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## Affordable housing project wins prestigious award and is praised in the national press

An affordable housing scheme developed by Clinton Devon Estates and its partners has found itself in the national spotlight not once but twice.

First, the Greenway Lane project in Budleigh Salterton won a Gold WhatHouse? Award for the Estates along with family home builders Cavanna Homes and housing association Cornerstone. The scheme, also known as Horizon, was designed by LHC Architecture.

The project came about following a request from Budleigh Salterton Town Council to the Estates in 2009 asking if social and open-market homes could be built on the site, which at the time was given over to allotments for local people.

The WhatHouse? Judges, naming the project as the nation's best partnership scheme, said: "It has been a remarkable success – Cornerstone was involved early in the design process and the affordable housing (40% of the development) has been allocated mainly to young local families – a demographic that was previously priced out of the area. The private sale homes have been popular with a variety of buyers, including local downsizers.

**“**There are an impressive 14 house types among the 48 homes, all designed in the local vernacular to sit comfortably in the landscape (a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty); and the 56 allotments were replaced by 87 new ones. Perhaps Horizon's most enduring quality is the sense of how much each of the stakeholders really cared about its delivery and success, and it shows in the final product and the budding new community it is creating.”

Secondly, the development was highlighted as an exemplary project by RICS, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, which suggested that other estates across the country should follow Clinton Devon Estates' example in an effort to solve the nation's rural housing crisis.

The story was run by the Financial Times and the Independent, among other national titles.

Jeremy Blackburn, RICS Head of UK Policy, said: "We are urging landowners behind England's 5,000 largest rural

estates to release land for affordable housing. We would like to see local authorities work sympathetically with estate owners to encourage the release of land for eight or more affordable houses, based on long leaseholds, which would allow estates to retain long term interests.

"A similar scheme has been pioneered this year in East Devon, where Lord Clinton, the largest private landowner in the county, worked with Cornerstone Housing Association to develop 19 affordable homes in the town of Budleigh Salterton, made up of both rental and shared ownership properties."

RICS also spoke to the Estates' Head of Property and Land, Leigh Rix, who said: "To provide affordable housing for local people is an important step towards building sustainable communities.

"From the outset we worked with the Exeter-based housing association, Cornerstone, to provide the right mix of affordable homes – for rent and shared ownership – to enable young families to stay in Budleigh Salterton and allow this seaside town to thrive for generations to come."

## Young people rise to sailing challenge offered by foundation

Young people from Devon set sail on a confidence building adventure along the South coast thanks to a donation from Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust.

The group of 11 Teignmouth Sea Cadets, aged between 12 and 17, embarked on a return journey from Brixham in Devon to Fowey in Cornwall on a week-long sail training exercise, provided by the Trinity Sailing Foundation.

The training, which is funded by donations, is designed to challenge and motivate young people to help build self confidence, as well as contributing towards their Royal Yachting Association qualifications.

Two of the groups that have recently undergone sail training have benefited from a donation made by the charity's patron, Lord Clinton. The trust funded the voyages of the sea cadets and a group from a Devon-

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based adoption charity earlier in the summer. Upon arrival in Brixham, Charles Fane-Trefusis, son of Lord Clinton, greeted the young sea cadets to hear about their adventure.

Trinity Sailing Foundation Director Toby Russell said: "We are very grateful for the support we have received from Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust over the years. Donations are absolutely critical in keeping our sail training opportunities available for young people of all backgrounds and abilities, as many of the groups we provide sail training for would otherwise not be able to afford to take part."

The vessels used for Trinity's training are a fleet of Brixham-built trawlers dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Leader*, built in 1892, has been restored to its former glory by the charity, and has very minimal modern technology on board.

Speaking of his time spent on *Leader*, Sea Cadet Euan Crago, aged 14, said: "We were all friends at the beginning of this trip but having to work together, doing things like raising the sails and keeping below deck tidy has helped make our friendships stronger."

Lara Caine, who was the Skipper on *Leader* for the week said: "The sail training we provide aims to build self confidence in the kids. By taking them out of their comfort zone at the beginning of the week, they appreciate the support of their friends and crew members and realise they can do things they have never done before."

"It is so rewarding to see the change that happens from the beginning of the week to the end and we are so grateful to those that donate and keep these opportunities and vessels alive."

Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust, which is connected to the property and land management business Clinton Devon Estates, provides charitable support at a regional, national and international level, with preference given to Devon-based charities.

John Varley, Estates Director for Clinton Devon Estates and a Trustee of Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust, said: "Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust supports local or regional charities with a focus on developing and empowering young people. The Trinity Sailing Foundation not only meets these criteria but provides so much more."

"We are proud to support this charity which provides young people with a unique learning opportunity and also preserves a part of Devon's heritage, through the maintenance of Brixham's historic trawlers, which may otherwise be lost."

## Well-known family take over running of historic Devon mill

A well-known Exmouth family have become the new business tenants of East Devon's award-winning Otterton Mill, owned by Clinton Devon Estates.

Chris and Carol Wright whose family have operated Exmouth seafront's attractions for 40 years have taken

over the popular visitor destination from Simon and Caroline Spiller. The Wrights have pledged to continue to build on the success of the historic working watermill with its bakery, café-restaurant, local food shop, gift shop and gallery.

Chris Wright, who is also a Director of Exmouth Rugby Club, says that when he heard that Otterton Mill was to become available to a new business tenant he "jumped" at the chance.

"Having lived all of our lives in East Devon and brought up our family in Exmouth, we jumped at the opportunity to be part of the Mill's rich history," explained Chris.

 Carol said: "We will strive to continue offering the high quality product and experience that the Mill is so well known for. To help us achieve this, we are delighted that so many of the current team are staying with us for this exciting new chapter."

Chris and Carol had kept the news of their new business venture a secret from their five children until the new tenancy was signed. Chris said: "Our 10-year-old son Jonty had asked for some chickens for Christmas so I took him to the Mill and told him that the chickens he could see there were his Christmas present - AND that they came with the Mill!"

Chris added: "The whole family have always been very hands-on in our business and we are all looking forward to introducing ourselves to the visitors to Otterton Mill, both old and new."

The 1,000-year-old Mill, on the banks of the River Otter at Otterton, was restored in 1977 by Desna Greenhow, who became a miller herself producing the Mill's renowned wholemeal flour. Desna also created a centre for arts, crafts, education and entertainment, and began selling locally produced foods.

Desna's legacy flourished under Bob Butler and Claire Stein, followed by Caroline and Simon Spiller who took over the business in April 2008. Otterton Mill is now the most productive watermill in Devon and open to visitors throughout the year.

Clinton Devon Estates' Head of Property and Land, Leigh Rix said: "Over the past seven years the Spillers have worked hard to secure the Mill's reputation as one of East Devon's top visitor destinations."

"It has so much to offer in terms of its history, its location and the excellent, locally produced food and drink and with the Wright family in charge, we are confident that the next chapter of its rich heritage is in very safe hands."

Acting on behalf of Clinton Devon Estates, Malcolm Williams from Harrison-Lavers and Potbury's negotiated the new lease. He said: "There was a huge amount of interest in Otterton Mill but as soon as we met Chris and Carol Wright it was clear that their enthusiasm and business vision for the Mill would take it from strength to strength."

 For more details please visit [www.ottertonmill.com](http://www.ottertonmill.com)

## Estates need to innovate and invest, farms conference is told

Sustainable business is no longer just an ideal, it is real, Estates Director John Varley told the seventh Oxford Real Farming Conference.

Mr Varley, speaking as part of a discussion on big estates of the future, said: "The world has changed, so must estates. Estates need to develop long-term visions to address the challenges and opportunities derived from a new and complex paradigm.

"Consumers expect it, governments legislate it and the economy and environment need it. We need to be engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to build vision and strategy. We need to recognise, support and reward those that manage land sustainably, as well as the role of wider society.

"Rural estates should invest in education, developing land-based skills, supporting new entrants to farming; providing career paths across all the disciplines – from agriculture, property, forestry, conservation to finance and digital innovation. These are exciting careers and we should be showcasing them."

Mr Varley also emphasised that short-term economic success was never the main driver of estates, and that stewardship had been the watch-word for generations: "Rural estates should be setting standards, engaging with communities and policymakers on how to manage land and property sustainably."

Mr Varley reflected on the words of one of his predecessors, Robert Lipscomb, Steward of the Estate from 1865 to 1892, who said: *"...our power for good or evil in this world's affairs in a countryside is enormous. You may do much, very much, to make many hundreds of people of all grades prosperous and contented, or the reverse...And if you are a lover of nature as well as of your work; if every bird and beast of the field, every flower of the hedgerow, every change of the developing season, every geological change on your charge, and all that such a change brings with it, have an interest for you, and if your barometer, thermometer, and rain-gauge record have the same...how can your life ever be dull?"*

Other speakers at the conference, at Oxford Town Hall, included Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General of the National Trust, Guardian columnist George Monbiot, and Liz Bowles, head of farming at the Soil Association.

● The conference, on January 6 and 7, came just days after it was announced that Mr Varley had been awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours list. Mr Varley said: "It is an honour to be recognised in this way and I know this is also recognition of the tremendous efforts of a group of very special people.

"Since joining Clinton Devon Estates 15 years ago I have been privileged to be the Estate Director for Lord Clinton, his family and trustees, all of whom are personally committed to delivering a sustainable future for Devon's natural environment and local communities. I have also been very fortunate to work with an incredible team of dedicated professionals, completely focused on doing things better, innovating

and ensuring that we hand over to the next generation of people living and working in Devon, something even more valuable than we were given."

## Arena scoops top honours at eventing association awards

Bicton Arena scooped two prestigious honours at the Eventing Riders Association's annual awards with manager Helen West named Organiser of the Year for the second year in succession and her team winning the Social Media prize.

Last year Bicton Arena staged Devon's first international horse trials which proved a popular addition to the eventing calendar, with many well-known riders competing, including several who rode at the European Championships. Helen said: "The feedback we received following the event was very positive and it was wonderful to see so many well-known riders competing here."

Helen has previously represented Great Britain at Junior and Young Rider level and in 2015, riding Eebay, she won the high jump, jumping 6ft11ins at Blenheim International Horse Trials. Using her experience she has been able to develop events that are in line with the demands of today's competitive rider.

 Helen said: "The two international classes ran over courses which were separate from the novice and intermediate tracks. Often at competitions this is not the case, with the course virtually the same. I think the riders really appreciated this. The tracks were also educational and a lot of riders used Bicton as a stepping stone to Houghton International.

"We were praised for the dressage arenas and for staging the showjumping in our main arena which gave horses and riders the chance to compete in such a fantastic atmosphere."

Bicton Arena was also recognised for its effective use of social media and for having developed a large following. Helen said: "Becky Barratt and Gemma Cooke deserve special mention for this. We've found that social media is a very effective way of keeping competitors informed and it's fantastic that our efforts have been recognised."

There was more local success at the awards with Exeter's Miranda Collett named best event secretary of the year for her work at Bicton and Keith Watkins, who volunteers at both Bicton and Pontispool Equine Sports Centre, awarded Volunteer of the Year. Helen said: "It was a super evening and lovely that Bicton Arena was recognised in so many different ways. But Bicton Arena's success is very much down to the fantastic team we have who all work so hard to put the arena and Devon on the map. We are constantly evolving, and we constantly listen to what competitors want and that, we hope, encourages more people to head west to Devon."

Bicton Arena was also highly praised after hosting a Petplan Area Dressage Festival in September. The

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success of the event, the first of its kind to be run in Devon, was largely down to Gemma Cooke who organised it so efficiently.

"I really am so lucky to have such a strong team behind me, including Gemma and Beccy, and a loyal and hard-working bank of volunteers," said Helen.

You can follow Bicton Arena on [Facebook by clicking here](#) and catch up with the latest tweets [@BictonArena](#).

## Estates farmhouse features in new Sky Atlantic TV comedy

A thatched farmhouse in East Devon, owned by Clinton Devon Estates, will feature in a new comedy series to be broadcast on Sky Atlantic this spring.

The six-part series, called Robin's Test, has been written and directed by Bafta award winner Julia Davis and follows three couples on a camping trip to Dorset – although much of the filming actually took place in and around Budleigh Salterton. Production company Baby Cow contacted Clinton Devon Estates last year asking for a picturesque farmhouse with some land in East Devon to use as a location for filming and also as a base for all of their kit, props, make-up and green room.

Estate Surveyor Clare James said: "We had a farmhouse near Otterton that was vacant at the time so we were really pleased to be able to accommodate their request. The cast and crew – about 50 in total – were there for eight weeks last summer, filming at the farmhouse and the field alongside. Their visit extended right through to the end of September and proved to be a real boost to the local economy too. Not only did they stay in local accommodation and use local shops and restaurants, and they even hired boats and some local chickens!"

A spokesperson for the production company Baby Cow said: "The local business owners and residents were lovely to deal with, plus, we had the most stunning weather throughout. It was lovely, sunny and warm, and East Devon looked absolutely beautiful."



Robin's Test will air in early 2016. [Click here for more information on the show and its characters](#)

## Naturally, the best place to learn is upon the heath

By Dr Sam Bridgewater  
Nature Conservation Manager

Woodbury Castle's Iron Age builders chose its location well, for the views are commanding: to the east, the Otter Valley and the sea beyond; to the west Dartmoor across the Exe Estuary.

Now covered in majestic, ancient beech trees, Woodbury Castle has provided the stage for many historical dramas. It was here that our Iron Age

ancestors met to prepare for the burial of their nobility. Here that the 19th century commoners met to protect their ancient rights. Here that local villagers mustered in the 1970s to successfully protest against the building of a golf course across their beloved heaths. It seems only natural, therefore, that East Devon's annual celebration of the culture and wildlife of its most emotive landscape should be held under the shadow of its greatest archaeological site.

Taking place at the end of July, Heath Week has long been a popular fixture in East Devon's local calendar. From the headlining festival day with its collection of stalls and entertainments to the final evening ramble on closing night as the bats and Nightjars begin to stir, the event is an annual reminder of why East Devon's Pebblebed Heaths are so cherished. It is also a powerful recognition of the partnerships that are securing the heaths' future.

The Nightjar, Dartford Warbler and Southern Damselfly are iconic species whose abundance on the heaths and rarity elsewhere in Europe have helped them secure many international conservation designations, including Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area, as well as Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The bulk of East Devon's Pebblebed Heaths are owned by Clinton Devon Estates and have been managed since 2006 by its own conservation charity the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. However, although it may be the most important, the Estate is not the only hand that acts to protect this ecosystem: the local council, the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Natural England, local civic societies, wildlife agencies, recreational groups, the military and police all work together to protect it.

The [Otter Valley Association](#), for example, is a civic group which seeks to safeguard the heritage of the Otter Valley and its surroundings. Not afraid to challenge the Estate's approach to landscape management, it is a valued critical friend.

Taking a lead role in the clearance of invasive Himalayan balsam from the River Otter's tributaries whose origins lie on the heaths, the association also financially supports the transport costs of local schools, enabling them to participate in the Conservation Trust's annual outdoor education programme.

The association's contribution to 2015's Heath Week event programme was a guided tour of all of the commons which together cover more than 1,000 hectares and make up the Pebblebed Heaths.

Although often called 'Woodbury Common', the heaths are actually made up of seven commons, each associated with local parishes. We tend to think of common land as being open to all, and indeed, since the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, this has been the case. But the commoners of old would have fiercely protected the resources of their commons from others, so important was the land to their own survival.

Although the site is no longer a source of food and shelter to local people, its social value is undiminished, attracting walkers, cyclists and horse riders, with an estimated million visits annually.

The military have a long connection with the Pebblebed Heaths. Sir Walter Raleigh likely roamed East Budleigh Common as a boy, and the Estate archives are rich with historical photographs of encampments dating back to the Devon Yeomanry and the First World War. Today it is the Royal Marines who are associated with the Pebblebed Heaths, and they are an important conservation partner, acting as an informal policing presence.

Despite their heavy usage of the commons and the interest they attract, few members of the public ever have a chance to meet the Royal Marines face-to-face, so their offer to contribute a dedicated public day during Heath Week 2015 was eagerly accepted. Unsurprisingly, it formed one of the eventual highlights, with 1,000 people flooding to the Castle site to see them in action, learn more about their training programme, and try their hand at a range of activities including sniper observation, first aid, camouflage skills and assault courses.

Although the Estate and the Conservation Trust are responsible for the management of the core area of the heaths, the RSPB, the Devon Wildlife Trust and East Devon District Council own and care for smaller areas of the reserve. Pond dipping, bat walks, botany outings, willow weaving, roundhouse building, storytelling and tractor rides all featured as popular activities led by these organisations during the week.

Each of these partners plays an invaluable role in safeguarding their own part of the heaths, and yet the integrity of the site must work as a whole. The Estate's recent Space for Nature Report for the heaths has highlighted the conservation status of more than 3,000 species known to occur on the site. This important work was itself a partnership project drawing on data supplied by a broad range of organisations such as the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, special wildlife interest groups, academics and local amateur naturalists.

Every year the Nightjar walks are among the most eagerly anticipated events of the week. There is something magical about being on the heaths at dusk and hearing the churring of this elusive species. Nightjars thrive in areas of heathland associated with forests, and newly planted woodlands are favoured grounds for nesting. Dalditch Plantation is one site where this bird is thriving. Formerly a softwood timber plantation, the site has now been converted to heath in an example of the way the Conservation Trust and the Estate's Forest Department are working together.

For more than 2,000 years Woodbury Castle's structure has defined part of the East Devon skyline and evoked a local sense of identity.

For as long as this structure continues to withstand the elements, we hope that Heath Week will feature under the boughs of its trees, and continue to celebrate the partnerships past and present that have shaped and are conserving for future generations this most special landscape.

*The next Heath Week is from July 24 to 30, 2016*

## Managing beavers: the lessons we have learned so far

By Dr Sam Bridgewater

Nature Conservation Manager

Almost 12 months have passed since the start of the five-year trial which saw two families of beavers returned to the River Otter under license from Natural England.

The origins of the beavers remain unknown: they were either introduced illegally or escaped from captivity. Clinton Devon Estates is frequently being asked why we support the trial on our land.

"Surely, as a landowner you must be against this sort of thing," we are told, amid suggestions from those who oppose the trial that our actions are "insane" and "criminally cavalier."

It is true that when it became clear that a population of beavers was breeding on the River Otter, and we were approached by the Devon Wildlife Trust to become a partner in a proposed trial, that we had our concerns. The ecology of this long-absent native species and its impacts on the countryside was not part of our corporate knowledge.

 We were aware, however, of the polarised views of the "for" and "against" camps played out in the press throughout 2014. But we wanted to be properly informed, and our decisions had to be evidenced-based. The Estate has been steward of the Lower Otter valley for hundreds of years. Caring for the environment, including sites of national and European importance, is a core activity. If this species could be beneficial for the riverine environment, or indeed a nuisance to those who live and work alongside it, we wanted to know.

There is no shortage of literature or practical knowledge on the Eurasian beaver – it has been present and studied in Scotland for several decades, and is widespread across Europe after multiple reintroduction programmes over the last 100 years.

These are creatures with the capacity to dramatically transform landscapes for the better, and the potential to cause conflict. Many benefits are claimed for beavers: that they support a broad range of wildlife through the diversification of wetland habitats caused by their damming and tree-felling; that their dams can regulate rivers, maintaining base levels in times of drought and reducing peak flows in times of high rainfall; that their dams remove sediments caused by agricultural runoff, and absorb pollutants. The scientific evidence for these positive impacts does appear to be conclusive.

In the long-term, beavers might even provide cost-effective partial solutions to problems such as flooding and pollution.

But there are counter claims: that beavers can cause flooding; that they can block drainage ditches and undermine flood defences; that they fell trees of amenity importance; that their dams can impede

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migrating salmon and trout and that the fishes' spawning areas might be ruined by a build-up of silt.

There is evidence for this too, although the negative impacts cited for fish have to be weighed against the beneficial ones, such as the creation of better habitats, cleaner water and an increase in prey diversity and numbers.

So as a landowner, what should our position be? As an environmental organisation our belief was that scientific evidence suggests support. As a land management organisation with farming interests the evidence would suggest the opposite.

But we want those ecological benefits – and at the same time we want to continue to farm productively without fear of flood embankments being burrowed into and drainage ditches blocked. Is this possible? The answer, of course, is yes, but this depends on being able to manage beavers pragmatically should the need arise. For in the future, management they will surely need. It would be wonderful to believe that we could let beavers loose and allow them to live unhindered by human hand managing the riverine environment for us – probably better than we can do ourselves.

For the most part this is what is likely to happen: beavers doing what they do, largely unnoticed, without conflict. But the main lesson learnt from all other countries where they have been reintroduced is that a few will construct their dam or lodge in a place that will have negative impacts, and because of these few we will need a management strategy in place.

Unfortunately there is little faith among those who farm or manage land that as a country we are able to manage wildlife that causes conflict in a pragmatic manner. There is recognition that wildlife needs protection, but also a belief that licensing for protected species management can be costly and laborious. These views are coloured by experiences of dealing, or being unable to deal, with such species as badger.

So how might we embrace and protect the beaver and remove the fear factor? For ideas we need to look abroad where other countries have been addressing these same issues.

Bavaria is about the size of Scotland and home to about 20,000 beavers.

Its low-lying areas are agriculturally productive and suffer from periodic flooding. Many of the problems we may face in the future, they have already been tackling for decades – beavers were reintroduced in Bavaria in 1966. There are about 500 "conflict incidents" a year requiring attention. The Bavarian response was to develop a management system that respects the beaver's European Protected Species status (which doesn't yet apply in the UK), but allows swift and decisive management when required.

Broad 'class licenses' were developed allowing water management companies to act when, for example, a critical ditch was being blocked, and 'no-tolerance zones' apply to critical infrastructure such as sewage works or dykes. A network of trained volunteers quickly addresses conflict with landowners. They have even introduced compensation for those adversely impacted.

Not everyone may like beavers in Bavaria, but they are tolerated and their benefits appreciated, and the system appears to work. Which of these elements might we be able to apply here, if any? Answering this question is for us one of the key drivers of the trial, and a primary reason why we were keen to support it.

There needs to be dialogue between government, landowners, wildlife interests, the Environment Agency and water companies, and a critical analysis undertaken of how beavers might provide opportunities for habitat creation and improved natural water management.

Discussions are needed now while the beaver numbers are low and before any trial is complete.

Ultimately, our support for the River Otter Beaver Trial came from a belief that beavers have potential to deliver great environmental services, and that management is possible. Other countries have had the wit and insight to achieve it, so why not us?



We will continue to support the education and research aspects of the trial, but will make sure that the uncomfortable truth of beaver management is not kicked into the long grass. All partners, including the Devon Wildlife Trust, openly accept the need for beaver management in the future, and Natural England has already taken pre-emptive steps, formulating draft licenses that reconcile the needs of the species with those of land managers.

There are still thorny issues that need to be answered. Is compensation for beaver damage appropriate, for example? This would be an uncomfortable precedent that government would be likely to resist.

The truth of the matter is that most financial damage is likely to be small. In Bavaria more than 90% of beaver-related damage claims are less than 200 Euros. However, somebody will at some point be impacted significantly. Should those impacted be supported in such rare cases or not? Discussion and transparency is also required regarding who will pay for the long-term management of the beaver. In Bavaria, 50 years on from the initial reintroduction, management now costs many hundreds of thousands of pounds per year and is paid for by the public purse.

Would this model work in the UK? Quantifying the broader benefits of beavers in providing ecosystem services in the longer term will be critical in informing debate on this issue. The decision to fund beaver management in the future might indeed be very cost effective, but there must be honesty well in advance of when significant management will be needed about who will foot the bill.

● *Dr Sam Bridgewater has published more than 20 academic research papers, two books and numerous book chapters. He currently oversees the management of the [East Devon Pebblebed Heaths](#) and the [Otter Estuary](#).*