



**Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight**  
Wildlife Trust

**ISLE OF WIGHT  
BIOSPHERE**

## **A Beacon of Hope: Pioneering a New Nature Economy and a Prosperous Future for all**

“Our vision is to breathe new life into our Island by creating a nature-led economy. We want to turn decline into recovery – bringing wildlife back, aligning farming with nature, revitalising natural capital, and uniting communities around a bold economic revival with opportunities and prosperity for all. Our project is one of radical imagination, invoking a world in which nature, people and the economy thrive together – as a true Beacon of hope for the UK.”

February 2025

## Introduction

At Nunwell Home Farm on the Isle of Wight, skylarks soar above a wilder landscape. The farmland is out of intensive production and butterflies are returning to the meadows. Natural processes are actively harnessed to restore habitats, repair denuded soils and reduce the impacts of pollution. Through combining regenerative farming practices, healthy food production and rewilding initiatives, this is a powerful example of collaboration in tackling the biodiversity and climate crises whilst creating a viable business that delivers real value for the local economy. But it is a rare and isolated example. Outside of this haven and across the rest of the Island and much of the UK, our economies, landscapes and communities are facing a different future with multiple, interlinked, intensifying crises and challenges.

## The problem

The *State of Natural Capital Report 2024* warns that the continued loss of nature across England is causing substantial interconnected risks to society and the economy, harming people in the process. Pollution and habitat destruction are pushing ecosystems to the brink of collapse. Decades of intensive agriculture have destroyed soil health, water quality and biodiversity. Declines in nature make the impacts of climate change worse, including flooding and soaring urban temperatures. Communities are struggling with poor health and rising inequality, and economic prospects for our young people are bleak. Our current economic system treats nature as an externality rather than an underpinning necessity. Instead, we need nature to sit at the heart of decision making and to invest in natural capital now to reduce risks and reap rewards. Changing the broken system to create a future that benefits people and nature needs a holistic, systemic response.

## The opportunity

The Isle of Wight is the UK in microcosm, facing all the big social, economic and environmental issues impacting society today. Indeed, the issues are particularly acute here, but this means that interventions will have more impact. As England's largest island with 140,000 inhabitants, largely rural, and with a significant visitor and tourist economy, the Island is large enough yet small enough to develop and deliver a holistic place-based framework for a new nature economy. It offers a perfect model system, a land and sea laboratory, to create a catalyst for the change we need and demonstrate a better way. As one of only a handful of whole-Island UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in the world, it offers a vital opportunity to combat systemic problems, a creative sandbox in which to build the conditions for an economic transition and demonstrate a blueprint for a brighter and more prosperous future for both nature and people.

## Our ambition

We are seeking funding to allow us to embark upon a high-ambition, transformational systems change project at a whole-Island scale. With the health of people and nature at the heart of our vision, we will remove silos and shine a light on the interventions needed to create a circular, regenerative economic revival. By bringing together a range of partners, stakeholders and experts, the project will move quickly to break down institutional barriers and construct a theory and practice of urgent change. We will harness the opportunity of devolution to maximise democratic engagement, create the conditions for investment in nature-led rejuvenation, and catalyse permanent, impactful change. Our project is one of radical imagination, invoking a world in which nature, people and the economy thrive.

## Our approach

- *Joined up:* A whole-Island approach to nature-led economic thinking that confronts the interconnected social, economic and environmental challenges of the 21st century.
- *Aligned:* Breaking down silos to surface and pinpoint the interventions needed to create systems change across the whole economy, creating alignment in different sectors towards nature-positive.
- *Accelerating:* An approach that leverages the skills of on-Island and off-Island organisations and individuals to increase impact, adding value to existing initiatives and accelerating investment.
- *Learning and Communicating:* Underpinned by robust objective measurements to learn, share and demonstrate the value to the economy, jobs, health and prosperity, creating a blueprint for systems change towards a new nature economy on the Island and beyond.



### Outcomes and impact framework

Investing in nature recovery and a regenerative economy is a high pain but high gain process which will lead to significant returns, both in terms of environmental outcomes and long-term social and economic benefits. We will use the [4 Returns Framework](#) (which aligns with locally developed [Biosphere principles](#) and [Doughnut economics](#) principles) to demonstrate transformative impact, and to help build capacity and create the conditions for additional investment to enable us to scale further:

4 RETURNS FRAMEWORK		<b>What we could measure in the 5 years of this project and beyond:</b>
 <b>Return of Inspiration</b>	<b>A positive future</b> that people can aspire to and believe in.	
 <b>Social Return</b>	<b>A stronger society</b> with improved health & wellbeing, education and social connections: the building blocks of thriving communities.	
 <b>Natural Return</b>	<b>A healthy environment</b> with nature in recovery, restored functioning ecosystems, reduced pollution, reduced emissions, climate resilience.	
 <b>Financial Return</b>	<b>A rejuvenated economy</b> , with sustainable income for communities; encouraging innovation and creativity; new business models based on principles of ecological restoration, regeneration, circular economy, local wealth, fairness and equity.	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A buzz around systems change and optimism in creating a nature-led economic system.</li> <li>• The Island recognised as a centre of innovation and ecological growth.</li> <li>• Increased community engagement.</li> <li>• Uplift in health and wellbeing metrics.</li> <li>• Events such as the Biosphere Festival are powerful agents of community empowerment and positive impact.</li> <li>• Increase in land managed for nature.</li> <li>• Measurable environmental improvements, e.g. biodiversity, water quality, soil health.</li> <li>• Reduced pollution and waste, lower carbon &amp; ecological footprint.</li> <li>• Increased economic activity and jobs in nature-related projects, regenerative and organic farming and eco-enterprises.</li> <li>• Local procurement and supply chains for nature-led businesses &amp; circular economy, for increased self-sufficiency.</li> <li>• Growth in natural capital investment flowing into the island.</li> <li>• A strong investable place model based on Biosphere principles.</li> </ul>

### Strategies to create change

We will use funding and investment to kickstart systems change, through a programme of linked activities that embed [5 transformational strategies](#) to bring about lasting change:

1. **Conserve and regenerate places of value to nature and people.** (identifying key opportunities through the local nature recovery strategy and newly commissioned natural capital assessment).
2. **Drive systems change in sectors most responsible for nature's decline/most able to deliver nature's recovery.** (catalysing a land use transition, supporting the shift from intensive to regenerative practice, facilitating innovation in healthy food production alongside nature recovery, and accelerating the adoption of nature-based solutions, e.g. creation of wetlands, to build resilience to climate change).
3. **Transform economic systems to fully value nature and ecosystem services.** (nurturing local procurement and supply chains, developing a circular economy, creating natural capital markets, and building an investable place model, attracting investment and generating local wealth).
4. **Ensure inclusive, accountable governance for both nature and people.** (using the opportunity of devolution, the power of our parishes, and the reach of our many local partners).
5. **Shift values to recognise human-nature connections and interdependencies.** (through a comprehensive and inclusive engagement and communications strategy that empowers people, builds momentum, showcases progress, influences decision makers and inspires others).

### **Why we are best placed to lead this project**

For more than 60 years, the Trust has cared for wild spaces and places. We manage over 12,000 acres of land for nature in the local area and work with others to protect, restore and connect wildlife sites across our two counties; we inspire local communities to care for wildlife and take action for nature's recovery. We have a proven track record of leading and co-ordinating large-scale and innovative projects which harness the expertise of a wide range of partners. We are delivering nature restoration, community engagement and nature-based solutions on the Island through our Wilder Wight strategy, and by partnering with the IW Biosphere team and others, this project will allow us to stretch further and increase our impact and reach.

### **Collaboration at the heart of our project**

There is already a buzz of positive activity on the Island with the emergence of many sustainability related initiatives. But without strategic investment, these projects lack the joined-up approach needed to ensure long-term systems change. With funding we will convene powerful partnerships and governance models to empower people to lead and innovate. We will formally bring together organisations, groups and individuals including the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, IW Biosphere, The Common Space, Arup, National Trust, IW Youth Trust, IW Council, regenerative farmers Nunwell Home Farm and the Garlic Farm, the Environmental Farmers Group, Together for Mission Zero group and IW Doughnut Economics group, all of whom have been involved in shaping our vision for the Island. We will work with key academic partners including the Universities of Portsmouth, Southampton and Exeter alongside national and international organisations such as the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, other environmental NGOs and the IUCN. We will combine our different skills to connect theory to on-the-ground delivery and build our collective capacity and confidence, leading to further investment and lasting change.

### **Communications and engagement**

Key to the success of this project will be our communications and engagement strategy. Starting with engagement across the Island's community of 140,000, we will build buy-in and collaboration across key stakeholders, sectors and silos through a comprehensive programme of events, training, workshops and hack-days, to co-create a positive vision and an inclusive model for change in the community. Winning hearts and minds and creating momentum are key to the success of our project. With more than 30,000 members, supporters and volunteers across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, we have a strong base from which to build positive engagement, alongside the Wildlife Trusts' combined social media audience of 2.3 million and 36,500 pieces of media coverage in 2024. Local partners in the project, such as Connected Wight CIC, will provide an Island-focused platform for multi-sector communications and a strong voice in support of the project. We will build a sense of excitement with a high-profile, high-engagement communications campaign that engages, locally, nationally and internationally.

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