

Clinton Devon Estates appointed their first Countryside Learning Officer last month. Teacher Kate Ponting has recently taken-up the new role and will be delivering countryside learning activities to primary and secondary school pupils in East Devon, as well as engaging with community groups and the wider public on issues impacting on the countryside. The aim of the post is to stimulate broad debate on how the local landscape should be managed.

Kate's background is in outdoor and primary education. She taught for 13 years, has recently delivered events with Exeter based Fun Kitchen and is also a forest school practitioner.

"I am looking forward to getting out and listening to the views of local people. The more there is a two-way dialogue between those who manage the countryside and those who live on it, the more we can learn from each other. Engagement enables organisations like Clinton Devon Estates to understand the things that people living in the countryside value most, and for this to influence how we operate. We are keen to show what we can contribute to society.

The Estate's outreach work for many years has focussed mainly on wildlife and the management of Woodbury Common and the Otter Estuary. The Estate's conservation charity the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust hosted classes from local primary schools last summer, for example. The children looked at heathland ecology and how the local wildlife is managed. They learned to identify tree species and recognise some of the heathland's rare species. Kate's appointment will allow the Estate to expand this important work to include other aspects of landscape management, including dairy farming, forestry, the provision of local homes and the production of renewable energy.

"Reconciling the many different demands we place on our countryside can be difficult. I am passionate about giving others the opportunity to explore and interpret the countryside around them. I believe we need to recognise it as a living landscape where local people work extremely hard to provide something that meets all of society's needs into the future. The challenge is to do this whilst safeguarding the beauty and wildlife of our special part of Devon."

Kate hopes to provide those in Otterton with regular updates on what is happening locally on the Estate through the year. She is happy to discuss working with your school or community group. To contact her please email kate.ponting@clintondevon.com