6. Promoting Understanding of the Exe Estuary

Providing education opportunities for the people who use the Exe Estuary is vital for the future sustainability of the area. It is important to promote a good understanding of the impressive ecosystems supported by the Estuary in order to raise local awareness of their rarity value. Providing easy public access to information encourages people to feel a sense of ownership for their natural surroundings and take an active interest in their management.

6.1 Education and Interpretation

Education around the Exe Estuary

At present, there are four established education providers on the Exe Estuary.

East Devon District Council

East Devon’s education rangers offer primary school children the opportunity to visit Exmouth Local Nature Reserve to find out more about the habitats and creatures that live there and how they adapt to life in a tidal environment. Until 2014 the Exe Estuary Officer provided this service to a maximum of 10 schools each summer, with around 250 children visiting in 2013. EDDCs Countryside Team also manages the Maer Nature Reserve in Exmouth and offers an extensive programme of wildlife activities for all the family. This includes craft activities, bug hunts and rockpool rambles on Exmouth beach.

Image 6a: Outdoor education at Exmouth LNR
Source: East Devon District Council

Image 6b: Exploring Exmouth LNR
Source: East Devon District Council
National Trust

National Trust rangers offer events at Lower Halsdon Farm, which borders the Estuary just outside of Exmouth. Events run all year round and include wildlife walks and hedge laying. The National Trust also owns another property, A la Ronde nearby on the outskirts of Exmouth, which hosts a varied programme of exhibitions, trails and workshops.

Dawlish Warren Visitor Centre

Teignbridge District Council (TDC) manages a visitor centre on the Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve which contains displays on local wildlife, habitats, geology and coastal management, for both children and adults and stocks a range of local publications. The Rangers here undertake practical conservation work on the site and offer a programme of public events including guided walks and beach craft activities to raise awareness of the invertebrates, birds and plants that can be found on Dawlish Warren. There is also a programme of events for children, called Junior Rangers. The visitor centre is open most days from April to September and on weekends only from October to March. The Rangers offer talks and accompanied activities to visiting primary and secondary school groups. Groups wishing to visit need to inform the Rangers in advance so they can manage visitor numbers to this sensitive site. Groups are also requested to follow the shore code and not to dig anywhere within the Nature Reserve, so as not to disturb protected species nor cause damage to the rare sand dune habitat.

Image 6c: Dawlish Warren Visitor Centre
Source: Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve

Image 6d: Junior Ranger Activities at Dawlish Warren
Source: Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve
RSPB Exe Estuary Reserves

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) runs nature reserves at Exminster Marshes and Bowling Green Marsh, near Topsham. There are opportunities to volunteer here to undertake practical conservation tasks. Occasional public events are organised and schools visits are sometimes possible. There are bird viewing hides at Bowling Green Marsh and also on private land at Darts Farm. The RSPB also organises popular Avocet cruises on the Estuary.

Image 6: **RSPB Bird viewing hide at Bowling Green Marsh, Topsham.**
Source: Paula Salge
Living with a Changing Coast (LiCCo) Project Educational Resources

The Living with a Changing Coast (LiCCo) project is a cross channel partnership between the Environment Agency, Exe Estuary Management Partnership, National Trust, Dorset Coast Forum and a range of partners from Normandy, France. In the Exe Estuary it has run from 2011 to September 2014. It is part funded by the EU via its INTERREG programme and works with coastal communities in the Exe Estuary and Poole Harbour to raise awareness of climate change impacts on the coast and what can be done to improve resilience. Building awareness of coastal issues amongst the next generation is a key part of the LiCCo project, which has worked with the former Devon County schools geography advisor to develop Exe Estuary focused learning enquiries for primary and secondary schools. Both packs are supported by an extensive suite of resources, such as films, presentations, datasets, maps, paintings and historic photos. They are designed to deliver multiple topics of the new national curriculum and are available free of charge to teachers. The packs are suitable for Key Stage 2 to 4 pupils (age 7-14) in Devon schools and cover topics such as natural coastal processes, flood risk, community resilience, coastal wildlife and habitats, land use, climate change, coastal change and coastal management.

The learning enquiries have already been rolled out to around 200 teachers via free training days. They are available as printed packs or to download from the LiCCo project website at www.licco.eu/resource-library/ - look for ‘LiCCo primary school learning pack’ or ‘LiCCo secondary school learning pack’. Education resources for GCSE and A-level students are also being developed by the project.
Interpretation Material around the Exe Estuary

Interpretation boards

The presence of interpretation boards and information signs around the Exe Estuary is another effective way to raise awareness for the people who use the Estuary. There are currently a variety of boards and signs positioned at access points to the Estuary including panels around the Exe Trail. Some are used to relay information about the estuarine environment and how to protect the sensitive ecosystems, whilst others outline Byelaws or provide safety advice. However, the risk of relying on sign boards alone to relay important information is that they may not always be read by all target audiences.

Image 6h: Interpretation board and Exe Trail marker on the Exe Estuary
Source: EEMP

Estuary Leaflets

The Exe Estuary Management Partnership has produced and maintains a suite of leaflets about aspects of Exe Estuary, which are popular with both visitors and local people. They include:

- **Exe Explorer** - a guide to getting around the Estuary by bike, on foot, by ferry and on public transports;
- **Exe Wildlife** - a guide to the fantastic wildlife that can be experienced on the Estuary;
- **Exe Activities** - a guide to all the recreational activities that can be enjoyed in and around the Estuary, by all the family.

All three leaflets can be downloaded from the EEMP website – [www.exe-estuary.org](http://www.exe-estuary.org) or obtained from tourist information centres. A new leaflet focusing on the coastal heritage of the Exe Estuary will also be available shortly.
Wishing Well Project

A bespoke Spiral Wishing Well was launched in 2012 to showcase the rich diversity of wildlife and habitats around the Estuary and also to fundraise by the Exe Estuary Partnership and The Rotary Club of Exmouth & District. The board comprises eye-catching illustrations, unusual facts about the Estuary wildlife, and activity sheets for children, leaflets and a wide map of the whole Estuary. The wishing well is currently located in the Ocean Blue Café bar/ bowling Alley in Exmouth.

Research, Surveys and Publications

Over the years the Exe Estuary has been the site of a wide variety of research studies and surveys. The results generated have been used to inform management decisions, raise awareness and understanding of different aspects of the Estuary, and promote a continued interest from academics, managers and the people that use it.

The Exe Estuary has also been the subject of numerous books, ranging from watercolour and nature books, to historic accounts. A selection of local publications is stocked by museums at Topsham, Dawlish and Exmouth along with the Dawlish Warren Visitor Centre. The Exe Estuary Management Partnership’s website (www.exe-estuary.org) provides up to date Estuary-related news, links and reports.