



THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF REWILDING

The Isle of Wight Biosphere

The Isle of Wight was designated a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, one of only seven in the UK and only 3 in England.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are unique places connecting people and nature. These internationally recognized areas celebrate, test and demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable development. A biosphere reserve is much more than just a protected area. It is a learning place for sustainable development, where scientists, local communities, and policymakers work together to balance the conservation of ecosystems with the sustainable use of natural resources. These places include terrestrial, marine, and coastal ecosystems, covering each of the planet's diverse habitats.

The Isle of Wight conundrum

Island communities the world over are especially vulnerable to patterns of change; they are bounded territories that must rely to a much greater extent than mainland societies on their own resources, enterprise and self-reliance. Our own Island is now suffering from the worsening effects of a combination of overlapping and intensifying issues, some home-made, some national and some global, but all concentrated into the 'underlying health conditions' that are impacting people, nature and the environments we share.

Accelerating climate-driven harm; an ageing population and the 'brain drain' of youth flight; the rising costs of living and of doing business; significant challenges in health care (mental health and addiction especially), education, wages and jobs, and the rise of dereliction and town centre decay.

And yet the Island is blessed with globally recognized quality in its landscape, ecology, marine environment and earth science. Searching for ways to use these great resources to secure new investment for the Island is a key objective of the work of the Isle of Wight Biosphere

The International School of Rewilding (ISR)

We plan to establish the International School of Rewilding, an international centre for research, study and innovation in environmental sciences that will cater for students from the island and the mainland, developing a year-round visitor economy, building the reputation of Sandown and the wider Bay area as a centre of study, research and innovation, developing investment partnerships with universities and environmental science industries, and delivering real and lasting nature recovery work for Island habitats and species.

The ISR Objectives

1) Embodying biosphere principles in the fabric of the centre

Showcasing next generation ecological design and materials science, the centre will be built with an iterative process, working closely with International School of Rewilding stakeholders and funders to develop proposals, and to monitor – and respond to – the on-going relationship between wildlife, people, ecology and landscape.

2) Provide lifelong learning and pipelines to industry



The Isle of Wight is already a hotbed of innovation in the environment sector, with several Island organisations pioneering techniques and supporting groundbreaking research in this field. The combination of the Island's Biosphere status and the published Local Nature Recovery Strategy is accelerating this arena of special expertise, identified as a national priority in the recently published UK Industrial Strategy.

The new centre will allow Island students to follow a pathway of study from school to industry, without the need to move away, retaining talent and building the new enterprise that we need. As the first campus to embody biosphere principles, it will create unmatched opportunities for students from across the world to study, generating an inward migration of young adults. We intend for the centre to also support research and learning in regenerative farming and forestry, helping land managers across the Island and beyond to sustain a livelihood in harmony with the outstanding environments that they care for.

3) Integral to and connected with the community

Locally rooted with an international focus, the centre will celebrate local heritage and support existing Island businesses whilst attracting a new younger demographic to the area, creating new opportunities for growth. Rewilding principles will catalyse actions in the area to enrich the lives of the communities and drive economic regeneration.

Beneficiaries

- **Academic Institutions and Lifelong Learning**
- **Land managers**
- **Island economy**
- **Local, National and International students**
- **Young Islanders**
- **The community of Sandown and the Bay area**
- **Nature Recovery efforts**

Site

The proposed location for the International School of Rewilding is a 140-hectare site, including underutilised parts of the Wildheart Sanctuary, areas of the Browns estate previously used for golf and the grazing marshes inland the River Yar.

The floodplain wetlands will be the first UK site to be re-wilded by European Elk, a long-forgotten native species perfectly suited to this habitat restoration work under the changing conditions driven by climate warming.

There will be new visitor facilities accompanying the work for wildlife including boardwalks across the wetlands, viewpoints and hides, linking with the LCWIP's and better connecting the Bay with surrounding communities.

The wetlands will provide not only an important nature recovery zone but also a research area where students attending the ISR can work on a wide range of ecological, hydrological, climate, land-management and river engineering projects.



The centre will create a native species centre linked to both the Wildheart sanctuary and the school, focusing on priority Island species as identified by the LNRS, essential for connecting students and visitors alike with the biosphere and providing species focused research opportunities in support of nature recovery.

ISR will also of course make full use of its proximity to Sandown Bay through research programmes on marine biology, aquaculture, ecological engineering and earth science. Creating a new native species centre

Site buildings and features

- **Multi-purpose lecture/workshop/event spaces**
- **Marine Laboratories**
- **Student accommodation for residential courses**
- **Lodge-style accommodation for other visitors**
- **Educational native species area**
- **Re-wilded river valley wetlands**

Delivery Partners

Current stakeholders include;-

Wildheart Animal Sanctuary
Artecology
RSPB
Atelier One
UK Architecture Today
Natural England
Environment Agency

Timescale

2 to 5 years dependent upon availability of funding. Can be a phased approach.

Funding and Next steps

The business case for the centre is already being put together and following agreement in principle from the Isle of Wight Council (as the major landowner) we will be pursuing the commercial investment and grant funding interest that is growing around the scheme proposals. The centre will be run as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting the regeneration of Sandown. A commitment from the start will be to protect and enhance the freely accessible public open space qualities of the area.