



People *for* Nature Nature *for* People

Community involvement in
Biodiversity on the Isle of Wight





Biodiversity...

is shorthand for biological diversity – the total variety of life and habitats. The word was coined at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 1992. International agreements have to be applied at a local level – “think global, act local”. Over the last few years, a group of local and regional organisations have been working in partnership with the countryside section of the Isle of Wight Council to produce action plans for the Island’s habitats.

But for there to be real success, there needs to be the backing of the individuals and groups that make up our community. Surveys show how highly residents value the natural environment, but there is often the feeling that the Island’s wildlife and countryside look after themselves, and so they are taken for granted.

Island Futures, the *Community Strategy*, is developing themes to involve people in all aspects of Island life. The Island’s natural heritage is vital to each strand of this plan.

Lawrence Hamilton, a major figure in the World Conservation Union said: “It is not ecologists, engineers, economists or earth scientists who will save spaceship earth, but the poets, priests, artists and philosophers.”

In other words, it’s not just what we know, but how we value our environment that is the crucial factor. And it’s not something that can just be left to someone else.

Picture Tennyson Down





Biodiversity is

OUR LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM

Everything we have comes from our surroundings. Natural recycling systems keep the air, water and soil in balance.

Community Strategy theme: Thriving Island

A SOURCE OF WEALTH AND JOBS

Our very distinctive local environment and its wildlife underpin our tourist industry, attracting visitors from far and wide. And it adds greatly to our quality of life.

Community Strategy theme: Thriving Island

A PRESCRIPTION FOR GOOD HEALTH

Sick people recover more rapidly if they have a 'natural' view. Walking in the countryside helps mental as well as physical health – does a wider view help us have a sense of perspective?

Community Strategy theme: Healthy Island

A STORE OF NATURAL KNOWLEDGE FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING

An enquiring and active mind is a healthy mind – what better subject than the natural world?

Community Strategy themes: Skilled and Educated Island, Healthy Island

COMMON GROUND FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Nature is a catalyst for community involvement – anyone can join in, make new friends, learn new skills and make a difference to their environment.

Community Strategy themes: Safer Island, Healthy Island

NATURE FOR NATURE'S SAKE

The intricacy of the web of life that surrounds us. When we do stop to 'stand and stare', there is a sense of fascination, awe and wonder at what is before us.

Community Strategy themes: Skilled and Educated Island, Thriving Island

Our life support system

OUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT – air, water, soil and rocks – supports all life and we draw pleasure from these natural elements of our surroundings. The Island has long been considered a classic area for the study of earth sciences and the importance of the Island's geological heritage is recognised by the extensive network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) which protect this unique inheritance.

It is a dynamic and finite system. Plants renew the balance of the atmosphere and our coast changes under the influence of weather and the sea. Human activity modifies the environment, and issues such as sea level rise and climate change need to be addressed.

Systems which work with nature are being promoted as long-term environmental solutions to issues such as soil erosion, flood defence and coastal protection.



Biodiversity in action for natural systems

- *Grants to help farmers reduce run-off from the land*
Agri-environment schemes, funded by the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), have provided uncultivated buffer strips next to watercourses, reducing soil erosion and pollution of watercourses by silt.
- *Working with nature to protect important geology*
To slow down erosion, and at the same time protect unique peat and clay deposits dating from the Ice Age, the beach alongside the Bembridge Coast Hotel is being replenished with local gravel. The resulting shingle bank acts as a barrier to the waves, reducing their effect on the cliffs behind.
- *Grants to encourage landowners to plant more trees*
The Forestry Commission's JIGSAW (Joining and Increasing Grants for Semi-natural Ancient Woodlands) Scheme which was launched in 2000, has enabled over 200 hectares of new woodland to be planted for the benefit of wildlife. These connections will act as corridors to allow wildlife to spread. With the help of Wight Wildlife and other partners, farmers and landowners have been encouraged to take up the scheme.
- *Improving the environment and reducing flood risk*
Concrete channels have been removed from the confluence of the Lukely Brook and Gunville stream at Towngate in Newport and the former pond has been re-instated as part of an Environment Agency scheme. Sculptures and seating have been installed by Island 2000 Trust and wild flower planting has taken place. It is an attractive place for wildlife and people in the heart of the town as well as providing flood storage capacity in times of heavy rainfall.



Main picture Gorse on the downs
Inset Towngate Mill, Newport
Left Glanville fritillary butterfly



A natural source of wealth and jobs

THE ISLE OF WIGHT provides a very special sense of place and environmental quality – this is reflected by half of the Island being recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our nationally treasured landscapes are integral to the quality of life of Islanders and an asset in attracting our visitors.

Although only directly employing around one per cent of the Island's population the farming sector produces food, provides land management, and is involved in environmental stewardship initiatives, all contributing to the local distinctiveness and strong identity of the Isle of Wight.

Sensitive land management and the continuation of natural processes (such as coastal erosion), every year draw millions of visitors to our shores, to share this special Island with us. This in turn provides jobs and income for the tourism and allied sectors, our largest employers and creators of wealth.

For those of us in other industries and professions, the Island's landscape, natural and historic environments, provide the backdrop to our lives and can often be the reason for corporate relocation to rural areas, to gain a better quality of life for their employees.



Biodiversity in action for wealth and jobs

■ Buy locally sourced products and produce – the Farmers' Market

The Farmers' Market, held in St Thomas's Square, Newport each Friday, started in 2002 and is now regularly supported by over 20 traders selling local produce and products. These markets help to bridge the gap between people and the environment, reduce food miles, and provide an income to those that are actively managing our beautiful and bio-diverse Island.

■ Advocate or subscribe to a visitor payback scheme – Gift to Nature

Gift to Nature, managed by Island 2000 Trust, utilises collection boxes or envelopes held by various tourism providers or other fund raising resources, for visitors (and residents) to make voluntary donations. The money raised is then used to fund local conservation projects.

■ Support businesses with a proven commitment to sustainable environmental practices – Green Island Awards

The Green Island awards highlight businesses that have demonstrated a commitment to improving and promoting environmental best practice through energy saving, water reduction, local produce and services, landscape and wildlife and sustainable forms of transport.

■ Promote the natural assets of the Isle of Wight as part of your business message – "Finest Landscapes" visitor information packs

These packs, produced by the Isle of Wight AONB partnership are available to visitors in the rooms of many of the Island's holiday establishments. They highlight some of the many features that make the Island so distinctive.



Main picture Lambing at Newtown
Above Ploughing at Arreton
Left Hedgelaying at Carisbrooke



A prescription for good health

NATURE IS GOOD for you – a prescription for good health, long life and fun.

Physical inactivity has serious effects on human health, and outdoor activities particularly walking, offer a cheap and accessible way to better health for all.

Time spent in natural surroundings is known to promote a positive outlook on life and enhance our ability to cope with and recover from stress, illness and injury. Wildlife-rich natural environments with inspiring landscapes are most effective in promoting sociable walking and a healthier lifestyle.

Main picture Sunset at Wheeler's Bay

Right Walking above Alum Bay

Below Which way?



Biodiversity in action for health

■ *Be active with a conservation task*

Established on the Island in 2003, the BTCV Green Gym offers people a new way of becoming healthier by taking part in nature conservation activities. There is a comprehensive programme covering all areas of the Island, with activities taking place weekly. Tasks vary from pond clearing and butterfly habitat management to felling trees and helping school children make bird boxes.

■ *Enjoy healthy walks*

Healthwalks encourage physical exercise and are led by fully trained local people. They are currently established in Freshwater, Lake, Cowes and Ryde. The walks are very popular with 100 participants each week and two leaflets have been produced to encourage walking, one for pushchair friendly walks of up to three miles in the West Wight and a circular short walk in the Ryde area.

The Wight Summer and Wight Winter walks leaflets are put together by the Isle of Wight Council's Countryside Section with the assistance of many local groups and organisations, who introduce people to the environment on their doorstep through guided walks and talks

■ *Grow your own food*

Growing your own fruits and vegetables in your garden or allotment provides healthy exercise and nourishing, tasty, fresh food.





A store of natural knowledge for life-long learning

THE ISLAND IS made up of a spectacularly diverse range of landscapes and coastlines, providing a variety of habitats for wildlife. This provides a unique environment to learn and be inspired, whatever your age.

The range of biodiversity on the Island provides a wealth of natural knowledge that can help people find jobs, learn new skills, enjoy their surroundings more, attract visitors and improve health.

Thousands of hours are spent by volunteers each year learning how to care for the countryside, with organisations like the National Trust, RSPB, BTCV and the council's countryside section. They are vital to ensure conservation takes place, and traditional skills are not lost.

Main picture Guided walk at Newtown
Right Geology at Redcliff, Sandown
Below Identifying a crab, Brook



Biodiversity in action for life-long learning

■ *Learn on guided walks*

The National Trust education warden at Newtown National Nature Reserve works with school groups, families and adults to ensure this excellent resource for learning is used in a sustainable way. This includes projects like the solar powered radial telescope, which transmits images to a solar powered TV to enable groups to see the birds in the estuary.

■ *Ecology for school groups*

Medina Valley Centre has the Eco-challenger mobile field centre (a Leader + funded project) which helps bring the natural world to schools with a variety of activities, such as pond dipping, recording the weather and demonstrating renewable energy.

■ *Learn about rocks and fossils*

Dinosaur Isle champions the geodiversity beneath our feet and organises courses and walks for schools and individuals to bring geology alive.

■ *Learn about wildlife*

Learn more about wildlife and geology and to identify and record species in an informal, friendly environment by joining a group such as the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society.





Common ground for local communities

NATURE IS ALL around us; in our gardens, village greens, open spaces and the wider countryside. It may seem unchanging and unchangeable, but the majority of the nature that we see, hear, smell and touch has been influenced by our hands and continues to be so. The fate of the forests, downland, parks and gardens is intimately linked with our own.

Nature, like people, loves communities. Each individual plant and animal is linked to the land and other living things, forming larger and larger interdependent units of great diversity. Likewise, people forge relationships between themselves and their surroundings.

Nature is a catalyst for communities to come together – a local project can provide an opportunity to bring people together in a common aim, to share in a new experience and make friends. Involvement in a project to improve the wildlife of an area helps the community to develop respect and responsibility for their surroundings, and reduces problems of vandalism.

Main picture Community project at Fort Victoria
Right Winter teasel
Below New gate and fence at Newtown



Biodiversity in action for local communities

■ *Becoming a pond warden*

A pond warden course is run each year by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, to assist members of the public who are interested in managing ponds for wildlife. Some have gone on to help look after a pond on public land, while others have created a pond in their own garden.

■ *Using community grants*

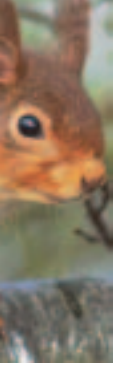
During 2004, over 40 Island groups received a grant via the BTCV People and Places project to improve their local environment. They included Brading Community Partnership which is working with others to improve butterfly conservation in an old chalk pit, and Godshell Scouts, who have improved a piece of wasteland to provide habitat for barn owls and other wildlife and created a wildlife pond.

■ *Setting up a nature reserve*

In 1988, residents formed a group to look at ways of helping protect their local countryside around Sibden Hill and Batts Copse on the outskirts of Shanklin. With the increasing pressure for development around the site, the group lobbied the Isle of Wight Council to designate the site as a Local Nature Reserve. Through the hard work and determination of the group, a Local Nature Reserve at Sibden Hill and Batts Copse was declared by the Isle of Wight Council.







Nature for nature's sake

WE ALL APPRECIATE the value of open green spaces, trees, countryside and undeveloped coastlines. The Island is particularly well-endowed with a great richness of wildlife. The great variety of geology results in a great variety of plants and animals from the open downs with their orchids, blue butterflies and skylarks, to the sandy cliffs with their coastal flowers and fossil dinosaurs. This diversity of our natural environment gives the Island its special character.

Nature is essential to the quality of life in our communities. We are in contact with nature through the wildlife which visits our gardens, and we are fortunate in that nowhere is very far from the coast or countryside where we can renew and refresh our acquaintance with nature.

Living harmoniously with nature presents great challenges. Local action needs to complement national and international action. There are many successful examples of people working with nature rather than against it, but there is still much more to do. Look at the websites listed on the back cover for up-to-date information.

Biodiversity in action for individuals

■ *Join a conservation working group*

Volunteers help the RSPB manage their reserve at Brading Marshes by managing the land, leading guided walks and carrying out survey work. Join a nature conservation group (such as Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Wight Nature Fund) and take part in their work parties.

■ *Help protect rare and endangered species*

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust purchased land at Cranmore to protect one of Britain's rarest moths, the Reddish Buff. Volunteers carry out scrub removal and path clearance to improve the habitat for the moth and Wight Wildlife works with nearby landowners to encourage sympathetic management to help the moth and other specialised plants and animals.

■ *Help conserve our red squirrels*

A network of volunteers across the Island, co-ordinated by the Wight Squirrel Project, looks after red squirrels in their gardens and acts as eyes and ears for problems which could be threats to red squirrels.

■ *Encourage wildlife in your garden*

Garden using organic and wildlife friendly techniques, compost green waste and reduce dependence upon watering. Get involved in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to make sure that the links between people and nature are clearly made.



Main picture Red squirrel
Above Field cow-wheat
Below St Catherine's Down





Further information

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan – Audit and Action Plans
www.iwight.com/Countryside/Ecology/Biodiversity/

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group Members

Isle of Wight Council Countryside Section
www.iwight.com/countryside

Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership
www.wightaonb.org.uk

Country Land and Business Association
www.cla.org.uk

Dinosaur Isle Museum
www.dinosaurisle.com

English Nature
www.english-nature.org.uk

Environment Agency
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Forestry Commission
www.forestry.gov.uk

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
www.hwt.org.uk

Island 2000 Trust
www.island2000.org.uk

National Farmers' Union
www.nfu.org.uk

National Trust
www.nationaltrust.org.uk

RSPB
www.rspb.org.uk

Rural Development Service (Defra)
www.defra.gov.uk

Wight Wildlife
www.hwt.org.uk



Other local organisations

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
www.btcv.org/

Farmers' Market
http://www.iwight.com/isle_working/food/farmer_default.asp

Footprint Trust
www.footprint-trust.co.uk/

Gift to Nature
www.gifttonature.co.uk

Green Gym
www.greengym.org.uk/index.htm
www.footprint-trust.co.uk/greengym.htm

Green Island Awards
www.islandbreaks.co.uk/accommodation/green_island_awards.asp

Health Walks
www.iwight.com/just_visiting/walking/healthwa.asp

Island Futures (Community Strategy)
www.Island.Futures.com

Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society
www.iwnhas.org/

Pond Wardens
www.footprint-trust.co.uk/pondwardens.htm

Wight Nature Fund
www.communicate.co.uk/hants/amcg/index.phtml

Wildlife Warriors
www.iwight.com/just_visiting/walking/wildlife.asp

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This publication is also available on request in large print, in Braille, on audiotape and in other languages. If you require any of these services, please telephone the Isle of Wight Council Countryside Section on 823864.

This publication can also be found at www.iwight.com

