

South West Press Release for North Devon Landscape Pioneer

North Devon chosen to explore future environmental management in innovative pioneer project

On the 11th of January the Prime Minister launched the 25 Year Environment Plan. This plan will inform the approach to environmental management post EU Exit, aiming to improve the state of the environment for wildlife and future generations within 25 years.

To inform the content of the 25 year environment plan, four pioneer projects have been set up around the country. North Devon has been chosen to host the Landscape Pioneer. Natural England will be leading the project, trialling innovative and exciting new approaches to manage farmland, natural habitats, watercourses, coasts and urban environments in a better way for people and nature. The pioneer will be looking at new methods of funding environmental improvements and drawing on strategic decision making to improve the capacity of current resources.

'It is a fantastic opportunity for Natural England to invite our partners and the people and businesses of North Devon to work with us. We want to agree approaches that fit with falling public budgets and uses the post EU referendum opportunities to shape a path that will work best. There is a strong community of leadership in North Devon to work with to find ways to get more for our money, work better together and make sure everyone benefits from the natural environment. The first thing we'll do is talk to people to agree what are the most immediate opportunities for innovation and then follow that with trialling change to better deliver improvements in our environment within a generation – the vision of the 25 Year Environment Plan'. Pioneer Lead for NE, Jo Traill Thomson

North Devon has had a number of successful initiatives and the Pioneer working group will draw on these particularly the outcomes from Nature Improvement Area, the North Devon Biosphere, North Devon Coast AONB and the Catchment Partnership.

Professor Michael Winter, (University of Exeter and Natural England Board member) known to many in Devon comments, *'This invitation from Defra to pioneer the 25 Year Environment Plan in Devon is a great opportunity to identify those areas where we could work together better, to be more efficient and achieve more with our investments whether it's in land management, planning and development, tourism, or finding ways to get people benefiting from the natural environment around them for their incomes and their health as well'.*

The Pioneer will work within the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve area. Professor Winter is the chair of the Biosphere Reserve Partnership that is the body responsible for coordinating, on behalf of the constituent local authorities and stakeholders, the management of the Biosphere Reserve. The Biosphere is home to around 150,000 people, 63 SSSIs, 671 County Wildlife Sites, 3 Marine Conservation zone's, covers 3,300 square kms and at its core is Braunton Burrows, an internationally recognised sand dune system. It also encompasses one of the greatest concentrations of culm grasslands in the UK which is both species rich and helps with flood prevention. The dramatic and distinctive coastal landscapes of North Devon are also protected Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Led by Natural England the North Devon based Pioneer working group has agreed an initial plan to work with businesses, communities and farmers over the coming months to identify the priorities

for North Devon's environment. At the core of the Pioneers strategy is the natural capital approach. This approach considers the environment as an asset and seeks to fully understand the benefits the environment provides to people. By understanding the economic value of these benefits the pioneer is hoping to improve decision making, funding and innovation within the environmental sector.

The working group will bring together leading thinkers and delivery partners, Non Government Organisations, private sector businesses and communities to better understand who benefits from North Devon's natural environment, and the factors affecting it. In particular the Pioneer will consider 1) governance and localised strategic decision making 2) land management to improve the environment 3) planning for the future and 4) innovative funding for the environment.

The North Devon Landscape Pioneer has a steering group of local partners including: Natural England, North Devon Biosphere, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, the Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area, North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Devon Wildlife Trust, the Westcountry Rivers Trust, Devon County Council, the Local Nature Partnership, Torridge District Council, North Devon District Council and Defra. This working group will draw on a wider network in North Devon through many existing business and community networks.

By summer 2018 the working group aim to have a clear plan of action, identifying priorities for immediate, medium and longer term change and innovation. During 2019 actions, strategies and innovative funding mechanisms will be trialled to test out a new way of working within North Devon such as, looking at a new way of incentivising landowners to manage the environment, improving the suite of benefits which are relied on by local communities, for example flood prevention and food production. These trials hope to inform the content of the 25 year environment plan and shape future environmental policies after EU Exit.

This Pioneer is one of four. The others include a catchment based Pioneer in Cumbria led by the Environment Agency (EA), an urban Pioneer in Manchester led by the EA, and a Marine Pioneer over two locations: Suffolk, hosted by Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, and North Devon, hosted by the North Devon Biosphere Reserve.

Together with the other pioneers across the country the North Devon Landscape Pioneer aims to provide fresh thinking, enthusiasm and strategies to change the system of environmental management and human interaction with the environment. This pioneer will use the wonderful environment of North Devon to influence and inform the way forward for the 25 Year Environment Plan in years to come.

If you would like to know more about the project please contact Dr Jo Traill Thomson at jo.traill-thomson@naturalengland.org.uk

NOTES FOR THE EDITOR

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. **Natural England** is leading this Defra Pioneer. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#). The Natural England Pioneer Lead is Dr Jo Traill Thomson T. 07775704207 and 02080268212. Both the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission also executive non-departmental public bodies are members of the Pioneer Working Group. The **Environment Agency** monitors flood risk, issues flood warnings, manages coastal change, oversees waste and waste carriers, manages

environmental permits and a number of other environment related activities. **The Forestry Commission** works to protect and expand forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment.

The North Devon Marine Pioneer is a partnership that has been developed to lead innovative and pioneering activities in the marine environment to support the Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan. The Marine Pioneer is supported through the partnership working and input from the Biosphere's marine stakeholder group known as the Marine Working Group. The Marine and Landscape Pioneers work together aiming to complement the initiatives within the North Devon Biosphere Reserve.

The Landscape Pioneer Working Group has a number of members which provide leadership and governance to the Pioneer. Members include the Biosphere Core Management Group and other key partners and partnerships in North Devon.

- 1. North Devon's Biosphere Service** is a partnership organisation based in Barnstaple and hosted by Devon County Council. It is core funded by Devon County Council, North Devon Council and Torridge District Council. The Service co-ordinates and delivers activities set out in the North Devon's Biosphere Reserve Strategy and works with a wide range of local, regional, national and international partners. More information about the work of the service can be found at www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/ **North Devon's Biosphere Reserve** is the first new-style UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the UK. It exists to inspire a positive future by connecting people and nature. The Biosphere in North Devon is a special place with wonderful wildlife and landscapes, and an economy and social structure still strongly linked to the environment but it is also more than that. It is a community of people working together to champion life and the environment, empower people to get involved and explore new ways of living that address local and global challenges.
- 2. Devon Wildlife Trust** is the county's leading environmental charity, with 31,000 members. The charity manages 50 nature reserves across Devon, including a range of beautiful landscapes such as woodlands, meadows, wetlands and heaths. Devon Wildlife Trust relies on charitable donations, grants and the generous support of its members and the general public to raise more than £3.5million every year. Money raised is spent maintaining our work for wildlife conservation and education in Devon, for present and future generations.
- 3.** The Landscape Pioneer working group also includes Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area, Westcountry Rivers Trust, North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Devon County Council and the Local Nature Partnership, Torridge District Council, and North Devon District Council. Additional members are expected to join the Pioneer as the initiative develops.