

New Biosphere Committee announces principles for island biosphere living

What does it mean to live in a Biosphere? The new Isle of Wight Biosphere Committee has drawn up a list of principles for biosphere living that it hopes all islanders and visitors will embrace, including businesses and other local organisations. The Committee is also asking social media users to share images of our unique environment and the way people are living in harmony with it using the hashtag #iwbiosphere to encourage discussion and celebration of the Biosphere.

Background: In 2019 the Isle of Wight was awarded Biosphere Reserve status by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). This designation recognises the unique mix of habitats, plants and animals that are found on the island, as well as the cultural heritage and sustainable way of life of islanders and visitors. The island is a particularly special and rare environment for red squirrels, the glanville fritillary butterfly, water vole, reddish buff moth, early gentian and wood calamint.

Since the island became a biosphere there have been events and programmes to celebrate this status and raise awareness but until now responsibility for this has been spread across various organisations. There is a need for a new structure that was specifically dedicated to the Isle of Wight Biosphere, and we are pleased to announce that a new Biosphere Steering Committee has been created for this purpose.

To create the committee the council made a public call to invite applications for new members, seeking those with local environmental expertise as well as from the business community and general public. Seven committee members have now been appointed alongside 2 representatives from Together for Mission Zero and the Isle of Wight Council (see member list below).

The Biosphere Steering Committee (IW BSC) had its first meeting in January, and will be meeting on a monthly basis. We have appointed a chair and agreed a constitution and set of principles for the Biosphere, see below and online [<https://iwbiosphere.org/steering-group>]. We are in the process of agreeing terms of references and exploring how we can be most effective in supporting the adoption of those principles across the island. We have also been speaking to people in other Biosphere reserves to learn more about what has worked for them and how they have tackled the challenges they have faced.

Currently the IW BSC has no budget of its own and all members are unpaid volunteers, but we will be exploring possibilities for funding or partnerships for future projects. We recognise all the amazing current and past efforts to conserve and enhance this incredible environment and will be looking for ways to collaborate with, promote and build upon these as well as consulting widely with the island community. We are all very excited about this opportunity to support our beautiful Biosphere and those who live here and look forward to sharing more about our plans and work soon.

We would love to see more discussion and celebration of the Biosphere and ask that people post pictures of what the Isle of Wight Biosphere means to them on social media using the hashtag #iwbiosphere [<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/iwbiosphere/>]. We also encourage islanders and visitors to read the Isle of Wight Biosphere Principles and consider how they can reflect these in their own lives. Soon, we will be reaching out to businesses and organisations to discuss how these might fit into their own strategies.

QUOTE FROM CHAIR: 'The Isle of Wight UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve is not only a designation for which we should be justly proud but also a testament to the stewardship of the Island's natural and cultural heritage in the past and a commitment by future generations to keep this heritage alive and relevant. In a world of increasing pressures on our planet there is no excuse for ignoring the changes required to achieve the goal of a sustainable Island'.

Richard Grogan

QUOTE FROM COUNCIL.

Councillor Jonathan Bacon, Cabinet member for environment said: "I welcome the news that we now have a newly formed Independent Isle of Wight Biosphere Steering Committee (IW BSC), they will play a vital role in helping to shape the future of sustainable development on the Island, as outlined within the UN Sustainable Development goals."

"It is important for the council to work towards its aspirations in making the Island a sustainable place to live and work, and now with the support of a dedicated Biosphere Steering Committee it is a significant step forward for everyone in our community as we strive to protect our Island, for future generations."

IW Biosphere Steering Committee members

Chair: Richard Grogan

BSC members:

- Barnes Edwards
- Iain Delaney
- Ian Boyd
- Keith Herbert
- Martha Henson
- Richard Grogan
- Sally Chaucer

Together for Mission Zero representatives: Rob Sauven; Will Myles

Council attendance (non-voting):

Cllr. Jonathan Bacon, portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Heritage, Human Resources and Legal and Democratic Services
Holly Jones, Climate Change Delivery Manager

Biosphere principles

THE ISLE OF WIGHT BIOSPHERE PRINCIPLES

We commit to...

1. Value our Island Heritage The Isle of Wight Biosphere Reserve is home to over three thousand specially protected areas that conserve a critical network of natural and cultural diversity. As people living in this unique environment, we learn about and respect these places, and work to preserve them for future generations.

2. Protect and Sustain Nature Across the Island, communities of nature share our neighbourhoods. Biodiversity is integral to the Island's special character. We prevent the neglect and destruction of the everyday places where wildlife thrives. We enhance and enrich our experience of the natural world.

3. Celebrate Local Distinctiveness We recognise that every place on the Isle of Wight has its own unique cultural and natural character. We value the past and demand the best of the future, adding new content, traditions, and cherished places that enrich our sense of place and develop our own local stories.

4. Build a Liveable Island A high-quality built environment is crucial for a society that believes in individual and collective health, social justice, and prosperity. We design and manage our public realm to reflect a better way of living together and ensure that everyone has the right to belong to a community that values sustainability and well-being.

5. Share Biosphere Knowledge Participation in the work of the Biosphere and in the global family of UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves, is available to all. We have widespread learning networks that freely share open-source information. We connect people and projects across the Island in a growing body of community intelligence.

6. Embrace a New Economy The Isle of Wight Biosphere creates a new relationship between people, places, climate and the natural world, extending fresh opportunities for

community wealth and economic health. We seize these chances to create socially useful, culturally and environmentally productive enterprises for a better future.