



**SWEN**

**South West Environment Network**  
2010 Environment Priorities

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# SWEN's 2010 Environmental Priorities

## The top four environmental priorities for the South West.

At a time when the natural environment, our life support system, is under such severe threat, and the costs of exceeding environmental limits are clear, SWEN offers a new focus on the most important themes for action in the South West.

Here is our exacting but exciting challenge, our rallying call for all walks of life - politicians, businesses, and communities: stop wasting our environment and invest in our future prosperity.

### Outcome 1 - One Planet Living

Communities, businesses and the public sector recognise and act upon the need to operate within environmental limits, and significantly reduce their ecological footprint.

### Outcome 2 - The natural environment

Real progress achieved on ecosystem and biodiversity restoration.

### Outcome 3 - Valued landscapes

Landscapes become resilient, distinctive and multi-functional.

### Outcome 4 - Inspired people

We understand and celebrate the benefits of a healthy environment to our quality of life.

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges that we face. Reducing damaging climate change and its impacts must, therefore, be considered across everything that we do. Delivery of our top 4 outcomes – what we want to happen most - would significantly contribute to reducing both the causes and effects of climate change.

Supporting each Outcome are a set of opportunities which include new legislation, current initiatives, imminent reform and the action of social movements. These opportunities together provide the focal point for delivery. They indicate an existing momentum, a platform for SWEN's call for investment in our future quality of life. We need leadership, support and a full take up of these kinds of opportunities.

Members of the South West Environment Network – collectively & individually - offer extensive capacity to work with all partners to strengthen delivery against these four most important environmental outcomes. By developing the evidence base and supporting take up, SWEN will track and report on delivery of the outcomes.

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## SWEN offers 3 major roles in achieving these outcomes:

1. To champion, support and encourage people's understanding of the benefits of a healthy environment to our quality of life;
2. To support communities, businesses and the public sector to operate within environmental limits and significantly reduce their ecological footprint (especially their climate impact) and increase their resilience to the effects of climate change;
3. To build and spread the awareness, skills, and 'human resources' of all kinds required for better delivery

## Why an Ecosystem Services Approach

The SWEN Priorities are shaped by the 'ecosystems approach' which describe the benefits and services our environment provides. These benefits include: clean air, clean & plentiful water, productive soils, supplies of raw materials - food, fuel, construction materials, productive land, rivers & seas, climate regulation, flood protection, high quality landscapes and heritage & geodiversity. Benefits also include our natural health service which contributes to the health & wellbeing of people in the South West.

SWEN will seek to promote widespread adoption of the ecosystems approach to all development and environmental actions. This supports a transition from the established 'silo approach' to environmental activity, and a move from single issue to multi-benefit integrated delivery.

**It's a good investment:** Investing in the natural environment is investing in our essential infrastructure. The natural environment provides cost effective solutions to growing problems like flood and coastal defence, carbon emissions and the preservation of soil, water and air quality. However, the vital role the natural world plays in contributing to a thriving economy continues to be undervalued. Investments that destroy or undermine the natural environment risk our future prosperity. The environmental limits and targets we set should allow ecosystems to be resilient to external shocks such as extreme weather and human pressures.

**It's connected:** Integration is an essential element for SWEN's priorities work. It allows us to connect across issues and topics. It is also a means of communication and provides the structure to establish working networks that can deliver positive environmental outcomes.

**It's positive:** It signals a shift in focus from the costs of losing environmental services to an emphasis on the benefits that we all receive from healthy functioning ecosystems. Ecosystems-based solutions recognise that a healthy natural environment and future prosperity are both needed; that we need to deliver both food and environmental security, more low-carbon energy and wildlife.

## The Ecosystems Services approach provides us with:

- A systematic framework for deepening our understanding of the value of nature and our natural capital;
- Knowledge of where the environmental limits are and the choices we face;
- Better informed decision-making; and
- A justification for sustained and long term investment in natural capital.

# 1

## One Planet Living

Communities, businesses and the public sector recognise and act upon the need to operate within environmental limits, and significantly reduce their ecological footprint.

One Planet Living highlights the fact that the services the environment provides cannot support infinite economic growth. What we do to natural ecosystems has real limits. The costs of exceeding these environmental limits can be very high, and irreversible.

The challenge facing the South West is to set the direction for sustainable and stable development. By living within environmental limits, adapting to climate change and shifting fast to a low carbon society we have a great opportunity to create a resilient natural and built environment with biodiversity-rich landscapes and more accessible, distinctive, tranquil and healthy greenspace.

People, businesses and government in the South West must rapidly reduce their ecological and carbon footprint and actively invest in the environment sector. Preparing for the effects of climate change will reduce vulnerability and help to ensure long term prosperity for all.

### Opportunities for One Planet Living

- 1. Transport.** Local Transport Plans must deliver transport systems that ensure carbon reduction.
- 2. Making the most of existing National Indicators and targets for local government, public agencies and other bodies.** There is much more to be made from programmes and targets that central government frames for local government and its agencies across the South West. For example, NI185 & NI186 CO2 reduction from local authority operations & per capita; NI188 Planning to adapt to climate change; NI175 & NI176 Access to services, facilities & employment by public transport, walking and cycling; NI187 Tackling fuel poverty - % of people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating; NI189 Flood and coastal erosion risk management.
- 3. Net zero carbon investments.** The SW Regional Development Agency aspires to have a net zero carbon investment portfolio by 2013. This means that the strategies and projects that agency chooses to invest in need to be considered in terms of their carbon footprint. Following this model, investment by public, private and third sectors can deliberately favour low and net-zero sustainable construction standards, renewable energy & low carbon technologies.
- 4. The right technology in the right places: renewable energy deployment.** The SW is rich in low carbon energy resources, but in common with the rest of the UK, we are making poor progress at current rates of take up. There is much more to be done, fast, and in ways that work for our communities and in harmony with our natural environment.
- 5. Sustainable settlements.** Although there are scattered shining examples of best practice, a strong 'transition town' movement and plenty of aspiration in policy documents, there is a massive task ahead to improve our settlements, from urban centres and market towns to our rural and coastal settlements. We need an accelerated transformation that places quality of life, low carbon and environmental justice at the centre of our approach to future prosperity.

# 2

## The natural environment

Real progress achieved on ecosystem and biodiversity restoration.

The natural environment of the South West provides an immense range of valuable services and benefits for society. These range from the essentials for life, including clean air and water, food and fuel, and essential natural processes, such as climate and flood regulation to things that improve our quality of life and wellbeing, such as recreation and beautiful landscapes.

Progress on ecosystem restoration would also increase biodiversity's resilience to climate change, ensuring that these benefits can be enjoyed into the future. Restored ecosystems also act more effectively as carbon sinks and therefore mitigate climate change. The natural environment is our strongest ally in understanding and choosing development paths that will benefit all in the future.

### Opportunities for the natural environment

- 1. The Common Agriculture Policy reform in 2013** represents a significant public investment opportunity for the natural environment. CAP reform could support sustainable farming practices and secure high quality environmental outcomes, including: restoring habitats; improved water quality and flood risk management; better quality protected areas including our National Parks & Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and accelerate the move to low carbon farming. 'High Nature Value' farmland and extensive livestock systems could become a real focus in farming and rural land use post-2013.
- 2. Scale & integration:** a much stronger focus on scale, and integration through an ambitious programme of landscape scale projects across the South West, including in the protected landscapes (National Parks & AONBs). Elements could include the delivery of 'SW Nature Map' to create resilient and joined up habitats for wildlife in urban and rural areas, and the implementation of the Regional Woodland and Forestry Framework.
- 3. The 'ecosystem services approach'** should rapidly be trialed, tested, developed and mainstreamed to become the principal underpinning guidance for **land use and development planning** across the South West.
- 4. Healthy seas and abundant marine wildlife.** With the passing of the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) we have entered a new era in which the protection, appropriate management and restoration of coastal and maritime environments is now possible. Key to this will be the establishment of new Marine Conservation Zones that, together with existing designated marine sites, will form an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in the waters around the UK by 2012. There is a great deal to do now to make sure the promise of the Act is translated into good environmental outcomes.
- 5. Celebrate!** The South West should be famous for doing more to maintain and improve its natural environments – its 'green infrastructure'. People live in, work in and visit this outstanding region because of these. People care passionately about our special environments and wildlife, and not just because they see the economic benefits that flow from them. There is much more scope to celebrate our love for these places.

# 3

## Valued landscapes

Landscapes become resilient, distinctive and multi-functional.

Landscape is more than just ‘the view’. It is about the complex, interacting natural and cultural systems that make up each landscape and it is also about the relationship between people, place and nature. SWEN promotes an integrated approach and so this outcome includes urban greenspaces and biodiversity.

We champion the highly valued, rural and urban South West landscapes. The objectives guiding our changing landscapes will ensure they remain valued and resilient to climate change in the future. Environmental quality plays an essential role in local communities and their future prosperity across the South West.

### Opportunities for valued landscapes

- 1. Delivery Plans & Commitments:** Protected Landscapes sustainably managed through delivery of the 15 National Park and AONB Management Plans.
- 2. Agri-environment schemes and their targeting:** Continue and increase the land area under agreement in Protected Landscapes
- 3. Monitoring landscape change:** Landscape change monitored to inform future policies and implementation with support from Regional Landscape Partnership
- 4. Living landscapes:** a programme of large, interconnected, wildlife-rich areas will ensure a resilient and integrated landscape for biodiversity, with wider benefits for people.
- 5. Green infrastructure:** champion the development of ‘Green Infrastructure’ in all our cities and conurbations. Create and protect natural networks in our towns (eg gardens, allotments, trees, rivers, canals, railway verges and parks).
- 6.** The development of **Heritage Protection Plans**, seeking to identify and manage vulnerable historic assets which are currently not afforded statutory protection. The expansion and monitoring of the National Heritage at Risk initiatives, will help track progress in securing vulnerable historic assets.

# 4

## Inspired people

We understand and celebrate the benefits of a healthy environment to our quality of life.

The natural environment is a natural health service with the potential to make a major contribution to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of everyone in the South West. It is free for everyone to use and enjoy, enriches our knowledge, develops skills, supports cultural activities and is crucial for sustainable living.

Effective planning and delivery for increased provision of, and appropriate access to, natural spaces can also inspire people to develop productive, healthy and socially just communities. The better we value and understand environmental benefits, the better we can ensure they are integrated into the support and development of truly sustainable, healthy communities in our locality.

### Opportunities to Inspire People

- 1. Sustainable consumers & producers of fresh, healthy, local food with clear, traceable origins.** Community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises have an important role to play in supporting activities that promote healthy eating and more sustainable production and consumption. Initiatives which inspire people as consumers and producers are encouraging people to manage agricultural land and take up allotments to grow local food. Such schemes promote new approaches, facilitate behavioural and cultural change and reconnect people and land through local food.
- 2. The NHS** to engage people more actively with their immediate environment by jointly creating space that will be used by staff, patients and the local community for art, food crops and woodfuel.
- 3. World Class Places Action:** to strengthen leadership on quality of place at both the national and regional level; to encourage local civic leaders and local government to prioritise quality of place; and to put the public and community at the center of 'placeshaping'.
- 4. 2012 Cultural Olympiad** – bringing together art, cultural and environmental stakeholders to celebrate and engage with the outstanding environment of the South West.
- 5.** Promote new initiatives including: **SW Outdoors for all network; Natural England's Access to Nature** for greater participation; and the **1SW** plans to make South West England a world-class destination for off-road cycling and to encourage outdoor recreation.



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This statement is deliberately short. You can access more detail of our members, practical delivery actions, the evidence base and material on the ecosystems services approach on the SWEN website <http://www.swenvo.org.uk/swren/>

**Key supporting documents:**

1. Haines-Young, R and Potschin, M, DEFRA 2007. The Ecosystem concept and the identification of Ecosystem goods and Services in the English Policy context.
2. Natural England, 2009. No charge? Valuing the natural environment.
3. SW Regional Woodland & Forestry Framework Implementation Plan 2009 – 2012
4. RSPB 2009. Naturally at your service: why it pays to invest in nature.

Weblinks for these documents are available on the SWEN website.

The South West Environment Network (SWEN) is an independent network of environmental organisations, agencies and groups in the South West of England. SWEN aims to make an important contribution to the South West agenda by adding real value to the efforts of those involved in protecting and enhancing the environment of the South West, in the context of sustainable development.

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