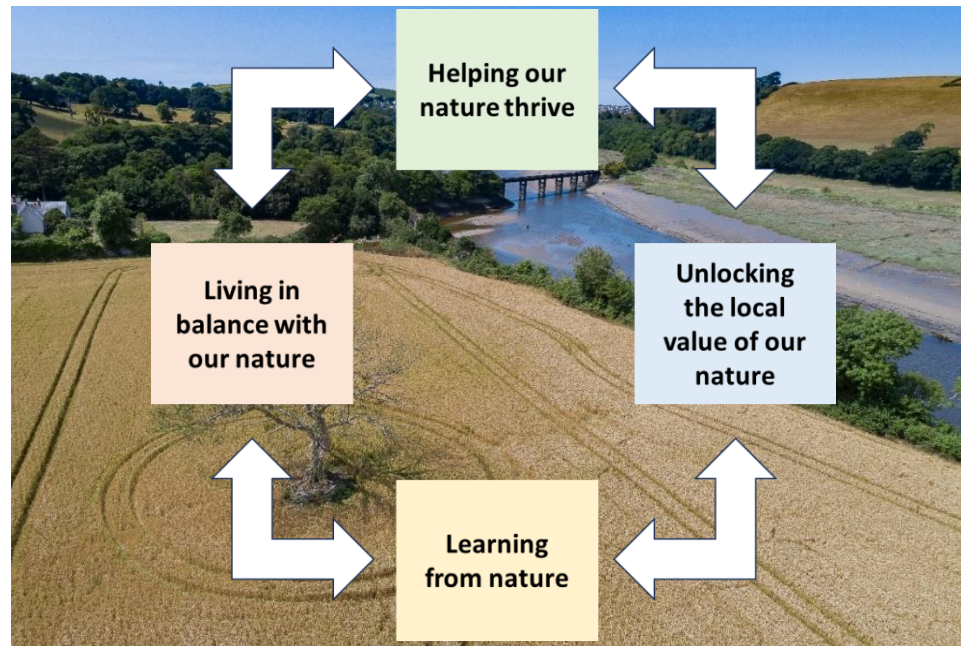


# North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Strategy: September 2025 to September 2035 [Draft for consultation]

*Living up to world class by nature*



Developed by the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Partnership

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## Preamble

This document is a consultation draft and is deliberately aspirational to set the high ambitions of the Partnership reflecting the sustainable development needs in the area. The consultation phase is an opportunity for partners, authorities and members of the community to fine tune the aspirations.

## Introduction

### What is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve?

A biosphere reserve is an area that has been recognised for its unique mix of plants and animals, valued environment and sustainable way of life of the people who live and work within this area. Biosphere reserves are designated by the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and rely on local cooperation to ensure the careful management of the resources within biosphere reserves that allow development without harming the area for future generations.

Key Functions of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve:

1. **Conservation:** Protects biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes.
2. **Development:** Encourages sustainable economic and human development.
3. **Logistic Support:** Facilitates research, monitoring, education, and information exchange.

Biospheres serve as “living laboratories” for testing and demonstrating integrated management of land, water, and biodiversity. The idea is to find innovative ways to live and work sustainably while preserving and restoring the natural environment which helps communities, local stakeholders and government gain an increased awareness of environmental and development issues and share the lessons with the rest of the world.

## About this Strategy

This strategy marks the beginning of a bold new chapter for the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere. As our third 10-year strategy, it builds on two decades of progress and learning, setting out a clear and ambitious vision for Northern Devon as a global hub for sustainable development innovation. The timing of this strategy aligns with our required 10 year progress report to UNESCO.

Our strapline for the next decade – ‘living up to world class by nature’, reflects both the exceptional natural assets of our region, many of which require our support to recover and flourish to their full potential, and our commitment to harnessing them and enabling communities to thrive alongside them. We’ll achieve this through pioneering approaches, collaborative action, and looking at the big picture to understand and share how various parts of the environment interact and influence each other.

This Strategy is intended to inspire you as the reader and the people and organisations across Northern Devon and beyond. It provides a framework for extraordinary programmes and projects, rooted in the belief that innovation, creativity, and collective effort can deliver lasting change for our environment, communities, and economy.

We have deliberately been specific about the outputs and outcomes the Partnership aims to achieve. Each of the 19 targets, organised under four strategic themes, is supported by success metrics, key performance indicators, and milestones at years 1, 3, and 5. This clarity ensures that the Partnership can be held to account – by the public of Northern Devon and by UNESCO – for the progress we make.

Yet, we hope this accountability is embraced in the spirit in which the strategy is written: one that celebrates innovation and risk-taking, where the learning and evolution of our activities are valued as highly as the results themselves.

Delivery will be driven by our Partnership of 36 organisations, working together through seven themed working groups, yet the success of this Plan relies on everybody in Northern Devon playing their part – doing what they can. The Biosphere Foundation, a charitable organisation, will play a central enabling role, helping to convene, support, and amplify the efforts of all involved.

Together, we are setting out to prove that Northern Devon can lead the way in shaping a future that is not only sustainable, but truly world class – by nature.

# North Devon UNESCO Biosphere: Summary of 10-year strategy 2025-2035 Targets



## Helping our nature thrive

1. 50% of land managed in nature friendly way & 30% covered in healthy semi-natural habitats
2. 50% of river waterbodies at 'good' ecological status & none at 'poor'
3. Woodland cover increased to 17%
4. 10,000 hectares of marine priority habitats in recovery
5. 10 previously threatened locally important species achieving sustainable populations



## Living in balance with our nature

6. Biosphere area can account for and is significantly reducing net carbon footprint to 40% of the 2010 levels
7. Impact of extreme climate change events reduced by 10%
8. Number of cultural events (& participation) on nature increased by 50%
9. 10,000 people per year engaging in nature positive activities



### **Unlocking the local value of our nature**

10. £1 million per year in local revenue from nature positive activities driven by the Biosphere
11. 20% increase in time spent in nature by residents & track health impacts
12. More than 90% of visitors cite nature as key reason for visiting
13. Consumption of locally grown food increased by 20%
14. Awareness of the Biosphere & its mission increased to >80% in visitors and residents



### **Learning from nature**

15. Biosphere Science Centre established & attracting > 50,000 visitors per year
16. Environmental intelligence system built & used by > 10,000 people
17. Systematic monitoring & reporting of 30 public chosen species
18. Biosphere established as living lab for nature; at least 20 projects of national significance
19. Working with > 50 education providers or community groups on nature and climate education

## About the North Devon Biosphere?



### The Place

The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere was the first new style biosphere reserve in the UK and covers over 5000 square kilometres of land and sea. It has the purpose of to “create a better future by linking people and nature today”.

### What Makes It Special?

**Core Area:** At its heart is Braunton Burrows, the largest sand dune system in England, rich in rare plants and wildlife. More core areas that reflect variety of rich biodiversity in the area are being investigated.

**Buffer Zone:** Surrounding areas include parts of Exmoor and Dartmoor, Atlantic oak woodlands, culm

grasslands, and the Taw-Torridge estuary, which are vital for biodiversity and migratory birds.

**Marine Zone:** Extends into the sea to 12 nautical miles enveloping Lundy Island, a hotspot for marine biodiversity and the UK’s first Marine Conservation Zone.

## **Our Achievements**

Our previous strategy helped to coordinate the delivery of a very diverse and impactful range of programmes and projects. Partnership achievements include:

### **Nature recovery and habitat enhancement**

- Nature Recovery Plan designed and under implementation with a 2030 Vision
- Over 300 hectares of priority habitats restored or newly created, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience
- 14 hectares of Community Woodland established, providing green space, carbon sequestration, and community engagement opportunities
- More than 100 km of river frontage improved, contributing to better water quality, riparian habitat, and flood resilience, also resulting in water quality elemental improvements in 3 streams.
- Over 500 landowners supported with sustainable land management advice and funding access, fostering landscape-scale environmental stewardship
- Dramatic breeding seabird recovery on Lundy; beavers returning to the River Taw.

### **Marine and coastal innovation**

- 4 Marine Conservation Zones designated, protecting vital marine ecosystems and species
- UK's first World Surfing Reserve established, safeguarding surf heritage and promoting sustainable coastal tourism.
- Lead partner in the £5M Blue Communities Programme, supporting sustainable marine planning and conservation in Southeast Asia through the Global Challenges Research Fund to both advise and learn from the collaboration.

### **Policy influence and national leadership**

- Pioneered environmental policy development through participation in Defra’s Nature Improvement Area scheme, Environmental Land Management Scheme Test & Trials, and the Marine and Landscape Pioneer Programmes—informing the current UK environmental land management schemes
- Influenced strategic planning through active input into the Joint Local Plan for Torridge and North Devon, embedding nature recovery and climate resilience into the planning policies, development and green infrastructure including the delivery of biodiversity net gain in advance of national adoption.
- Contributed to the UNESCO Shared Outcomes Project, driving policy innovation at the intersection of climate, health, and biodiversity resulting in development of shared datasets to support decision-making and methods of working with policy and decision makers to build in interdisciplinary policy.

### **Sustainable economy and tourism**

- 6 sustainable tourism products developed, supporting low-impact visitor experiences and local economic growth, such as new experiences in foraging or rural skills.
- Key partner in the South West Partnership for Environmental and Economic Prosperity programme, leveraging academic research from the University of Exeter, University of Plymouth, and Plymouth Marine Laboratory to help people understand and value nature’s benefits—like clean air, water, and biodiversity—in decision-making and create practical tools like wave forecasting models and habitat mapping systems to support planning and conservation.
- Biosphere Business Partner scheme that supports small businesses to become more sustainable and recognised with our brand.

### **Culture, community and engagement**

- Strong environmental strand embedded in the North Devon and Torridge Joint Cultural Strategy, with new events and initiatives celebrating local identity and nature and challenge conventional narratives around climate change to provoke thought and inspire action

- Community participation embedded across projects, from woodland creation to citizen science, strengthening local ownership and engagement with nature

### **Innovation and natural capital investment**

- SMART Biosphere data platform launched, deploying over 60 environmental sensors to monitor water quality and inform land management decisions, habitat creation (e.g. salt marshes, ponds and woodland) and farming advice to improve biodiversity and water quality.
- Secured investment in natural flood management, delivering multiple Environment Agency-funded projects to reduce flood risk and improve biodiversity.

In a time of rapid policy change, the Partnership has responded national initiatives like the Landscape and Marine Pioneers, which support the government's Environment Improvement Plan. It has also stayed ahead of international developments, including the Global Biodiversity Framework from the Convention on Biological Diversity, to which the UK is a signatory. These efforts have sharpened the Partnership's focus, leading to key initiatives such as the Natural Capital Approach and the Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan, The Marine Natural Capital Plan, Marine Nature recovery Plan, Woodland Policy and the Catchment Management Plan. These active plans are the bedrock of this new strategy, which builds on their ambition to cover the next 10 years. This strategy also aligns with recent strategies created by partners, including those through North Devon Futures and the local authorities.

### **Our Vision for the Biosphere**

*A thriving, resilient landscape where nature and people flourish together. The Biosphere is globally recognised and locally cherished, driving behaviour that restores habitats, supports sustainable livelihoods, maintains their well-being and safeguards clean water, rich biodiversity, and climate resilience from moorland to sea.*

### **Our Mission:**

*To make the North Devon Biosphere a globally recognised model for sustainable living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through directing growth that creates a bright future for our residents and visitors of all ages in line with our vision and supports peace through international collaboration.*

## Our Targets and how we will get there



### Helping our nature thrive

Target 3 from the Global Biodiversity Framework (agreed internationally through the Convention on Biological Diversity) asks countries to protect 30% of the planet by 2030. Protection doesn't just mean legal designations like a Site of Special Scientific Interest - it can also include long-term agreements that help safeguard biodiversity.

The framework also encourages that the remaining 70% of land should be managed in a more nature-friendly way, reducing activities that harm wildlife and ecosystems. However, this part of the goal might not be fully achieved by 2030 in Northern Devon, so a slightly lower target (Target 1) is used in this strategy.

These goals are reflected in the Biosphere's Nature Recovery Plan, which has five chapters covering all major land-based habitats rich in wildlife.

#### **Biodiversity and land-use**

According to Natural England's mapping, 19% of land in the area is identified as Priority Habitat, although we don't yet know how healthy these habitats are.

Our efforts to meet these targets will be supported by the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the UK Government's Land Use Framework.

**Target 1: 50% of land managed in nature friendly way & 30 % covered in healthy semi-natural habitats**

Long-term ambition	Become nature recovery region, with > 70% of land managed regeneratively, & connected mosaic of thriving semi-natural habitats
10-year target	50% of land managed in nature friendly way & 30% covered in healthy semi-natural habitats
Headline metrics	(1) % of land managed in nature friendly way (2) % of land covered in healthy semi-natural habitats
Other KPIs	(3) % of land under agri-environment or regenerative farming schemes. (4) area (ha) of restored, created or reconnected priority habitats (peatland, grassland, heaths, wetland, broadleaved woodland including temperate rainforest)
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Define & publish criteria for 'nature-friendly management' & 'healthy semi-natural habitats' - Update the Nature Recovery Plan with new 10 year targets
Year 3 milestones	- 2 large-scale new projects underway
Year 5 milestones	- Additional large-scale project added - Demonstrable progress against all KPIs

Policies to assist reaching the target include:

- Planning authorities should explore the opportunities for increasing the current requirement<sup>1</sup> of 10% biodiversity net gain in qualifying developments, with the aspiration of delivering 20% biodiversity net gain through the next joint Local Plan
- Continued collaboration with Defra to ensure the Environmental Land Management Scheme delivers these outcomes.

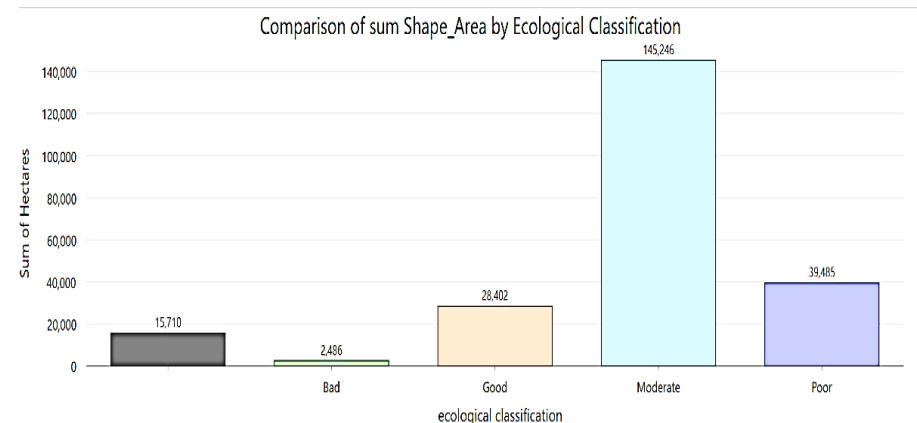
## Rivers and Waterbodies

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<sup>1</sup> as set out in the Biodiversity Net Gain regulations

Water quality is one of the most important issues of community concern in the Biosphere. The Water Environment Regulations 2017 (Water Framework Directive) classifications show 84% of the water bodies by number and 80% by area are in poor/moderate ecological condition in the 2022 assessment of river waterbody health.

Ecological status or potential	Bad	Poor	Moderate	Good	High	Total
Number of water bodies	0	17	66	15	0	98
Number of water body elements (the range of parameters that determine health of the rivers)	2	27	121	109	619	878



We need clean and plentiful water for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy our rivers, including more water held back in the upper catchments to improve river flows and reduce flooding. Over the last 20 years partners such as the Westcountry Rivers Trust, the Devon Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, the National Trust and the Biosphere team have worked together to improve water quality and reconnect rivers to their flood plains to ‘slow the flow’ and hold precious water within the catchments during droughts. Their efforts have achieved good results, including better conditions of a few rivers and streams such as reduction in phosphate in the Bradwell and Upper Caen rivers. However, much more needs to be done. We need to step up our efforts and find new ways to work with those causing pollution, so we can make a big difference across many more water bodies.

The data shows that many of the factors (known as parameters) used to assess water quality are already rated as high. This suggests that if we focus on just a few key problem areas, we could significantly improve the overall water classification.



<b>Target 2: 50% of river waterbodies at 'good' ecological status &amp; none at 'poor'</b>	
Long-term ambition	All rivers & waterbodies ecologically healthy, & resilient to abstraction, pollution & climate pressures
10-year target	50% of river waterbodies at 'good' status & none at 'poor' or 'bad'

Headline metric	(1) % of river waterbodies achieving 'good' or better ecological status under the Water Framework Directive, and % at 'poor' status
Other KPIs	(2) Number of waterbodies improved from 'moderate' or 'poor' to 'good' status (3) Number of waterbodies with active restoration or natural flood management projects
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Identify all river waterbodies at 'poor' status & make a plan - Identify which river waterbodies can be improved to 'good' & make a plan - Identify the rivers at risk of deterioration from good or moderate - Develop a public-facing 'My Biosphere Rivers' dashboard to track progress
Year 3 milestones	- Programmes & funding in place for all identified waterbodies
Year 5 milestones	- Demonstrable progress in all identified river waterbodies

Policies to assist reaching the target include:

- Data from all sources about the state of the rivers should be made public and updated at least monthly.
- Local Authorities should explore through planning obligations mechanisms to help improve water quality and hold more water in the upper catchments.
- Foster strong collaboration with the new water regulator and cooperation with South West Water.

## Woodlands

Woodlands in the area offer a big opportunity - not just for wildlife, but also to help reduce flooding, improve water quality, support the local economy, make the landscape more attractive and storing carbon.

Currently, 11.8% of Biosphere land is covered by woodland, with another 5.8% covered by tall trees outside of woodlands. Target 3 in this strategy focuses specifically on increasing woodland cover, including both conservation woodlands and productive ones. There's a special aim to grow more woodland that could become temperate rainforest, which is rare and valuable.

Only about half of the woodlands are actively managed, meaning many are in poor condition and slowly degrading - especially small farm woodlands and those on steep slopes.

Out of 5,400 hectares of ancient woodland, 2,500 hectares are plantations on ancient woodland sites. These should be encouraged to return to more natural woodland, and where possible, to temperate rainforest. Well managed hedgerows are also an important feature of the Biosphere.

To make this happen, in addition to strong incentives for woodland creation we need to build up local skills and capacity - through training, better access to equipment, and support for local wood processing.

<b>Target 3: Woodland cover increased to 17%</b>	
Long-term ambition	Home to a resilient, connected & biodiverse woodland network
10-year target	Woodland cover increased to 17% (with wood pasture, agroforestry and other canopy cover reaching a total canopy cover of 22%)
Headline metric	(1) % of total land area under woodland cover
Other KPIs	(2) Area (ha) of new woodland created (by type: native, mixed, agroforestry, etc.) (3) % of woodland in active management for biodiversity or sustainable use (4) Length of hedgerows and % of hedgerow allowed to have extended growth
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Publish strategy to get to 10-year target, including 'Woodland Enterprise Zone'
Year 3 milestones	- 2 large-scale projects underway
Year 5 milestones	- Additional large-scale project added - Demonstrable progress against all KPIs

Policies to support this work include:

- Local Planning Authorities will welcome appropriate applications to improve operational access into woodlands to improve their management.
- Forest management should focus on keeping tree cover continuous and encouraging natural changes in habitats. Clear felling (removing all trees from an area) should be discouraged.
- Canopy cover in towns should be increased to improve cooling and pollution capture for urban dwellers.

## **Marine**

Half of the Biosphere Reserve is at sea, covering over 2,200 square kilometres. In the past 10 years, we've helped set up four Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to add to the long-standing and much-loved marine reserve at Lundy. The Taw Torridge estuary is an important international stopping off point for migratory waders and wildfowl, but it is challenged by some intense and conflicting uses and has a heavily modified shoreline, that limits its natural response to sea level rise leading to squeezing out the important intertidal habitats.

A review by WWF in 2018 (as part of the Marine Pioneer programme) recommended that £750,000 a year should be invested in marine conservation here to meet good standards for managing protected marine areas.

Although we're still building up scientific knowledge and data about the health of our marine environment, we already know that global changes - like climate change and plastic pollution - are putting pressure on it.

We now have a Marine Nature Recovery Programme that aims to improve the MCZs beyond just the specific features they were originally set up to protect.

Our goal is to have healthy, clean, and productive seas, where sustainable activities like renewable energy, aquaculture, and a viable local fishing industry can thrive alongside nature. This will help coastal communities - both people and wildlife - become more resilient.

We also need to plan carefully for other activities happening in our marine area and work together to agree on what will help nature and reduce our impact - especially when it comes to things like aquaculture and marine renewable energy.

**Target 4: 10,000 hectares of marine priority habitats in recovery**

Long-term ambition	All marine priority habitats in a state of recovery or resilience, supporting rich biodiversity, sustainable fisheries & coastal communities that are stewards of a healthy marine environment
10-year target	10,000 hectares of marine priority habitats in recovery, 40 Ha of new intertidal habitat in the estuary and a further 100 Ha of grazing marsh
Headline metric	(1) Hectares of marine priority habitats in recovery
Other KPIs	(2) Hectares of marine area with active habitat restoration (3) Hectares of marine area subject to lower pressure due to sustainably managed fisheries
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Publish strategy to get to 10-year target - Identify priority areas for habitat restoration
Year 3 milestones	- 2 pilot projects underway
Year 5 milestones	- 1 large-scale project underway - Demonstrable progress against all KPIs

Policies that will support the achievement of this target include:

- Adopt an integrated impact assessment methodology to account for potential impacts on the marine environment of proposed developments in a source to sea approach.
- Develop a more spatially defined approach that will enable compensation and support through a marine recovery fund
- Secure funding to support the management of all the Marine Sites in the Biosphere
- Support proposals for a greater emphasis on local fisheries management governance in the area to reduce over exploitation.
- Safeguard water front sites from uses that do not specifically need access to the sea or estuary

## Species Conservation

The Biosphere is home to some very special species; species found nowhere else in the world (termed ‘endemic species’), such as those found on Lundy (the Lundy Cabbage and the Lundy Cabbage Beetle) or the Yelland yellow-striped bear spider. We host several rare or threatened species such as the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, the Clovelly Herring (recently determined as genetically distinct from other herring species in the Bristol Channel area) and the Water Germander. The Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy has indicated 100 species special to the County and the Biosphere’s own Nature Recovery Group has highlighted those found within the Biosphere. These include but not restricted to Yelland yellow bear spider, pied flycatcher, willow tit, wavy St Johns Wort and the freshwater pearl mussel.

Protecting endemic and special species is important because they are unique to the area - if they disappear, they’re lost forever. These species play vital roles in their ecosystems, helping to keep nature in balance. Their presence often signals a healthy environment, and their loss can be an early warning of wider problems. Many also have cultural, scientific, or economic value, offering insights into biodiversity and supporting eco-tourism or local livelihoods. By looking after these species, we help protect the wider natural world and the communities that depend on it. We also seek to re-introduce species that have been lost from the area, these include beaver, pine marten, white stork, water vole, white trailed eagle and chough.

<b>Target 5: Ten locally important species that were once at risk now have stable, sustainable populations.</b>	
Long-term ambition	All locally important species of conservation concern are thriving in connected, climate-resilient habitats
10-year target	10 previously threatened locally important species with sustainable populations
Headline metric	(1) Number of previously threatened locally important species with demonstrable sustainable populations
Other KPIs	(2) Population trends of target species (e.g. breeding success, abundance, range) (3) Number of species-specific recovery plans implemented
Year 1 milestones	- Identify & agree on 10 priority species (in consultation with experts & communities)
Year 3 milestones	- Complete baseline population assessments & habitat condition surveys - Begin development of species-specific recovery plans for at least 3 species and 2 implementation projects started
Year 5 milestones	- Species-specific recovery plans and implementation measures in place for all 10 chosen species



## Living in balance with our nature

Climate change is a threat to the wildlife and the people in the area. Impacts of rising temperatures, hotter and drier summers and milder wetter winters, increased frequency and severity of storms, and increased frequency of heatwaves will compromise the ability of certain species to survive. Furthermore, the rate of sea level rise is increasing and therefore coastal erosion and flooding will also accelerate. Addressing the climate emergency requires adaptation for those changes that are coming as well as mitigation to reduce the greenhouse gases being emitted that are driving the changes such as land-use, transport and domestic energy use. As a demonstration area, the challenge is to show how we can reach net zero - which means balancing the greenhouse gases we produce with actions that remove the same amount from the atmosphere - while still supporting and improving the local economy and community wellbeing. The Biosphere will deliver a subset of the Devon Carbon Plan and likewise the Regional Strategic Energy Plan. In the past, through the sustainable energy action plan, the need urgent need to address fuel poverty was identified through improving the energy performance of homes. This was shown to be problematic due to technical issues, planning issues in older buildings and the cost that have deterred uptake by house owners.

Along with this change, we must celebrate our culture and how that essence of northern Devon is a key ingredient to our success of thriving in the future. The Flourishing Futures cultural strategy sets out how we must use culture to secure a better future through using activities and practices that speak to the hearts as well as minds of people.

### Climate change mitigation

Target 6: Biosphere can account for & is significantly reducing net carbon footprint	
Long-term ambition	Biosphere becomes net carbon negative
10-year target	Biosphere can account for & is significantly reducing net carbon footprint to 40% of the 2010 levels
Headline metric	(1) Annual net carbon footprint of Biosphere (total emissions minus sequestration), tracked in tonnes of CO <sub>2</sub> e
Other KPIs	(2) Number of households, schools & businesses (including farms) reporting carbon emissions Emissions from the 5 main sources

	(3) % of energy used that is renewable (4) Total carbon sequestered through land use, forestry & marine habitats (5) Extent of carbon stocks
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Publish strategy to get to 10-year target - Develop platform for households, schools & businesses to report their carbon emissions
Year 3 milestones	- 1 large-scale project underway
Year 5 milestones	- Additional large-scale project added - Demonstrable progress against all KPIs

Policies that will support this include;

- LPAs will develop and adopt a sustainable energy action plan that indicates the renewable energy that can be installed in the region and still safeguard the natural environment.
- The Biosphere Partnership and the LPAs will prioritise a programme of nature-based carbon-rich habitat restoration also recognised in local planning policies such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the application of Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Review and adjust planning guidance and policies for easier retrofit of energy conservation measures to homes.
- Soil conservation and measures to reduce emissions from livestock

### **Climate Adaptation**

Flood risk to communities will increase along with the impacts of heat waves and droughts; the risk will be demonstrated in increased severity and frequency of such events and insecure water supply in dry periods. Over the last 10 years the biosphere partnership has been piloting flood risk reduction projects that use nature-based solutions (e.g. trees, leaky dams, ponds and the benefits provided by beavers) rather than concrete. These types of solutions will become more commonplace in the future because they are often cheaper, help nature recover and are more long-lasting. However, they're still quite new, and we need to learn more about how to fund and maintain them over time. The Biosphere will continue to be a place where we test these ideas and share what we learn.

<b>Target 7: Impact of extreme climate events reduced by 10%</b>	
Long-term ambition	Climate-resilient region where communities, infrastructure & ecosystems are adapted to withstand extreme weather events, with minimal disruption, economic loss or harm to people & nature
10-year target	Impact of extreme climate events reduced by 10%
Headline metric	(1) % reduction in the economic, social & environmental impact of extreme climate events (e.g. flooding, drought, heatwaves), compared to baseline
Other KPIs	(2) Number & % of high-risk areas with nature-based solutions in place (3) Number of community alert networks operational
Year 1 milestones	- Conduct baseline assessment of recent extreme weather events & their impacts - Identify & prioritise 3–5 high-risk areas for early intervention
Year 3 milestones	- Launch more pilot projects using nature-based solutions for flood or heat mitigation - 25% of high-risk communities have plans in place
Year 5 milestones	- Measurable progress toward 10% impact reduction target

Polices that will assist this include:

- A proportion (10%) of flood risk investment to include nature based solutions as well as engineered solutions
- LPAs should explore polices that would seek development proposals to build better capacity into sustainable urban drainage schemes as a default in planning from a 20% (1 in 5 yr) event level to a 5% (1 in 20 yr) level event for water volume attenuation.
- Facilitating the development and consents for nature first solutions (including re-introduction of beavers)

**Culture as an essence that joins us**

The joint North Devon and Torridge cultural strategy, Flourishing Futures, sets out how the future of the area is closely linked with our environment. Working with youth theatre, international artists, and hosting thought-provoking events can help people see the area in a new light. This will help build a lively and creative local industry that benefits everyone.

<b>Target 8: Number of cultural events (&amp; participation) on nature increased by 50%</b>	
Long-term ambition	Nature embedded in cultural identity, with thriving year-round programme of events, festivals & creativity
10-year target	Number of cultural events (& participation) on nature increased by 50%
Headline metric	(1) % increase in the Number of cultural events explicitly themed around nature, compared to baseline
Other KPIs	(2) Total Number of attendees at these events
Year 1 milestones	- Baseline mapping of existing nature-themed cultural events and participation level
Year 3 milestones	- Launch a small grants scheme to support 5 pilot events or creative commissions
Year 5 milestones	- First 'My Biosphere Festival' piloted in partnership with local venues and communities

### **Linking people and nature**

Helping people understand and appreciate biodiversity is key to gaining public support for restoring nature. One way to do this is by encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors and increase their awareness of the nature around them - whether that's in their local green spaces or exploring the wilder parts of the Biosphere Reserve. Before COVID, visits to natural areas were steadily increasing, according to national surveys (Natural England's MENE database). After COVID, the number of visits rose even more, and people showed stronger environmental attitudes and behaviours. However, not everyone has the same access to nature - some communities face barriers. That's why the Biosphere Communities project is working with eight local communities to support nature-based action. This work also links closely with the Wild About Devon initiative. There is a strong body of evidence that connecting with nature is good for people's health and wellbeing.

<b>Target 9: 10,000 people per year engaging in nature positive activities</b>	
Long-term ambition	Nature positive living becomes the norm in the Biosphere

10-year target	10,000 people per year engaging in nature positive activities
Headline metric	(1) Number of individual people per year engaging in nature positive activities
Other KPIs	(2) Number of unique school-age people per year engaging in nature positive activities (3) Number of events/activities organised in conjunction with the Biosphere
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Publish online calendar of events across Biosphere partners - Publish strategy to increase participation in nature positive activities in the Biosphere - Publish strategy to significantly increase participation by younger people
Year 3 milestones	- 2,500 people per year engaging in nature positive activities
Year 5 milestones	- 5,000 people per year engaging in nature positive activities

Policies that will assist this include:

- Ensure that communities have easy access to good quality natural greenspace from where they live.



## Unlocking the local value of our nature

The Biosphere has huge potential to generate and support innovation, high quality employment and sustainable economic growth. Through our work in the Marine and Landscape Pioneer programmes, the Biosphere Partnership helped shape the national Environment Improvement Plan. In these projects, we developed new ways to show how protecting and improving natural capital - which includes things like clean air, water, soil, wildlife, and landscapes - can support the local economy. These approaches offer a better alternative to developments that harm the environment, by showing that nature-friendly solutions can also bring long-term economic benefits. Examples currently being explored include aquaculture and the processing of the products for local use and consumption. The need for food security but using production systems and local supply chains is becoming an imperative for the Biosphere Partnership.

### Increasing the natural economy

Target 10: £1 million per year in local revenue from nature positive activities driven by the Biosphere partnership	
Long-term ambition	Nature becomes the largest sector, with >£100 million per year in local revenue from nature positive activities
10-year target	£1m per year in local revenue from nature positive activities driven by the Biosphere partnership
Headline metric	(1) Local revenue from nature positive activities driven by the Biosphere
Other KPIs	(2) Farm / landowner revenue from nature positive activities (3) Eco-tourism revenue (4) Sustainable marine & maritime revenue
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Establish methodology for what revenue to count; establish system to collect revenue data - Publish strategy to get to 10-year target - Resource and re-launch Biosphere Business Partners scheme & Biosphere nature tourism scheme

Year 3 milestones	- Trend of increasing revenue from nature positive activities
Year 5 milestones	- £400,000 per year in local revenue from nature positive activities

Evidence shows that having access to biodiversity, hearing birdsong and having nature positive lifestyle improves mental and physical wellbeing. Not only that, it improves people’s attitudes and behaviours towards the environment. Improving access to nature on people’s doorsteps and supporting people to access the countryside and coast, especially if targeted to deprived areas, will boost health. The Devon Local Nature Partnership’s Naturally Healthy initiative will be supported by the Biosphere Partnership to expand its activities and integrate policies to ensure that a win-win for biodiversity and human well-being is achieved. It will support the emerging NHS strategies of disease prevention and whole life improvement and initiatives such as Active Travel to boost cycling and walking, but especially through nature friendly routes.

### Reducing public costs through access to nature

<b>Target 11: 20% increase in time spent in nature by residents &amp; track health impacts</b>	
Long-term ambition	Better mental & physical health by virtue of living in the Biosphere
10-year target	20% increase in time spent in nature by residents & track health impacts
Headline metric	(1) % increase in average time spent in nature per resident per week, compared to baseline
Other KPIs	(2) % of residents reporting improved wellbeing linked to time in nature (3) % of residents with regular access to nature within 10 min of home (4) Number of nature-based health programmes or social prescribing initiatives (5) Reduction in local indicators of poor mental health or inactivity
Year 1 milestones	- Publish a methodology to track (a) time spent in nature & (b) health impacts - Identify & promote areas for nature
Year 3 milestones	- Develop (with health organisations) a Nature & Health Framework - Pilot 2–3 nature-based health programmes

Year 5 milestones	- 1,000+ residents participating in nature-based health programmes
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Policies that will help deliver this:

- Support the creation of nature hubs within developments and communities as sites of quality biodiversity value for the residents to enjoy
- Support the expansion of the sustainable active travel networks through green infrastructure areas
- Expansion and support for green prescribing as a means to help restore people’s health
- Developers should consider integrated biodiversity, health and climate proofing in the design of new developments with a view to making communities more resilient and better places to live. The LPAs should explore opportunities to introduce policy and guidance that seeks to require such matters to be addressed through development proposals.

**Green and Sustainable Tourism**

Tourism has long been a big part of the local economy. Since 1998, visitor surveys have consistently shown that around 80% of people come here because of the area's natural beauty - its coast, countryside, and landscapes. However, tourism is very seasonal, which often means temporary and low-paid jobs. To improve this, we want to extend the tourist season and offer more year-round activities that are connected to the environment.

Through our EU-funded Bio-Cultural Heritage Tourism project, we created models to help spread visitors more evenly - reducing pressure on sensitive areas and encouraging visits to places where people can enjoy nature and even help restore it. By offering a variety of experiences - like stargazing, charcoal making, farm visits, nature walks, and citizen science - we can attract visitors who are more connected to the area, more respectful of it, and who bring less negative impact.

**Target 12: More than 90% of visitors cite nature as key reason for visiting**

Long-term ambition	Leading destination in the southwest for nature experiences; 100% of visitors engage with natural environment & contribute to stewardship
10-year target	>90% visitors cite nature as key reason for visiting
Headline metric	% visitors who cite nature as key reason for visiting
Other KPIs	(1) Number of tourism businesses offering nature positive experiences (2) Visitor satisfaction scores related to natural environment experiences
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Launch ‘My Biosphere Visitor Charter’, spurring nature positive behaviours - Evaluate Biosphere eco-tourism scheme - Publish top 50 nature sites for visitors
Year 3 milestones	- Pilot visitor feedback tool focused on nature engagement - Engage 25 local tourism businesses in co-designing nature-based visitor experiences.
Year 5 milestones	- 85% visitors cite nature as key reason for visiting - 50% tourism businesses offer at least one nature-positive experience - 10,000+ visitors have engaged with the “My Biosphere” campaign

Policies that will assist this include:

- Promotion of “Nature First” destinations within the Destination Management Organisation
- Support the signage to nature destinations and tourism signing for biosphere related activities and businesses

**Food production and food security**

Agriculture and food production and processing in the biosphere accounts for 10 to 15% of the economic activity. Livestock and dairy account for more than 50% of the agricultural sector. Whilst it will be a challenge to make the biosphere self-sufficient in every aspect of food, there's a big opportunity to eat more locally and sustainably produced food. This would mean shorter supply chains, keeping more of the economic benefits in the area, improving local diets, and reducing the environmental impact of food production.

However, with the cost of living crisis, it's also important to make sure that healthy, sustainable food is affordable - especially for people who are struggling financially. That's why we need to make sure the shift to better food systems is fair and inclusive.

The Biosphere is working with the Devon Food Partnership to create solutions that work both at a large scale and in local communities, helping everyone benefit from better food and farming, Furthermore, farmers can benefit from better prices due to shorter supply chains .

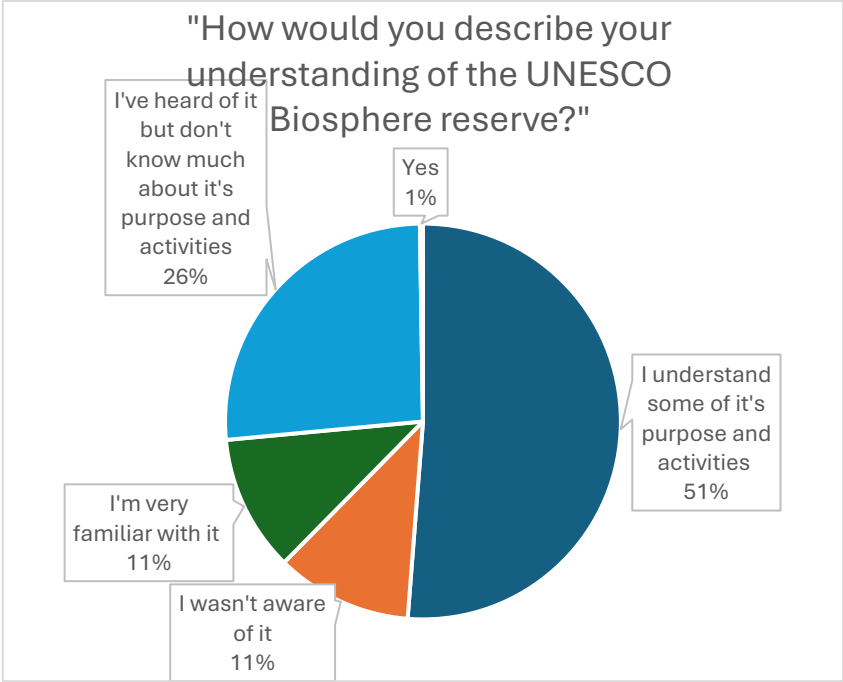
<b>Target 13: Consumption of locally grown food increased by 20%</b>	
Long-term ambition	Majority of food consumed is grown, produced & celebrated locally
10-year target	Consumption of locally grown food increased by 20%
Headline metric	(1) % increase in consumption of locally grown food (by volume or value) compared to baseline
Other KPIs	(2) Number of local producers supplying local markets, shops & hospitality (3) % of schools, hospitals & public institutions sourcing local food (4) Number of local food hubs, banks or markets (5) Volume of fertiliser and agrochemicals applied to food production
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - Publish strategy to get to 10-year target
Year 3 milestones	- Launch a 'My Biosphere, my food' campaign - Trial communal eating schemes - Pilot local food procurement in 3 public sector settings
Year 5 milestones	- 10% increase in local food consumption

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 new local food hubs, banks or markets</li> <li>- Local food branding or certification scheme launched</li> </ul>
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Policies that will support this include:

- LPA will explore the introduction of policies they help to support local food security such as facilities for local food production, processing.
- Supermarkets will be encouraged to increase the shelf space dedicated to local food produce

**Biosphere Awareness**



The public understanding of the Biosphere is steadily growing over the years with the range of campaigns and social media activity.

Whilst this survey was targeted to reach people via other channels not known to us, we recognise that there is a bias in the survey results. Earlier surveys from 15 years ago indicated less than 10% knew about the biosphere reserve's existence.

The welcome signs on the outer edges of the reserve are known to have made a large difference to the levels of awareness and made people alive to the fact that they are entering a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Regular features in the local press and copious social media posts have assisted in the maintenance of awareness.

However, those sectors already engaged in the Biosphere recognise it as an under-used asset for generating local pride, stimulating new economies and better ways of living. Much more work can be achieved through cultural

activities, informal and formal education, marketing promotion and celebrating the work of the Biosphere Partnership to really demonstrate the benefits.

<b>Target 14: Awareness of the Biosphere &amp; its mission increased to &gt; 80%</b>	
Long-term ambition	Biosphere is a household name - widely recognised, deeply valued & actively supported by >90% of residents & visitors, with its mission embedded in local identity, education & decision-making
10-year target	Awareness of the Biosphere & its mission increased to > 80%
Headline metric	(1) % of population that are aware of the Biosphere
Other KPIs	(2) % of people who report feeling connected to or proud of the Biosphere (3) % of people who can name a Biosphere-related project or initiative
Year 1 milestones	- Establish baselines for all metrics & KPIs - 5 awareness raising events - Publish plan to significantly increase Biosphere signage
Year 3 milestones	- 10 awareness raising events
Year 5 milestones	- 500+ community members or ambassadors actively promoting the Biosphere - 15 awareness raising events - Awareness increased to > 50%

Policies to support this include:

- Signage throughout the area that highlight the UNESCO Biosphere will be supported especially in the form of village name signboards, nature tourism destinations, and river crossings
- Local Authorities and other partners should collaborate more to mainstream the understanding of the Biosphere and what the benefits are to the community, local and national government.



## Learning From nature

Knowledge development and sharing is a function of the UNESCO Biosphere. As part of a UN intergovernmental science programme it is in the designation’s DNA to carry out research and push the boundaries for improving the science in sustainability. It also serves to improve awareness and culture of sustainability in the community, at work and play.

To support this, we’re planning a public facility that will inspire curiosity and enthusiasm for science and the natural world. Through the unique designation and setting of the Biosphere it will help to demonstrate and encourage the interlinkages of science, technology engineering and maths (STEM) with other disciplines such as social science, economics, humanities and arts. It will also showcase the work of the Biosphere and help build the skills needed for a greener economy.

The Biosphere Science Centre, developed in partnership with the Biosphere Foundation and the Exeter Science Centre charity, will help share research with the public, tackle global challenges at a local level, and support sustainable tourism. It will work closely with universities, colleges, and schools to make sure learning and innovation are accessible to everyone.

### Biosphere Science Centre

Target 15: Biosphere Science Centre established & attracting > 50,000 visitors per year	
Long-term ambition	Biosphere Science Centre becomes a nationally recognised hub for environmental learning, innovation, and inspiration - driving informed nature-positive choices
10-year target	Biosphere Science Centre established & attracting > 50,000 visitors per year
Headline metric	(1) Number of visitors per year
Other KPIs	(2) Number of school age visitors per year (3) Number of resident and visitors per year (4) Number of exhibitions
Year 1 milestones	- Build & publish business plan for Science Centre

	- Trial exhibitions in pilot location or rotating locations
Year 3 milestones	- Funding in place for long-term home for Biosphere Science Centre
Year 5 milestones	- Biosphere Science Centre established in long-term home

The UN Aarhus Convention encourages open access to environmental information, and this has helped shape the idea of a SMART Biosphere—a system for collecting and sharing environmental data across the Biosphere Reserve. The goal is to make information more transparent, accountable and accessible, so everyone can understand what’s happening in the environment.

There’s also strong public interest in the health of our rivers, which has led to many citizen scientists getting involved - not just to help, but to learn more about their local environment. These volunteers are helping collect data, which is now being fed into a prototype digital platform in its raw form.

To make this data useful, we need to organise and explain it in ways that are easy for different people - like community groups, decision-makers, and landowners - to understand. This will take collaboration, data sharing, and good data management between those who collect and hold the information.

### Shared environmental data

Target 16: Environmental data platform built & used by > 10,000 people	
Long-term ambition	Biosphere hosts a world-leading sustainable, open environmental intelligence platform
10-year target	Environmental data platform built & used by > 10,000 people
Headline metric	(1) Number of people using platform
Other KPIs	(2) Number of environmental datasets on platform (3) Number of people involved in citizen science data collection
Year 1 milestones	- Establish underlying data platform - Develop & publish strategy for featured datasets

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 datasets on platform with dashboards</li> <li>- Collect &amp; display baseline inputs from all other 10-year targets</li> </ul>
Year 3 milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4 datasets on platform with dashboards</li> </ul>
Year 5 milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 datasets on platform with dashboards</li> <li>- Data platform being used by &gt; 2,000 people</li> </ul>

### Systematic Monitoring

It's always been difficult to get good-quality data that shows how the environment is really doing. National data often isn't detailed or accurate enough to support strong local decision-making. To improve this, we're taking inspiration from the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy and its list of special species, along with a selection of key "emblematic" species. The idea is to involve local communities in regularly monitoring these species, which will help us build a clearer picture of the health of the Biosphere's environment. This kind of community-led monitoring will add valuable local knowledge and help fill gaps in existing data.

<b>Target 17: Systematic monitoring &amp; reporting of 30 public chosen species</b>	
Long-term ambition	National leader in community-powered biodiversity monitoring, with a living observatory of 100+ species tracked by thousands of residents, informing conservation action & deepening public connection to nature
10-year target	Systematic monitoring & reporting of 30 public chosen species
Headline metric	(1) Number of species monitored
Other KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(2) Number of citizen scientists contributing to species monitoring</li> <li>(3) Number of schools &amp; community groups involved in data collection</li> <li>(4) Number of featured species with improved conservation status or habitat condition</li> </ul>

Year 1 milestones	- Consultation to pick 30 species, including: 10 popular with the public, 10 iconic to Biosphere, 10 endangered
Year 3 milestones	- Develop monitoring framework with protocols, tools & training materials - Pilot monitoring for 5 species with community groups & schools
Year 5 milestones	- Monitoring in place for each of chosen species - First conservation actions taken in response to species trend data

Biosphere Reserves are designated under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere programme, which is a transdisciplinary intergovernmental science programme. This is why knowledge generation and sharing is an important function of a Biosphere Reserves. The draft Strategic Action Plan for the MaB programme places a lot of emphasis on the research aspects so that cooperation and understanding can be enhanced between member states and cultures. Our approach to knowledge generation and sharing must recognise and embrace local knowledge and other knowledge systems around the world, especially in places we work with. The North Devon Biosphere has a good international research and collaboration track record thanks largely to the work of the local universities and research institutions and the activity of the biosphere team within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Our collaboration has extended round other forest sites in Europe, marine areas around Europe and coastal and community health in South East Asia and east Africa.

### **High quality research**

From a purely domestic perspective, the Universities of Exeter and Plymouth along with Rothamsted Research have been particularly active in supporting research alongside the work of the Biosphere Reserve, in areas of coastal and marine management, catchment management, flood resilience, farming, soils, sustainable tourism and rural development, to name a few. The development of the Appledore Clean Marine Innovation Centre is a good example of how the area can use its UNESCO credentials to attract investment in science and technology. Therefore the Biosphere is presented as a research platform for local, national and international science collaboration.

<b>Target 18: Biosphere established as living lab for nature; 20 projects of national significance</b>	
Long-term ambition	Biosphere sustains its reputation as a hub for natural environment innovation, hosting pioneering projects that shape national & international policy & climate finance
10-year target	Biosphere established as living lab for nature; 20 projects of national significance
Headline metric	(1) Number of projects of national significance
Other KPIs	(2) Number of research institutions or innovation partners involved (3) Amount of external investment attracted for innovation and demonstration (4) Number of projects with international partners (including other Biosphere Reserves)
Year 1 milestones	- Write & publish strategy for infrastructure & capability that is needed to crowd in projects - All projects use common system of reporting - Write & publish research strategy
Year 3 milestones	- 3 projects of national significance
Year 5 milestones	- 7 projects of national significance

Policies to support this include:

- Support the presence of higher education and or research facility development in the biosphere area

### **Local School and Community Learning**

Education of the next generation is vital to establish and maintain high levels of literacy in the fields of sustainability. A report by British Educational and Research Journal suggests that any emphasis on teaching about sustainability within the curriculum falls largely to the discretion of the school or individual teachers. A report for the Natural Environment Educators in Devon (NEED) demonstrated that 75% of children consider environmental issues as important, 62% feel anxious about the future of the planet and most do not think that their school or local authority are doing enough. In collaboration with the Living Coast Biosphere in Brighton and Hove area, the Biosphere had commissioned climate change curriculum support in 20 schools across the area in the Our School Our world Programme. Continuation of this will support the government target for every school to have a climate plan and a sustainability lead. Four years previously in the Pledge

for Nature project, the biosphere team had engaged a small number of afterschool clubs to stimulate young students to think and do more for biodiversity. The scheme was a success and more resources are needed to roll the programme out further.

<b>Target 19: Working with &gt; 50 education providers or community groups on nature or climate education</b>	
Long-term ambition	Every learner has some time dedicated to sustainability & nature
10-year target	Working with > 50 education providers or community groups on nature or climate education
Headline metric	(1) Number of education providers or community groups being worked with
Other KPIs	(2) Number of primary school children reached (3) Number of secondary school children reached (4) No of schools with climate plan and sustainability lead member of staff
Year 1 milestones	- Establish & publish strategy for significant in-school & out-of-school programme - Secure funding for programme
Year 3 milestones	- Working with 20 education providers or community groups
Year 5 milestones	- Working with 40 education providers or community groups

## Governance

The Partnership which consists of 36 organisations and individuals from multiple sectors, agrees and implements the strategy with the support and involvement of the local community, ensuring that there is conformity with the actions and that the right organisations are delivering the plan. The strategy is the beacon for the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Partnership and is the how they are accountable to the wider community. Reporting to the Partnership are 7 working groups that deliver on a thematic basis (Nature Recovery, Communities, Research, Climate, Woodlands and Forestry, Catchment Management, Marine). The North Devon Biosphere Foundation as a registered charity with the purpose of supporting the Biosphere, provides a secretariat as well as some of the delivery for the programmes for the Partnership. The Core Management Group is the group of key funders and delivery bodies to act as an executive body and clearing house to help coordinate the funding applications and collaborative actions. Devon County Council as the lead legal entity is the accountable body for the designation.

## Monitoring

A high level reporting framework will be developed that matches the targets, milestones and KPIs as set out in the section above. These will be collated through the working groups by the secretariat. Progress will be reported to the Partnership and published on the North Devon Biosphere website.

## Risk Management

The Biosphere Reserve designation is still maturing; this brings some inherent risks; each identified risk in the following register was scored High, Medium or Low according to its Likelihood and Impact.

Likelihood – the probability of the threat being realised:

- Low: 30% or less chance of the problem occurring.
- Medium: 31-70% chance of the problem occurring.
- High: Over 70% chance of the problem occurring.

Impact – the effect of the threat being realised:

- Low: Threat would have little impact on delivering the Strategy.

- Medium: The threat would have an impact on the delivery of the Strategy, including benefits and time-scales.
- High: The threat would jeopardise the entire Strategy.

A cumulative risk score (High, Medium or Low) was then assigned according to the matrix below. The risk register will be reviewed periodically by the Core Management Group and report to the Partnership.

		Impact		
		High	Medium	Low
Likelihood	High	H	H	M
	Medium	H	M	M
	Low	M	M	L

Description of risk	Impact	Likelihood	Counter measures	Contingency
Poor stakeholder understanding of the Biosphere Reserve and its aims	H	M	Clear communications with stakeholders and have continual dialogue with the community. Good demonstration by practical actions	Work with Local Authority press and media people to augment the messages, develop strong media links.
Local Government Re-organisation leading to loss of accountable body	H	M	Ensure good communications with policy makers and seek to have Biosphere reserve a key part of national policy	Ensure agreements are well established and commute to whatever new authority is established
Lack of cohesion in the partnership	H	M	Regular meetings. Share information on opportunities arising. Encourage mutual respect	Be responsive to issues as they arise.

Reduction in core funding for coordination	H	H	Secure funding agreements and/or Service Level agreements.	Explore other models of providing coordination function. Fill shortfalls with project delivery income.
Lack of funds available for delivery	H	H	Work with all partners on collective funding bids. Share capacity in fund raising. Be responsive to funding opportunities where they fit the strategy	Reduce the ambition. And/or have a code for working with private sector to attract funds.
Biosphere Reserve is undermined by other authorities making inappropriate development decisions. Eg National Infrastructure	M	M	Strong promotion of the benefits of the Biosphere. Close working with the authorities. Be strategic and outwardly communicate only the growth that is appropriate to the area.	Major departures can be modified and improved. The ethos can be “not what is done, but how it is done”