

Clyst Valley Regional Park

Master Plan Draft Public Consultation (Dec 2020)



Exeter Cycling Campaign

<https://exetercyclingcampaign.org.uk/>

Non-statutory planning consultees in Exeter

About This Report	3
Context	4
Methodology	5
Feedback	6
Route Purpose	6
Quiet Lanes	8
Existing Infrastructure Quality	9
Directness	10
Public transport / CoBike integration	11
Route Resilience	12
Missing Links	13
Broadclyst (school) to Cranbrook railway station.	13
Woodbury / Woodbury Common link	14
Business Parks	14
Whimble to Cranbrook	14
Out of Catchment Locations	14
Conclusions	15

About This Report

The Exeter Cycling Campaign are pleased to respond to East Devon District Council's public consultation on the Clyst Valley Regional Park Master Plan draft.

The Exeter Cycling Campaign's vision is that the region is made accessible for people of all ages and abilities, using all forms of bike, to travel on safe, convenient and connected cycle paths. Significantly increasing the cycling modal share plays an important role in addressing climate breakdown, reducing pollution, alleviating congestion and making our city more liveable. Leisure cycling provides a readily accessible way to promote physical health and wellbeing and can bring valuable tourism into a region.

The broad master plan encompasses land management and transport themes and aims to develop leisure facilities that can become renowned for quality whilst also enabling the industrial and residential growth of the region. In particular the Campaign notes that the Masterplan states:

"The Regional Park has a significant role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to future climate by providing walking and cycling infrastructure, including electric bikes, and promoting better public transport"

Given the breadth of scope of the proposals this response focuses on the active transport aspects of the proposal and looks for overall themes and tries to pick examples to illustrate points. We also highlight a few links we feel are missing in the overall plan. We would encourage East Devon District Council to consult with us to help flesh out the details for the individual schemes involved. These plans provide a once in a generation opportunity to change the landscape for active travel and leisure within East Devon and we want to help refine them to reach their full potential.

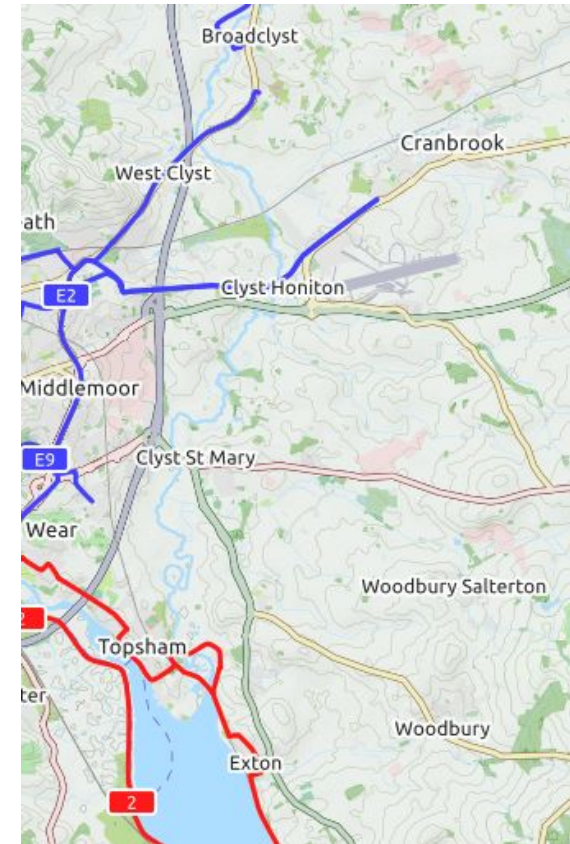


Context

The western area of East Devon District is dominated by its proximity to Exeter. The area's inclusion in the county's Multi-Use Trail Strategy (2015) is reflective of this, with major active routes leading out of Exeter to some of the surrounding Villages (E1 to Exmouth, E2 to Pinhoe / Broadclyst, E3/4 to Cranbrook and E5 to WestPoint)¹. Several of these routes are not complete or fail to meet minimum standards.

The area has two rail lines providing key links to the western and southern edge, via stations at Digby & Sowton, Newcourt, Topsham and Exton, and through northern areas with stations at Pinhoe, Cranbrook and Whimble. The area also plays host to several key industrial areas, including Exeter Airport and several business parks. There are several dormitory towns and villages in the area and many are marked for expansion in the coming years.

The area (and the master plan) is dominated by water - the constraints of the river Clyst and it's floodplains, and the Exe Estuary to the southwest.



¹ <https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/documents/s11335/Cycling%20and%20multi-use%20trail%20network%20strategy.pdf>

Methodology

Campaign volunteers used multiple sources in addition to the consultation document:

- First hand experience on the routes
- Issues reported to the campaign by members of the public
- Strava heat map analysis (2 years prior to Nov 2020)
- Strava Metro corridor analysis
- Strava Metro statistics for individual road sections
- Accident Data (2018/19 - DfT “Think map”)
- School catchment Areas
- East Devon’s key development areas (west)
- Exeter Council’s “Key Business Locations” report



Feedback

Route Purpose

There will be a wide range of users of the routes indicated in this plan, from commuting cyclists to scooting children, families on bikes, horse riders, walkers, wildlife spotters and those touring the area on road bikes. Each group brings its own needs and use cases. As the regional park is pitching to be an attraction as well as serving the local community it needs to provide a clear offering to each group. Some existing sites do this well - e.g. Topsham nature reserves with easy access by bike, bus, train, and car, with a short walk for birdwatchers to get to the wetlands, and the Exe Estuary Trail which offers a safe, direct and traffic free commuting route between Exeter and the popular seaside towns of Exmouth and Dawlish, as well as excellent leisure routes.

We feel that the overall plan is a patchwork of existing and planned links that can be made, rather than a cohesive plan with purpose. This often leaves users facing strange routes or pushes them onto sections that are outside of their comfort zone. It is important to consider that whilst a touring road cyclist or equestrian traffic may be comfortable (or even enjoy) quiet lanes, cycle commuters or families may be uncomfortable with them. Clarifying the route purpose will highlight and encourage the resolution of many of the other feedback points.

We would recommend taking the idealised map and planning activities on it for a variety of use cases (including transport pre/post activity) such as:

- Locals commuting to schools/work/nurseries (via foot and/or bike - government figures suggest a significant portion of the catchment should be within reach via these active transport methods) - Are the routes safe for the children and/or suitable for bike trailers (a standard double bike trailer is around 90cm wide and still requires a safe passing distance to be maintained)?
- Commuting links between every industrial centre and the key dormitory areas - Will the indirectness of routes or poor quality (see LTN1/20) put potential commuters off using the suggested routes?
- Tourists arriving for an afternoon outing to explore the area on hire bikes - Are there suitable links to public transport such as train stations and places to visit/eat/spend money locally?
- Dog walkers from the local dormitory areas after a 2 mile circular - Are there direct links to the main residential areas or is this going to have to be in car use to get to the start of a walk?

- Utility cyclists and car free families trying to do a weekly food shop from any of the dormitory areas - are the routes suggested too hilly and/or indirect for carrying shopping and/or children?
- Families looking for a quiet place for their kids to build confidence on the bike - Can they start where they live or do they have to drive to get to somewhere safe and quiet?
- Horse riders trying to reach an open access area
- Road cyclists out for a Sunday morning ride
- Wildlife lovers wanting to come and admire the rare “X” that has appeared

Several of these uses are outlined in your vision statement but do not seem to have been enabled by the plan,, such as “cycling to the rugby at Sandy Park” - this location is very poorly connected via bike from the dormitory areas, requiring an “on road cycle lane” from Clyst St Mary along Old Rydon Lane at a time when it will be very busy with rugby traffic and any shared use pavements in the area will be full of pedestrians walking in.

Whilst increasing the density of paths may give some benefit to the existing local traffic, we feel the cohesive vision of the overall scheme and connectedness of quality routes is lacking and thus will not see it achieve its full potential.

Quiet Lanes

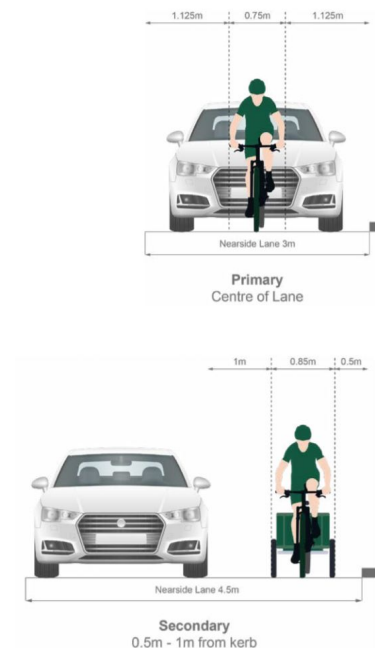
Many of the routes shown in the plan rely on the concept of Quiet Lanes. We note that there is more than one definition of Quiet Lanes in use in the UK (e.g. Sustrans, Campaign to Protect Rural England, LTN1/20 chapter 7, DfT Circular 02/2006) and would like to have the definition used here clarified. We are concerned that the Quiet Lanes indicated here do not meet Exeter Cycling Campaign's vision of a safe, convenient, connected cycle network of cycle paths for people of all ages and abilities. We note that many of the Quiet Lanes shown here are National Speed Limit and/or too narrow to allow safe passing of an individual confident cyclist, let alone a child, family using a trailer (which may be around 90cm wide), someone using an adapted cycle (for example for a disability) or a horse rider. This raises the possibility that parts of this proposal are indirectly discriminatory.

Without traffic data or the specific standards to which you are planning the use of Quiet Lanes we are unable to comment on specific sections. We would highlight the speed requirements of <35mph at the 85 percentile from the DfT Circular 02/2006 and the width requirements of LTN1/20 section 7.2 which illustrates and documents the minimum widths required for overtaking.

We recognise that there may be a use for well designed quiet lanes to serve a wider range of users but this must be in addition to, not in place of, a high quality arterial network of dedicated traffic free routes, compliant with LTN1/20 and suitable for users of all shapes, sizes and needs.



Figure 7.2: Primary and secondary riding positions



Existing Infrastructure Quality

Many sections of the existing infrastructure that are used as part of this plan are not up to a suitable standard. Over the network included in this proposal, that covers everything from too narrow, overgrown/poorly maintained, insufficient capacity, unsuitable/unmaintained surface and sections with a very high reported accident rate. These routes often frequently fail to meet any form of accessibility standard.

Particularly given the standards set by the central government in LTN 1/20, serious consideration is needed as to if they can even be included. Sustrans recently de-marked several trails (including the 279 in Devon) for failing to meet safety standards. A visionary plan should not include sub standard routes either.

Some prime examples of this are:

- The E2 between Westclyst and Broadclyst - pictured. Narrow as well as usually overgrown, beside a very busy 40mph road. It is shared use, with long sections where it is impossible for a lone pedestrian to pass a single standard bicycle, let alone enabling a child's buggy, wheelchair, trailer or adapted bicycle to use it.
- The off road trail between Broadclyst and Killerton house - narrow sections, extremely poor surface and with gates that are difficult to manage with non-standard bikes.
- Topsham road - high accident rate suggests the existing shared usage is over capacity, has poorly designed junctions or both.

We welcome the plan's assertion that "We will cater for all ages and abilities by championing the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 when delivering new infrastructure, and in all communication" but due to the heavy reliance on existing infrastructure we need to see this applied to all stated routes, not just any new proposed routes.



Figure 3.4 Indicative dimensions of typical 'non-standard' cycles

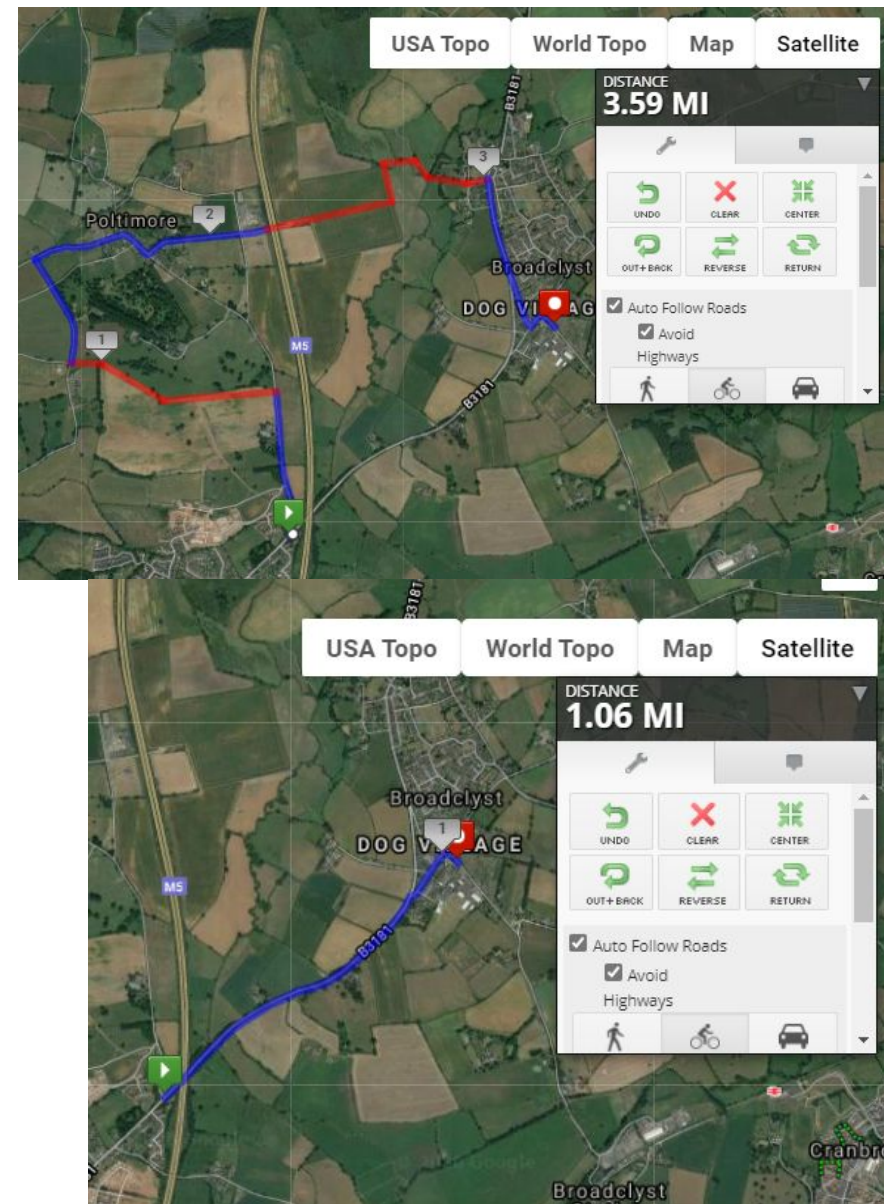


Directness

The plan states that the Clyst Valley Trail “will provide a direct, safe, green route to employment centres at Science Park, Sky Park, and close access to Exeter Business Park & Sowton Industrial Estate.” We contest this statement. Many routes on the proposed Masterplan lack directness.

For example, the CVT route proposed between Westclyst and Broadclyst. This could be an excellent active travel link between Westclyst’s rapidly expanding residential areas and their nearest secondary school - Clyst Vale Community College in Broadclyst. When you compare the proposed CVT (first image) against the option for car drivers (the B3181 - second image), the proposed CVT route is 339% longer with more than double the elevation gain! Note that as previously mentioned the E2 does not currently meet minimum standards so should also not be included as a viable cycle route without an upgrade. Upgrading the proposed footpath link at Jarvishayes to enable cycling may also assist in upgrading this route.

While this proposal may provide a useful leisure route it certainly doesn’t meet the stated aim for “a **commuting and recreational** trail for walkers, cyclists, mobility scooters and where feasible, horse riders.” nor “a rapid reduction of greenhouse gases” and the objective of “creating a network of walking and cycling routes linking home, work, school”



Public transport / CoBike integration

The current plan does not highlight integration into a wider, connected transit network. It is mentioned briefly in the vision and values but does not seem to be anything more than a passing thought. The “transit hubs” should be a centre for any plan, with routes radiating out from the train stations and bus interchanges. This can be further fuelled with integrating the cobike network of e-bike hire stations at critical locations, providing visitors the ability to get the bus to/from a bike ride rather than driving.

Given the increasing resident numbers anticipated during this plan it's fair to expect that, without significant intervention, traffic will also increase. Now is the time to design the interventions into the plan and make it more convenient to use public and active transport to get to destinations. Creating high quality cycle links between the hubs will enable tourists to make use of the hire bikes (and spend their money in the cafe / ice cream shop / etc en-route). Linking in the residential hubs to these pools and active transport can open up longer car free commutes. There is also a need to ensure that there is plenty of bike storage and good routes to public transit hubs from dormitory areas - hybrid journeys are most efficient if they can be made smooth and painless.

“ Residents and visitors spend lots of time outdoors, and are able to explore the Regional Park via a network of traffic-free trails that link with trains and buses. They have a great choice of places to go, and things to do: birdwatching and tea at Topsham; glamping, biking, riding and den building at Ashclyst Forest; cycling to the rugby at Sandy Park; a stroll beneath the spring blossoms of Whimble; a charity run at Cranbrook Country Park; feeding the pigs at Broadclyst Community Farm; or watching a play at Poltimore House

”

Route Resilience

Water and land management naturally forms a large part of the challenge in this area. Where routes are intended for commuter and utility cycling it is important that access to and quality of the routes are maintained throughout the year. Where routes are hoping to encourage more people to make every day trips by bike then they need to be reliably available for use in all weathers. This is an issue across the existing routes and proposed routes, at inland waterways and on coastal sections. Station Road (pictured to the right) between Broadclyst and Cranbrook is sufficiently bad as to have it's own social media page for notifying residents! However, other routes which also flood regularly, some of which are included in the plan as quiet lanes for cycling, do not benefit from such a service.

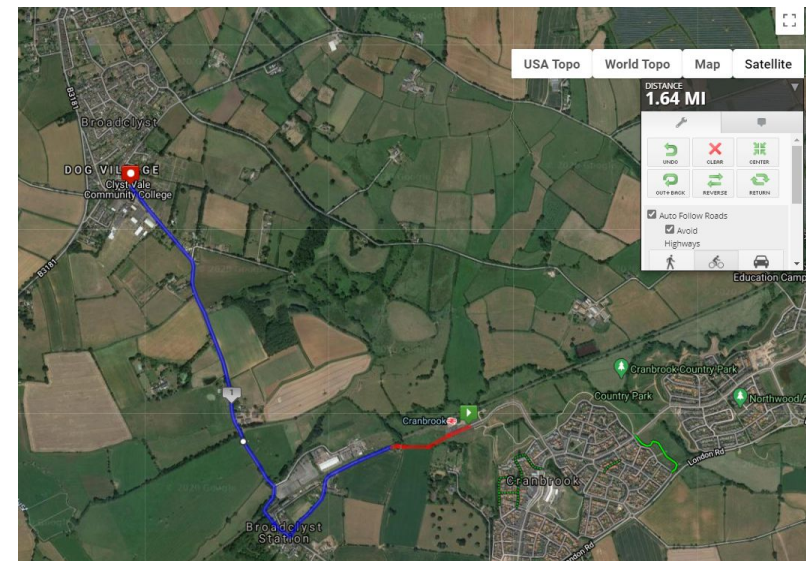
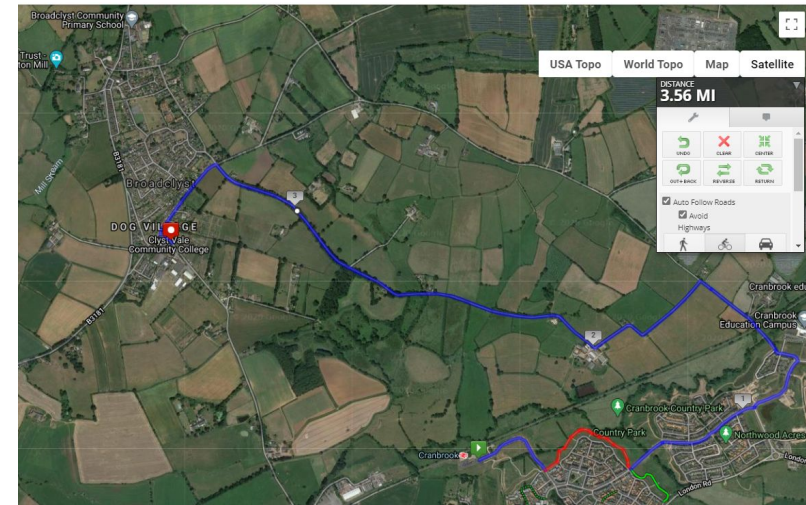


The existing route to Cranbrook along Blackhorse Lane illustrates some of the other issues beyond river / coastal flooding. Lack of formal drainage leads to mud, gravel and stones on the surface after rainfall, particularly during the winter. Lack of drainage can also lead to standing water and flooding across the entire Lane. In cold weather any standing water becomes especially hazardous as off road cycle routes and quiet lanes are not gritted. On traffic free sections the lack of vehicle traffic and insufficient cutting back of vegetation mean that the width can be quickly reduced to single person width or smaller.

Missing Links

Broadclyst (school) to Cranbrook railway station.

As well as a residential population, there is a major secondary school in Broadclyst and Cranbrook contains many more amenities than much of the surrounding area, including the Station for onwards travel into Exeter (taking the pressure off the B3181 and Pinhoe Road) and to other parts of the country including London.. The current link from Cranbrook is close to the proposed, but incomplete, Town Centre and acts as a huge detour for anyone in Western Cranbrook or trying to use Cranbrook Station - Using the proposed route between Cranbrook Station and Clyst Vale is 3.56 miles with 104 feet of elevation gain (first image). Using the existing (but unsuitable for safe cycling) road network via Station Road brings this down to 2.52 miles with 74 feet of elevation gain. If a small connection was made directly between Cranbrook Station and Broadclyst station (e.g. through the planned Bluehayes expansion area) this reduces to 1.64 miles with only 40 feet of elevation gain (second image). It's easy to see what a huge benefit more direct and flatter routes are for cycling but this level of distance reduction would also make this route walking distance, e.g. for many students, if it were made safe. If this plan is to meet its stated vision, particularly regarding tackling climate change, then walk-and-cycle-first thinking needs to be applied.



Woodbury / Woodbury Common link

Woodbury common is popular for a wide range of outdoor pursuits but it appears to have not been included in any plans or projects. It would benefit from a good link into the active transport and public transport networks. Likewise the adjacent village of Woodbury would benefit from this connection too - under the current plans a “quiet lane” passes through but as previously mentioned these do not suit most users or meet the aspiration to be inclusive.

Business Parks

All residential and industrial areas should be connected to the network but several business parks have been left out. The E5's absence leaves West Point disconnected and nothing continues onwards to link in the greendale industrial areas. The route marked EX through Sowton Industrial Estate is currently the site of many near misses and is certainly not off road currently. Some industrial areas are only served in passing by quiet lanes nearby. This will only encourage continued reliance on private motor vehicles for those working there or visiting to use the amenities/spend money.

Whimble to Cranbrook

This would benefit from a dedicated link, providing onward access to the catchment secondary school at Broadclyst. Quiet lane status has been marked on one of the primary routes out of the village - at rush hour we do not expect it to feel safe to send a child unsupervised down it.

Out of Catchment Locations

As mentioned this proposal is very focussed around the water network. As a result all links seem to stop at the edge of the river catchment. This excludes some major residential, business and school areas such as Cullompton and Honiton effectively excluding them from sustainably accessing the high quality green space through the stated aim of “creating a network of walking and cycling routes linking home, work, school and high quality green space”. Both are well within 10 miles of the Regional Park, thus it would be beneficial to the Masterplan to consider and create links into the Regional Park from all major settlements/employment areas, not just those in/close to Exeter.

Conclusions

Overall we commend the vision behind the plan for the Clyst Valley Regional Park. The desire to improve the hydrology, ecology and accessibility of the region is full of promise. We feel that many of the implementations do not match up to the stated vision and require significant refinement to be compliant with LTN 1/20 and to provide the robust, well connected active travel network that the region needs.

We recognise this is a high level plan but have reservations that as written, little of the travel infrastructure indicated will meet the needs of commuters and utility cyclists year round. Whilst some aspects will provide useful leisure routes, the overall plan feels like it is not fit for the present or future and clearly pre-dates the “Gear Change” document issued by the Department for Transport in July 2020. We would challenge those working on the plan to refresh and upgrade the plans in light of “Gear Change”, “LTN 1/20” and the broad areas we have raised, to produce a regional park of national quality and significance.

Studies show that investment in these types of green infrastructure pay back society at ratios of up to 35:1 (2014 gov. figures). With ever increasing interest in active travel, cycling for leisure and more understanding of the cost of pollution and the need to tackle the climate emergency, the latest figures are likely to be much higher. The increased investment needed to meet these standards and fulfil the vision completely will pay dividends.

We look forward to working with East Devon District Council over the coming months and years to assist in designing and delivering a high quality regional park that serves locals and tourists alike well into the rest of this century and beyond. May our children and children’s children be able to enjoy it to its full extent!