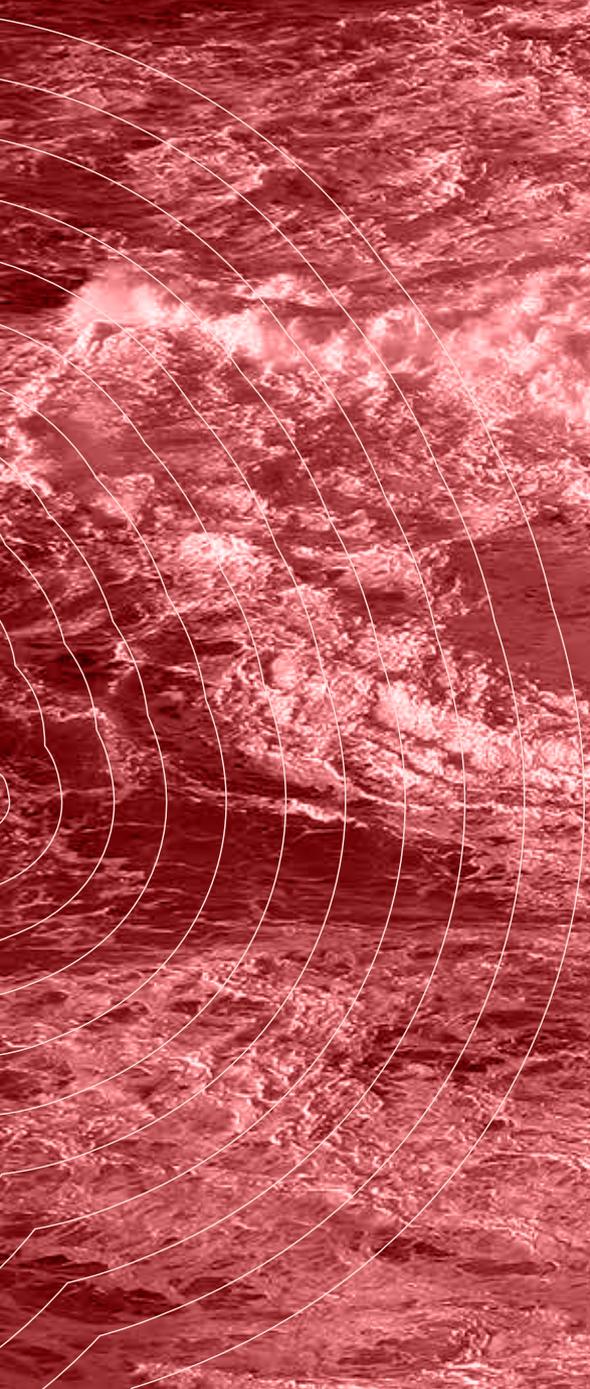


NEW FRONTIERS

STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL CAPITAL



STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL CAPITAL

Context

The value of the environment to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly cannot be underestimated; our communities and organisations reflect this commitment and respect for our natural heritage. Thus, we have a notably strong Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership that brings together the main regulating agencies bodies, key third sector stakeholders and independent views. The CIOS LNP works in close Partnership with our two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnerships for Cornwall and the Tamar Valley, and can offer an aligned and integrated landscape for considering new approaches to governance and funding. We also offer a strong relationship with our Local Enterprise Partnership, whose Ten Opportunities notably include seven which are dependant or impactful on our natural capital: Space; Energy; Agri-food; Tourism; Marine; Mining; and Aerospace.

Our Environmental Growth Strategy offers a long term direction of travel with cross sector support to drive the innovation necessary to deliver it. It has embedded the principle of net gain in Cornwall, aligned to the ambitions of Defra's 25 Year Plan for the Environment. Our challenge now is to ensure we deliver our vision.

Unlocking barriers

The rationale for change

Cornwall has a close, motivated and innovative community who would like to collaborate more formally to govern and invest in the natural capital we are so reliant upon.

Our natural capital itself also has distinctive features; we are an Atlantic peninsular, furthest south and west, creating opportunities from our growing conditions but vulnerabilities due to the intensifying winter storm systems making land fall here. We have short rapidly responding catchments, which are hard to manage in the increasingly frequent heavy down pours we are receiving in summer months. Our small rural and coastal communities, dispersed through our landscape, are rich in heritage assets form a long history of human habitation, which has created unique and rare ecological conditions. Our natural capital provides a unique way of life for our residents and is of enduring appeal to visitors; we want to manage this carefully at a local level to preserve this balance into the future.

Cornwall has a finely balanced social, economic and environment system, reliant on limited infrastructure

Cornwall has a finely balanced social, economic and environment system, reliant on limited infrastructure. Our natural resources and beauty help to generate wealth which improves local resilience and creates a national asset for all. As we exit Europe, we have the opportunity to rebalance our system to not just protect our environment but to link its health to ours and capitalise on its growth, making our systems more resilient and prepared for a changing climate.

The wider context of policy change post-Brexit, and the need to increase productivity nationally and locally gives us reason to explore the opportunity for new approaches now, which can respond to these future changes but in doing so also address some of the anomalies of the outgoing system.

There are features of our environment that are not appropriately recognised within our national systems. We would like the opportunity to discuss the impact of this and propose changes which will support our work through more refined application of local resources and we hope an ability to obtain and utilise national resources more effectively.

We have set out a series of areas for consideration which concern our approach to regulations, governance, funding and operations, all of which are framed in the context of the ambition to create environmental growth.



Our ask

Freedom to evolve: Moving beyond existing definitions

Cornish Hedges and Moorlands

Ecological networks are essential to ecosystem health; small woodlands, single trees and Cornish hedges are essential connecting routes between different habitats. Cornish hedges do not fit the national hedgerow regulations since they do not always have a 'hedgerow' as defined by the legislation associated with them. We are seeking the freedom to develop and utilise an alternative system for protection of Cornish Hedges that would use a Hedge Importance Test.⁴⁴ This approach would enable a locally informed assessment of our hedgerows and their importance to our ambitions for environmental growth. Working with Government colleagues to have this test recognised in national systems would enable us to manage our ecological networks more effectively.

Another area of interest is the consideration of our 'moorlands' against the national definitions of 'uplands'. We would like our 'relative' uplands, with many features and management requirements of the defined uplands further north in the UK, to be considered equally with regard to access to funding to enable better management to result in demonstrable examples of environmental growth. The linkage of the three south west moors – Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor - in a recent application to Defra for peatland restoration funding illustrates the ecological similarity between these areas, as the farming practises are in response; they are not however considered equally in policy terms.

⁴⁴ 'Cornwall Council Peer Review,' <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/31600495/corporate-peer-review-final-report-160218.pdf>

Rapid response catchments

Rapid response catchments are designated by the Environment Agency and result in support for communities to prepare emergency response plans for flooding incidents. There is not a holistic approach to how thinking differently about these landscape features could be both innovative, cost effective and deliver multiple benefits. We would like to see a joined up approach across Government and local regulators to managing these typical features of Cornwall's landscape into the future.

These catchments and associated river corridors are mostly steep and narrow and still contain linked, important terrestrial, coastal and marine habitats. Focussing new schemes to buffer rivers on a greater scale could help to protect and enhance habitats, reduce river pollution, alleviate flooding and alleviate low flows in dry periods. Setting up new schemes to do this is likely to be more cost-effective than farming right up to watercourses in terms of the public benefits that could be delivered. For example, healthier ecological systems and linkages would provide increased flood prevention, improved bathing and drinking water quality, access, recreation and biodiversity. This increases the potential to include species reintroduction such as beavers, who are natural environmental engineers, maintaining and enhancing these functions on our behalf⁴⁵.

Public rights of way network

Cornwall has the most extensive network of rights of way in the UK, nearly 4,500km. We are seeking the opportunity to explore freedoms from the existing legislation on managing our public rights of way network. Limited local resources are now stretched to service requirements originally conceived in the 1940/50s. Better outcomes with the resources available could be delivered with freedom to redefine our objectives.

More recently legislation has had a positive impact, such as the Marine and Coastal Access Act, underpinning the long term viability and value of the South West Coast Path. We would also be interested to discuss with Natural England proposals to increase access and create significant associated economic opportunities through the provision of a nationally supported north to south coast linkage route on the Cornwall and Devon border.

Our offer

Each of the examples given are linked to awareness within our communities that with further empowerment through freedoms and flexibility on definitions, and where appropriate, financial support that reflects parity with others areas of the UK, we could make better use of our local resources to generate societal and economic benefits from environmental growth in these areas.

We are seeking the opportunity to explore freedoms from the existing legislation on managing our public rights of way network

⁴⁵ 'Cornwall Council Peer Review,' <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/31600495/corporate-peer-review-final-report-160218.pdf>

Our ask

Aligning operations

'Mind the gap':

Managing multiple designations

A number of notable sites in Cornwall are subject to designations that are governed by multiple Government agencies, such as Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. Bringing these groups together, to ensure the sum of the parts is greater than the individual aspects is becoming increasingly important as particular sites diverse values are posing opportunities and challenges for management. We would ask for a Governmental review of the legislation, governing bodies and methods used to determine management approaches on our multiple designated sites to ensure actions undertaken 'mind the gap' between the jurisdictions of the different legislative documents and agencies.

Planning

We would like to investigate with Government colleagues how our ambitions for environmental growth and the intention articulated within the 25 year Environment Plan to deliver 'net gain' and increase then provision of green infrastructure can be rapidly delivered through forthcoming developments within Cornwall.

Increased clarity around the quality standards for environment in our regulatory landscape would give more certainty to planners, developers and to empower local residents and NGOS to work in partnership with them to get the best outcomes in the areas of Cornwall set to see large scale increases in housing numbers, infrastructure and commercial activity. We have an active community seeking to improve outcomes from development across our designated and non-designated areas.

Our offer

'Mind the gap':

Managing multiple designations

By working through example cases at a local level, we would not only resolve our challenges locally but provide the evidence and methodologies for the necessary improvements at a national level which would close the gap between our regulating agencies policy and practice.

Planning

Learning from our work with Historic England on Cultural Distinctiveness there is an opportunity for us to work in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency to create an agreed method for ensuring the consistent delivery of environmental growth. This would be supported by the work being done locally on developing a Supplementary Planning Document on Environmental Growth to support our Local Plan; encouraging the use of the Wildlife Trusts' Building with Nature standard on major developments, developing a system for Biodiversity banking/offsetting, as well as being a partner in the INTEREG PERFECT project which focuses on improving the delivery of Green Infrastructure. We are working proactively to ensure our ambitions for high quality development is given significant weight in the planning process and particularly at appeal.



Our ask

Facilitating funding locally

The careful application of future farming subsidies and agri-environment schemes will be critical for our future prosperity and environmental quality. This would be most effectively done through enhancing our involvement in delivery against locally-set priorities, informed by a regional natural capital accounting system.

We would like to propose the consideration of stewardship funds for agriculture and other Defra monies (or proportions of), such as flood defence grant in aid, as a single- environmental-pot of funding – where delivery against the ambitions of the 25 year Environment Plan could be better supported by local knowledge, and help align activity with our Environmental Growth Strategy.

Our offer

We would pilot a government and locally defined body to oversee the management of funding in Cornwall, similar to the existing Intermediate Body status we were granted to managed the European Union Structural Funds. This body would be tasked with resolving priorities for funding allocation and monitoring outcomes of the programme through a supporting natural capital accounting method. We would specifically be seeking to address the

weakness in the current programme where socio economic activity is being delivered in isolation to environmental measures. This separation often leads to sub optimal outcomes and high cost delivery model.

Our approach would help us to enable Government to deliver locally targeted projects informed by national thinking. Combining learning from Natural Capital Committee recommendations and the Pioneer projects; experience within our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnerships, innovations within the University of Exeter SWEEP programme and a bespoke private-public partnership for managing natural capital in the Fowey catchment, we can offer a regional scale pilot to test an integrated approach.

Consideration might also be given to the co-location of all environmental management organisations in Cornwall to drive collaboration, local responsibility and accountability, informed focus, alignment and efficiency of resources within Government bodies and local organisations. We would also welcome discussion of how an enhanced role for local intelligence might inform options around the operation of an Environment Bank.

All of the opportunities outlined would radically improve our ability to effectively steward our natural capital alongside the delivery of economic prosperity in rural areas. Ensuring empowered, aligned organisations, which collaborate and are structurally supported to seek multiple benefits from investments and optimise production of ecosystem goods and services.

Consideration might also be given to the co-location of all environmental management organisations in Cornwall to drive collaboration, local responsibility and accountability

Resilience

In 2015 we received agreement from Government for us to work together to examine our resilience related to flooding and coastal defence. Having undertaken this work through our Strategic Resilience Board, we have increased the understanding of Cornwall's predicament and can make specific asks on Government regarding policy and funding conditions.

We want to begin to address Cornwall's environmental challenges systematically, so we optimise the limited resources we have to invest from government and local sources. To do that we need Government to take account of our circumstances when policy and investment decisions are taken.



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Our ask

- Overall a request for Government to consider how rural and coastal areas are considered in national policy, where each place has unique circumstances, but Cornwall's are particularly distinctive, being an unprotected Atlantic peninsula with rapid response catchments around our coast line, creating a unique combined risk from intense rainfall events and sea flooding to small and/or vulnerable communities.
- For national approaches to modelling flood risk to include wave action and heights and that these are modelled to reflect future risk from sea level rises and more rapid climate change.
- For the Partnership Funding Calculator that has a mechanism included within it to account for low population – high risk – high cost flood risk management measures. This would require measures of value such as the risk of loss of life to be given greater weight within the calculator model.
- For a fund to conduct a feasibility study and consultation on the implementation of Schedule 3 (deferred) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (SUDs) and support to fund a nationally important guidance document into design, implementation and maintenance of Sustainable Drainage Systems.
- For infrastructure, commercial premises and livelihoods to be accounted for more equally with residential properties within the Calculator mechanism. To introduce a calculation of impact (Financial and Social) to a flood affected area to demonstrate the outcome of flooding and quantify the true Cost/Benefit of flood resilience improvements.
- For positive consideration be given to increasing funding for green infrastructure and natural flood management interventions. To enable investigation of how these risks can be managed cost effectively into the future, taking account of the capital and revenue implications associated with protecting communities with complex risks. We would welcome collaborations with the Environment Agency's research programmes to evaluate investment proposals and projects to enable increased intelligence on such an approach to become more widely available. To define, nationally, the concept of Natural Flood Management and Working with Natural Processes and a way of quantifying the benefits of such schemes when compared to engineered, traditional structures.
- For Government to consider the impact local ownership of coastal assets has upon their maintenance, and the risk of deterioration as storm pressures increase. We would ask that increased funding was made available for maintenance of these assets in the South West.
- It has become clear that in the future in Cornwall roads will need to convey water and traffic; however, they are not being specifically designed for this purpose. We ask Government to convene a cross departmental task group to consider the policy changes needed to support adaptation to climate change for rapid implementation across all Government investment streams associated with transport infrastructure.
- Consider the application of a small climate change adaptation levy on local taxes, such as Council Tax and Business Rates. This would provide a revenue stream for the Council to support communities who want to proactively consider their future to inform growth and development plans and to access the available national funding more effectively.
- Consider a parallel scheme to FloodRE for Small/Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in areas of deprivation where economic and social resilience is reduced. This will encourage new investment in economically and socially disadvantaged areas and support existing businesses to increase their investment and increase their resilience. Businesses' sharing the burden of flood risk like residential properties, presents a fair and collective responsibility to flooding.

Our offer

Our offer is one of local responsibility where we are doing all we can within the constraints outlined previously to manage our risks, this however, leaves us locally and nationally at risk of high levels of reactive spending during the increasing rainfall and storm events through the summer and winter.

We have created our Strategic resilience Board which is working actively with the Regional flood and Coastal Committee; we have reviewed our evidence base, examining our working practises and formulating our 25 year investment plan. We have a pioneering Community Flood Forum, an excellent emergency response service capability and good partnership working between local teams in the Risk Management Authorities. Unlocking the barriers above would enable these strengths to be built upon further.



Benefits

Undertaking the measures outlined above will facilitate Cornwall to increasingly prepare for and manage the impacts of a changing climate, it will increase business resilience and proactive investment and will reduced the social impacts of both severe unexpected flood events and chronic flooding which can blight people's lives.

The measures will present a consistent funding profile for Cornwall, one which highlights the gaps in funding well in advance, reducing system shocks and the need for storm recovery funds. The benefit to national government is consistency, the 25 year investment programme addresses priority areas first, ones where the true impact of flooding is calculated, the programme moves through Cornwall's priority of needs vs vulnerability, building long-term sustainable solutions which have the potential to stimulate economic growth.

We will empower ourselves locally to engage with the Governments programme for funding and support the delivery of national targets, with local leadership through the Strategic Resilience Board, for project development and identifying suitable interventions for Cornwall that account for our funding and risk context. This will provide better outcomes with less costs in project development and management by approaching projects pragmatically through locally informed process form the start i.e. accounting for realistic budgets and methods which respect local constraints.

Our policies will be designed to deliver resilient growth, giving greater value for money from government investments in the long term, as well as increasing local confidence and investment. Our innovative policies to favour Green infrastructure and natural processes where possible would also drive our knowledge economy, professional innovation and new markets.