

THE EXE ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

The Partnership	Exe Estuary Management Partnership
The Estuary	the Exe Estuary
ToR	Terms of Reference
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
HRA	Habitat Regulations Assessment
The Executive	the Executive Steering Group
The Committee	the Partnership Committee
The Forum	the Exe Estuary Stakeholder Forum



Purpose

The purpose of this document is to identify the governance arrangements for the Exe Estuary Management Partnership (the Partnership). It includes the membership, organisational and administrative structures, and Terms of Reference (ToR) for each Group, as agreed by the Partners to the Agreement. As such it forms part of the Agreement.

Objectives

The objective of the Partnership is to provide a strategic and coordinated framework for the integrated management of the Exe Estuary (the Estuary), fostering cooperation between statutory bodies, local authorities, stakeholders, and the community, and improving communication, transparency, and accountability in the Estuary's governance to:

- i) Protect and enhance the natural environment of the Exe Estuary, with particular emphasis on safeguarding its internationally and nationally designated sites, including the Exe Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), Exe Estuary Ramsar site, Exe Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Dawlish Warren Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Ensure biodiversity and ecosystem health are at the heart of all management decisions.**
- ii) Promote the sustainable use and long-term resilience of the Exe Estuary, supporting activities that are environmentally responsible, economically viable, and socially beneficial. Address potential conflicts between uses through collaboration and evidence-based decision-making.**
- iii) Provide a strategic and coordinated framework for the integrated management of the Exe Estuary. Foster cooperation between statutory bodies, local authorities, stakeholders, and the community, and improving communication, transparency, and accountability in the estuary's governance.**

Administration

For administrative purposes, Devon County Council hosts the Partnership. Coordination is provided by the Exe Estuary Officer, who also serves as the Council's Marine, Estuaries, and Coastal Officer. This role is based within the Climate Change, Environment & Transport Directorate. This arrangement may change in the future if it becomes beneficial for the Partnership to be hosted by another organisation.



Protected Sites and Environmental Importance of the Exe Estuary

The Exe Estuary is a highly valued and environmentally significant estuarine system in the UK. Its ecological importance, together with the multiple statutory designations that safeguard it, were key factors in establishing the Exe Estuary Management Partnership.

- **Exe Estuary Special Protected Area (SPA)**

Designated under the UK Habitats Regulations for its internationally important populations of overwintering and migratory birds, including species such as Brent geese, shelduck, avocet, and wigeon. The SPA underpins much of the estuary's conservation management and requires decisions to follow the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process.

- **Exe Estuary Ramsar Site**

Recognised as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, the estuary supports nationally significant eelgrass beds, intertidal mudflats, sandflats, saltmarsh, and diverse bird assemblages. The Ramsar designation emphasises the estuary's global significance and the need for international standard protection and sustainable use.

- **Exe Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

The SSSI covers the majority of the estuary and protects nationally important habitats, geological features, and species. It places legal obligations on relevant authorities and landowners to avoid damage, manage recreational pressures and maintain favourable condition.

- **Dawlish Warren Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**

Designated under the Habitats Regulations, the SAC protects internationally significant dune habitats, sand flats, and associated species. These habitats play a key role in flood defence, biodiversity resilience, and coastal processes. Management requires careful balancing of recreation, shorebird disturbance, sediment dynamics, and habitat conservation.

- **Additional Local, Regional and Marine Designations**

The estuary also forms part of wider landscape and coastal protection frameworks, contributing to the Nature Recovery Network, Marine and Coastal Access Act



responsibilities, shoreline management policy areas, and locally designated nature conservation sites.

Purpose of the Partnership in Relation to Protected Sites

The extensive suite of designations presents overlapping legal responsibilities, complex ecological interactions, and pressures from recreation, tourism, climate change, sediment movement, and development. The Exe Estuary Management Partnership was created to provide a coordinated, integrated, and collaborative mechanism to:

- Ensure the protection and enhancement of the estuary's designated features.
- Support compliance with national and international obligations.
- Reduce the risk of adverse impacts from activities and developments.
- Provide a shared evidence base, consistent communications, and aligned management actions.
- Bring together statutory agencies, landowners, user groups, and wider stakeholders in a structured, transparent framework.

This coordinated approach is essential to safeguarding the Exe's protected sites, meeting legal duties, and ensuring that the estuary's environmental, social, and economic values are sustained for the long term.



Geographical Extent

The activity of the Partnership is to include the Exe Estuary to its tidal limit and to the mouth of the river at Exmouth as defined by a line drawn from Langstone Rock to Orcombe Rocks and the immediate hinterland of the Estuary up to the 5m contour. The activity of the Partnership will have regard for the wider hinterland and terrestrial area that has an influence upon the environment of the Estuary and its communities.

5m AOD refers to 5 metres above Ordnance Datum (mean sea level).

This height is commonly used in coastal and estuarine mapping as a practical upper limit for areas influenced by tidal processes, flooding, or coastal change. The boundary was set at 5m AOD to provide a clear, databased line that captures the areas functionally connected to the estuary while avoiding subjective mapping boundaries.

Key Roles of the Partnership

The key roles of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership are to support sustainable development and use of the estuary by:

- i)** Providing strategic leadership in the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the Exe Estuary's natural environment, ensuring the estuary's ecological health and protected site designations are safeguarded for the future.
- ii)** Enabling sustainable recreation and access, ensuring that leisure and tourism activities are compatible with the estuary's conservation objectives and do not compromise its environmental integrity.
- iii)** Engaging and involving the wider estuary community — including residents, users, landowners, and local organisations — in shaping decisions, identifying priorities, and resolving issues through open dialogue and shared action.



Governance Structure

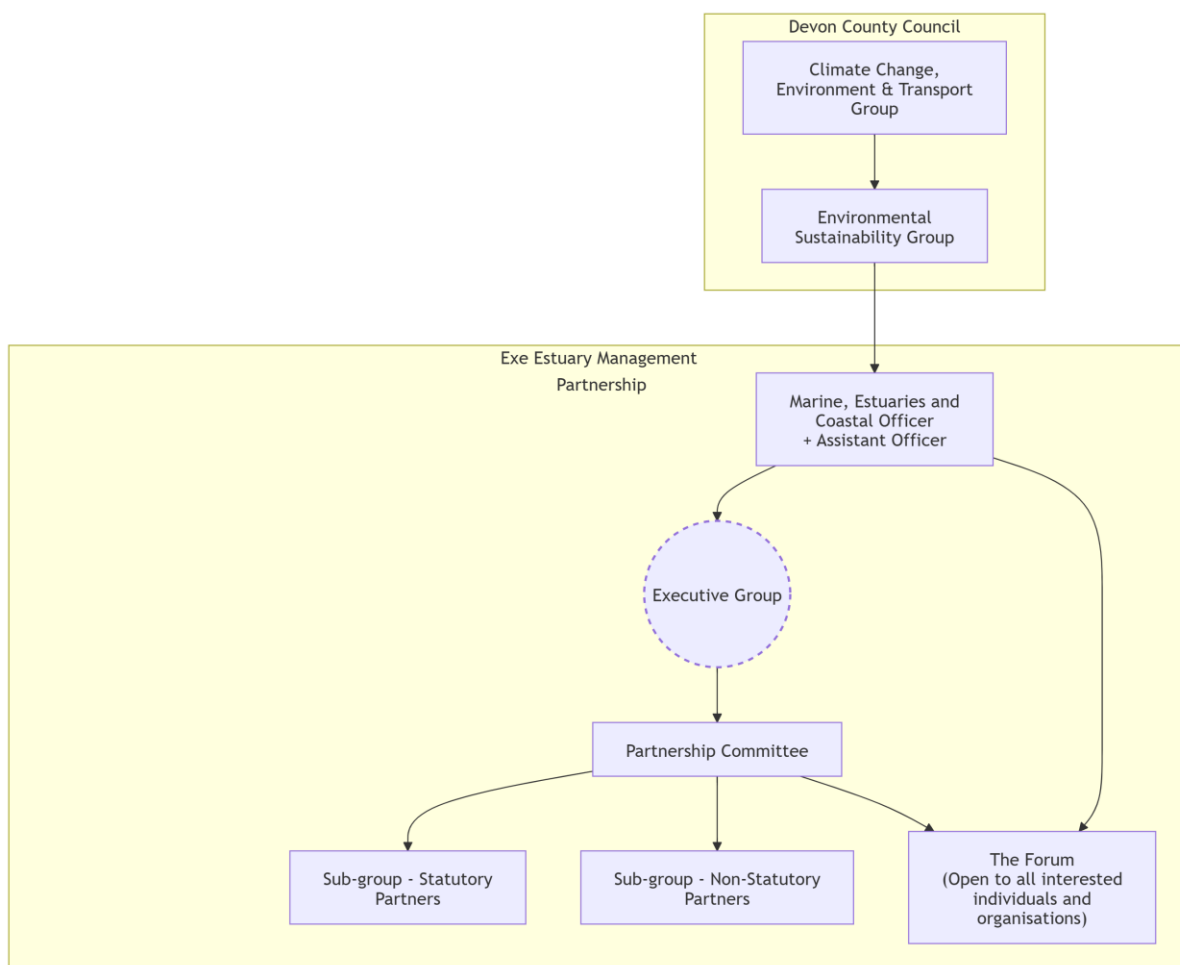
The Exe Estuary Management Partnership operates through a two-tier structure comprising an **Executive Steering Group** (the Executive) and a **Partnership Committee** (the Committee). These bodies work collaboratively to ensure effective decision-making, strategic direction, and coordinated action.

The lead body for the Partnership is the **Executive Steering Group** which provides the strategic leadership for the Partnership and has responsibility for securing resources, setting priorities through the Strategic Plan (formally Management Plan), and delivery. The Executive offers support to the Exe Estuary Officer in delivering the three-year Strategic Plan and annual delivery plan.

This Executive Steering Group is supported by the Partnership Committee whose role is to give additional advice and support to the Exe Estuary Officer in delivering both the three-year Strategic Plan and the annual delivery plan. The Partnership Committee has the option to split into two sub-groups to aid in reporting and collaboration amongst partners. The local community and other stakeholders are engaged in the work of the Partnership through the **Exe Estuary Stakeholder Forum** (the Forum). Devon County Council is the host authority to the Partnership, employs the Exe Estuary Officer and is responsible for the day-to-day financial management of the Partnership as advised by the Executive Steering Group.



Component	Role	Decision Making	Meeting Frequency
Executive Steering Group	Management; Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elects the Chair - Resourcing 	3 times per year (June, November, February) - online
Partnership Committee	Strategy; Collaborative & Partner Specific Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High level budget allocation - Strategic delivery 	Once per year (March) - in person Online update meetings may be arranged as needed.
Statutory Sub-Group	Reporting; Collaborative Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Those relating to delivery of statutory responsibilities 	Once per year (late spring/summer) - hybrid Online update meetings may be arranged as needed.
Non-Statutory Sub-Group	Reporting; Collaborative Delivery	None	Once per year (late spring/summer) - hybrid Online update meetings may be arranged as needed.
Stakeholder Forum	Knowledge Exchange; Collaborative Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Input to formal processes 	At least once every other year – in person At least 6 smaller events and activities throughout the year - hybrid



Executive Steering Group

The Executive Steering Group is a smaller, core group drawn from the Partnership Committee. It is responsible for supporting the delivery of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership's strategic direction and overseeing day to day coordination of Partnership activities. Membership of the Executive is based on relevant knowledge, expertise, and a commitment to active participation, not simply financial contribution. Members of the Executive Steering Group are expected to actively represent their sectoral or organisational interests within the Exe Estuary. The Executive membership is reviewed annually.

Role and Responsibilities

- Provide strategic oversight and direction for the Partnership.
- Discuss and agree the Partnership's priorities, objectives, and key initiatives.
- Review and endorse the Management action plans.
- Provide operational guidance and support to the Exe Estuary Partnership Officer/Coordinator.
- Monitor progress on delivering the Management Plan.
- Advise on funding, project delivery, and emerging issues.



- Consult with relevant user groups or stakeholders within their area of representation.
- Feedback key issues, concerns, and updates to the Executive Steering Group.
- Ensure two-way communication between their sector and the Partnership.
- Contribute towards agendas and materials for meetings and ensure follow up actions.
- Function as a sounding board between meetings for urgent matters requiring direction.
- Elect the Partnership Chair.

Executive Membership

Individuals or representatives of organisations who:

- Bring specialist knowledge in areas such as estuarine science, coastal management, biodiversity, community engagement.
- Represent stakeholder groups with a direct and meaningful interest in the estuary (e.g. recreation, tourism, environmental NGOs, regulatory bodies, academic institutions, fishing or boating communities).
- Membership is by invitation, based on active involvement and strategic relevance.
- Members are expected to attend regularly and contribute to the delivery of agreed actions.

Key Criteria for Executive Membership

- Demonstrated expertise or lived experience relevant to the estuary's management,
- Willingness to engage constructively in partnership activities and decisions.
- Commitment to collaborative, multi sector working,
- Ability to function as a liaison between the forum and their wider network or organisation.

Meetings

The Executive meets three times a year or as required. Executive members are also required to attend the Exe Estuary Partnership Committee meetings (once a year).

Chairing of the Executive Steering Group

Chaired by the elected Exe Estuary Management Partnership Chair

This structure is designed to ensure that the Partnership benefits from broad, informed input across all interest areas. Executive members play a vital role in maintaining this connectivity and supporting the Partnership's collaborative approach.



Partnership Committee

Role and Responsibilities

- Facilitate collaboration, communication, and knowledge sharing between sectors.
- Ensure the Partnership reflects the views and interests of the wider estuary community.

Partnership Committee Membership

For the purposes of this Agreement, the formal membership of the Partnership comprises those organisations listed in Appendix 1 and includes all organisations that:

- i) Agree to adhere to the stated objectives, plans and strategies and any other relevant agreements of the Partnership, and
- ii) Make a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives and actions as stated in plans and strategies and will be bound by the Memorandum of Agreement, and
- iii) Make a financial contribution to the Exe Estuary Management Partnership.

Guest Members are welcome on the Committee should they:

- i) Agree to adhere to the stated objectives, plans and strategies and any other relevant agreements of the Partnership, and
 - ii) Make a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives and actions as stated in plans and strategies and will be bound by the Memorandum of Agreement.
- Open to all organisations and stakeholders with a responsibility or interest in the estuary, including:
 - Local authorities
 - Statutory agencies
 - Conservation and user groups
 - Landowners and businesses
 - Academic institutions
 - Youth and Community Organisations
 - Membership is reviewed annually to ensure inclusive representation.



Meetings

The Partnership Committee meets once per year.

Chairing of the Partnership Committee

Chairing of the Partnership Committee will be delivered by the Exe Estuary Management Partnership Chair.

Sub-Groups of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership

To support more effective delivery, strengthen engagement, and ensure that partner interests are fully represented, two new sub-groups will be established under the Partnership. These groups will provide focused discussion, advice, and coordination within their respective sectors, reporting into the full Partnership.

Statutory Partners Sub-Group

Purpose

This subgroup will provide a dedicated forum for statutory organisations with legal duties relating to the management, regulation, and stewardship of the Exe Estuary. It will allow these bodies to coordinate approaches, share regulatory updates, resolve cross boundary issues, and provide clear, aligned advice to the wider Partnership.

Membership (Statutory Partners)

Organisations with statutory responsibilities connected to the Exe Estuary, including but not limited to:

- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Devon County Council
- East Devon District Council
- Exeter City Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Exeter Harbour Authority
- Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Functions

- Coordinate statutory positions and regulatory advice.
- Share updates on policy, compliance, planning, and licensing.
- Identify and address risks and obligations.
- Provide technical guidance to the full Partnership.
- Ensure alignment with national, regional, and local frameworks.



Non-Statutory Sub-Group

Purpose

This subgroup will bring together commercial, recreational, tourism and visitor economy stakeholders who use, benefit from, or contribute to the Exe Estuary. Its role is to champion sustainable recreation, responsible business practices, and positive visitor experiences while protecting the estuary's environmental integrity.

Membership

Organisations without statutory responsibilities connected to the Exe Estuary, but who represent users of the Estuary and surrounding areas. They include, but are not limited to:

- Royal Yachting Association (RYA),
- Powderham Estate,
- Paddle UK,
- Exmouth Marina Ltd.

Functions

- Provide feedback from the recreation, tourism, and business communities.
- Support development and implementation of codes of conduct.
- Promote safe, responsible, and sustainable estuary use.
- Identify opportunities for partnership working and events.
- Feed into communications, education, and visitor management work.
- Ensure economic and recreational perspectives are represented in decision making.

Governance and Reporting

Both sub-groups will:

- Appoint a Chair.
- Meet a minimum of once per year.
- Produce notes and recommendations for the main Partnership meetings.
- Support delivery of the objectives set out in the Partnership's Management Plan and annual action plan.



Forum

The Partnership organises and facilitates public forums focused on the Exe Estuary. These events are open to anyone with an interest in the estuary. These forums aim to encourage discussion and provide information on topical issues affecting the Estuary. They also serve as a platform for residents and stakeholders to engage with the work of the Partnership, voice concerns and discuss relevant estuary related topics. The forums may take the form of townhalls, workshops, online webinars, celebrations, festivals, and others (non-exhaustive list) and will be delivered on an ad hoc, by need basis throughout the year.

Purpose of the Forum

- **Facilitating Stakeholder Engagement**
To provide a neutral space for diverse groups to share knowledge, voice concerns, and contribute to decision making processes regarding estuary management.
- **Promoting Sustainable Management Practices**
By bringing together various stakeholders, the forum helps develop and implement strategies that balance environmental conservation with economic and social needs. This collaborative effort supports the sustainable use of estuarine resources.
- **Enhancing Public Awareness and Education**
Raising awareness about the ecological importance of estuaries, the challenges they face, and the actions individuals and communities can take to support their health and resilience.

By bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, the forum helps develop, promote, and implement strategies that balance environmental conservation with economic and social needs. This collaborative effort supports the sustainable use of estuarine resources.

Events of the Forum are organised by:

- The Marine, Estuaries and Coastal Officer
- The Marine, Estuaries and Coastal Support Officer
- Exe Estuary Management Partnership Chair
- The Executive and Partnership will be drawn on to contribute themes and topics to be shared at the forum

Chairing of the Forum

The Exe Estuary Management Partnership Chair will deliver chairing of the forum. While most Forum events do not require an official Chair, the Partnership Chair will lead and provide direction at designated events. Where Forum events take the form of forum or townhalls, the Chair's role will be vital to:



- Ensure the forum is productive, inclusive, and aligned with its environmental and community focused goals.
- Set the tone, manage discussions, and facilitate collaboration.
- Help organise the forum agenda, structure, and speaker line up, contributing to a coherent and engaging programme.
- Chair the event, opening and closing the forum, guiding discussions, and ensuring sessions run smoothly and on time.
- Promote the forum by supporting outreach efforts, encouraging diverse stakeholder participation, and acting as a visible advocate for the event and its purpose.
- Facilitate dialogue, ensuring a balanced and respectful exchange of views among all participants.
- Summarise key points and outcomes, reinforcing how the forum contributes to the estuary's long-term management and community engagement.