

# Feasibility Study for the development of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

Exeter Centre for Environmental Law



University of Exeter



Research England



# Credits

**Title:** Feasibility Study for the development of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

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# Executive Summary

This comprehensive feasibility study explores the prospects and challenges of designating Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (BR), considering the region's unique socio-economic, heritage, geographical, and ecological conditions. The Exeter Centre for Environmental Law (ExCEL) hosted two workshops, the first looking at the local/national best practices and the second with an international focus, in February and March 2023 to engage with the local community and, following this, hosted a series of meetings introducing the Biosphere concept to interested key stakeholders.

The study outlines how Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can harmonise existing initiatives and designations with UNESCO BR governance and soft law principles, emphasising the potential benefits. By integrating local nature recovery strategies with the Biosphere framework, the region can foster better collaboration, strategic coordination, and a more adaptive approach towards conservation and sustainable development. Becoming a BR will bring global recognition of local nature, services and products of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. This global accolade of sustainable development practices (not a designation as it might appear to be) could increase the effectiveness of branding of the region in various sectors and areas in addition to new funding opportunities from environmental projects, enabling green growth.

A critical focus of this study is to address the major barriers and challenges that lie ahead. It examines issues of resource allocation, legal complexities, and the need for consistent data and research. Potential solutions include seeking diverse funding sources, aligning with academic institutions for research, and building a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to ensure transparency.

One of the central themes revolves around enhancing strong and effective collaboration and public engagement. The study explores how collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and government bodies, can break down barriers, streamline policy implementation, and amplify the reach of local nature recovery strategies. By fostering public engagement and environmental education, the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Biosphere can spark active participation in conservation and expand the influence of existing strategies.

Addressing the concern that pursuing a UNESCO BR status might be viewed as a distraction from existing initiatives, this study underscores that the Biosphere concept should be seen as a governance and soft law framework, based on collaborative and bottom-up approaches, which aligns and strengthens ongoing efforts rather than competing with them. The focus is on complementing and enhancing the impact of local nature recovery strategies.

In conclusion, this feasibility report assesses the potential and outlines a path forward for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to take towards becoming a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, fostering a harmonious relationship between nature and society while enhancing its unique identity and natural heritage, as a special place in the world.



# Introduction

This study evaluates the potential of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly to be designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (BR). It gathers information about the unique geographical and ecological qualities of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, assessing their viability as a biosphere.

The study develops a strong case for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to apply for biosphere candidacy through the United Kingdom committee for Man and the Biosphere (UK MAB). It builds upon the preliminary scoping work conducted between February and July 2023, aiming to thoroughly investigate the region's potential to receive biosphere designation in terms of its unique social, economic, heritage, geographical and ecological conditions.

## 1.1. Background

The concept of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly becoming a UNESCO BR was initially proposed by Dr Tiago de Melo Cartaxo and Dr Swastee Ranjan, in a submission for the Research England Policy Support Fund, in the University of Exeter, recognising the potential value biosphere status could bring to the region.<sup>1</sup>

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly potential for biosphere status was initially based on the following factors:

- Multiple types of well-established and well-accepted protected areas (PAs) in place across both Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly;
- Strong ethnic identity and language diversity, where the revival of the Cornish language is a priority for the region (on UNESCO list of endangered languages)<sup>2</sup>;
- Diverse cultural heritage including traditional lifestyles;
- Tourism is a major industry, with the beginnings of, and good potential for further, ecotourism (nature based tourism, social projects, agricultural tourism);
- Agriculture region with good base for sustainable development (already innovative projects in place), diverse and distinct traditional land use patterns (dairy farming, early cropping produce and flowers, social and community agriculture projects);
- Regional development strategy in place;
- Council and PA administration representatives already showed support for biosphere;

- Opportunity for transboundary cooperation and collaboration with North Devon Biosphere, such as their contribution presenting at the national biosphere workshop;
- Opportunities for connecting and partnering with other biospheres in other UK biospheres such as Isle of Man.

In March and April 2023, the Exeter Centre for Environmental Law (ExCEL), based at the Law School and the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Cornwall, hosted two events, the first was a local and national focused workshop, the second was an international workshop, where stakeholders and the community came together to talk about the potential for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to be a BR. To gain further insight into the possible benefits and challenges ExCEL hosted a series of engagement meetings that introduced the biosphere concept to various stakeholders.

## 1.2. Objectives

The study assesses the feasibility of designating Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, either in part or, as a whole, as a BR.

The first objective is to analyse the current situation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, in terms of nature conservation and sustainable development, to assess the feasibility of the region as a BR through establishing the criteria necessary for a successful biosphere, drawing upon best practices and lessons learned from other BRs around the world.

The second objective is to identify effective strategies, initiatives, and practices that enhance resilience of communities living and are already happening within Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Meeting these objectives will help this study develop context specific recommendations.

### 1.3. Methodology

This study is based on the existing information, including available reports and research describing best practice from stakeholders, alongside additional information gathered at the two local/national and international group workshops and in meetings with stakeholders through March to July 2023. The study analyses best practices of sustainable development employed in other BRs alongside best practices within Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Both the workshops and several meetings with a number of stakeholders have supported and guided the study in finding the most adequate sources and examples for this specific reality.



## 2.1. Definition of the study region

The region reviewed in this feasibility study is Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Cornwall is the most South West county in England.

The Cornish and Scilly landscapes are determined by geology and the influence of the sea. The Cornish peninsula extends into both the Atlantic Ocean and English Channel. Twenty-five miles off Land's End lies the Isles of Scilly archipelago, consisting of 200 low-lying granite islands, islets and rocks. St Mary's is the largest of the inhabited islands at five miles across. The other inhabited islands are Tresco, St Martin's, St Agnes and Bryher.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, Scilly's population was 2,100 and Cornwall's population was 570,300.<sup>4</sup>

Cornwall consists of exposed granite massifs. Cliffs, wide beaches, dunes and coves. Mudstones and slaty shales. Tin, copper and clay give Cornwall its rich mining heritage.<sup>5</sup> The Isles of Scilly form the remnants of an upstanding granite landform once linked to Cornwall.<sup>6</sup> There are extensive tidal flats which are home to rich communities which are important for their diversity in the United Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> The Western Rocks, Annet, St. Agnes, rocks and islands west of Bryher are removed from the rest of the archipelago by depths of over 10m.<sup>8</sup>

Communities in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly experience significant levels of deprivation with wages below the national average. There is also a housing shortage which has a knock-on effect on employment and local business.

In 2020, Cornwall produced its first State of Nature report which showed that nature in Cornwall is in decline. Habitat fragmentation and loss are drivers of lower rates of species abundance and distribution; half of terrestrial mammals, three-fifths of butterflies and half of breeding birds are seen in fewer places compared to 30 years ago. This decline is a national issue and in response the government has produced a 25-year Environment Plan which sets out mechanisms for nature recovery.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Councils, together with local leading environmental organisations, are currently collaborating on Cornwall's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), a statutory commitment, which will define the blueprint for Nature Recovery Network (NRN). The NRN will enhance places designated for nature conservation and create and restore other places for wildlife.

## 2.2. Nature and biodiversity conservation

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly terrestrial and maritime areas encompass a range of geographically distinctive ecological habitats from 30,000 miles of Cornish hedges to the one the United Kingdom's largest area of known subtidal seagrass in St Austell Bay, Cornwall also has remnants of Coastal Rainforest, one of the rarest, threatened habitats worldwide.<sup>16</sup>

The landscapes and seascapes interact throughout the region giving Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly a strong place-based identity.

### 2.2.1. Protected Landscapes

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have a plethora of statutory designations between them: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Area Of Natural Beauty (AONB), RAMSAR, Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs), World Heritage Site, Heritage Coast, National Nature Reserves (NNR), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), European Marine Site, Marine Conservation Sites (MCS), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Conservation Area, Special Protection Area (SPA) and Protected Wreck Sites.<sup>17</sup> These designations are recognition of the unique, valuable landscapes and heritage sites which constitute Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

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## 2.3. Review of best practices projects in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

There are a multitude of best practices of sustainable development and biodiversity restoration happening in communities, enterprises and those led by statutory authorities throughout Cornwall and the Isles Scilly. The following best practices are just a sample of the possible selection which meet many of the UNESCO sustainable development goals.

### CASE STUDY

#### 2.3.1. Cornish Hedges, Biocultural diversity

A key aspect of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's biosphere potential is the area's unique culture and heritage.<sup>18</sup> Cornish hedges are 'abundant across the protected landscape and connects the disparate and diverse AONB sections with other areas of Cornwall'.<sup>19</sup> Cornish hedges are one of the world's oldest human built structures still in use for the same purpose they were made for today.<sup>20</sup> They represent the biocultural heritage still alive in Cornwall today. Known as 'vertical meadows', hedges are a significant geological, ecological and heritage feature of Cornish landscape.<sup>21</sup> Rich in biodiversity and providing vital habitat corridors for safe wildlife movement, they contribute to the Cornish economy, providing Cornwall with its unique 'look' and employing local skilled craftspeople.<sup>22</sup>



Cornish hedges are uniquely constructed, generally stone built with earth and topped with trees such as hawthorn and blackthorn. They host a vital habitat to a wide range of native flora as well as provide a refuge and wildlife corridor to fauna. There are an estimated 30,000 miles of hedges in Cornwall, providing a vital network linking diverse habitats, including remaining pockets of ancient woodland.<sup>23</sup>

The Guild of Cornish Hedgers is inspiring a new generation of Cornish Hedgers through supporting 170 training days, engaging with 800 primary school pupils, working with Golden Tree Productions on their project Kerdroya: the Cornish Landscape Labyrinth at Colliford Lake on Bodmin Moor due open in Autumn 2023.<sup>24</sup>

### CASE STUDY

#### 2.3.2. Isles of Scilly Seabird Restoration, Community collaboration

A partnership between the RSPB and the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust (IoSWT) to restore seabird populations, specifically the Manx shearwater on St. Agnes and Gugh. The islands are one of only two sites in England where Manx shearwater and storm petrel breed.<sup>25</sup> The core work of the project was eradication of the islands rat populations which had decimated the seabird breeding sites, predated eggs, chicks and adults.<sup>26</sup>

For the project work to be successful the whole community needed to be aware and in agreement with supporting the project, not only in theory but also in a very practical sense. Every single household needed to have a trap. Therefore, the whole community had to be on board with the project and willing to have the trap in their house, to check it and to keep the IoSWT and RSPB updated.<sup>27</sup>

The bulk of the project work was carried out by volunteers living on the island. Volunteers regularly checked rat traps. Communicated their findings with the lead organisations. Communicated with one another. They also needed to be able to advocate for the projects purpose and understand the socio-economic benefits of the project to continue to do the work over a sustained period of time.<sup>28</sup>

The project was also reliant on good planning and organisation: a suitable storage space for the biosecurity equipment was established in a suitable, convenient location for the community, with an equipment plan in place to ensure equipment was updated in a timely manner. The lead organisation responded to the volunteers in a timely and positive way. The lead organisation also had staff involved in the project themselves, RSPB annual sabbaticals where staff are part



of the community for a few weeks doing jobs like painting the shed, deep clean of stations and giving a talk.<sup>29</sup>

Another good practice was utilising station checks into the volunteer's regular routines, such as their daily walks. The lead organisations showed their gratitude and ensured the volunteers felt valued as members of the team.<sup>30</sup>

The project has had lasting positive impacts for biodiversity on St. Agnes and Gugh: breeding population of Manx Shearwaters tripled in three years and birds are colonising new areas, Storm Petrels recorded breeding successfully, shrew numbers increased. It has increased community cohesion with additional socio-economic benefits to these islands as well as the wider benefits to Scilly as an archipelago.<sup>31</sup>

#### CASE STUDY

### 2.3.3. Falmouth Harbour, biodiversity restoration

Falmouth Harbour is a trust port, established over 150 years ago, responsible for the Inner Harbour at Falmouth as well as parts of the Penryn River, Carrick Roads and Falmouth Bay. A working harbour, with large vessel moorings of up to 180m in Carrick Roads, is home to important marine habitats. Falmouth harbour is regenerating seagrass in partnership with Ocean Conservation Trust.<sup>32</sup> Seagrass meadows provide multiple ecosystem benefits including storing 30% more carbon than tropical rainforests in sediments.<sup>33</sup> They also: increase oxygen production; increase biodiversity and resilience providing shelter and a nursery for fish and for rare species such as seahorses and stalked jelly fish; stabilise sediments preventing erosion and damage in extreme storms.<sup>34</sup>

Monitoring has shown that where pressure is removed regeneration occurs. The harbour use seagrass markers so harbour users can anchor in other areas away from sensitive regeneration zones. An important aspect of this project's success has been raising awareness, which the harbour has done through advertising on beer mats in local pubs. Falmouth Harbour's work towards integrating regenerative nature-based practices within a working harbour demonstrate that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have strong biosphere potential.



## 2.4. Socio-economic situation in the target region

The coastal landscapes of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have a rich heritage in farming, maritime activities and mining. These human activities have shaped the landscapes that makes Cornwall a distinctive place.

The main contemporary economic activities are tourism, agriculture and construction. Local communities in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly face a heterogenous set of challenges depending on location, with a number of significant issues impacting most communities across the county, namely access to year-round employment, affordable housing and health services.<sup>36</sup>

The tourism industry in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is dependent on the region's natural beauty.<sup>37</sup> Conservation practices are therefore essential to maintaining the balance between economy and ecology. Innovative ecotourism projects can both profit off and preserve this natural capital.

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### CASE STUDY

#### 2.4.1. Newquay Orchard, Social Wellbeing

Improving the connection between people and nature is one of the core goals of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere programme.<sup>38</sup> Newquay Orchard is a community project where people, nature and learning connect. On the seven-acre site there is: a green community hub with a café and office facilities; learning spaces including the greenhouse, maker space, community growing space, classrooms and market garden; mixed fruit orchard, traditional orchard, espalier, forest garden, wild wood; and outdoor spaces where community events can take place.

Newquay Orchard promote social wellbeing through the delivery accompanied by business support, social programmes and education initiatives.<sup>39</sup>

Since the project began in 2015, it has directly created 120 jobs, 32% of participants have entered or re-entered education or employment and 98% of participants have engaged in new social activity, resulting in a 22% decrease in GP visits and bringing an estimated £7 million to the community each year.<sup>40</sup> Newquay Orchards is an incredible example of how to foster socially sustainable communities demonstrating that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has strong potential as a biosphere candidate.

### CASE STUDY

#### 2.4.2. The Eden Project, Socio-economic benefits of innovative tourism

Cornwall's Eden Project is a popular tourist attraction that serves to both connect people with nature and demonstrate the importance of nature to human life.

The landscape surrounding St Austell was dramatically changed by China clay mining in the Nineteenth Century.<sup>41</sup> Eden set out to show the principles of landscape and local livelihood regeneration through human ingenuity and creativity by turning the disused clay pit into a visitor centre.<sup>42</sup>

The project's main attraction are two enclosed domes representing different 'biomes', an indoor rainforest representing the tropics and a smaller, cooler dome representing Mediterranean type landscapes.<sup>43</sup> Alongside being a tourist destination, the Eden Project hosts community and cultural events and collaborates with outside partners on groundbreaking sustainability projects, such as its on-site geothermal energy plant.<sup>44</sup> Since 2001, the Eden Project has generated over £2 billion for the regional economy.<sup>45</sup> The project's success has led to the creation of a global network of Eden Projects, each unique to its location. As of 2023, there are six international Eden Projects and five in the United Kingdom.<sup>46</sup> Eden employs over 400 people, an important employer in the St. Austell area.<sup>47</sup>

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## 2.5. Review of related projects around the World

The “Taste of Nordhordland UNESCO Biosphere” project<sup>48</sup> is a comparable example for the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The initiative “Smak av Nordhordland,”<sup>49</sup> is the branding which promotes local food from the Nordhordland BR which supports sustainable practices in turn boosting the agricultural industry. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly follow a similar approach in the network Sustainable Food Cornwall partnership integrating Cornwall’s food system.

The inclusion of hotels within a UNESCO BR, as seen in Großes Walsertal BR in Austria,<sup>50</sup> presents a relevant best practice. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can encourage the establishment of eco-friendly and socially responsible hotels that align with the region’s commitment to conservation and sustainable development. These hotels can serve as exemplars of environmentally conscious hospitality, integrating green technologies and renewable energy sources. By promoting eco-hotels, the region can attract environmentally conscious tourists seeking authentic experiences while minimizing the ecological footprint. Collaboration with local communities and businesses can support the use of locally sourced materials and services, fostering economic growth with community involvement.

The Annual Research & Conservation Conferences<sup>51</sup> held by the Long Point Biosphere Reserve offer a compelling best practice. Organising an annual conference promotes knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders. It is a useful forum for experts, communities, and organisations to discuss environmental challenges and explore innovative solutions, fostering a collective commitment to protect the region’s natural resources. Hosting an international conference allows Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly stakeholders to experience and network with other BR first hand.

The Rural Residential Stewardship Program<sup>52</sup> in the Beaver Hills Biosphere sets a commendable example of conservation best practices. Launched in April 2023, this program supports landowners in implementing stewardship practices to protect natural assets associated with their properties. With funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada and resources from the Green Acreages programme,<sup>53</sup> property owners can apply for funding to undertake eligible stewardship initiatives on their lands. The program operates on a 25-75 cost-share basis, encouraging private landowners to engage in conservation. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can draw inspiration from this model to develop their own funding

initiatives that encourage responsible stewardship and contribute to the ecological health of the region.

In Porto Santo, the “Smart Fossil Free Island” initiative<sup>54</sup> showcases best practices in carbon emissions mitigation and climate change adaptation. This transformative strategy aims to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and embrace renewable energy sources. It involves shifting towards renewable energy for electricity production, using smart grids and energy storage systems to ensure a stable and sustainable energy supply. Electric mobility with smart charging promotes energy efficiency and grid capacity.

## 2.6 Stakeholders of a possible Biosphere Reserve

Over 33 stakeholders, other national and international BRs, statutory organisations such as Cornwall Council, Isles of Scilly Council, public bodies such as IFCA Cornwall, universities, third sector organisations and local businesses, have engaged with this research project, attending workshops, presenting at workshops, and in meetings. These organisations are the most likely organisations to form the basis of the invested stakeholders in the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly BR steering group.

## 2.7. Institutional and administrative situation

Cornwall Council is a unitary authority which has responsibility for housing, schools and education, health and social services, planning, waste, fire and rescue, libraries, museums and archives, people and communities, business, trading and licences, births, deaths, weddings and funerals, parks, leisure and culture, transport, parking and streets, benefits, council tax, and environment.<sup>55</sup>

The Isles of Scilly Council is a sui generis unitary authority. The Isles of Scilly Council are the responsible authority for education, housing, environmental health, planning, social services, fire services, waste management, highways, coastal defence, economic development and emergency planning, among other things. They own and operate St Mary’s Airport.<sup>56</sup>

## 3.1. UNESCO concept of Biosphere Reserve

'Biosphere reserve's share a set of common objectives: to be "sites of excellence" that support biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and capacity for building research, education and learning at regional scales'.<sup>57</sup>

BRs serve as learning sites for nature-based solutions and sustainable development, providing logistical support for research and monitoring projects.<sup>58</sup> They serve as holistic mechanisms that encourage collaboration among all sectors of the community, enabling them to develop strategies in response to statutory directives and socio-economic factors that impact the ecological and cultural significance of the area.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, without imposing any extra hard law restrictions biosphere reserves offer flexibility, allowing the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly biosphere reserve to grow and adapt to its unique circumstances.<sup>60</sup>

The three mutually complementary and equal functions of a biosphere are: conservation of biological and biocultural diversity; development which is sustainable and considers social development and cultural diversity alongside economics; logistic Support for partners projects, training and education for sustainable development, research and monitoring of nature-based solutions, conservation, and sustainable development locally.<sup>61</sup>

BRs were established as part of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program, to create learning sites where innovative approaches to conservation and sustainable development could be explored and implemented.<sup>62</sup> BRs represent geographically significant regions with global social-ecological importance.<sup>63</sup> They share a common set of objectives, functioning as "sites of excellence" that promote biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and capacity building through research, education, and learning at a regional scale.<sup>64</sup>

The primary purpose of UNESCO BRs is to enhance the relationship between people and their local environment.<sup>65</sup> They foster collaboration among various stakeholders, including local communities, land management organizations, governments, schools, and institutions. This collaboration enables the development of strategies that respond to external influences such as politics, economics, and social factors, which affect the ecological and cultural significance of the area.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.1.1. General framework and criteria

The WNBR Statutory Framework lists the general criteria for consideration as a biosphere to include:

- Encompass a variety of ecosystems, with a gradation of human interventions;
- Be of significance for biological diversity conservation;
- Provide an opportunity to explore and demonstrate approaches to sustainable development on a regional scale;
- Have an appropriate size to serve the three functions of biosphere reserves which are: contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation, foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable, and Support for demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, regional, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development;
- Include a core protected area, a buffer zone around the core area and a transition zone;
- The organisational structure will provide opportunity for the involvement and participation of stakeholders and communities;



- Mechanisms to manage human use and activities in the buffer zone; an organisational structure to implement the plan for the biosphere area; a management plan for the area proposed as a biosphere reserve, programmes for research, monitoring, education and training (Article 4 WNBR Statutory Framework).

The total proposed area of the biosphere needs to be able to demonstrate it can meet the three functions of biospheres and the criteria. To fulfil the zonation criteria, the biosphere must contain designated or legally protected areas, a contractual protection area and an unprotected area where people carry out their usual daily lives.

The strong regional identity of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will be a positive factor which can help communities align themselves with sustainable development.<sup>67</sup>

The focus of the core area is to provide information about ecosystem functions and processes. The area needs to include legally protected areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB). The area needs to be sufficient size to meet the requirements.<sup>68</sup>

**“The strong regional identity of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will be a positive factor which can help communities align themselves with sustainable development.”**

The buffer zone or zones surround or are contiguous to the core area or areas. Only activities compatible with the conservation objectives can take place within the buffer zone although there is no minimum size described in the Statutory Framework. The focus of the buffer zone is to allow management techniques to be developed, explored and learned about, to maintain the biodiversity of natural and/or semi-natural ecosystems.<sup>69</sup>

The transition area is where sustainable resource management practices are promoted and

developed. The focus of the transition area is to support and encourage local communities, enterprises and/or communities in maintaining sustainable social-economic and land use systems.<sup>70</sup>

The Biosphere Reserves Statutory Framework (Article 4, paragraph 7 WNBR Statutory Framework) requires that every BR have a management plan in place.<sup>71</sup> The management plan functions as a comprehensive framework for all stakeholders to collaborate towards achieving the defined goals for the BR and to address challenges as they emerge, over a multi-year period. It is imperative that all stakeholders have the opportunity to develop the managing principles in collaboration with one another and the biosphere's governing body. Stakeholders will continue to participate by sitting on the management committee or sub-committees.

The management plan will address equally the core, buffer and transition zones which make up the biosphere, as stipulated by UNESCO. Research and education are important functions of all three zones. While conservation of biodiversity is equally important in all three zones, it will be of different measure in each. Similarly, the promotion of economic sustainability and social development is vital in each of the zones, but how this is achieved in each zone will be different. Where a biosphere has multiple designations and corresponding zonations, the zonations must be legally and conceptually compatible. The management plan will address these different zones.



### 3.1.2. Governance and management of Biosphere Reserves

BRs are managed by a team who are responsible for the administration and day to day delivery of the project. The biosphere team will most likely consist of one to two members of staff. It is advisable that there is a Business Plan which supports and directs the teams' activities. The day-to-day operations may be managed by a not-for-profit organisation which is a separate entity or it may come under the local government authority.

A biosphere may decide to have other plans in place to support its operations these include a Marketing Strategy and a Communications Strategy. These will be orientated towards Stakeholders and/or to businesses and organisations within the biosphere for tourists and other customers, in order to generate income for local communities.

These strategic documents will provide clarity of direction for directors, staff, volunteers, board and committee members, stakeholders, supporting any changes of personnel over the period, and communities. Regular monitoring, record-keeping and evaluation of progress will support the management of potential donor expectations and compliance with government regulations.

The zonation plan, utilising local knowledge of environmental conditions and land uses, will consider:

- Areas with very high biodiversity value;
- Areas with minimal human disturbances, 'ancient woodland' and 'wilderness areas';
- Ecosystem health including minimum size for ecosystems to function effectively;
- Connected ecosystems and corridors;
- The settings of the physical environment e.g. coastal and marine ecosystems, watersheds, moorland, valleys, etc.;
- Property rights, including common lands;
- Historical and recent land use and trends;
- Agricultural lands, grazing areas, mining sites other 'anthropogenic pressures and their direction';
- Locations where ecological restoration activities and agro-ecological practices are being implemented;
- 'Ecological pressures and their direction' and other threats such as overfishing or alien invasive species, etc. based on a threat analysis;
- Towns, villages, infrastructure (roads, power lines, railway lines, etc.), other places and corridors of disturbance;
- Socio-cultural traditions, including heritage sites, sacred sites and existing and planned administrative structures;
- Designated protected areas; and
- Administrative regions.

The proposed zonation of the biosphere will be mapped using satellite/GPS coordinates, in the form of shapefiles, and publicly accessible.



## 3.2. Best Practices in other UK Biosphere Reserves

Best practice from current UK BRs, which share characteristics with Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, can inform the approach and the management systems put in place.

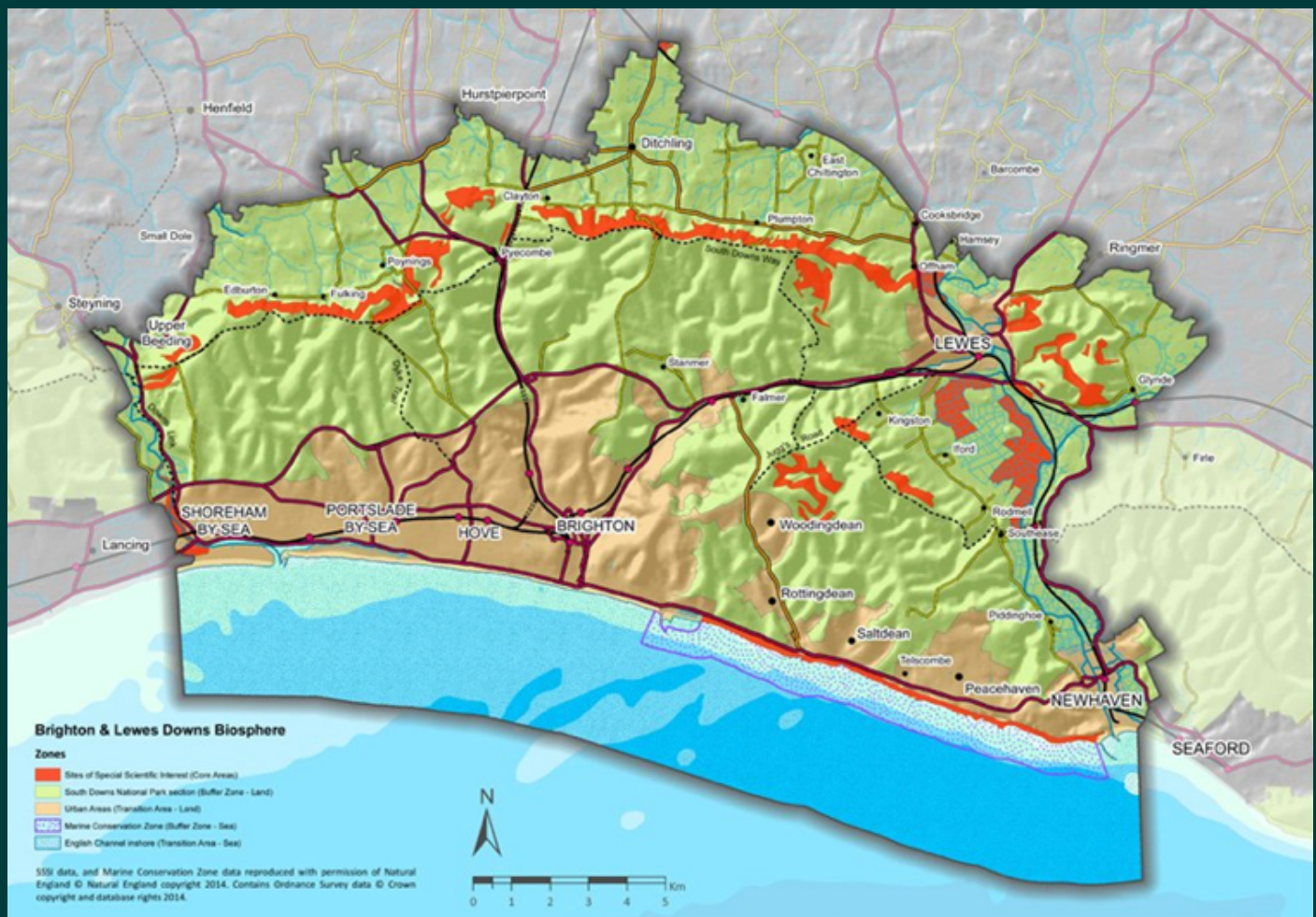
Best practices can be defined as methods which optimally contribute to the biosphere programme's goal of enhancing the relationship between people and nature with economic development that is both environmentally and socially sustainable. The Man and Biosphere Programme operates around several broad themes, including conserving biodiversity and restoring ecosystems, economic development and capacity-building, social wellbeing, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.<sup>72</sup>

### CASE STUDY

#### 3.2.1. The Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere “The Living Coast”

Other UK BR's offer comparable context for learning which can be applied to the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. One example is Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere, known as “The Living Coast”.<sup>73</sup> A diverse and ecologically rich area located along the South Downs and Sussex coast. The Living Coast BR is home to over 300,000 people and visited by over 12 million visitors each year.<sup>74</sup> A diverse landscape covering approximately 390 km<sup>2</sup>. The BR encompasses up to 2 miles offshore, constituting one quarter of the area.<sup>75</sup>

Source: The Living Coast – The Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere<sup>76</sup>



Non-statutory and politically neutral, the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere Partnership includes nearly 40 public and private sector entities, such as local authorities, educational institutions, community organizations, and voluntary bodies.<sup>77</sup> The involvement of various stakeholders, including town and parish councils, universities like Sussex and Brighton, Shoreham Port, the South Downs National Park Authority, RWE Rampion Wind Farm, and the Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, emphasises the importance of engaging multiple sectors in conservation and sustainable development efforts.<sup>78</sup>

The Living Coast is a substantial urban area, with Brighton & Hove, within its boundaries.<sup>79</sup> The “Changing Chalk - Greening the Cities” project,<sup>80</sup> funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, brings wildflowers from the South Downs into urban areas of Brighton and Hove, presents a unique opportunity to find innovative approaches that balance the needs of both people and the environment. Integrating nature into community food growing projects, green roofs, and private gardens, means the region can support more local biodiversity and enhance the connection between people and nature.<sup>81</sup>

The Stanmer Park Restoration Project restored 20 hectares of rundown parklands through partnership between Brighton & Hove City Council, Plumpton College, and the South Downs National Park Authority and received £5.1m funding from various sources, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the BIG Lottery ‘Parks for People’ scheme.<sup>82</sup>

The BioCultural Heritage Tourism project,<sup>83</sup> received £3.5 million from Interreg, to promote sustainable tourism and heritage preservation in the BR.

The Living Coast promotes sustainable marine tourism through water-based activities like yachts and fishing boats trips to the Rampion Offshore Wind Farm<sup>84</sup> showcasing the possibility to incorporating sustainable energy projects into tourist offerings.

Co-financed by Interreg and the European Regional Development Fund through the BRs BioCultural Heritage Tourism Project, The Homeward Bound Festival<sup>85</sup> celebrates coastal cultural heritage and maritime industries. The festival shares similarities with Falmouth’s Sea Shanty festival honouring the region’s maritime traditions through shanty singing and community withy lantern making, bringing in thousands of tourists out of the main holiday season.

Brighton and Hove BR use #WeAreTheLivingCoast to promote sustainable, local businesses and producers who reduce environmental impacts to support the

local economy.<sup>86</sup> Promoting consumption of locally produced food aligns with Cornish and Scillonian agricultural heritage and sustainable food systems, supporting local producers and encouraging the use of locally sourced ingredients<sup>87</sup> strengthens the regional economy, reduces food miles, to promote a healthier, more resilient food supply chain.

The Living Coast has several recent housing developments which maximise biodiversity, creating open spaces within housing sites.<sup>88</sup> At Albion Hill housing estate, Brighton, local downland wildflowers have been planted above the road in the housing estate. Prioritising biodiversity conservation and integrating green spaces into housing developments, 15 hectares classified as “housing land” have been transformed into community gardens, parks, and natural habitats.<sup>89</sup> Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can follow this approach, incorporating green spaces within new housing sites. Residents can enjoy better access to nature, leading to improved physical and mental well-being and fostering a greater sense of community. Furthermore, The Living Coast’s emphasis on enhancing residents’ quality of life through access to higher quality jobs, affordable housing, and community infrastructure<sup>90</sup> aligns with the vision of sustainable and inclusive development. Higher quality jobs and affordable housing options in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can improve livelihoods of residents and foster a thriving local economy.

The Living Coast serves as an exemplary model of environmental preservation and sustainable development. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can learn valuable lessons from this UK BR, using its best practices as a guide in their journey towards UNESCO BR candidacy. By adopting The Living Coast’s community engagement, education, and sustainable tourism approaches, we can pave the way for a thriving and ecologically conscious future.

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**“The Living Coast serves as an exemplary model of environmental preservation and sustainable development.”**





## CASE STUDY

### 3.2.3. North Devon Biosphere

The experience of the North Devon Biosphere is useful to analyse for the purpose of comparison with a potential Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly biosphere for the number of similar characteristics between the two areas. Both are rural, coastal areas in the South West of the UK, their landscapes have been shaped by human activity of agriculture and fishing. Both areas are dependent on tourism, retail and health and social care as key economic sectors.<sup>100</sup>

The first UK biosphere set up in 2002, the North Devon Biosphere encompasses all the catchment areas which drain North Devon extending to the twelve nautical mile territorial sea line.

North Devon Biosphere is a charity with an additional trading arm (Community Interest Company) to access funding and additional forms of revenue. Amongst the 34 members of the North Devon Biosphere partnership are: representatives from landowners, managers and marine sector including National Farmers Union and North Devon Fisherman's Association; Business Support organisations such as Barnstable Chambers of Commerce and Mole Valley Farmers; Research and academia including universities of Plymouth and Exeter as well as those further afield such as Portsmouth University and University of Liverpool; Local Authorities from across Devon; Devon Wildlife Trust, Royal Horticultural Society and National Trust as illustrations from the Voluntary Sector; and Statutory bodies such as North Devon Care Commissioning Group, Devon and Severn IFC, Natural England and Environment Agency.<sup>101</sup>

North Devon report seeing an improvement in the quality of the tourists who visit. Tourists want to get involved with what's happening locally, make a difference, leave no footprints. They are working on a project with France investigating tourist behaviour and spend in an effort to take pressure off tourist hot spots (coastal areas) and develop alternative things for tourists to do away from the coast through the creation of a tourism map. This type of joined up working enhances visitor management.<sup>102</sup>

Andy Bell, director of North Devon Biosphere, shared in our Local/National workshop that fishermen initially were suspicious about what becoming a BR would mean for their business and their ability to continue their traditional way of fishing off the coast of Devon.

However, having seen the benefits of collaborative and sustainable working practices the fishermen are now one of the biggest advocates of what BR designation brings to the region with fishing data showing the catches within the biosphere are sustainable.<sup>103</sup>

Another example of the benefits which can be reaped from collaborative working via the mechanism of the BR which North Devon gave is peer facilitated networks. Farmers within the biosphere are enabled to work together more effectively for example community bulk buying fertilisers which reduce costs to the individual farmer.<sup>104</sup>

At the local/national workshop, the advantages North Devon gave for biosphere status include: an alignment of purpose for all North Devon stakeholders; the partnership of 34 organisations governs collaboratively; the management plan defines a ten year strategy for the area; being a biosphere adds value to the local plan; looking at white space beyond designated areas; is a voice of reason; and, brings in finances for every £1 spent/invested by local government (DDC and town councils) the BR brings in £25 for other organisations.<sup>105</sup>



### 3.3. A UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will need to fulfil certain conditions to meet the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) criteria for BRs as described in the technical guidelines and WNBR Statutory Framework.

UNESCO Biospheres' management strategy is created by their communities and place relevant. The creation of the structure and strategy with which to drive the project forward needs the full collaboration and commitment of the key stakeholders.

To achieve the UNESCO objective that the management strategy is co-created the communities and stakeholders the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly would need to form a working group to initiate the process.

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Biosphere working group can then co-create a Biosphere vision, strategy and management plan with key stakeholders across all sectors of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere working group can set up a core team which is responsible for the administration and day to day delivery of the project. The biosphere team will most likely consist of one to two members of staff. A Business Plan can help to support the direction of the teams' activities. The day-to-day operations may be managed via the establishment of a not-for-profit organisation.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere management plan could cover activities and issues in the following areas:

- Biodiversity and ecosystem services and their conservation and use;
- Sustainable land and resource use;
- Improving livelihoods and generating benefits for communities;
- Promoting green economies;
- Infrastructure development;
- Ecosystem restoration;
- Disaster reduction and risk management;
- Tourism;
- Climate change;
- Mining;
- Cornish heritage;
- Research and education.<sup>106</sup>

The plan will follow the principles of adaptive management and will be updated to meet the needs of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly community at regular intervals, usually working to a five- or ten-year plan. The management plan is an integral and mandatory part of the nomination and periodic review process.<sup>107</sup>

The management plan will need to align with relevant Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's statutory plans including Cornwall Plan 2020 – 2050, Environmental Growth Strategy 2020-65 and Local Nature Recovery Strategy 2023.

The management plan can address all the relevant issues which relate to the management of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere. It can address issues which pertain to the management of the seas, coasts and land areas within the demarcated boundaries of the biosphere. The management plan can address current and future management issues as defined by the governing body, or interim body, in a participatory approach.<sup>108</sup>

The process of drafting the management plan will require sufficient resources. Staffing and resources will need to be funded. The full process can take between one to two years. Following the completion of the plan, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere governing body will need to seek support from all relevant partners to ensure there is full and explicit agreement to it, including government institutions and communities.<sup>109</sup>



To fulfil the functions of the UNESCO BR Statutory Framework, the suggestion is for the statutory designations already in place in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to form the core area of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere, with the whole of the Isles of Scilly to be encompassed within the core zone.

The buffer zone will surround the core, designated areas. The rest of Cornwall will make up the transition zone, where the intention is moving towards sustainable development practices.<sup>110</sup>

The draft management plan will be sent to all stakeholders for their feedback. It will be important at this stage to address any concerns raised by the community, with ample opportunity for discussion of challenges and reasoning of the management plan.<sup>111</sup>

Once the management plan is complete, and with stakeholders on board, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere team would be able to begin the process of making the application to UNESCO.<sup>112</sup>

The process of preparing the application will involve a number of key elements which are vital for the project to be successful: establish direct partnership with local communities; build effective stakeholder engagement; development of the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's strategy and management plan; and dialogue with the UK Committee for Man and Biosphere.<sup>113</sup>

### 3.4. Main Expected Challenges and Benefits

Becoming a UNESCO BR is a commendable goal for any region. However, there can be several challenges and barriers that need to be addressed. This section presents the analysis of the main chances, or opportunities, in contrast to the biggest constraints, or challenges, which could arise should Cornwall and Scilly become a BR.

One potential significant challenge raised by participants during the Local/National and International Workshops, as well as in meetings, is the lack of time and resources available to those working in the environmental sector. Staff across organisations report being stretched with their current workload. In addition to day-to-day tasks, there is considerable responsibility in the coming months preparing and actioning the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the area. This is a statutory obligation and therefore must take priority. Additionally, organisations are expected to develop a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) for the area, a major commitment of the government's 25 year Environment Plan. It was suggested that working towards a BR may be additional work and serve as a distraction from statutory and other work commitments.



Allocating adequate resources, whether financial or human, for the effective management and maintenance of a biosphere reserve is a crucial challenge. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly councils may consider a multi-faceted approach to secure funding. This may involve seeking government grants, establishing partnerships with private entities, and engaging with international organizations. By blending public and private investments, a diversified funding strategy can be developed to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the biosphere.

Moreover, BRs often provide access to long-term funding opportunities, facilitating the execution of short-term projects aligned with their conservation and development objectives. As a constituted organisation, the biosphere, could function as an opportunity for multiple smaller groups and organisations to apply for funding. It could provide additional human resources and funding to support the work already happening and alleviate pressure where most needed. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly biosphere could apply for funding on behalf of parishes or small to medium local groups to provide support, both technical and resource based, for these groups to select and manage their own NRN's. This financial support can be leveraged to complement and bolster local nature recovery strategies, effectively increasing available resources and expertise. By synchronizing efforts and resources, the impact of these initiatives can be maximized for the benefit of the environment and the community.

Another concern raised by participants at meetings and workshops was the management of multiple and overlapping designations in local areas which can create significant challenges. Indeed, collaborating with stakeholders, coordinating with other regional designations, and engaging the public can be complex tasks. However, within BRs, the collaborative mindset effectively breaks down barriers, streamlining policy implementation, and increasing the visibility of conservation efforts.

The biggest opportunity to be gained from Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly becoming a BR is that the biosphere

could then function as an overarching mechanism which enables environmental organisations, businesses and statutory organisations to work collaboratively and cohesively to manage climate change, biodiversity loss and economic, health and wellbeing of the community. BRs serve as hubs for enhancing communication and coordination, unifying local strategies into a coherent regional framework. This alignment strengthens and extends the reach and impact of local nature recovery strategies. With the inclusive approach, existing designations can collaborate more effectively. The biosphere acts as a platform for sharing resources, data, and expertise, which is vital for ensuring the success of individual conservation programs. A key feature of BRs is adaptive management. The adoption of adaptive governance strategies ensures flexibility and responsiveness to rapidly changing conditions. This adaptability becomes an asset in managing existing designations within the evolving environmental landscape.

Achieving a harmonious equilibrium between conservation efforts and socio-economic development is a complex challenge. To address this, a well-defined management plan is essential. This holistic approach ensures that environmental protection and socio-economic development work in tandem. The management plan should outline precisely how sustainable development practices will be seamlessly integrated within the transition and buffer zones while safeguarding the core conservation areas. For instance, construction or mining permits can be considered in this regard. While categorising already existing designations as core zone, economic activities, such as construction for new houses and mining, can still be conducted within the transition areas. This approach ensures that economic growth and conservation can coexist, reinforcing the principle that a healthy environment is essential for a thriving community. CloS Biosphere can complement and strengthen existing local nature recovery strategies by providing a broader perspective on environmental management and development since biosphere reserves encourage sustainable practices in various sectors, including agriculture, tourism, and fisheries. These practices align closely with the objectives of local nature recovery strategies.

Another significant challenge in establishing a BR revolves around dealing with intricate legal and regulatory frameworks. It's important to note that biosphere reserves operate based on soft laws, offering guidance and suggestions rather than imposing strict regulations. However, ensuring compliance with these frameworks and aligning them with the existing legal and regulatory landscape can be complex. To address these challenges, close collaboration with local and

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**“A key feature of biosphere reserves is adaptive management.”**



Land use conflicts, often arising from competing interests such as agriculture, tourism, and conservation, can potentially obstruct the establishment of BRs. Overcoming these conflicts requires effective dialogue among the diverse stakeholder groups. In this regard, Duchy of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly can be a good address to discuss land use management strategies. Facilitating open communication and negotiation can help identify common ground and develop land use policies that promote sustainability. Finding shared goals among these interests is essential to managing the land effectively.

Marketing of local products and eco-tourism is a daunting task. BRs enhance the region's appeal as a sustainable and environmentally conscious destination also enable use UNESCO Biosphere branding for local services and products. This visibility can attract more environmentally aware customers, tourists, investors, and businesses, providing the potential for increased revenue, job opportunities, and economic development. However, the challenge lies in effectively marketing these opportunities to fully capitalize on this enhanced image. Besides, BRs often act as catalysts for the growth of environmentally conscious businesses. Investments in eco-tourism, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture can thrive, offering job creation and economic diversification. The challenge here is to ensure that these industries develop sustainably, with minimal environmental impact, aligning with conservation goals while promoting economic growth.

The global recognition of becoming a BR helps collaborating within the international biosphere network which allows the region to share knowledge, ideas, and best practices, which can be immensely valuable. This collaboration enables Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to learn from the experiences of other regions facing similar environmental challenges. While this is an opportunity, it also poses the challenge of adapting and implementing lessons learned from diverse environments.

The challenge of gathering and managing the required data and research to support the biosphere's management is significant. Additionally, ensuring consistent monitoring and reporting of the activities and their impact can be complex. Collaborating with academic institutions and research organizations, such as the University of Exeter and Falmouth University, is crucial for conducting studies and monitoring ecological changes. This research contributes to informed decision-making and policy formulation. BR status encourages applied research and monitoring, which can benefit existing designations by providing valuable data that can refine and enhance current management practices.

national governments is key. This partnership allows for a coordinated approach that integrates the biosphere's goals with local and national legal requirements. In addition, legal experts can provide invaluable guidance to ensure all activities and initiatives undertaken within the biosphere are in full compliance with the soft laws governing UNESCO biospheres. Such collaboration and legal expertise are pivotal in navigating and overcoming the legal and regulatory challenges that may arise. It's crucial to understand that the establishment of a BR in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly does not aim to replace or overshadow ongoing local nature recovery strategies. Rather, it is designed to work in harmony with these existing initiatives, acting as a complementary framework to enhance their effectiveness. This holistic approach recognizes that the Biosphere is not a distraction from other regional responsibilities but a means to reinforce and amplify ongoing efforts. It functions as a unifying platform, aligning various strategies for conservation, development, and sustainability across the region. By promoting synergy among these initiatives, the BR ensures that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage are not only preserved but also leveraged for the betterment of the environment and the well-being of the community.

Overcoming potential barriers will require careful planning, strong leadership, and effective collaboration among various stakeholders. As an overarching narrative holding the space for big discussions and decisions to be made, the biosphere could enable all the voices of the area's community to be represented at the table, therefore enabling decisions to be made with all facts and perspectives fully considered. This mechanism of collaboration will serve to provide Cornwall and Scilly with the best available and future solutions to environmental and human challenges. It's important to acknowledge potential challenges and proactively address them to increase the likelihood of a successful UNESCO BR for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

In summary, rather than distracting from existing responsibilities, a UNESCO BR provides a structured framework for amplifying and coordinating ongoing local nature recovery strategies. Becoming a UNESCO Biosphere for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly offers numerous potential benefits for the region. These benefits can have a positive impact on various aspects of the

area. It brings global recognition, fosters collaboration, and promotes a holistic approach to sustainability. While there will be administrative and organizational commitments associated with the designation, the potential benefits, including increased resources, public engagement, and integrated conservation, make it a valuable addition to the region's conservation efforts.

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**“Biosphere status can provide global recognition to Cornwall and Isles of Scilly as a site of excellence for nature-based solutions and biodiversity recovery combined with sustainable economic development.”**

### 3.5. Conclusion

On analysis of the entire region of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly this study finds, through the methodology of workshops and meetings with relevant and interested stakeholders, that some of the criteria for biosphere candidacy is fulfilled, other criteria can be fulfilled with time and no criterion seems impossible to fulfil with time.

As no criterion seems impossible to fulfil, the feasibility for a BR in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is given.

With local willingness to collaborate towards establishing a BR in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly all UNESCO requirements can be met.

All the 33 local stakeholders which engaged with the BR concept are highly interested in the idea and are keen to be involved. The next stage would be to initiate a group of local champions who would like to continue the work towards making the application for biosphere status.

The BR development will depend strongly on local initiative and will to further develop the concept of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly gaining biosphere status.

Biosphere status can provide global recognition to Cornwall and Isles of Scilly as a site of excellence for nature-based solutions and biodiversity recovery combined with sustainable economic development.

BRs work as a holistic mechanism to manage nature-based solutions and sustainable development in a region. They serve as an umbrella for all development and facilitation of development, resulting in greater participatory decision-making for the benefit of the people and environment. The biosphere can function as a mechanism to support the ongoing work of organisations alleviating much pressure with additional people power. Additionally, the biosphere allows for better, collaborative and adaptive management of all already existing designations.

The benefits of BRs are outlined here. Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere can contribute to the conservation and restoration of ecosystems, habitats, species and biodiversity through integrating practices and collaboration between stakeholders.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere can build on current best practices within the region which enhance the socio-cultural and ecological sustainable development. Falmouth Harbour is an excellent example of how

providing space for regenerative practice, marking areas to be kept without moorings for seagrass to flourish, within a working harbour is possible. Newquay Orchards is providing social and economic opportunities while creating an urban green space which is open to all, with their Sustainable Lives programmes expected to save the NHS £7.50 for every £1 spent.<sup>114</sup> The Isles of Scilly Seabird recovery project has reestablished breeding Manx shearwaters on St. Agnes and Gugh, with over 80 pairs recorded in 2022 with chicks are fledging successfully.<sup>115</sup>

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere can provide logistical support for partners and communities to manage demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, regional, national and global issues of biodiversity restoration and sustainable development.<sup>116</sup>

Becoming a UNESCO BR can offer numerous potential benefits for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, creating a positive impact on various aspects of the region including:<sup>117</sup> Promoting collaborative working practices and knowledge exchange within the partnership of stakeholders helps to tackle challenges in an integrative way providing lasting solutions for communities. Connecting with other BRs within the international network facilitates collaboration with other BRs worldwide. The exchange of knowledge, ideas and solutions can inform conservation and sustainable development practices in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, benefiting from shared experiences and innovation.<sup>118</sup>

Quality of life can improve within the BR designated region as a Biosphere through the creation of a healthier environment, fostering a balance between nature and human activities.<sup>119</sup> Through use of nature-based solutions, air and water quality can improve, green spaces can be enhanced with native flora to improve biodiversity in urban areas, which can in turn improves overall well-being of communities in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Providing spaces for people to participate in outdoor activities like walking, cycling, swimming, and “green gyms” can promote healthier lifestyles and reduce future healthcare costs. Integrative measures with all stakeholders working together to reduce pollution from homes, gardens, and urban areas can improve the cleanliness and quality of seawater, benefiting both residents and the marine ecosystem.

BR designation gives a region unique marketing value as a sustainable and environmentally conscious destination.<sup>120</sup> Achieving the prestigious designation makes the region’s more attractive to tourists, investors, and businesses interested in environmentally responsible ventures. Increased tourism and investments can lead to greater revenue, job opportunities, and economic development.<sup>121</sup>

Assisting farmers with rural diversification schemes and supporting local sustainable fisheries contribute to the local economy and strengthen the region’s identity as an environmentally responsible community.

Many BRs gain access to longer-term funding opportunities, ensuring the successful implementation of sustainable, nature-based projects, aligned with Biosphere objectives.<sup>122</sup> This provides stability for continuing efforts in conservation and sustainable development, making a lasting positive impact for the region and communities. Other UK biospheres have received significant funding to manage projects which further their objectives of conservation and sustainable development. The Living Coast BR has received funding £3.5 million from Interreg and £5.1m funding from various sources, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the BIG Lottery ‘Parks for People’ scheme,<sup>123</sup> to manage projects such as promoting sustainable tourism and greening urban areas. North Devon is set to receive £17M over next 5 years secured mainly EA WEIF and DEFRA.<sup>124</sup>

BR status can provide the catalyst for emerging new environmentally conscious enterprises and industries. Investments in eco-tourism, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and other low-carbon sectors can thrive, leading to job creation and economic diversification. Emphasizing the construction of warmer and energy-efficient homes not only lowers the impacts of climate change but also results in reduced fuel bills for residents, especially significant in times of rising energy costs.





BRs offer a mechanism for integrative partnership working encouraging collaboration across sectors and communities. This collaborative approach can improve long term community engagement in projects, through the breaking down barriers and improving communication to support the implementation of conservation policies and initiatives. As an example, connecting local food producers with markets and developing supporting infrastructure strengthens the local food system, promoting sustainability and reducing environmental impacts. In these efforts, academic and scientific institutions play a crucial role in conducting research and monitoring tailored to address development challenges specific to the region.<sup>125</sup>

The Isle of Man demonstrates the relevance of heritage and language as an importance aspect of creating community cohesion and engagement through all projects.

The Living Coast shows the importance of leveraging multiple partnerships to support ambitious nature-based solutions projects improving the balance between human presence and biodiversity. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can use this approach to seek similar collaborations to secure funding for our own restoration and conservation initiatives. Improving green and blue infrastructure, such as community food growing, green roofs, and private gardens, aligns with Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's vision of creating a sustainable and resilient biosphere reserve. To support projects promoting conservation and sustainable development, Cornwall can seek funding opportunities and collaborations with external organizations, similar to The Living Coast's support from heritage lottery. This approach aligns perfectly with Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's vision of preserving its unique landscapes and rich cultural identity.

The Isle of Man BR integrates best practices in local language policy, education, and sustainable tourism using nature-based solutions which Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can use as a guide towards UNESCO BR candidacy.

Cornwall hosts multiple cultural, sporting and heritage festivals, such as Port Elliot festival, Gig rowing in the Scillies, Festival of Nature in the Scillies, Golowan in Penzance and the Sea Shanty festival in Falmouth, which strengthens Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's unique identity and attracts visitors. This is particularly important out of high tourist seasons and in areas away from visitor hotspots.

BR branding is a useful tool to promote local produce, supporting agricultural sector and promoting sustainable food systems, enhancing our reputation as a hub for high-quality, environmentally friendly products.

The Biosphere approach offers greater integration of how landscapes are considered and managed, rather than individual elements and environments (rural, urban and coastal/marine) in isolation. The Biosphere approach considers how the natural environment functions, based upon the fundamental processes which link the individual elements together.

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**“With local willingness to collaborate towards establishing a Biosphere Reserve in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly all UNESCO requirements can be met.”**

The partnership between the Biosphere Isle of Man and Manx Wildlife Trust working together to survey and map areas for the island's NRN is a persuasive model which shows how well BR can function as an overarching mechanism to enable actions and as the constituted organisation which can be utilised to apply for collaborative funding projects. The funding world is highly competitive especially for small organisations chasing the same pots. This is why a potential solution is to have one large organisation which can apply for funding on behalf of multiple community groups and businesses looking to do similar projects in their locality. The Biosphere Isle of Man project was made possible through the Biosphere Isle of Man's successful application to the government funding.<sup>126</sup>

Challenges to consider are that working in collaboration with many stakeholders who may hold different positions and have different priorities the process of collaboration can be more time consuming. Some compromise may be necessary to reach decisions. To ensure decisions are taken with thorough consideration to all of the issues sufficient resources are needed.

The benefit of collaborative working is that all options are considered from the beginning and all stakeholders have the opportunity to be heard, meaning that BRs integrate the threads of narrative of what makes a location unique.

### 3.5.1. Final assessment

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly UNESCO Biosphere could be a cohesive mechanism for the benefit of businesses, third sector organisations, statutory organisations and communities to work better together for nature recovery and sustainable development.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere could support stakeholders manage multiple and at times overlapping natural and cultural heritage designations through research and resources.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere could provide technical support with implementing Cornwall Council's Environmental Growth Strategy which seek to positively manage 30% of land, rivers and seas by 2030 to conserve and restore biodiversity and nature recovery in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Biosphere could provide technical support with implementing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy through collaborative and participatory practices. The biosphere could provide technical support for local community organisations with delivery of Nature Recovery Networks. As a legally constituted body the biosphere could act as a mechanism to obtain funding to support small to medium community organisations, such as parishes and local groups, to collaborate with larger organisations, such as the wildlife trusts, in creating, restoring and managing places for wildlife whilst benefiting local peoples' wellbeing and health.

### 3.5.2. Scenarios for a Biosphere Reserve in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly UNESCO Biosphere would become a legally constituted organisation such as a charity and/or Community Interest Company, in its own right, to enable the biosphere to be able to apply for funding for the benefits of communities, sustainable development and biodiversity of the region. One possibility is for the Local Nature Partnership to initiate the first stages of this process, engaging with other entities to form the organisation, based on the example shared by the North Devon Biosphere at the local/national workshop.



## 4.1. General Recommendations

This study, limited by time and resource constraints,<sup>127</sup> makes the following recommendations:

- Form a working group from interested stakeholders (including public, private and third sector organisations), and from this group create a core team to continue the necessary processes;
- The core team from interested stakeholders to look at funding possibilities, potentially from the Heritage Lottery (as it happened for North Devon) or others, for the next stages;
- A second round of in-depth research involving the universities in the region (Exeter and Falmouth), to establish the case for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Biosphere. This would involve further contact with the UK MAB Committee.
- Simultaneously, the process and procedures necessary to make the full application to UNESCO can be followed.

## 4.2. Next steps

The next steps would be to form a working group, perhaps within the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership, inviting all other interested stakeholders (public, private and third sector) across the region to be involved. Following this, the designated core team to apply for funding for further and detailed research about Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's potential to become a BR. Once funding is available, under the direction of the working group, the core team would commence the research and complete the BR application to apply for an official BR status before UNESCO.

<sup>1</sup> Translational Funding Research England Policy Support Fund – National & International Policy Engagement, University of Exeter.

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<sup>3</sup> Isles of Scilly, 'The Islands' (2023) <<https://www.islesofscilly.uk/the-islands/>> accessed 16 July 2023

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## Appendix I

Proposed logo for the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Bid

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## Appendix II

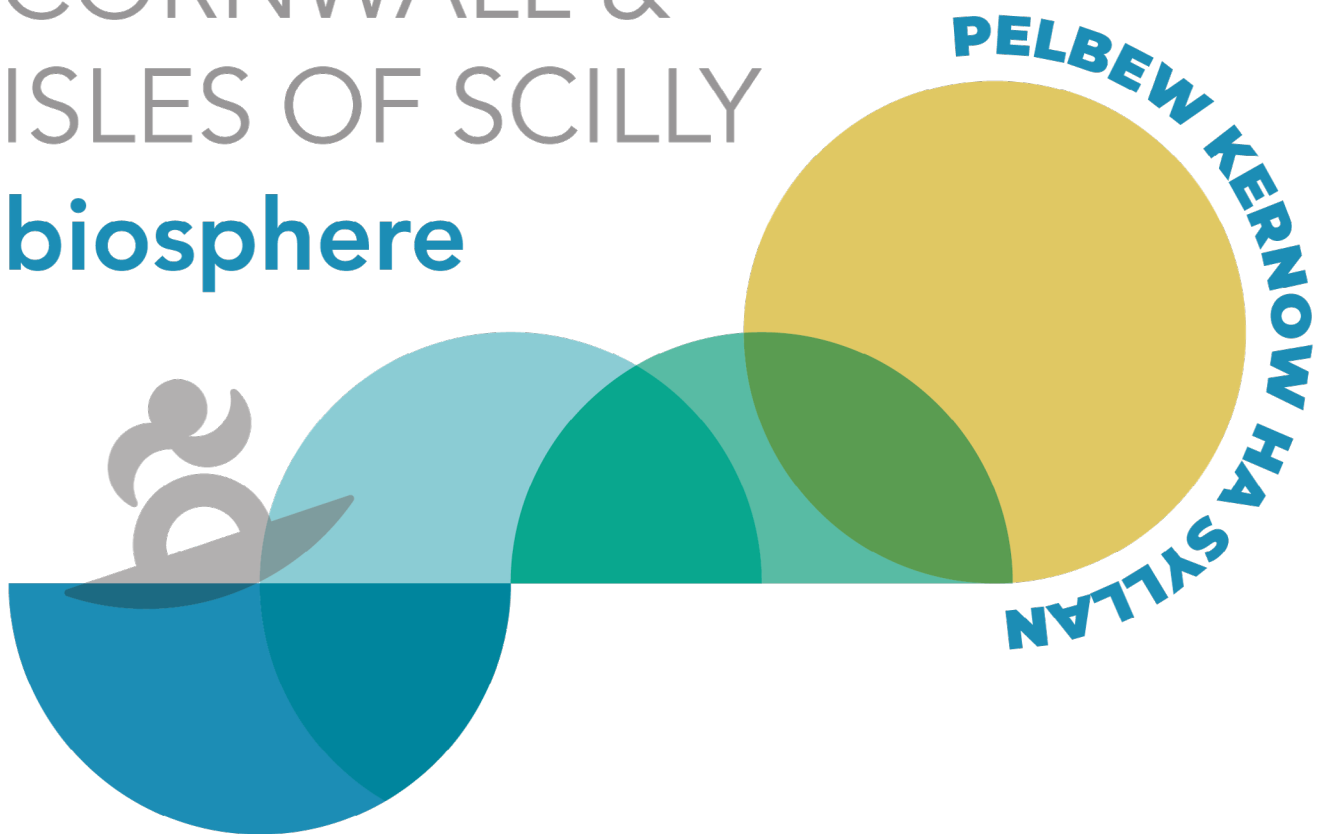
Workshops' Graphic recordings

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## Appendix III

Brief list of suggested initial stakeholders to be engaged in the UNESCO Biosphere process

CORNWALL &  
ISLES OF SCILLY  
**biosphere**







**Appendix III: Brief list of suggested initial stakeholders to be engaged in the UNESCO Biosphere process**

Name	What they do	How they can help	Sector
Blue Marine Foundation	A charity dedicated to restoring the ocean.	As leading sector marine conservation organisation, they share key aims of the biosphere.	Third sector
Cornwall Council	County council for Cornwall, currently led by councillor Lina Taylor. Part of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Leadership Board.	Main governing body for Cornwall - important for gaining public support and awareness. As a result of the 2015 Devolution Deal, Cornwall has been able to explore geothermal energy, which could be used to demonstrate sustainable development.	Public sector
Cornwall Wildlife Trust	Cornwall's mainland and sea wildlife conservation charity for over 60 years, with over 17,000 members. One of the 46 local trusts which form the UK-wide Wildlife Trusts.	Highly reputable charity could be useful for gaining public support and awareness. Environmental monitoring data could be useful for evidencing Cornwall's ecological importance.	Third sector
ERCCIS - The Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Official Local Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, working to collate, manage and disseminate biological and geological information using state-of-the-art data management and digital mapping software.	ERCCIS data can be used to demonstrate Cornwall and IOS' ecological importance.	Public sector
Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust	Registered conservation charity supporting citizen science monitoring of grey seals, which UK is legally bound to protect.	Large network of active citizen scientists, good example of community-based conservation.	Third sector



Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	Cornish branch for the marine inshore environment. IFCA create and enforce local byelaws and enforce relevant national/ international laws. Funded by Cornwall Council and DEFRA.	Plays a vital and strategic role in management of the protected marine areas.	Local Government
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership	Private sector-led partnership responsible for developing Cornwall and Isles of Scilly's economic strategy.	Along with the LNP, the LEP could form the basis of the biosphere committee.	Other
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership	Collaboration of local partners responsible for developing Cornwall and Isles of Scilly's Nature Recovery Strategy and developing Nature Recovery Networks.	Along with the LEP, the LNP could form the basis of the biosphere committee.	Other
Cornwall Marine Network	Works to improve the economic prosperity of Cornwall's marine sector.	Leading organisation within the marine sector could be useful to build connections.	Third sector
Cornwall Mental Health Transformation Project	Cross sector NHS project working to improve mental services in Cornwall.	Collaboration with blue/ green health projects through social prescribing.	Third sector
Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust	Award winning, evidence-based marine conservation charity working to protect and raise awareness of Cornish seals.	As a key charity and research organisation collaboration will build connections with the public and provide access to up to date research.	Third sector
Cornwall Trade & Investment	Offers free business support specialising in set up and export.	A leading organisation with connections in the economic sector and could help demonstrate sustainable development.	Third sector

Duchy of Cornwall	A private estate which funds the public, charitable and private activities of the Prince of Wales.	The Duchy is an important landowner and influencer within Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.	Private estate
Eden Project	Famous for its biomes: tourist activity centre demonstrating the value and potential of plants to restore ex mining land.	Important influencer and global innovator for regeneration and change.	Third sector
Falmouth Harbour	Trust port covering Inner Falmouth Harbour and parts of the Penryn River, Falmouth Bay and Carrick Roads.	Deep commitment to sustainability and restoration of biodiversity within a strategically important harbour.	Third Sector
Falmouth Town Council	The town council of one of Cornwall's largest towns.	Sharing a strong commitment to marine heritage, arts, community and sustainability matching the biosphere ethos.	Local government
Falmouth University	University specialising in creative industries.	A hub for the next generation of creative green thinkers.	Higher education
Finisterre	Ethical and eco clothing brand based in Cornwall.	Leading eco aware brand which are hugely influential.	Business
Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	Isles of Scilly branch for the marine inshore environment. IFCA create and enforce local byelaws and enforce relevant national/ international laws. Funded by Cornwall Council and DEFRA.	Plays a vital and strategic role in management of the protected marine areas.	Local Government
Isles of Scilly Council	Unitary authority for the Isles of Scilly	As the governing body for the Isles of Scilly the council are important for gaining public support and awareness.	Local government

Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust	The leading conservation organisation on Scilly.	Managing much of the wild areas of Scilly the trust works hard to ensure Scilly retains its wildlife, beauty and rich heritage.	Third Sector
National Trust	Conservation charity protecting nature and history which owns and manages significant sites in Cornwall.	Committed to preserving the natural and historic environments they share key aims with the biosphere.	Third Sector
Natural England	Non-departmental public body sponsored by DEFRA advising government on the management of England's natural environment	Connecting people to the natural environment, sustainable economic growth and nature-based climate change solutions are some of Natural England's key goals which overlap with the biosphere aims.	Public sector
Newquay Orchard	Green community project supporting those most in need they provide facilities, office space, business support and host community events and projects.	As a driver for change they share key aims with the biosphere promoting sustainable economic growth and community support.	Third Sector
Seal Sanctuary	Rescues, rehabilitates and releases seals.	Highly influential in their public facing role working hard to support seals.	Third sector
Sustainable Penzance	A community project which seeks to build sustainability in Penzance.	Change maker with a strong community and volunteer ethos which aligns with the values of biospheres.	Third sector
Tresco	A family run island estate. World renowned sub tropical gardens.	A key funder and supporter of the AONB and the loS Wildlife Trust with sustainability at their heart.	Business

University of Exeter	Branch of the University of Exeter (a globally recognised, Russell Group university) located in Cornwall with a Truro campus and a Penryn campus shared with Falmouth university.	Currently the lead organisation with a strong research interest in environmental sustainability.	Higher education
Visit Cornwall	The official tourist board in Cornwall.	Leading influencer within the tourism sector with keen focus on sustainable tourism.	Third sector
Visit Scilly	The official tourist board in the Isles of Scilly.	Leading sustainable tourism on Scilly could be useful for raising public support and interest.	Third sector



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