environmental funding streams will be used in combination to deliver this 'landscape' scale strategic project. Landowner, developer and multi-agency collaboration will be essential to achieve the broad range of outcomes intended for this area to ensure the planned growth is delivered sustainably over the plan period."

The partnership has now grown to 17 organisations and the level of ambition increased. The masterplan therefore defines a shared vision, objectives, values and an action plan for the long term (25 years) and the shorter term (5 years). The unique social, environmental and economic context is described, as are the policies, strategies and targets of organisations that could be delivered in the Regional Park.

East Devon's Strategic Planning Committee approved a draft masterplan for public consultation in October 2020. The consultation ran for 10 weeks. Despite lockdown, exhaustive efforts ensured that all stakeholders were aware of the consultation and given time to comment. 241 responses were duly received, analysed and a revised masterplan gained approval in April 2021.

2. Outcomes for People and Communities

Great trees in the Clyst Valley received a Pride of Devon award in 2019 and the infographic attached highlights some of the main achievements. The project supported 27 businesses ranging from web designers, ecologists, nurseries, food & drink suppliers, farm shops, artists, and arboriculturalists.

A drop kerb constructed on the existing Broadclyst to Killerton traffic-free trail has enabled people in mobility vehicles to enjoy the full 5km. A small change with a big impact. The Masterplan fully recognises the needs of disadvantaged communities. Cranbrook has higher levels of affordable housing than other East Devon towns, with 30% being social rented or shared ownership. 40% of children entering nursery at Cranbrook have underdeveloped gross motor skills. There is an urgent need to get those children active outdoors.

Walking is a very cheap form of exercise that has most chance of becoming habitual. We're working closely with our Cranbrook planning team to implement policies and planning guidance that delivers walkable neighbourhoods.

7% of the 117,000 Exeter residents are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Exeter Communities Together is enabling BAME residents in Exeter to have a voice and increased visibility in the wider community. The 5 year action plan includes work with them to resolve the specific barriers that these residents face in accessing greenspace.

We have designed our projects to overcome barriers to engaging with heritage and the outdoors. Live West are a major provider of affordable housing. Their staff have planted trees and their tenants at Cranbrook and Pinhoe have enjoyed visits to Broadclyst

3. Planning Contribution

The project is delivered by the Growth, Development & Prosperity Team. This is a multidisciplinary team with complementary skills in forward planning, development control,

ecology, archaeology, economics, and communications. The team works across all of the Councils other departments, including Countryside and Street Scene.

The delivery of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace is a particularly key area. We have established a Habitats Regulations Executive comprising members and officers from three local authorities. Planning permission for part of the Clyst Valley Trail was secured through partnership with Devon County Council & EDDC engineers, transport planners, ecologists, and tree officers. DCC continue to support the team in negotiations with landowners to secure the remainder of the route.

The masterplan has been fully supported by planners in our Cranbrook team, integrating with the emerging Development Plan Document. A practical example is that we delayed public consultation on the masterplan to ensure more effective consultation on the DPD. The Clyst Valley is not a protected landscape and neither does it have any extensive areas of nationally designated wildlife. It is also entirely in private ownership and land values are very high due to the proximity of actual and possible planned development. These factors create a major challenge in terms of creating and sustaining a partnership, giving the area an identity, and defining its unique qualities.

The employment of a GI Project Manager to lead partners toward a shared vision and values has been critical. This was achieved through a series of workshops with the Board. Input from our graphic designer was also instrumental in defining a brand for the Regional Park. The logo picks up on the love of greenspace (heart), and the importance of trees (rings, which also reflect the ripples of water – Clyst means “clear water” in old English). The colour palette reflects the soils (red) and the characteristic yellow lime wash of the National Trust's buildings at Killerton.

The Project Manager worked hard to identify how the Regional Park could deliver on the objectives of partners. There is a whole section on this in the plan.

4. Outcomes for climate action

Our vision is for East Devon to become a carbon neutral council by 2040. The EDDC Climate Change Strategy 2020 – 2025 sets out how we will reduce our carbon emissions year on year, and mitigate against the threats that climate change place on our communities. The strategy was developed following research by Exeter University to establish our current carbon footprint. Our 5 year climate action plan sets out development control ambitions, such as encouraging renewable and low-carbon energy projects.

The infographic for the 'Great Trees' project include figures on carbon sequestration through woodland creation and hedgerow planting. The Regional Park has a core objective

on climate change: To rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to extreme weather events and rising sea levels. We see this being delivered by:

1. Increasing carbon sequestration through habitat creation within Nature Recovery Networks
2. Increasing ecologically-sustainable food production and local consumption
3. Providing walking and cycling infrastructure, including electric bikes, and promoting better public transport
4. Increasing woody biomass to partly replace fossil fuels and provide building materials
5. Changing agricultural practices to reduce emissions associated with farming operations, manage soils sustainably and replenish soil carbon
6. Increasing flood storage in soils, aquifers and ponds, and through restoration of the full natural extent of floodplain, creating new riparian woodland and promoting Natural Flood Management.
7. Providing shade and cooling, particularly through street tree planting and biodiverse Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)

A new partnership has been created by the Project Manager with the aim of doubling canopy cover by 2050. The first step has been to apply for Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund to explore the creation of a 'Crystal Clear Clyst Green Bond' which would pull in private investment to deliver tree cover and associated benefits (public access, better water quality, flood amelioration, nature gain).

5. Outcomes for sustainable development

Our local plan set out strong policies for sustainable development in the 'West End' of the district. Cranbrook has the largest low density green field district heating scheme in England. The masterplan sets objectives and targets for the three pillars of environment, society and economy. In particular, the following UN goals are being tackled:

- 3 Good health & wellbeing - Achieve Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards by creating new high quality, nature-rich green space, prioritising the most deprived communities first. A long-term target of 740ha, plus 80km of traffic-free trail.
- 4 Quality education - Every pupil from schools and colleges within the Regional Park spends at least 5 days per year learning outdoors.
- 5 Gender equality - we have consciously and deliberately maintained a balance of women and men on our Board
- 6 Clean water and sanitation – reversing the poor water quality in the river through our 'Crystal Clear Clyst' initiative.
- 8 Decent work and economic growth – our objective is to increase and sustain high value jobs. We've deliberately stressed 'high value', recognising that the quality of the environment around the place of work is crucial for productivity
- 10 Reduced inequalities – our 5-year plan will audit the barriers preventing people accessing greenspace and using the traffic-free network, focusing first on those from the most deprived communities and those with protected characteristics.
- 12 Responsible consumption and production – our focus on local, high quality food, produced sustainably, with low food miles
- 13 Climate action – more detail on this in section 3 above
- 15 Life on land – ambitious target for nature recovery e.g. creation of 200ha of priority habitat and 10% nature rich land on every farm holding
- 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions – we consulted in the masterplan on the creation of a Community Incorporated Organisation to deliver greener infrastructure in the Regional Park, and we received strong support from the public.

6. Community Engagement

To support the development of the draft masterplan the following engagement activities

were undertaken:

- July 2019 - a questionnaire was sent out via direct email and social media channels with the aim to understand which places people visit in the Clyst Valley; what they regarded as special or unique; and what was understood by the phrase 'regional park'. 80 responses were received to the questionnaire.
- October 2019 – Officers attended the Killerton Apple Festival. Conversations were held with more than 200 people and 36 signed up to receive the masterplan once out to consultation. During the weekend, a draft logo for the Regional Park was also tested.
- Presentations were made to 8 parish councils between October 2019 and January 2021.
- Conversations with many (but not all) of the landowners in the Regional Park took place either to explore the possible route of the Clyst Valley Trail (a major traffic-free trail and the spine route of the Regional Park), or to broker support for activities delivered during the 'Great Trees' projects.

Under Covid restrictions, we had to adapt our processes. We advertised the masterplan consultation via a press release, social media, and posters at greenspaces and on Public

Right of Way fingerposts, direct email/letter and in local libraries.

A total 218 people received direct emails with links to the documents. This included 44 county and district council members and officers, 40 businesses, 36 private landowners, 29 charities, 17 parish/town councils, 16 statutory agencies, and 10 schools/colleges/universities.

In addition to the excellent level of response, we now have 840 people/organisations signed up as 'Friends of the Clyst Valley' and receiving updates on the Regional Park. We summarised the representations we received ('you said') and the changes we made to the masterplan in response ('we did'). Whilst the majority of comments were supportive, we received objections from two agents acting for developers, and one landowner. These consultees principally objected to a plan of potential projects, which they maintained was attempting to control land outside the approved Regional Park policy boundary. Because of these objections, we removed this plan from the final document.

However, four new figures were added to the final masterplan and these still show land outside the approved Regional Park policy boundary; Nature Recovery Network, Green commuting and recreation routes and Recreational zones/hubs. Text was added to all of these figures and the supporting text to make explicit that they are indicative only, and that they are technical guidance only in support of relevant policies and strategies of the approved East Devon Local Plan, most notably Strategy 10 on the Clyst Valley Regional Park.

7. Leading Practice

The Clyst Valley Regional Park is a hugely complex and challenging initiative. We have drawn on the experience of others who are more advanced, particularly the Wandle Valley, the Northern Forest, and the River Nene. An early breakthrough was securing Heritage Lottery funding for the springboard 'great trees' project. The success of this has given our team confidence, such that our second application to HLF was funded without any need for HLF to seek more information from us. This bodes well for a forthcoming circa £3 million bid to HLF. Our proven ability to deliver has also attracted new and more diverse partners to the table.

The establishment of a brand and taking the GI Board through a process of jointly defining a shared vision and values has also helped create a stronger partnership. The skills of our graphic designer were particularly key. A short film has also enabled us to quickly bring new

councillors up to speed with the programme.

It could be argued that the masterplan is too lengthy at 92 pages. However, we are now drawing on the content to complete our major funding application to HLF. We intend to produce a summary version and also to present some of the information through a new website.

During 'great trees', the team engendered an incredible sense of enthusiasm and goodwill from its volunteer team, who committed 400 days at a value of £42,000. As a legacy the Project leaves behind better protected heritage, environmental enhancements, enthused and upskilled volunteers, stronger partnership working and many inspired young people. Those children will be nurturing acorns that they have sown in the school nursery. We will be getting those 60 pupils back soon to see the trees that they planted two years ago and that are now growing strongly, just as they are!

This is planning beyond planning. It's not just about our statutory requirements but creating an engaging, distinctive, beautiful place for resident and visitors. We put a lot of energy into enthusing and inspiring – how else will we change the paradigm?!

8. Why you should be considered for the Chair's award?

People who have a disability test our projects at concept, design and implementation stages. Disabled Ramblers and Countryside Mobility South West identified a missing drop kerb that was preventing access for all to an otherwise wonderful traffic-free trail between Broadclyst village and Killerton. Taking the lead on negotiations with the landowner National Trust and highway authority Devon County Council, we acted quickly to install the drop kerb, enabling access to the full 5km of trail. A small change with a big impact.

Great trees in the Clyst Valley received a Pride of Devon award in 2019 and the infographic attached highlights some of the main achievements. We are particularly proud of the story of one of our volunteers. Out of work for several years following health issues, he was inspired by our ancient tree-recording project when he attended our training event. It gave him a reason to get mobile again and he ended up recording 300+ trees on the Woodland Trust database. This new information enables us to protect these trees through planning policy and development control. However, the real success was personal; our volunteer, having regained his confidence, went on to secure a job with a local hydrology firm.

The Masterplan we have written prioritizes the needs of disadvantaged communities. 40% of children entering nursery at Cranbrook new town have under-developed gross motor skills. There is an urgent need to get those children active outdoors. We are working closely with our Cranbrook planning team to implement policies and planning guidance that creates walkable neighbourhoods. We have designed our projects to overcome barriers to engaging with heritage and the outdoors. Live West are a major provider of affordable housing and support our latest 'Routes for Roots' project. Their staff and tenants have planted trees at Cranbrook and Pinhoe and enjoyed visits to Broadclyst Community Care Farm.