

HOW CAN WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR SOMERSET?



If we want to make sure that we can sustain a dynamic, vibrant and resilient environment in Somerset, we have to work together. If we want to make sure that residents and businesses can continue to benefit from our precious natural capital, we have to make real commitments to change. If we want to turn around nature's decline for future generations, we have to be more creative and joined up.

Our local environment is part of an intricate web of interlinked systems that depend on each other – tidal mudflats, river systems, fertile soils, peat moors and woodland. We need to manage these habitats in a joined up way – to benefit wildlife and humans, to help protect our future.

Right now we have a chance to influence the debate and more importantly change what we do. There has never been a greater need for urgent action; nor has there been quite such an opportunity to make the urgent changes needed.

DEFRA's recently launched 25 year plan is encouraging:

“We will use this opportunity to strengthen and enhance the protections our countryside, rivers, coastline and wildlife habitats enjoy, and develop new methods of agricultural and fisheries support which put the environment first.”

The time is NOW – will you join us?

Improve the quality of what we have

- Encourage new farming models that work with nature
- Implement new and better ways to manage our river catchments
- Create habitats of sufficient scale to support healthy populations of wildlife
- Train the next generation of land managers to create more resilience
- Protect and extend conservation areas

Encourage more people to benefit from the environment

- Improve access to the nature rich areas, supporting better health and wellbeing
- Improve interpretation and understanding of the natural environment
- Give people a stake in nature so they look after it and protect it
- Celebrate the wonderful wildlife and habitats in Somerset

Create new economic opportunities from nature

- Support enterprise opportunities alongside nature reserves – advice, soft loans, procurement
- Support new courses in land management and nature conservation – the workforce of the future
- Create a nature 'levy' on all new homes - to support a Fund for Nature
- Promote the economic value of a nature rich environment
- Encourage visitors to enjoy the natural environment and local food and drink.

Take account of nature in all plans, strategies and developments

- Ensure new developments improve, and not damage, the natural environment
- Increasingly use natural flood protection methods
- Ensure ALL plans have considered how to enhance the resilience of Somerset's natural assets

OUR **NATURAL** ADVANTAGE – for nature, for people, for the future

OUR NATURAL ADVANTAGE

Somerset has a rich and diverse natural environment. From the wild uplands of Exmoor to the abundant wildlife on the Levels and from the fertile Blackdown Hills to the grasslands on the Mendips – it offers important habitats, wonderful wildlife and critically important environments.

Nature is good for the economy

Somerset's economy and its culture are built upon the importance of its natural environment. Farming, forestry, fishing, tourism - all depend on the continued health of the environment. In fact, the quality of the environment is a key factor in attracting visitors and people to live and work in the County.

Nature makes us happy and healthy

Most of us enjoy nature. We enjoy being out in the fields and on the beach, wandering in the woods and along river banks. Whether we are dog-walking; fishing; bird-watching or mountain biking. Being out in the environment connects us with nature and makes us feel fulfilled. It also keeps us fit and improves our mental health.

But nature is so much more important than all that.

Nature is the very stuff of life

We get all sorts of direct benefits from nature - food, fibres and fuel. The natural environment also provides us with clean air, fresh water, pollination, a reduced risk of flooding and regulation of the climate. If we work with nature, we can benefit from the vital services and protection it provides. This is especially important as we come under pressure from a growing population and the effects of climate change.



WHAT HAS *NATURE* EVER DONE FOR US?



We should not forget that the environment underpins almost 12% of our economy – it is the resource on which farmers and foresters and tourism business depend. We should not forget that our wildlife and landscapes are a major part of what attracts businesses, workers and investors to Somerset. It makes sense to build up rather than diminish that natural capital.



IMPROVES

- health and wellbeing
- air quality
- property values
- labour productivity

SUPPORTS

- business investment
- tourism
- jobs in agriculture
- other land-based industries

PROVIDES

- recreation
- priority habitats
- food and fuel
- climate regulation
- flood alleviation
- pollination

CRITICAL ISSUES

The next 20 years or so will bring profound changes in the way we live our lives, manage our businesses and plan for our communities. Issues, such as climate change, population growth, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss, will provide serious challenges and some opportunities – both globally and locally.

Our natural habitats are under increasing strain; our soils are losing their fertility; bees and other pollinators are threatened; natural flood defences have been weakened and pollution affects our rivers and the air we breathe.

Some of our best loved species and habitats are under real threat. 1 in 10 species nationally, including Somerset's snipe, curlew, redshank, dormice and horseshoe bats. The Levels are at risk from climate change, peatland loss and the intensification of agriculture. Tidal mudflats are threatened by coastal squeeze and sea level rise. Much of the upland heaths and grasslands suffer from over-grazing, while woodlands suffer from neglect and ash dieback. Poor

planning affects available urban greenspace for local communities.

But there is time to restore much of our environment – if we have the will to do so.



Flood Alleviation

Parts of Somerset have suffered in recent years from extensive flooding. While it has always been a risk, with an increase in development and extreme weather events, the likelihood and frequency of major flooding have increased. At Holnicote, a National Trust estate near Minehead, trials have established new ways to manage the river catchments from the source to the sea. Working with farmers, land owners and local communities, the project has successfully reduced the flood risks by implementing a range of upstream natural management measures.

REASONS TO BE *CHEERFUL*



Somerset is rich in environmental assets – coast, moors, woods and rivers. Its beautiful landscapes and varied wildlife attract millions of visitors, provide a living for thousands of people, offer a playground for body and soul, protect our communities and produce our food.

Wooded hills and ridges are rich in woodland wildlife but also help to slow the flow of water onto lower ground and reduce flood risk. The Levels and Moors are one of the largest wetlands in the country and home to spectacular 'murmurations' of starlings that attract many thousands of visitors annually. Our wonderful protected landscapes such as Exmoor National Park and four Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are the destination of choice for hundreds

of thousands of visitors each year, providing local business and employment opportunities.

For many of us, the diverse wildlife that lives within our precious landscapes is why we chose to stay or move here; and life in a Somerset without such diversity is simply unimaginable.

We should celebrate the successful creation of new salt marshes at Steart Point; the natural flood protection measures introduced at Holnicote and through the double award winning Hills to Levels project; the launch of a county wide Pollinator Strategy; the Taunton Garden Town initiative and the increasing numbers of visitors to the internationally recognised Avalon Marshes.



Each success story has been the result of years of effort by local organisations based on sound science and hard-won resources. And there is still much more to do. If we learn from our successes, we can – together – reverse the decline in our natural environment. We can improve our important habitats and increase our wildlife – and so maintain the conditions for healthy lives, growing businesses and a resilient future.

If we get it right, our environments can support a diverse range of businesses and livelihoods. We can create a Somerset where the economy and the environment work hand in hand.

The Avalon Marshes

At the heart of Somerset's Levels and Moors, lies a beautiful area called the "Avalon Marshes". The Avalon Marshes is a vibrant, working landscape, celebrated for its rich wildlife and culture, valued and enjoyed by all. It is one of the finest remaining lowland wetlands left in Britain; it has 10,000 years of history; it is actively farmed and it attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year.

