

# Exmoor National Park

## Partnership Plan 2025-2030

### Consultation Draft



January 2025

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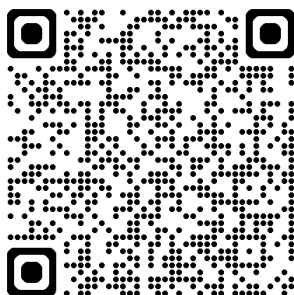
# Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan 2025-2030

## CONSULTATION DRAFT

This is a **draft** Partnership Plan for Exmoor National Park (2025-2030) for public consultation.

**Views on the draft are invited by 10am, 10 March 2025** and can be given via our online survey. Views are invited on the overall vision, objectives and content of the draft plan, as well as on the specific targets.

For further information, the survey links and alternative ways to respond please visit:



[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/pp-consultation](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/pp-consultation)

If you require this plan in an alternative format, would like to request a hard copy of the survey forms, or have any queries on the consultation, please contact [consultations@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](mailto:consultations@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)

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**Cover Image:** Doone Valley from County Gate, by Leo Davey.

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# Foreword

*To be added in final version*

## National Park designation and special qualities

Exmoor National Park was designated in 1954, in recognition of its national and international significance. The National Park designation reflected its: *'spectacular coastline, fine heather, bracken and grass moorland, beautiful, wooded valleys, antiquities in great profusion... including stone circles, barrows, hut circles as well as earthworks... notable wildlife... and is first rate country for motoring, and for walking and riding'* 1947 Hobhouse Report.

Since its designation, Exmoor's **special qualities** have been defined as:

- Large areas of open moorland providing a sense of remoteness, wildness and tranquillity rare in southern Britain
- A distinct and diverse landscape of softly rounded hills and ridges, with heather and grass moors, spectacular coast, deeply incised wooded valleys, high sea cliffs, fast flowing streams, traditional upland farms and characteristic beech hedge banks
- A timeless landscape mostly free from intrusive development, with striking views inside and out of the National Park, and where the natural beauty of Exmoor and its dark skies can be appreciated
- A mosaic of habitats supporting a great diversity of wildlife including herds of wild Red deer, rich lichen communities, rare fritillary butterflies, bats, and other species uncommon in southern Britain
- A complex and rich historic landscape that reflects how people have lived in, exploited and enjoyed Exmoor over the past 8000 years, including burial mounds on ridges, discrete stone settings, ancient farmsteads and settlements, picturesque villages and historic estates
- A deeply rural community closely linked to the land with strong local traditions and ways of life
- A farmed landscape with locally distinctive breeds such as Red Devon cattle; Devon Closewool, and Exmoor Horn sheep, and herds of free-living Exmoor ponies
- An exceptional rights of way network, with paths that are often rugged and narrow in character, along with extensive areas of open country and permitted access, providing superb opportunities for walking, riding, cycling
- A landscape that provides inspiration and enjoyment to visitors and residents alike

# Exmoor National Park statutory purposes

The purposes of National Parks are enshrined in law<sup>1</sup>. These are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public

Where there is conflict between these two purposes that cannot be reconciled, the first purpose takes precedence (known as ‘the Sandford Principle<sup>2</sup>’).

Exmoor National Park Authority was established under the Environment Act 1995<sup>3</sup> as a special purpose body charged with leading action to achieve these purposes, and, while doing so, is required to foster the social and economic well-being of National Park communities.

## Purpose of the Partnership/Management Plan

The National Park Authority is required to prepare and keep under review a Management Plan<sup>4</sup> for their area, based on the National Park purposes and duty (the statutory objectives). The Plan is for the National Park as a whole and involves many organisations and people, and so is called a Partnership Plan. It includes the work of the National Park Authority.

It describes the special qualities of the National Park and sets out:

- The opportunities and challenges facing Exmoor
- A long-term vision and objectives, reflecting the Government’s vision and priorities for all National Parks, and demonstrates how Exmoor can help deliver these
- Bold targets to focus partnership action on over the five-year timeframe of the Plan and beyond

## What is it?

This five-year Partnership Plan establishes the vision and objectives to maintain the special qualities of Exmoor, and to further the statutory National Park purposes. It is developed in collaboration with partner organisations, communities, visitors and businesses. While the National Park Authority facilitates the Plan, it brings together the work of many partners. It aims to mobilise the shared knowledge and resources of everyone who cares for Exmoor in a collective effort.

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<sup>1</sup> [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#) Section 5

<sup>2</sup> [Environment Act 1995](#), Section 62

<sup>3</sup> [Environment Act 1995](#), Section 63

<sup>4</sup> [Environment Act 1995](#), Section 66



## Who is it for?

The sections that follow are for everyone who has an interest in and cares about the National Park.

It's a plan for:

- The whole National Park
- National Park Authority members, staff and volunteers
- Partners. The Plan can only be achieved if we work together to deliver it. This involves a wide range of partners who all have an important role to play and, in some cases, a statutory obligation to the area
- Exmoor's land and property owners and managers, without whose support and co-operation the special qualities of the National Park would not be maintained and enhanced
- The people who live and work here: Exmoor's local communities and businesses
- The wider public. The Plan sets out what is important about Exmoor and what is being done to conserve and enhance the National Park as a nationally significant landscape

## Government priorities for National Parks and Partnership Plans

Seventy years after the creation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (collectively known as Protected Landscapes), the Government commissioned an independent review led by Julian Glover, to consider whether the protections for Protected Landscapes are still fit for purpose, what might be done better, what changes will help and whether the definitions and systems in place were still valid. The report from this Landscapes Review identified 27 recommendations around a renewed mission to enhance nature; connecting everyone with Protected Landscapes; supporting people who live and work there; adding new designations; and enabling new ways of working through changes in legislation, governance, and funding models. The overall conclusion was that *“We want our national landscapes to work together with big ambitions so they are happier, healthier, greener, more beautiful and open to everyone.”*<sup>5</sup>

The Government's response<sup>6</sup> to the Landscapes Review set out a new vision for Protected Landscapes and the role that they should play today as: *‘A coherent national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that all parts of society can easily access and enjoy. Protected landscapes will support thriving local communities and economies, improve our public health and wellbeing, drive forward nature recovery, and build our resilience to climate change.’*<sup>7</sup>

This was accompanied by some significant changes including a strengthened legal duty for relevant authorities to help to further National Park purposes (see below), a greater emphasis on National Park Management Plans, and the creation of a new Protected Landscapes Partnership to strengthen collaborative working at a national level.

The Government's response also highlighted the role of Protected Landscapes in helping to deliver national and international targets on tackling climate change, recovering nature, and enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment. In 2024, the Government produced the **Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework**

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<sup>5</sup> Landscapes Review [DEFRA - Landscapes Review - Final Report 2019](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Landscapes review \(National Parks and AONBs\): government response - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Landscapes review \(National Parks and AONBs\): government response - GOV.UK](#)

(PLTOF),<sup>8</sup> identifying the Environment Improvement Plan<sup>9</sup> goals that Protected Landscape bodies and other relevant authorities and partners must prioritise. This Partnership Plan sets out how Exmoor National Park will contribute to the delivery of these national targets. The national targets are highlighted in bold under the relevant aims and objectives of the Plan.

Government has also set out the expectation that Protected Landscapes are at the heart of delivering the UK government's commitment under the Global Biodiversity Framework agreed by Leaders at the UN Biodiversity Summit in 2022 to protect at least 30% of land and sea by 2030 (**30by30**). *“Our Protected Landscapes will provide the backbone to 30by30 in England, contributing towards the target where they are effectively managed and delivering in-situ conservation. We recognise that **we can, and must, go further within Protected Landscapes than other areas to meet our national environmental targets, including 30by30**. This will be driven by the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as well as further action to ensure that these special places are wilder and greener. Through their management plans, existing structures and strong partnerships, Protected Landscapes organisations can also play a convening role to champion, identify and support areas that meet, or have potential to meet, the 30by30 criteria”<sup>10</sup>.*

Protected Landscape bodies and their partnerships are being encouraged to maximise their potential contributions to 30by30, including the protection and effective management of existing, restored and new wildlife rich habitat. *“The UK is calling for high ambition and momentum to reach our international targets to protect and restore the natural world”<sup>11</sup>.*

The Labour government elected in 2024 has also set out its ambitions for National Parks to be **greener, wilder and more accessible to all**: *“Labour introduced National Parks 75 years ago, and introduced the Rights of Way Act that secured public access and preserved natural beauty. This Labour Government is committed to empowering Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible to all. We are actively considering options to ensure Protected Landscapes bodies like National Park Authorities have the tools and powers they need to deliver for people and nature, including through regulation and guidance”<sup>12</sup>.*

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<sup>8</sup> Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, published January 2024.

<sup>9</sup> [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#) is the first five-year refresh of the government's 25-Year Environment Plan and acts as one of the core drivers for all National Park Management Plans

<sup>10</sup> [30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>11</sup> Environment Secretary Steve Reed [“Britain back on global stage to support nature's recovery” - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>12</sup> [members.parliament.uk/member/5287/writtenquestion/1741720](#)

## Responsibilities of relevant authorities regarding National Parks

Relevant authorities<sup>13</sup> have a legal duty<sup>14</sup> to help **further** National Park purposes when making decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within the National Park, including helping to develop and deliver National Park Management Plans<sup>15</sup>. This duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its statutory purposes. If it appears that there is a conflict between the two statutory purposes, they must attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. Relevant authorities must show they have fulfilled this duty.

Guidance on this strengthened duty is expected from Government, but in the meantime, and without prejudicing this guidance, Natural England has provided advice on the strengthened duty<sup>16</sup>. This advice states that it is an active duty, not a passive one, and is outcomes focused, not just a process. Any relevant authority must take all reasonable steps to explore how the statutory purposes of the Protected Landscape can be furthered, demonstrating how they have done this. They must also avoid harm to the statutory purposes of designation, going beyond mitigation and like for like measures and replacement. Any proposed measures should align with and help to deliver the aims and objectives of the statutory National Park Management Plan. If it is not practicable or feasible to take measures to further the National Park purposes, the relevant authority should provide evidence to show why not. The National Park Authority should be consulted.

Public authorities<sup>17</sup> also have a duty under section 102 of the Environment Act 2021<sup>18</sup> to consider and take action to conserve and enhance **biodiversity**. Government guidance on complying with the duty<sup>19</sup> states that public bodies should consider Protected Landscapes as part of the duty, particularly if they have functions within or close to the designation, including helping to develop and deliver National Park Management Plans, and making improvements to nature in National Parks.

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<sup>13</sup> Relevant authorities include all levels of government and includes government agencies and ministers. Statutory undertakers (companies who have been given statutory powers to carry out certain public works or services) such as water companies, utilities, telecommunications, are also covered by the duty.

<sup>14</sup> [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#) section 11A, as amended by Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023](#)

<sup>15</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 section 90A as amended by Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023](#)

<sup>16</sup> Advice provided by Natural England to the Lower Thames Crossing DCO Examining Authority on the implications of the new duty to further, [Annex 2 of letter dated 15th December 2023](#)

<sup>17</sup> Public authorities include government departments, public bodies, local authorities, local planning authorities, and statutory undertakers (a business that has public authority duties for their land and delivers something of public importance)

<sup>18</sup> [Environment Act 2021](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#)



## How has the Plan been prepared?

- It's based on evidence from the State of the Park Report<sup>20</sup>
- It's informed by a public opinion survey<sup>21</sup>
- It's been developed with the Partnership Plan groups
- It's been discussed at online and in-person workshops
- It has included a particular focus on engaging with hard-to-reach groups, including younger people, in line with our commitment to engage with and inspire a wider diversity of communities, recognising that Exmoor National Park is for everyone
- The effect of the Plan on social, environmental and economic objectives have been tested through a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and the effects on Exmoor's Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) have been considered through a Habitats Regulation Assessment<sup>22</sup>.

## How is the Plan used?

- As the basis for the National Park Authority Corporate Plan, guiding our work priorities and resource allocation
- To develop National Park Authority policies and decision making
- To bring together a wide range of people and organisations around a set of common goals
- To co-ordinate action amongst partners and develop projects where we can work together on issues of shared interest
- To draw in funding to deliver the outcomes identified
- To monitor progress against our Vision, Objectives and Targets

## How does it fit with other plans and strategies?

- It's the single most important document for the National Park
- It sits within the context of international and national legislation, policy and strategy and does not override any other specific legislative requirements or consent processes
- It is accompanied by the State of the Park Report which examines the issues and trends affecting the National Park's special qualities, and provides the evidence base for the Partnership Plan
- It links to other plans and strategies relevant to Exmoor such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision and so on
- It provides the framework for the Local Plan which sets out the policies for determining planning applications. The Partnership Plan is a material consideration in planning decisions and the Local Plan is a means of delivering aspects of the Partnership Plan – for example through affordable housing provision and good design principles
- It gives effect to National Park purposes
- It reflects public views and opinions following consultation
- It is implemented through a separate Delivery Programme

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<sup>20</sup> [Exmoor National Park State of Park Report](#)

<sup>21</sup> [National-Park-Partnership-Plan-Public-Opinion-Survey-2023-final-results.pdf](#)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enpa/key-documents/partnership-plan-2025-consultation>

## Delivering the Plan

Delivering the shared vision and targets set out in this Plan will require:

- Collaboration and collective effort amongst the various partners working together to help deliver the Plan
- Appropriate funding and resources
- The alignment of many different plans, policies and projects
- Relevant skills and training
- Communications and engagement
- Supportive regulation, national legislation and policy.

Delivery Plans are being prepared which will set out the actions needed to achieve the targets, and the partners who will be involved in helping to deliver them.

## Monitoring and reporting

Progress against delivering the targets in the Plan will be regularly monitored to assess whether these are on track, enabling delivery plans and actions to be reviewed if needed and solutions found. This will be reported in annual progress reports.

The outcomes from delivering the Plan will be reported through the State of Park report.

## Some of Exmoor's highlights

- Wild, windswept open moorland, one of only three upland areas in southern Britain
- Europe's very first International Dark Sky Reserve
- The tallest tree in England
- The highest cliffs in England
- 58 km of stunning coastline, part of the Bristol Channel with the second highest and lowest tides in the world
- Almost 250 species of bird and over 1,000 different flowering plants and grasses
- One of the best places to see wild Red deer in England
- Free-living native Exmoor ponies, perfectly adapted to upland conditions and vital for conservation grazing
- Over 10,000 records on Exmoor's Historic Environment Record, representing human activity stretching back 8,000 years
- One of the first National Parks in England to gain the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism
- The longest stretch of coastal woodland in England and Wales with rare whitebeam trees found nowhere else in the world.
- Over 1,600 veteran trees throughout the National Park, and the highest beech plantation in England
- Over 1,300 km of paths and bridleways and around 17,600 hectares of open access land to enjoy
- One of the most tranquil places in England

# Changing landscapes: The challenges and opportunities facing Exmoor

There are many forces for change affecting Exmoor's landscapes, some of them global, others very localised in effect. While we do not have control over all these impacts we need to understand and be aware of them, so that we can respond and adapt to ensure Exmoor is resilient and thriving now and in the future. Details of the trends and changes affecting Exmoor's special qualities are set out in the State of the Park Report<sup>23</sup> that accompanies this Partnership Plan and the Landscape Character Assessment<sup>24</sup>.

A summary is given below

**Climate change:** The impacts of climate change are evident now and will impact all aspects of the National Park so there needs to be greater focus on adapting to a changing climate and increasing resilience. Exmoor also needs to play its part in the global drive to reduce carbon emissions.

**Nature recovery:** Urgent action is required to restore nature across Exmoor at scale. Statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies are being prepared and will feed into the Plan along with targets from Exmoor's Nature Recovery Vision and those cascaded down from the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan.

**Farming and land management:** The transition to the environmental land management scheme is ongoing but still holds much uncertainty over the details of how this will be implemented and the funding that will be available. The financial viability of upland farming remains of concern.

**Changing landscapes:** The National Park designation means that Exmoor has not seen the same level of development as in other areas, but it is not immune to other changes arising from climate change and changing land management. Landscape monitoring

has shown incremental but evident change in the nature of the land cover and vegetation and the occurrence of man-made features such as telecommunications masts.

**Local communities:** There are ongoing concerns over the viability of local communities with pressures on affordable housing and local services particularly from an ageing population and high levels of second homes / holiday lets.

**Local economy:** Exmoor's economy is dominated by the tourism sector and is primarily made up of micro-businesses. Farming and land management are also important to the local economy and part of Exmoor's cultural heritage. New technologies are changing the way markets and sectors work, and digital connectivity is more important than ever. The need to change, adapt and learn new skills will be essential for business and economic growth. Exmoor needs to retain and attract young people to visit, live and work here.

**Natural and cultural capital:** The next few years are likely to see a growing trade in natural capital assets such as biodiversity, clean water, reduced flood risk, and stored carbon. These potentially provide new sources of

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<sup>23</sup> [Exmoor National Park State of Park Report 2023](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Landscape Character Assessment | Exmoor](#)

income for land owners and managers on Exmoor who can provide a supply of these assets but there is uncertainty over the long-term value and credibility of some of these schemes.

**Finance and delivery:** Action to address these strategic challenges will require resources and partnership working, at a time of severe budgetary challenges. New sources of investment and funding will need to be found, including from the private sector.

**Policy:** With a change of Government in July 2024, there are likely to be changes in Government policy for the environment, farming and planning, which will all influence priorities for the National Park and how these can be delivered.

**Visitor management and experience:** Visitors bring economic benefit and National Park's are designated to give people the opportunity to understand and enjoy these special places. But pressures from visitor activities need to be managed. Travel to and around the National Park has a high carbon footprint, so developing sustainable transport, and access and recreation opportunities will be essential for the health and wellbeing of our residents

and visitors, as well as helping to reduce carbon and support a better visitor experience.

**Health & wellbeing:** The long term impacts of the covid pandemic are still being felt, and have had a significant impact on people's physical and mental well-being, on top of more general and long standing health and wellbeing challenges. Rural communities and particularly farming communities feel the impact of loneliness and isolation. The health and well-being benefits of connecting with nature and the outdoors are now widely recognised and provide an opportunity for increased engagement with the National Park. But the people that may benefit the most from better connection to Exmoor are often those that find it hardest to do so.

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** Inequality in the UK is at the highest level for over 50 years and within and around Exmoor there are many pockets of rural poverty and areas of very high deprivation. Many people face barriers that prevent them from visiting or engaging with the National Park and a proactive approach is needed to reach out to them and work with people within those communities to provide greater opportunities and awareness.



# Vision, Aims, Objectives and Targets

## Vision

This statutory Management Plan covers the period 2025 to 2030 but its vision, objectives and targets extend to 2050:

*Exmoor National Park is a beautiful landscape, leading the response to climate change and nature recovery. It is a place where nature can thrive, that's proud of its cultural heritage, welcoming to all who seek out inspiration and adventure, and where people can connect with this special landscape. It is home to thriving local communities, with a low carbon local economy benefitting from Exmoor's natural and cultural capital.*

## Aims

- A** A cared for landscape and heritage
- B** A nature-rich landscape
- C** A net zero National Park, mitigating and adapting to climate change
- D** A welcoming place for all, that people feel connected to, improving their health and well-being
- E** Healthy natural resources
- F** A great place for people to live, work and do business
- G** Bringing it all together - place based delivery
  - G1 Moorland & Farmland
  - G2 Woodland and Trees
  - G3 Rivers, Streams and Wetlands
  - G4 Coast

## Targets

Text in green relates to the national Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protected-landscapes-targets-and-outcomes-framework).

## A A cared for landscape and heritage

### Objectives:

- Exmoor's unspoilt natural beauty, tranquillity, openness, wildness and dark night skies are celebrated, looked after, and enjoyed
- Exmoor's irreplaceable historic environment and cultural heritage is cared for, celebrated and plays a key role in informing our future

National Parks are national treasures, the jewels in the crown of our beautiful countryside. It is the natural beauty of these landscapes that justifies Exmoor's status as a National Park, and is the primary draw for visitors. National Parks are the nation's breathing spaces, and Exmoor is one of the few upland areas in southern Britain, where people can enjoy remoteness, wildness and tranquillity, to refresh their spirits and recharge their batteries.

Exmoor's varied landscape offers the natural beauty of open moorland, steep wooded river valleys, dramatic coast and distinctive farmland shaped by natural and human processes.

*"Nowhere else in Britain can greater variety of scene be found than within the comparatively small territory of the Exmoor National Park" SH Burton 1975*

Exmoor National Park was certified as the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe and provides extensive opportunities and observation sites for experiencing our spectacular starry skies.

Exmoor's historic landscapes also provide an irreplaceable record of how people have lived here for thousands of years. Exmoor has a long history of human settlement, from small towns and picturesque villages, to tiny hamlets and isolated farmsteads, which reflect the changing fortunes of the communities who have lived here. Each settlement has its own character, with diverse vernacular building styles and materials that reflect local geology and traditions. The use of traditional building materials and techniques all contribute to what makes Exmoor unique. It's vital to support and promote that knowledge and skills if we are to protect and enhance the assets in our Historic Environment.

Within the National Park there are 17 conservation areas and over ten thousand archaeological sites and historic buildings, all helping to tell the story of Exmoor and conserving that story for future generations to learn from and enjoy. Exmoor is particularly important because there are so many undisturbed archaeological sites and monuments, and undoubtedly more to be discovered. Exmoor's peatlands contain a rich and rare archive charting how the environment has changed over the last 8,000 years.

However, many historic assets are undesignated and lack statutory protection, and there are a growing number of threats to both designated and undesignated heritage assets.

The National Park is not immune to the pressures of modern life, such as the need for telecommunications masts to enable mobile phone and broadband coverage, or increased number and size of agricultural barns to meet animal welfare standards. Changes to climate and land management are leading to small but incremental changes in vegetation and landscape character.

Exmoor's landscapes and heritage have changed over time and will continue to change, adapt and evolve. This will need ongoing careful management to ensure that changes are sympathetic to the character and history of the National Park. The planning system is an important tool to manage some pressures, and the National Park designation and local planning policies rightly provide protection against unsympathetic or large-scale development, but also allow the changes needed to allow people to continue to live, work and visit. However, there are concerns that some national changes to planning may weaken these protections. Land management changes are not subject to the same controls, but will be influenced mainly by the new funding schemes including the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Environmental Land Management Schemes. Increasingly, the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to restore nature, mean that there will be other changes which will need to be carefully woven into Exmoor's landscape character and cultural heritage, being mindful of how the past may play a significant role in informing future change.

Ultimately it is through engaging people with Exmoor's special landscapes, historic and built environment that will build understanding, helping to value, care for and protect these assets, and ensure that the fascinating stories of Exmoor's history, landscape and communities continue to be told.

### Targets and measures:

- A1 Ensure development and land-use change recognises landscape character and enhances natural beauty including impacts on the setting of and views from the National Park
- A2 Conserve and enhance landscape character through management of characteristic features including hedgerbanks, hay meadows, stone walls, traditional farm buildings, orchards, ponds, leats and gutter systems
- A3 Reduce light pollution across the whole National Park Dark Sky reserve to conserve and enhance the quality of the night sky
- A5 **Reduce the number of nationally and locally designated heritage assets at risk in line with national targets**
- A6 Improve the protection of heritage assets by designating 5 new national heritage assets (listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments) by 2030 and increasing the local list of heritage assets by 25% by 2030
- A7 Promote engagement with Exmoor's historic environment through the Historic Environment Record and increase the number of records accessed by 5% by 2030 (from a 2024 baseline)
- A8 Protect the character of Conservation Areas and promote positive management, ensuring all Conservation Areas have up to date appraisals and management plans
- A9 Conserve and enhance historic streetscapes and rural roads through maintenance and repairs to historic fabric including bridges, walls and paving, and reduction of unnecessary highway clutter, lighting, and road markings

A10 Improve understanding of the impacts of climate change on heritage assets and support adaptation and resilience measures

## B A nature-rich landscape

### Objectives:

- Exmoor's rich mosaic of wildlife habitats is enhanced, extended, resilient and well-connected, forming a network of nature-rich areas with blurred edges, with corridors linking them and stretching across the National Park boundary
- Wildlife is thriving with a greater abundance of species that can easily move across the landscape and adapt to a changing climate and historic assets, local communities and businesses are adapted and resilient to climate change

Many generations of management have contributed to the diversity of Exmoor's natural environment, with spectacular moorland, rich oak woodland, rolling farmland, clear streams and dramatic coastline. These form a mosaic of habitats including heath, blanket bog, ancient woodlands, species-rich grassland, and high quality freshwater and marine habitats. These habitats support a wide range of species, both common and rare, many of which are conservation priorities. They are one of the key attractions for people visiting the National Park, and are also highly valued by people living and working here.

This careful management has helped to conserve Exmoor's wildlife, but this is now under threat alongside widespread declines in nature across the country and globally. The reasons for these declines are many and complex, including the global challenge of climate change, cross-boundary impacts of air pollution, the introduction of non-native invasive species, and the long-term effects of historic policy and management such as land drainage and more recent intensification of agricultural systems and food production.

This Partnership Plan includes ambitious targets to restore, enhance and expand Exmoor's natural ecosystems and wildlife, supporting a beautiful and resilient landscape, with returning native wildlife and rich natural habitats teeming with life. This will be achieved by providing more space for nature alongside regenerative land uses that are sympathetic to nature but still produce high quality local food, timber, energy, recreational activities, and the jobs that go with them. It will require the right incentives and funding through environmental land management schemes and green finance, new skills, training, and advice, and for a collaborative effort between land managers, funders, regulators and environmental organisations.

We want Exmoor, along with the network of other Protected Landscapes, to be at the heart of nature enhancement for the nation, delivering the Government's priorities to be 'greener, wilder and more accessible to all', allowing nature to thrive and expand out to surrounding areas. They will play a key role in delivering the Government's ambitious commitments for 30% of land in the UK to be protected for nature by 2030, and the Protected Landscape targets which will help to deliver the Environmental Improvement Plan for England.



## Targets and measures:<sup>25</sup>

- B1 By 2050, at least three quarters (51,750ha) of the area of the National Park is in nature-rich condition, the remaining areas providing wildlife networks and corridors
- B2 By 2030, at least 50% of the National Park is protected and managed for nature, contributing to national 30 by 30 targets
- B3 Create or restore an additional 4,500ha of priority habitat<sup>26</sup> by 2030, and 6,500ha by 2042 in line with national targets [breakdown of this figure covered in sections below – includes species rich grassland, woodland/wood pasture; peatland; hedgerows; wooded corridors]**
- B4 Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 and ensure 60% of SSSIs have ‘actions on track’ to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028 in line with national targets**
- B5 Continue favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042 in line with national targets**
- B6 By 2030, nature-friendly farming is practised on 50% of enclosed farmland (11,780ha or 17% of the National Park) in line with national targets, where land is managed working with nature as part of a sustainable farm business**
- B7 By 2030, there are 7,000 hectares (10% of the National Park) of wilder ‘nature recovery opportunity areas where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course
- B8 Increase the populations of, and areas colonised by, species identified as priorities for Exmoor including threatened species
- B9 Develop and deliver species translocation programmes to bring back and boost native species, enhancing the diversity and richness of Exmoor’s wildlife
- B10 Reduce and control invasive non-native species particularly where they are impacting on the condition of designated wildlife sites
- B11 Improve the resilience of wildlife and habitats to climate change
- B12 Increase awareness and action among volunteers, residents and businesses to create more wildlife-friendly environments including in gardens, villages and towns

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<sup>25</sup> See also targets C2 and C3 on peatland restoration and woodland and tree cover, and targets in sections E and G

<sup>26</sup> Semi-natural habitats identified as priority for biodiversity conservation

## C A net zero National Park, mitigating and adapting to climate change

### Objectives:

- Exmoor is a net zero National Park, reducing greenhouse gas emissions to a minimum level and locking up carbon in peatlands, trees, soils and plants
- Exmoor's natural and historic assets, local communities and businesses are adapted and resilient to climate change

Climate change affects all aspects of this Partnership Plan. A science-based target<sup>27</sup> is being proposed for the National Park to be net zero by 2038, in line with global commitments to keep global warming within 1.5°C. This means that, collectively as a Partnership, we will take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions being re-absorbed from the atmosphere by nature, through woodland expansion, peatland restoration, improved soil health and other measures. These are challenging targets, but Exmoor National Park, alongside other Protected Landscapes, can also play a part in going beyond zero, through acting as carbon sinks for the nation, and this goes hand in hand with targets to restore and enhance nature.

Some of the actions needed to achieve the net zero target are outside the scope of the Partnership Plan, and will to be driven by national policy, and delivered by partners in the Devon and Somerset climate groups, for example phasing out fossil fuels in heating and transport systems. This Partnership Plan will focus on actions that can be delivered locally including improving energy efficiency in existing buildings, and providing sustainable and active travel options, E-charging and e-bike networks. Farmers and land managers will play a key part through sustainable land management and regenerative agriculture, producing food, helping to reduce emissions, and sequestering carbon. Initiatives such as Eat Exmoor will encourage consumption of locally sourced products, supporting local businesses and livelihoods. The use of local timber in construction, and directing timber into longer term end uses will help to ensure that sequestered carbon is locked up, and reduces the use of high embedded materials such as concrete and steel. In addition, individual choices around heating travel, diet and the goods we buy will all help reduce carbon emissions.

Exmoor's communities, businesses and wildlife also need to be resilient and adapt to the changing climate of warmer, wetter, winters and hotter, drier, summers, along with increased risks of extreme weather events, drought, flooding and coastal erosion. This Partnership Plan aims to enable and encourage adaptation through nature recovery, connecting habitats and providing corridors for species migration; increasing trees and woodlands in the landscape for shelter, shade and natural flood management; enabling sensitive adaptation of historic buildings and the recording of heritage assets at risk, including on the coast; and incorporating measures in maintenance and repairs to the rights of way network which will build greater resilience to extreme weather and storm

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<sup>27</sup> [Exmoor's Carbon Footprint | Exmoor](#)

events. A climate adaptation strategy will be produced for the National Park during this Plan period, and planning policies will be reviewed and updated in the next few years as a new Local Plan is produced.

## Targets and measures:

- C1 Exmoor National Park is net zero by 2038, leading the response to climate change and delivery of national net zero targets**
- Sustainable energy – 10% pa cut in emissions arising from energy usage by residents, visitors and industry for electricity, heating and travel within the National Park
  - Sustainable food & drink – 3% pa cut in emissions arising from consumption of food and drink
  - Sustainable purchasing – 12% pa reduction in emissions from other goods purchased by residents and visitors
  - Sustainable travel – 10% pa reduction in emissions from visitor travel to and from the National Park
  - Sustainable agriculture – 5% pa cut in emissions from farming practices
  - Sustainable land use (excluding agriculture) – 2% increase pa in carbon sequestration and storage
- C2 Restore 800 ha of deep peat by 2030, and 80% of Exmoor’s deep peat by 2050 in line with national targets**
- C3 Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of the total area of the National Park (2,080 ha) by 2030, and 10% (6,920 ha) by 2050, in line with national targets, to benefit nature and people, ensuring the right trees in the right place**
- C4 Produce a climate change risk assessment and adaptation plan for Exmoor National Park by 2026 and integrate climate adaptation into all actions and activity
- C5 Encourage individuals, communities and businesses to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change

## D A welcoming place for all, that people feel connected to, improving their health and well-being

### Objectives:

- More people from a broader range of backgrounds are connected with, inspired by, and care for Exmoor, improving their health and well-being and providing a “Natural Health Service”
- Public paths, open access land, recreational facilities and popular sites are well maintained and accessible for all to experience and enjoy Exmoor
- Exmoor is promoted and managed as a regenerative tourism destination, providing a great visitor experience, leaving the environment in a better state, and positively contributing to the well-being of local communities
- There are more opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to explore and connect with Exmoor, developing skills and knowledge, and taking an active role in the future of Exmoor

Exmoor was designated a National Park in 1954 as part of the post-war drive to restore the nation’s health by enabling access to the countryside. Today, that mission for National Parks to be the nation’s natural health service is just as relevant, if not more needed than ever.

We know that over 1.5 million people visit Exmoor each year, inspired by the natural beauty and tranquillity of the landscape, the coastline and wildlife. They enjoy sightseeing, walking and cycling and watching wildlife, making the most of the high-quality rights of way and access network, with over 1,300km of footpaths and bridleways available on Exmoor. They rate their experiences very highly, with 99% of visitors rating their visit as good or very good.

In addition, hundreds of volunteers donate hours of their time each year to look after the National Park through carrying out practical conservation works, leading guided walks or undertaking wildlife and path surveys. There are many educational visits to Exmoor as well, ranging from immersive residential stays to day trips or Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. All these activities, along with events, information, publications and interpretation and the work of the National Park Centres and other visitor centres, help people to understand, connect with, and care for the National Park.

However, we know that the demographic of people who currently enjoy Exmoor is skewed towards older people, and those from white, British backgrounds. There are many barriers facing young people and those from less represented communities, including practical difficulties getting to the National Park, lacking the confidence to visit or explore the moors, or not feeling that it is a place for them. There are also costs and other practical barriers for some people, particularly those from more deprived communities, or people with a disability, who are not able to access the benefits that Exmoor offers, even if it is right on their doorstep.

*“National Parks are for people of every class and kind, from every part of the country. They are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population but for all who care to refresh their minds and spirits and exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty”* John Dower, writing in 1945

During this Plan period, we want to address some of those barriers and help a greater diversity of people to access and enjoy Exmoor. There are some positive signs of change, with increasing numbers of younger people and those from a wider range of backgrounds visiting Exmoor, but there is still much more that can be done. We have set ambitious targets to ensure that more people are connected with and benefit from their National Park. This includes a particular focus on engaging with young people, providing opportunities for them to learn about Exmoor and develop skills.

We also need to ensure that the rights of way and access network continues to be well-maintained, and that routes and facilities are improved. This is a challenge during a time of budget cuts and a changing climate, and it will require careful prioritisation, alongside working with partners and volunteers, to continue to provide the infrastructure that enables so many people to explore and experience Exmoor. Enjoyment of the National Park can take many forms including access to water, use of access land and permitted paths and a wide range of activities. Public access needs to be considered as a whole in order to be fully inclusive.

Visitors bring benefits to the local economy and communities, with almost two thirds of employment based around tourism and hospitality. Whilst Exmoor is fortunate in not experiencing many of the impacts from high visitor numbers that other National Parks face, there are still pressures and challenges. This Plan includes a target for regenerative tourism, an approach that is moving from a position of tourism ‘doing less harm’ to ‘helping give back more than it takes’. The National Parks have collectively set out a new vision for regenerative tourism<sup>28</sup>. The aim is to champion and support tourism development that contributes to the enhancement and regeneration of the places and communities in which it operates. As well as supporting tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature recovery, while ensuring National Parks are relevant to everyone’s needs. Part of this challenge is to enable greener modes of travel to the National Park, contributing to the net zero target, and to encourage more people to leave their cars behind whilst here, making the most of the wonderful footpaths and bridleways.

### Targets and measures:

**D1 Improve and promote accessibility to the National Park and engagement with Exmoor’s special qualities for all, in line with national targets**

D2 By 2030 at least 50% of engagement with schools is with those schools that have above the south-west average of children eligible for free school meals or pupil premium.

<sup>28</sup> [UK National Parks set out new vision for regenerative tourism - National Parks](#)



- D3 Increase the number of days people volunteer to take action for nature and heritage by 10% by 2030 – with 15% of total hours delivered by young people under 25
- D4 Provide a night under the stars for 6,000 children, between 2025-2030
- D5 Deliver and develop a Young Rangers programme that supports young people to engage with Exmoor and develop skills and confidence through volunteering
- D6 Take positive action to support and enable people from a wider range of backgrounds to access and enjoy Exmoor
- D7 Strengthen partnerships with health professionals and communities to promote and enable more people to access the health benefits of connection with Exmoor’s nature
- D8 Increase the diversity of visitors to Exmoor
- D9 Promote engagement with Exmoor’s natural and cultural heritage through art
- D10 At least 80% of Exmoor’s public rights of way are assessed as ‘open and easy to use’
- D11 Improve the public access network by delivering enhancements to cycling, riding and walking opportunities and improving accessibility
- D12 Work with local tourism partners and businesses to promote regenerative tourism principles contributing in a positive way to Exmoor’s special qualities
- D13 Ensure that visitor satisfaction figures remain high (at least 97% consider their experience to be good or very good)
- D14 Increase opportunities for green travel and active travel to and within the National Park

## E Healthy natural resources

### Objective:

- Exmoor's soils, air and water resources are healthy and support naturally functioning ecosystems

Our natural environment is a valuable asset and a major source of national wealth, but our natural resources are under pressure. Only around half of monitored rivers are achieving 'high' or 'good' status, with concerns over a toxic mix of chemicals and impacts on ecology. Extreme weather events are increasing risks of both flooding and drought. Levels of air pollution, particularly nitrogen and ammonia, are impacting on the conservation status of protected wildlife sites and soil health is at risk from climate change. One of the key goals of the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan is to ensure that we are using our resources from nature sustainably. Protecting and enhancing our natural capital will help deliver benefits for people and nature, including long-term flood risk reduction, improvements to water and air quality, and soil health.

### Targets and measures:

- E1 75% of Exmoor's monitored rivers, waterbodies and coastal or transitional bodies achieve 'high' or 'good' ecological status (in line with national goals)
- E2 Improve water quality (ecological and chemical) by reducing pollution and sedimentation from agriculture and wastewater treatment in line with national targets
- E3 Increase natural flood management and nature-based solutions to slow the flow, increase water infiltration and storage and reduce flood risk, water stress and drought and to ensure there is sufficient water and flows for nature
- E4 Reduce the impact of air pollution (from nitrogen and ammonia) on sensitive habitats and species
- E5 Improve soil health through good soil management practices in line with national targets, reduce compaction and increase water retention capacity, protect and improve soil ecosystem services (soil carbon, biodiversity, food production and flood mitigation) and increase resilience to extreme weather impacts

## F A great place for people to live, work and do business

### Objective:

- Exmoor's communities and economy are sustainable and resilient, supporting the transition to a low carbon economy and lifestyles, and providing new opportunities, skills and employment

Exmoor's environment and its local economy and communities are connected. Exmoor's rural nature and its communities with close links to the land, have created a strong sense of identity and community, and a spirit of self-sufficiency. The high-quality environment makes Exmoor an attractive place to live, work and do business, but it's rurality, geography and National Park designation also provide some unique challenges and opportunities.

Exmoor has a population of around 10,000 with over 1,300 businesses, many home-based, and a significantly higher proportion of self-employment than the national average. Exmoor's communities and businesses, as everywhere, are affected by changes in how we live and work. This includes the need to adapt to the effects of climate change, with more extreme weather; higher rainfall and more flooding. New and existing development will need to adapt to cope with changing conditions. A declining and ageing population; the lack of public transport; the small, scattered nature of settlements; deregulation and privatisation and the rise of online shopping and services all put pressure on local services and facilities. High house prices and low average wages mean that many people struggle to be able to afford to live in the National Park. Fast changing technology means access to digital communication has become a necessity to provide accessibility to information and services and reduce the need to travel.

Change is needed to adapt to the rapidly changing world and to secure a sustainable and viable future for local people and businesses. This Plan seeks to encourage economic activity in the National Park which benefits from and enhances the local environment, helps to achieve National Park purposes, plays its part in responding to the global climate and nature crises, and supports local communities and businesses. Delivery of the Plan's objectives and targets will help to support and create jobs, but will require education and training such as new apprenticeships to develop the necessary skills. A more technologically driven world means that digital connectivity and improved transport are increasingly important to ensure that opportunities are accessible to all, particularly for younger people.

Developing connections between producers and suppliers, and considering whether products can be sourced, processed or marketed locally can add more value – building community wealth. This means that tourism income, agricultural sales, or funding from outside the area are spent and retained locally which helps to strengthen Exmoor's economy. The public sector also has an important role through providing local services, employment, support, grant funding, and local procurement.

It is not the role of this National Park Partnership Plan alone to address all these issues, but it can play a part in helping to respond to some of the challenges through partnership working. Our Rural Enterprise Exmoor vision has been developed with partners and businesses, *for Exmoor to have an economy building community wealth, sitting lightly in its environment, and creating opportunities from its special qualities*<sup>29</sup>. This recognises that we will need to do things differently - being open to new ideas, new types of investment and new entrepreneurs - adding to the rich mix that is Exmoor. Together, we will focus our efforts on actions that benefit from and enhance the area's status as a National Park. The partnership that has come together under Rural Enterprise Exmoor has identified the key areas for partnership working as: delivering the homes needed for local people; continuing to improve digital connectivity and taking advantage of new technologies; collaboration; good businesses supporting a greener, fairer Exmoor; stronger communities engaged in delivering housing, energy, transport and local food; a strong Exmoor brand underpinning the hospitality, food, farming, craft and culture sectors; and flourishing farms that deliver prosperous livelihoods, finding new ways to produce food and deliver public goods for the nation.

The Partnership Plan also links closely to the Local Plan which sets the policies for how planning and development will be managed<sup>30</sup>. This plays a major role in conserving and enhancing Exmoor's special qualities, and also supporting the needs of local communities, particularly the delivery of affordable housing and protecting local services and facilities.

### Targets and measures:

- F1 Promote and develop skills to support delivery of National Park purposes via internships, apprenticeships and placements and deliver 20 opportunities for these by 2030
- F2 Promote local, sustainable supply chains and buying local to support Exmoor's businesses and create and retain community wealth
- F3 Support the housing needs of local communities and increase the number of affordable homes (conversions and new build) available
- F4 Support the sustainability of settlements and needs of local communities, businesses and visitors through safeguarding and maintaining access to community services and facilities
- F5 Support a sustainable and low carbon economy

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<sup>29</sup> [Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision | Exmoor](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Exmoor Local Plan 2011 - 2031 | Exmoor](#)

## G Bringing it all together - place based delivery

### GI Moorland & Farmland

#### Objective:

- Exmoor's distinctive **moorland and farmed** landscapes are evolving and resilient to climate change. Their natural beauty is enhanced and heritage conserved. Habitats are more diverse, in better condition, extended, connected and richer in wildlife. Some areas are wilder and natural processes are restored. Land is managed sustainably to produce high quality food and timber. People can access and enjoy these special places including the tranquillity and dark night skies

Exmoor's dramatic moors and heaths dominate the landscape, with big, expansive and dark skies, and far-reaching views across the National Park and to surrounding areas. Its wild, rugged remoteness offers escape and tranquillity but it's also a living, working landscape. The open, exposed landscape of Exmoor's upland heath, grass moors and bogs extend in an uninterrupted sweep from Dunkery Beacon in the east to Challacombe Common in the west. Other areas of more fragmented moorland provide the backdrop to the National Park to the south and west, with the high coastal heaths fringing the northern boundary.

The moors are framed by more productive farmland, with Exmoor's climate, soils and elevation favouring extensive livestock farming. This is primarily sheep and cattle, mainly continental cross-breeds, with the majority of livestock sold to lowland areas for finishing, but also some rare traditional breeds such as the Exmoor horn and Devon Closewool sheep, Devon Red Ruby cattle. These hardy breeds are able to withstand the harsh conditions on the moors, and are also important for conservation grazing. On higher land, where farmland has been carved out of the surrounding moorland, the fields are geometrically shaped, bounded by fences or the distinct beech hedge banks which are strongly associated with Exmoor. . These give way to more fertile, rolling hills which form a gentle, enclosed and settled landscape with a more irregular patchwork of hedged fields, woods and villages. To the east, in the Brendon hills and rich soils of Porlock Vale, farming is more intensive.

The moors form a mosaic of habitats including blanket bog, acid grasslands and heath, of which gorse, scrub, scattered trees and bracken are important components. Collectively these moorland habitats are internationally important and provide homes to many species including specialist moorland plants, invertebrates, birds and animals. Peatlands are important carbon stores and essential to meeting targets for responding to climate change, including helping to regulate water quality and flows. However, many designated wildlife sites are not considered to be in good condition and there has been significant vegetation change on the moors over the last forty years, with less heather and more gorse, bracken and purple moor grass resulting in complex mosaics of

vegetation being replaced by fewer dominant species. The cause of these changes are multifaceted but are linked to: changes in management particularly levels of grazing and swaling; heather beetle damage; climate change; and increased nitrogen deposition from air pollution.

Peatland habitats are particularly sensitive to climatic change and hydrological disturbance and have been damaged by centuries of moorland reclamation, agricultural drainage and domestic peat-cutting, historical overgrazing, swaling and nitrogen deposition. Future climate change is likely to increase the drying effect on damaged peatlands. Swaling was a common management tool but is now rare and difficult to carry out in wetter winters. Increasingly, it is seen as contrary to meeting carbon emission targets especially on deep peat where this is banned due to damage to biodiversity and long-term carbon storage. Peatland restoration over the last twenty years has aimed to reverse some of these negative impacts, with over 2,600ha of peatland undergoing restoration to date. Monitoring indicates that restoration on deep peat has been more successful than on shallow peat regarding increasing water levels, reducing runoff and greenhouse gas emissions, and returning the peatland to more natural functioning in the longer term.

In the surrounding farmland, traditional mixed farming provides a range of habitats, including unimproved grassland, hedgerows and areas of scrub, which are important for wildlife as they support a wide variety of species. Exmoor's hedgebanks are one of the elements that make up the distinctive character of the landscape, and most are hundreds of years old, or even prehistoric. They are rich habitats for wildlife and act as corridors through the landscape. Traditional management by hedge-laying provides a wildlife-friendly and stock-proof barrier, but letting hedges grow out can also add to the value of the hedge as a habitat and expanded wildlife corridor. Unimproved grasslands are also important habitats, although they are less well-recognised, supporting for example, ant hills of the yellow meadow ant, butterflies and rare waxcap fungi. Many of these farmland habitats are undesignated, or have limited protection through local designations, and are consequently under greater threat of being lost or damaged.

The wild herds of red deer and free-roaming Exmoor ponies are a quintessential part of the Exmoor experience and are what many visitors come to see. Deer numbers have increased over the last 20 years, as has the density of deer, due to changes in land management in some areas, the erection of deer fences, and more active management, resulting in larger numbers of deer grazing in a herd. This increases the potential for conflict with farming and woodland management, and also nature recovery ambitions, due to increased browsing pressure. The health of deer, particularly levels of Bovine Tb are also a concern. This requires ongoing monitoring and management to maintain good health in the herds and sustainable numbers. Exmoor ponies are a priority on the Rare Breed Survival Trust's Watchlist, although numbers have increased from a historic low of just fifty after World War 2, due to the conservation efforts of many pony enthusiasts and organisations. There are now around 4,600 registered Exmoor ponies worldwide with 600 living freely on the moors.

Exmoor is considered to be a premium national, and increasingly international, venue for game shooting, primarily pheasant and partridge, and this is a very important part of the local economy. These range from small local shoots to large commercial businesses offering a high-end experience. Around 30% of land on Exmoor is managed or used in some way for game shooting, including rearing and release pens, cover crops, feeding and shooting areas. In some areas, more intensive, large-scale shoots are having impacts, with significant change to the character, condition and visual quality of the landscape from planting of cover crops, a reduction in ground cover vegetation, the introduction of infrastructure such as fencing, tracks, feeders and pens, impacts on tranquillity and other recreational users and potential impacts on water and air quality. Without careful management, the feeding and release of high numbers of released game birds can also elevate numbers of opportunistic species such as rats, grey squirrels and crows, and feeders can cause disease cross-contamination concerns. At the same time, there can be positive benefits from management for game shooting for habitats and wildlife through predator control, winter cover and food for birds, and active woodland management. It is important that the management of land for game shooting follows best practice, delivering positive outcomes for the local environment and communities and that the scale and density of game shoots is in keeping with the place.

The moorlands and farmland also hold a deep sense of history, with the landscapes, historic sites and features reflecting the long interaction with people from early prehistoric times to the present day. This is a rich historic landscape, with medieval farms, bridges, churches, lanes and paths still in use today. Moorlands contain some of the best preserved prehistoric landscapes, often overlain with later influences and contain organic remains and evidence of our past environments preserved in the peat. The industrial heritage of Exmoor is also apparent, with surviving features such as old railway lines, mines, engine houses and the abandoned cottages of miners.

Despite its timeless quality, Exmoor's moorland and farmland are places of change and their fragile habitats have suffered from past management practises, climate change pressures and the deposition of nitrogen-based pollutants. New approaches are needed to address these challenges, trialling different management, and learning from what has been done before. The new Environmental Land Management Schemes are a vital tool, particularly ensuring that higher level schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery, are available to land managers to enhance the moorland and farmland through targeted and effective management.

On the moorlands a priority is to improve the condition of designated sites, as well as buffering and linking habitats. This will require a co-ordinated approach working with many land managers and also outside the National Park, for example in relation to addressing the issues around air pollution. In some areas, such as the central grass moorlands, different approaches and trials are needed to support a more resilient mosaic of habitats and reduce dominance of single species like *Molinia*. This will include restoring or reinforcing heather and dwarf shrub heath, blanket bog and fen, as well as encouraging more scattered trees, gorse and scrub in the combes. Further work is needed to restore natural processes including hydrological function through peatland and river restoration to store more water, slow the flow and reduce flood risk. These



changes all need to be carefully undertaken to retain the special qualities of the moorland, it's openness, tranquillity and dark night skies.

The farmland provides great opportunities for nature recovery and climate resilience, whilst also enabling sustainable farm businesses to thrive. Farmers have always evolved their business with the times but they need support to do this, and adapt their businesses and farming systems to all these changes. Some are already leading the way with regenerative practices through restoring and enhancing soil health, which will also benefit biodiversity, restore well-functioning water cycles, adapt to and mitigate climate change, and increase economic profitability. Many farming systems are also already low input, high quality output, with hardy and traditional livestock breeding and selection, avoiding artificial inputs such as pesticides and fertilisers, and allowing areas to be 'roughened up' for nature.

Hedgerows are an important landscape feature and wildlife habitat as well as a practical tool for stock management and shelter, a source of biomass, and a carbon store. Traditional management of hedgerows is a valued skill, and part of Exmoor's cultural heritage. In addition, letting some hedgerows become naturally scrubbier and wider with hedgerow trees, provides additional benefits for wildlife and carbon storage. New hedge planting, in-field trees, and wood pasture all provide future fodder and shade for livestock in a warming world, as well as habitat and wildlife corridors.

Hay meadows were a traditional feature of farmland on Exmoor, but have declined in favour of silage, partly as a result less predictable weather. Through collaboration and sharing of equipment and seed between landowners, and more favourable agricultural payments, species-rich grasslands are now starting to be created and will provide a habitat for many grassland species, as well as a fodder crop for livestock.

Together these landscapes are a core part of what visitors and locals alike come to enjoy on Exmoor, which they are able to explore using the extensive network of paths, bridleways and open access land. Maintaining a good quality public access network is key to enabling people to continue to connect with Exmoor's natural beauty and cultural heritage. In addition, we need to continue to provide and improve more accessible options so that Exmoor can be enjoyed by all.

### Targets and measures:

- G1.1 Restore more naturally functioning heathland and upland moorland ecosystems, with increased diversity of habitats and species
- G1.2 Maintain and improve the condition of Scheduled Monuments, Principal Archaeological Landscapes and locally listed sites
- G1.3 Manage populations of wild red deer to maintain deer health and enable nature recovery
- G1.4 Maintain herds of wild Exmoor ponies contributing to moorland management and a nature-rich landscape
- G1.5 Continue the use of traditional upland breeds including Exmoor Horn and Devon Closewool sheep, and Red Ruby Devon cattle as part of Exmoor's land management

- G1.6 Exmoor leads the way in best practice management of game shoots, delivering positive outcomes for the local environment and communities
- G1.7 Maintain a good quality public path network across the main moorland areas, including some promoted and highly accessible options
- G1.8 Increase the number and area of orchards with at least 10 new orchards created and area of existing orchards expanded by 25% (12 ha) by 2030
- G1.9 Create 100km of new hedgerow and 100km of wooded corridor greater than 20m wide by 2030, to support a wide range of species
- G1.10 Support a variety of hedgerow management, encouraging laying and coppicing of hedgebanks as important landscape features, and allowing other hedgerows to grow out to support a diversity of nature. Protect veteran hedges and ancient hedgerows and select a new generation of hedgerow trees to protect from hedge-cutting
- G1.11 Create 1,500 ha of species-rich grassland by 2030 and increase connectivity between wildlife-rich grasslands and associated habitats. Support the effective management of grasslands to increase species diversity and for the benefit of rare and/or threatened species
- G1.12 Increase the planting of individual trees, wood pasture and agro-forestry as part of farming systems
- G1.13 Increase the retention of water in ponds and scrapes to slow the flow and create new habitats

## G2 Woodland and Trees

### Objective:

- Exmoor's **woodlands and tree cover** are diverse, well-managed, expanded, better connected, more resilient, and productive. They enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and enjoyment of the National Park and play a major role in responding to climate change

Exmoor's woodland is exceptional. Deeply incised wooded valleys, wild ancient coastal woodlands, verdant temperate rainforest, designed landscapes of trees and woods, rare and veteran trees, old estate woodlands and, more recently, productive conifer plantations, all contribute to Exmoor's rich natural beauty, cultural heritage and biodiversity. Trees and woods are important habitats, absorb and store carbon, slow the flow of water over the land, provide wood, timber and livelihoods, provide diverse places to explore, and improve health and well-being.

14 per cent or 9,500 hectares of Exmoor is now woodland, with a further 3.6 per cent or 2,500 hectares of land under canopy of trees outside woods - in hedges, wood-pasture, historic parkland, orchards and gardens. An extensive network of rights of way and permissive paths means that much of this woodland resource can be enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

At the same time, our trees and woods are at greater risk than ever before. Diseases and pests are already having a dramatic and devastating impact. Combined with climate stresses and the immense damage extreme weather events are causing, our woods and trees are under serious threat.

We want to increase the positive management of existing woodland, and work with communities and our partners to explore opportunities to increase tree and woodland cover, in a way which enhances and respects the special qualities of the National Park.

We will explore innovative techniques to blend trees and farming on a more expansive scale, to blur the edges between woodland and open habitats, to relieve pressures preventing natural tree regeneration and connect and restore habitats, landscapes and people in new and exciting ways.

Temperate Rainforest is a habitat of global significance with rare woodlands rich in lichens, ferns and mosses, which needs a very special kind of Atlantic climate. It supports rich biodiversity and offers numerous benefits including carbon sequestration, natural flood management and climate moderation. Exmoor supports fragments of this special habitat and is highly suitable for the creation of new Temperate Rainforest mosaics.

Due to their longevity, ancient semi-natural and long-established woodlands are more species rich, and therefore need to be well protected and carefully managed. Over the centuries ancient woodland has become reduced in area, size and is increasingly fragmented. Creative and imaginative solutions are needed to re-connect and rebuild

woodland networks to help ensure the habitat and species they support is more resilient. This includes increasing the amount of woodland in positive management, particularly in those smaller, steeper or isolated woods often overlooked in the past but with great potential. Traditional management practices such as coppicing creates temporary gaps which in some woods favours distinctive plants, in others the dense thicket regrowth supports nesting birds and dormice. In addition, the warm and sheltered open spaces support specialist species such as the heath fritillary butterfly (the Woodman's Follower), and migratory woodland specialist birds such as pied flycatchers, redstarts and wood warblers. Careful restoration of planted ancient woodland sites will also help the survival and recovery of native plants, fungi and animals.

Woodlands have always been an important part of the Exmoor economy, providing coppice products, woodfuel, charcoal, timber, and cover for game birds. As a nation, we currently import more timber than any other country except China. This demand for imported timber from regions with little regulation or control helps drive environmental damage and social problems overseas. We want to see more of our own high- quality timber harvested in genuinely sustainable ways from Exmoor's woodlands. Productive conifer plantations stand over large parts of the Eastern Hills and elsewhere. These yield significant volumes of timber, support jobs, sequester carbon and are habitat in their own right, home to gosawks, crossbills and other wildlife. Many are even-aged and dominated by few tree species, making management more efficient, but leaving them vulnerable to pest, disease and climate impacts. Stands displaying age, structural and species diversity are likely to be more robust and resilient and will help ensure we have a sustainable supply of home-grown timber in the future, taking pressure off fragile habitats elsewhere in the world.

We are now more aware of the important role that woodlands also play in helping to mitigate climate change through absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing flood risk through slowing the flow of water. Given the magnitude and rate of predicted climate change, trees and woodland will be significantly affected. Adaptation is therefore an important issue and should be addressed at the earliest opportunity. Changes in climate create opportunities in terms of the species of tree that can be grown on Exmoor, and the management practices we employ such as continuous cover forestry, but also bring additional threats for our woodlands in terms of changes to landscape character, pests and diseases and potential risks to native wildlife. Simply replacing trees we have lost to pests, disease and climate stress is already a significant task. Recovery from ash dieback alone will take decades.

We also better understand how restoring even low-density canopy cover into some more open landscapes can have a significant beneficial impact in terms of natural flood management and providing habitat networks and connectivity for wildlife, for example supporting birds such as the whinchat which have seen a 60% decline nationally but are thriving on Exmoor. If predicted climate impacts are realised, we need to begin the adaptation process now and increase carefully designed and well considered tree cover

across our landscapes. This does not mean covering moorland with trees, but there are opportunities for more scrub and scattered trees in the moorland combes, enhancing the existing hedgerows and boundary features to provide improved habitat connectivity, and creating a more diverse mosaic of habitats. Similarly, there could be increased in-field trees and wood pasture in farmland which will provide shelter, shade and fodder for livestock in a changing climate. Under more extreme climate scenarios, increased tree cover may be a significant factor in how landscapes continue to function, but it will take decades for canopies and roots to develop for benefits to be fully realised.

Improving the positive management of existing trees, and increasing tree cover in all its forms, from new woodlands, smaller groups of trees, in-field trees, wood-pasture, parkland, hedges, trees in gardens, orchards and scrub, as well as connecting existing tree cover, creating new woodlands and forming mosaics with other habitats and land-uses, will provide multiple benefits for people, nature, and the economy.

### Targets and measures:<sup>31</sup>

- G2.1 Restore and create 170 ha of temperate rainforest within the hyper-oceanic zone on Exmoor (areas with high humidity and rainfall above 1.7m)
- G2.2 Improve connectivity between woodlands, both within Exmoor and surrounding landscapes, and ensure a diverse network of treescapes including broadleaved and conifer woodlands, wood pasture, parkland, coppice, scrub, field trees and pollards, hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- G2.3 Enhance the ecological condition of woodland
- G2.4 At least 75% of all woodland is in sustainable management by 2030
- G2.5 Increase the diversity of conifer and productive woodland through continuous cover and climate change adaptation principles to continue timber production, increase access, and support key species
- G2.6 All Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to be managed to UK Forestry Standards to halt further decline and 10% of PAWS to be restored by 2030 following best practice principles
- G2.7 Conserve existing ancient and veteran trees, encourage positive management, and identify trees for succession and replacement
- G2.8 Manage existing woodland and design new woodland to take account of landscape character, wildlife and historic environment, and build resilience to climate, pest and disease impacts
- G2.9 Ensure a network of well-maintained footpaths and bridleways provide access to our varied woodlands including some promoted and highly accessible options

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<sup>31</sup> See also target C4 on woodland and tree cover

## G3 Rivers, Streams and Wetlands

### Objective:

- Exmoor's **wetlands, rivers, streams** and their associated valleys are in good condition and function more naturally. Their native flora and fauna is thriving, and flood risk is reduced. Access is managed sensitively

On Exmoor you are never far from the sound of water, and the rivers and streams that flow from the high ground and have cut the many deep combes are one of the defining characteristics of the National Park. The very name, Exmoor - is derived from the source of the Exe, our largest river. The Exe system, which includes the River Barle, rises in the Exmoor forest and drains south into the English Channel at Exeter, whilst the River Lyn and tributaries drain north into the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth. Exmoor also includes the source of the Rivers Tone and the Taw.

Rivers are a key aspect of Exmoor's special landscape qualities, and vital habitat and corridors for wildlife. Clear, oxygen-rich waters are home to some of our most important wildlife including the elusive otter, salmon, brown trout, dipper and kingfisher, as well as mayflies, dragonflies and damselflies that provide a vital link in the food chain. The River Barle is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its exceptionally natural character and wildlife importance. Many of the deep valley sides are cloaked in woodland including ancient woodland.

The rivers and streams are an important supply of water for the reservoirs which supply much of Devon and Somerset. Most of our rivers are privately-owned and managed, but luckily there are plenty of opportunities for people to enjoy them from footpaths along the rivers, canoeing down permitted sections, or spending a day fishing, respecting their value as sensitive habitats.

There are increasing pressures on these important natural resources. Climate change affects river flows, with periods of intense rainfall leading to flooding and erosion, contrasted by periods of drought with low flows, and increased water temperatures impacting on aquatic wildlife. Past modification of river courses and more intense rainfall leads to the deepening and scouring of the river bed, disconnecting the river from its floodplain, and increasing the risk of flooding downstream. The extremes of high and low flows place pressure on the sewerage systems leading to storm overflows and low dilution levels. Only half of monitored rivers (nationally?) are achieving 'high' or 'good' status, and there is increasing evidence that the range of chemicals entering the river systems including from pharmaceuticals, veterinary medicines and everyday household products and are creating a toxic mix which is of concern for people and wildlife. Recreational activities can add to these pressures and cause disturbance to wildlife. Non-native invasive species are also a major threat to these sensitive habitats.

We want to address these pressures, and ensure that Exmoor's rivers, streams and associated valleys are in good condition and function more naturally, providing high

quality habitats, bringing back species lost to Exmoor, providing clean water, and reducing flood risk.

It will take a huge collective effort to achieve our objectives for these river systems. There is an increased appreciation of the role that land management in the upper catchment of rivers can play in storing water, regulating river flows and boosting biodiversity through nature-based solutions and natural flood management. For instance peatland restoration, woodland management, tree planting in appropriate locations, re-naturalising river courses and installing leaky barriers. We need improved monitoring of water quality to better understand the issues and impacts, but land management also plays an important role in reducing run-off and pollution through soil and dirty water management and animal husbandry.

Reducing the impact of non-native species is vital to protect the natural function of aquatic ecosystems. We will also explore the potential of species reintroduction such as marsh fritillary butterflies, water voles, and beavers to enhance biodiversity.

We will continue to promote sustainable public access to Exmoor's waterways, balancing recreation with conservation to protect sensitive habitats.

Through these integrated efforts, Exmoor's rivers and streams will not only support a diverse range of wildlife but also provide many benefits to local farmers, businesses, communities and visitors.

### Targets and measures:

- G3.1 Restore the natural courses and flows of rivers, reconnecting them to their floodplains, expanding riparian habitats and supporting an increased abundance and diversity of native wildlife
- G3.2 Reduce the impact of non-native invasive species on the ecology and natural functioning of wetlands, rivers and streams
- G3.3 Increase monitoring and understanding of water quality and reduce impacts on the natural environment, particularly the effects of veterinary medicines on riverine ecology
- G3.4 Improve habitat and condition for fish, particularly spawning of migratory Atlantic salmon and sea trout
- G3.5 Explore opportunities for reintroduction of aquatic and wetland species such as marsh fritillary butterflies, water vole and beavers
- G3.6 Promote responsible access and activities that enable people to enjoy Exmoor's rivers and streams whilst protecting sensitive natural habitats and species



### Objective:

- Exmoor's stunning **coast** has access opportunities for all, where people and nature can thrive, heritage is conserved, and we build resilience to coastal change

Exmoor is one of only two National Parks in England with a coastline. The impressive coastal elevations along its 58 km/ 36 mile length include the highest sea cliff in mainland Britain (Great Hangman) and some of the most remote and inaccessible shoreline. This is one of the few places in England where moorland meets the sea, with coastal heaths adorning the cliff tops, interspersed by extensive Atlantic oakwoods which form the longest stretch of coastal woodland in England. Exmoor's coastline also has a rich cultural heritage from coastal Roman fortlets and prehistoric landscapes to historic coastal harbours. It inspired Romantic Poets including Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth. There are also relics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century fashion for picturesque landscapes such as the Italianate terraced gardens at Ashley Combe designed for Ada Lovelace. These natural and cultural heritage assets are increasingly at risk from coastal change.

Sea level rise and increased risk of coastal flooding puts low lying areas at risk. On Exmoor, this primarily affects the settlements of Porlock Weir and Lynmouth. The low-lying coast around Porlock includes the distinctive breached shingle ridge and salt marsh behind. This part of the coast is dynamic and particularly vulnerable to rising sea level and the effects of storms and tidal surges, which can result in rapid and dramatic change. Coastal erosion of Exmoor's high cliffs also threatens heritage assets and public access. Preserving the integrity of the King Charles III England Coast Path / South West Coast Path and addressing the impacts of coastal erosion and flooding is paramount, alongside promoting sustainable access and engagement with the coast's unique features.

At the foot of the cliffs are wave-cut platforms, sea caves and rocky bays with hidden, often inaccessible, beaches. Less is known about these inter-tidal and marine areas, although more research is being undertaken to s better understand and care for our coastal and marine environments. With the second largest tidal range in the world in the Bristol Channel, there is great interest in the opportunities that could arise from renewable energy. We seek to ensure that Exmoor plays its part in these considerations in a way that is compatible with National Park purposes.

Exmoor's coastline is a valuable resource, where people, nature, and heritage can thrive together while building resilience against the challenges of coastal change, sea level rise and increased flood risks. We aim to protect Exmoor's coast, while providing opportunities for public enjoyment, understanding, and responsible development, ensuring that the area remains resilient to climate change and accessible for future generations.

## Targets and measures:

- G4.1 Plan for the effects of coastal change and support communities to adapt to sea level rise and increased flood risk
- G4.2 Maintain 'excellent' water quality at designated bathing waters (Lynmouth and Porlock Weir) and support catchment management measures to improve water quality at Combe Martin, Dunster, Minehead and Blue Anchor
- G4.3 Restore 15% of priority habitats along the coast by 2043 in line with national targets
- G4.4 Plan for the effects of coastal change on heritage assets
- G4.5 Maintain and improve the high scenic quality of the coast, protecting important views and seascapes and conserving the character of the undeveloped coast and the National Park setting
- G4.6 Maintain the quality and diverse character of the King Charles III England / South-West Coast Path and respond positively to changes required as a result of coastal erosion or inundation. Ensure some highly accessible and promoted routes are available to enjoy the coastal landscape.
- G4.7 Ensure that opportunities for offshore renewable energy generation and other marine infrastructure are consistent with National Park purposes, benefit local communities, and support the transition to a low carbon economy