

Pioneering a new nature-economy

A beacon for the UK



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Photo: Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife
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Purpose of this talk

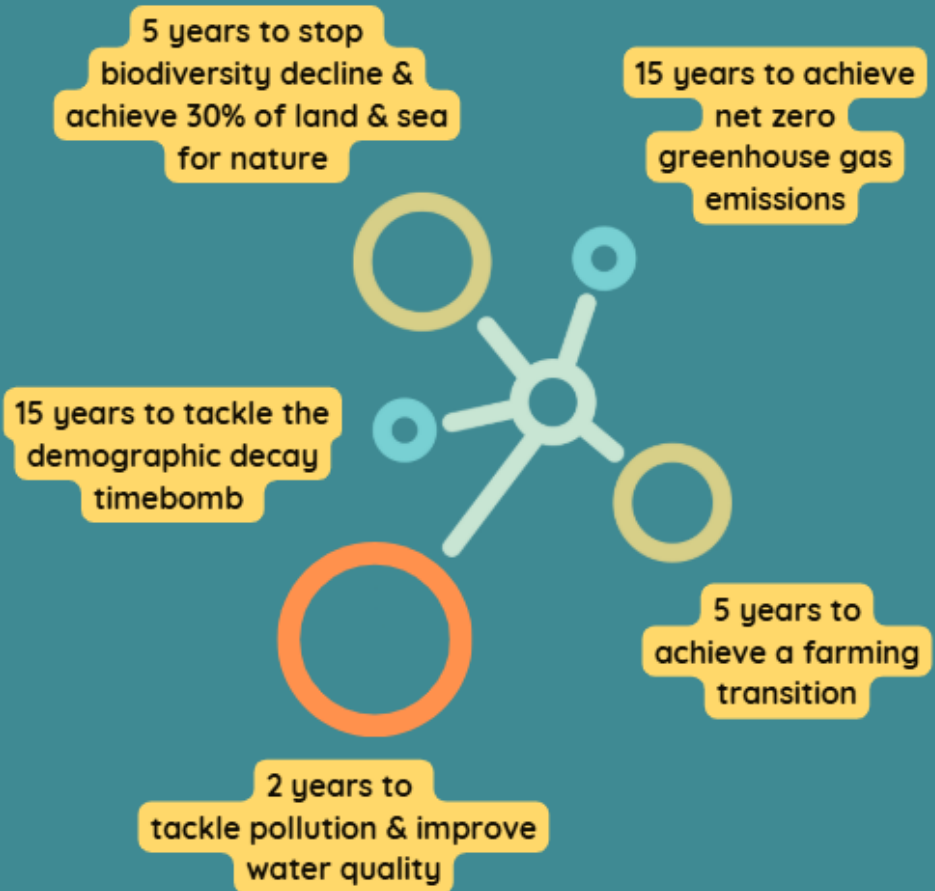
To introduce Beacon and the work we want to carry out on the Isle of Wight and to *share learnings* from similar projects and island initiatives.

Photo: Wild Garlic in Shorwell, Isle of Wight © 2021 Ellen Williams

The urgency: a place in decline

Like much of the UK, the island is facing a series of interlocking, urgent challenges whilst being required to meet targets

- **Three-quarters of land used for intensive farming** – Leading to degraded soil, polluted water, and biodiversity loss.
- **2nd Highest socio-economic need in England (OCSI)** – The Isle of Wight ranks among the most deprived areas nationally.
- **Rising child poverty** – Increasing levels of deprivation are impacting children disproportionately, with long-term consequences for health, education, and opportunity.
- **Amongst the lowest full-time employment and income rates in the UK** – Economic stagnation is contributing to poor life outcomes and limited prospects for residents.
- **Youth flight and demographic decay accelerating** – Young people are leaving the Island due to lack of opportunity, weakening community resilience and future workforce potential.
- **Critical infrastructure fragility and enterprise stagnation** – Local systems are under strain, with limited innovation and investment in sustainable enterprise.
- **Significant risk of systemic fracture by 2035** – Without intervention, the Island faces compounding risks across environment, economy, and society.



Government and local authority targets

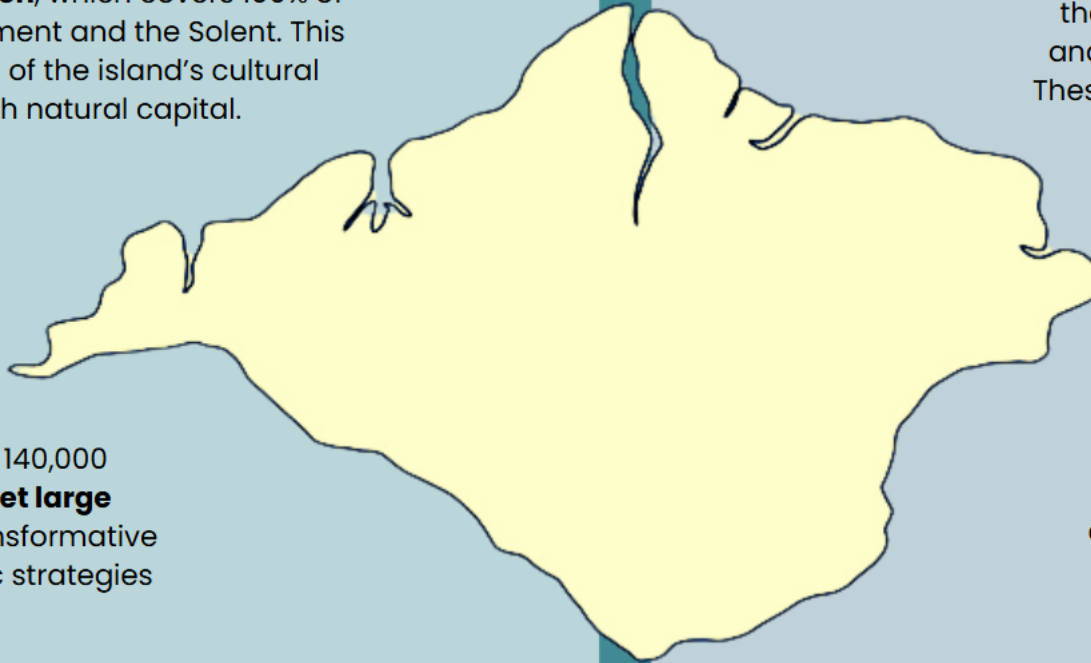
Why here? The ideal model system

UNESCO Biosphere designation, which covers 100% of the Island, its marine environment and the Solent. This was awarded in recognition of the island's cultural distinctiveness and rich natural capital.

Closed system, by virtue of being an island like the UK mainland, where all inputs/outputs are measurable via ferry

As England's largest island with 140,000 inhabitants the island is **small yet large enough** to develop and deliver transformative system-wide nature-led economic strategies

Representative of the mainland: 63% of island land is farmed (vs 63.1% on mainland England), all of lowland UK habitat types and all main categories of European Red List Habitats as defined by EUNIS are represented, and both the island and mainland are aiming for 30% of the land and seas to be protected by 2030



Why now? Building on momentum

Increasing delivery of sustainability related projects that to improve local natural capital, public health and tackle economic and demographic stagnation. These isolated projects lack the investment needed to make a genuine long-term difference.

Growing sustainability-focused identity, it's an Island with a strong sense of positive enterprise.

Islanders want to **continuing building strong research and teaching connections** with the cluster of central south universities, particularly Portsmouth and Southampton, which would deliver unrivalled capacity to measure and disseminate programme impact.

New Island partnerships, collaborations and coalitions are already forming and continue to grow, for example Together for Mission Zero, the IOW Doughnut Economy Group, the Environmental Farmers Group, Connected Wight, the Wildlife Trust's Wilder Wight, and Solent Seascape.



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The vision

Beacon is a strategic plan as part of the Isle of Wight Biosphere to *boost the economy and restore nature*, through driving investment into local projects that benefit the whole community.

Beacon will create a *blueprint for off-island communities* across the UK Economy to follow, to have a truly transformational and far-reaching impact.

Beacon is designed to attract, validate, and channel aligned finance, partnerships, and creative capital into the Island's biocultural economy.



Nature-led Economy

A metaphorical and literal Beacon

We want to demonstrate that aligned action at scale can deliver:

- **A healthy biosphere** with nature in recovery, restored functioning ecosystems, reduced pollution, reduced emissions, climate resilience;
- **Stronger society** with improved health & wellbeing, higher quality, affordable, locally produced food, better social cohesion;
- **Rejuvenated economy** with increased access to higher quality jobs, innovation & creativity, more opportunities for young people and increased adoption of circular & regenerative economy principles.



What this looks like in practice

Systems change – not trickle down but feeding up

From this		To this
Declining wildlife & fragmented habitats	➔	Abundant and thriving wildlife with 30% of land and sea protected for nature
Polluted & dysfunctional rivers and seas	➔	Rivers and seas restored with less pollution and more naturally functioning
Poor soil quality & bad farming practices	➔	Transition to regenerative, nature-friendly farming to restore soil health, with new climate-resilient crops and circular local food markets and supply chains
Food poverty and unhealthy communities	➔	Healthy local food supply chains, community food growing, education and skills
Economy struggling overall	➔	Development of natural capital markets for the Island to attract investment and new income sources for land management
Lack of jobs for young people, brain drain	➔	New jobs and skills in nature restoration, local food markets, regenerative farming, creative industries
Vulnerable to external shocks: financial, climate	➔	A more self-sufficient, resilient Island
Isolated projects, no join up for system change	➔	Creating a buzz around systems change. A model system for others to follow



Systems change is hard, and it needs to be developed, delivered and tested in a real place, through real projects, at the right scale.

But if we can do it on the small Island, we can do it on the big one ..

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Unlike the arbitrary borders on the mainland, the Isle of Wight's boundaries are defined by nature herself. As one of the few entire-island UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves, the Isle of Wight is, by definition, a 'bioregion' with a density and diversity of important natural assets. Life on an island has shaped many of its inhabitants into visionaries and changemakers – this place boasts a remarkable concentration of cultural creativity, natural science innovation and business entrepreneurs.

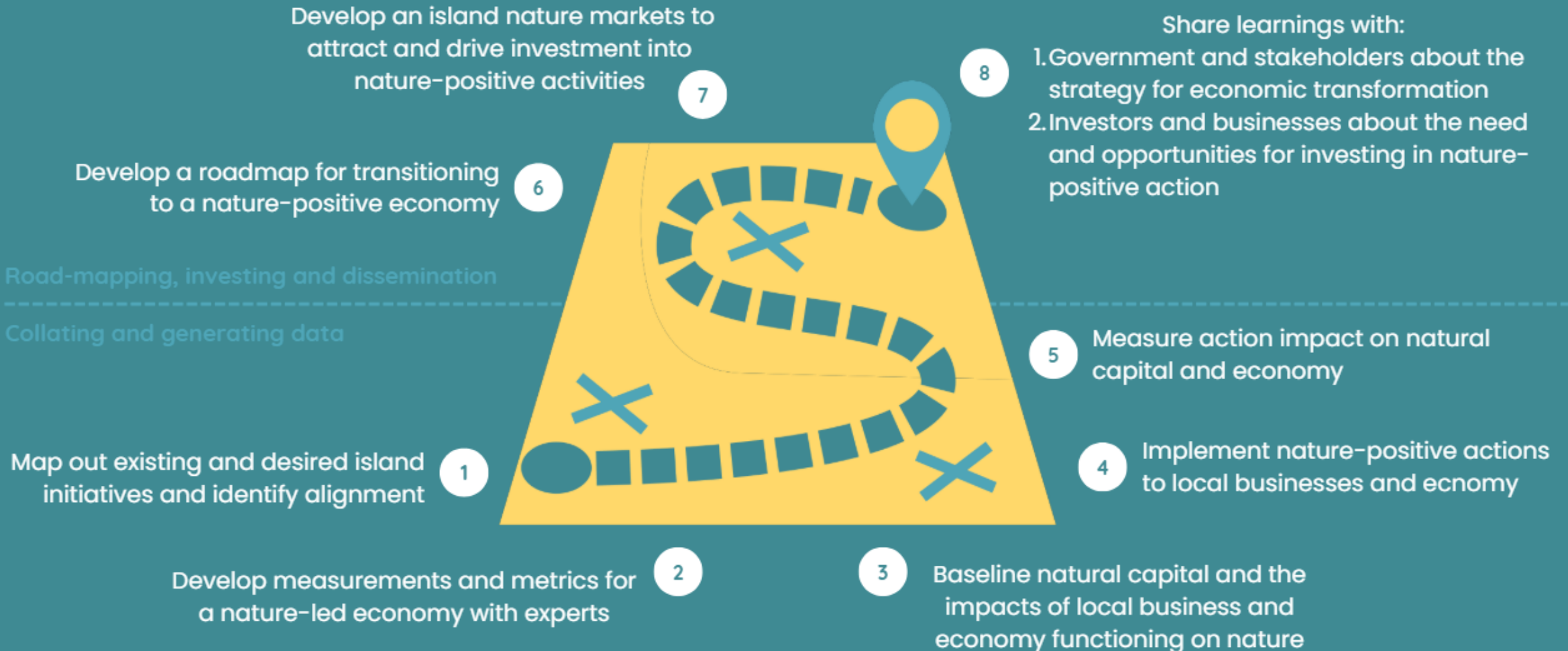
ISLE OF WIGHT
BIOSPHERE

Key:

- HIWWT nature reserves
- Nature conservation sites managed by other NGOs (RSPB, National Trust)
- Designated sites (SPA, SAC, SSSI, Ramsar)
- Protected landscapes (National Parks, AONBs)

Proposed Action Plan

Demonstrating that aligned action at scale to create a nature-led regenerative economy can deliver a thriving Island and prosperity for all.



Support and ask needed



Experience

- Working within a UNESCO Biosphere
- How to demonstrate relevance of biosphere to local community
- Finding support on the other areas of help needed



Financial

- For a central programme office to develop vision and aims, build support, communications, develop fundraising, etc.
- To develop a business case for investment into nature-recovery
- To deliver initial projects and initiatives



Connections

- Establish Academic partners to set up data, evidence, research and monitoring
- Test business case for investment with global multinationals



Communication

- Sharing project aims, ambitions, findings etc. wider to inspire others across the globe to adapt similar models.



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