



# Delivering nature recovery across Hampshire & Isle of Wight with the New Forest at the heart

## New Forest Biodiversity Forum

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3 March 2026





**Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight**  
Wildlife Trust

# Overview

- **About the Trust and our strategy**
- **Our work in the New Forest**
- **The pressures and risks to nature**
- **Grasping the challenges and opportunities**

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**Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight**  
Wildlife Trust

# About us

- Independent charity ~ 65 years old
- ~ 30,000 members
- ~ 5,000 hectares owned/managed
- ~ 30 team wilder groups ~ 1000 volunteers
- Part of The Wildlife Trusts ~ 1 million members
- Impact across land, rivers & sea
- Conservation, restoration, partnership, engagement, advocacy
- Work at scale – ecological and societal



**4,917**

hectares (12,150 acres) in Hampshire and the Isle  
of Wight managed by the Trust (2023/24: 4,896  
hectares / 12,098 acres)



**96%**

of Trust SSSIs (Site of Special Scientific  
Interest) in favourable or recovering  
condition (2023/24: 96%)



**107**

Full Time Equivalent (FTE) contracted  
employees (2023/24: 103)



**29,103**

members and friends (2023/24: 28,689)



**6**

sites acquired to support nature recovery –  
Colman's Withybed, Portchester – Solent Wader  
and Brent Goose Sanctuary Site and the extensions  
of Goulters Dean, Deacon Hill, Lymington Reedbeds  
and Merton Marsh (2023/24: two sites)



**518**

livestock animals, enabling conservation  
grazing on the land we manage – 267 cattle,  
242 sheep and 12 native ponies  
(2023/24: 246 cattle, 270 sheep and six  
native ponies)



**46,578**

social media followers across Facebook,  
Instagram, X and LinkedIn  
(2023/24: 44,632)



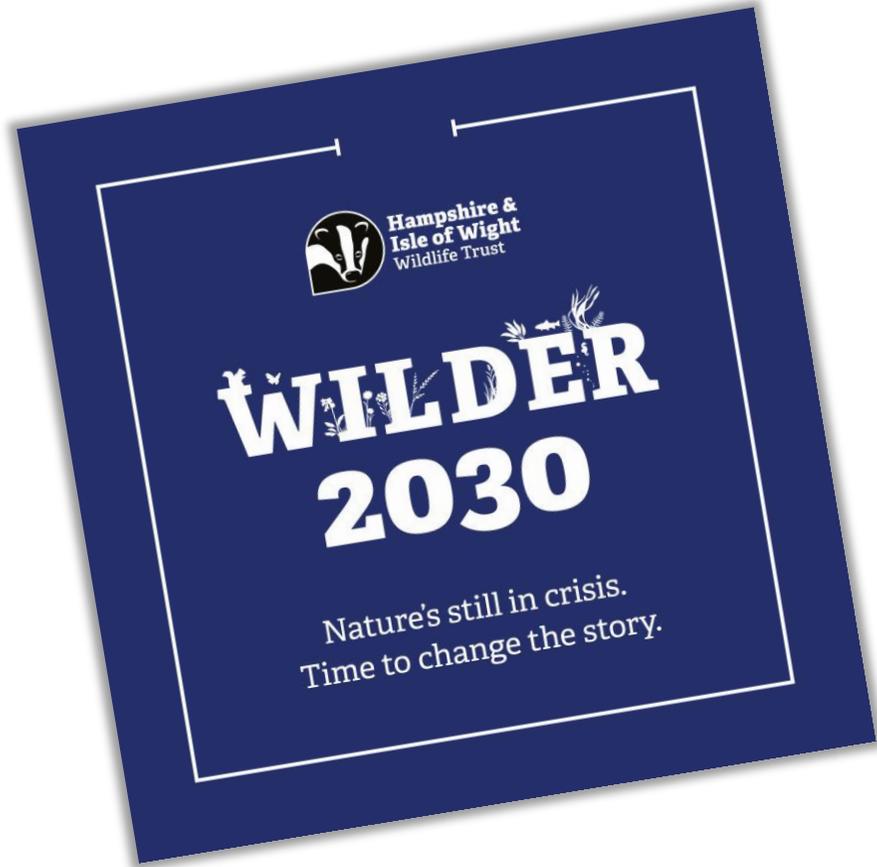
**1,407**

volunteers (2023/24 1,466)



**Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight**  
Wildlife Trust

# Our approach is changing



## The Challenge

- Nature still in decline
- People and systems disconnected from nature
- Economic and policy structures drive degradation
- Lasting recovery requires systemic change

## Our Approach

- Fewer isolated sites → more connected landscapes
- Not just protection → but restoring abundance
- From resisting change → adaptation and resilience
- Conservation not a niche activity → but a whole-society movement
- People as active participants in nature's recovery
- Nature not just a nice to have → but a necessity and a solution
- Nature's value fully embedded in economic planning and decisions

Success depends on place-based delivery – and the New Forest is one of the most important places.

# Our strategy for change

Our strategy sets out what we will do to start to change the system in favour of nature's recovery – working across five strategic priorities and delivering through integrated place-based programmes.

1.

## Thriving nature

Through protecting and restoring wild places, nature can flourish, recover and spread.

*Our Role: Nature Restorer, Solutions Provider.*

**PRACTICE**

2.

## Powerful partnerships

By working together, we can scale the transformation of landscapes and seascapes.

*Our Role: Local Leader, Collaborator, Convenor.*

**PARTNERSHIPS**

3.

## Connected communities

People are inspired and enabled to play their part in nature's recovery.

*Our Role: Educator, Mobiliser, Culture Shifter.*

**PEOPLE**

4.

## Nature-positive society

The value of nature is understood and is central to decision making.

*Our Role: Policy Shaper, Change Maker.*

**POLICY**

5.

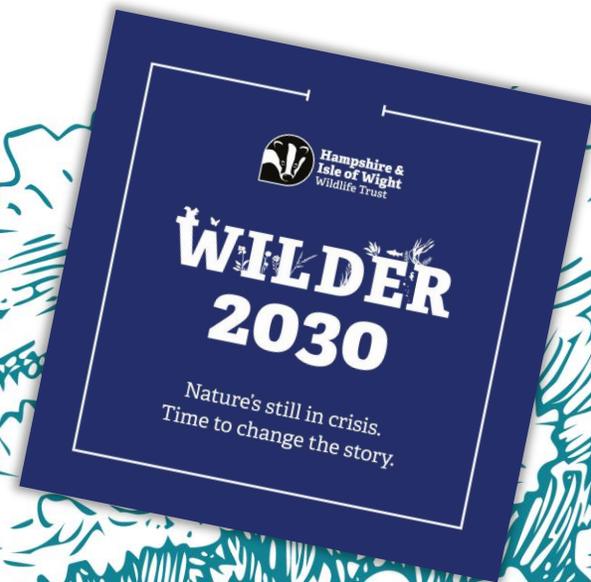
## Future-ready team

We are a strong organisation, embedded in our communities, with the people and resources needed to make change happen.

*Our Role: Employer, Partner, Moderniser.*

**PURPOSE**

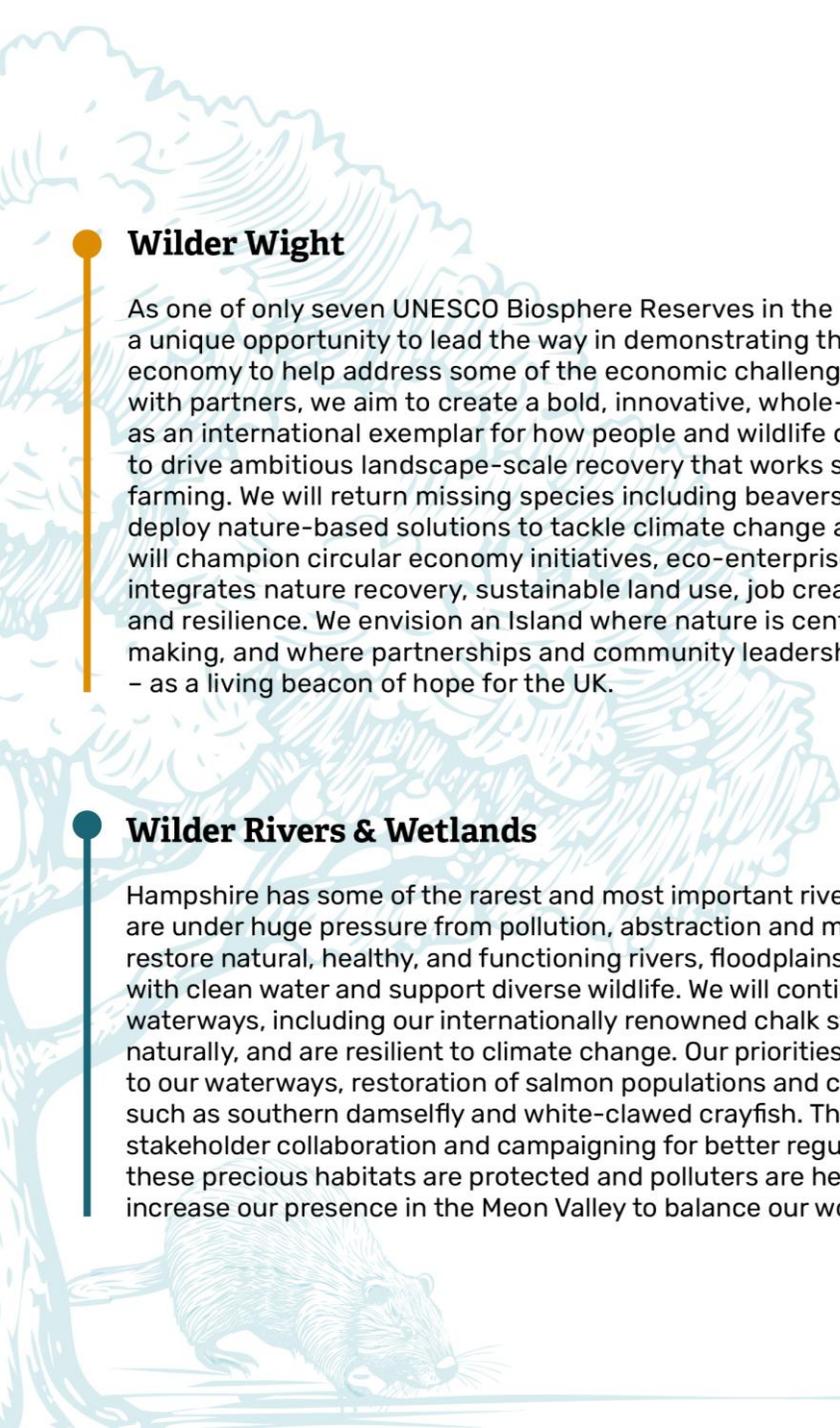
**PLACE-BASED DELIVERY**





# Place-based delivery



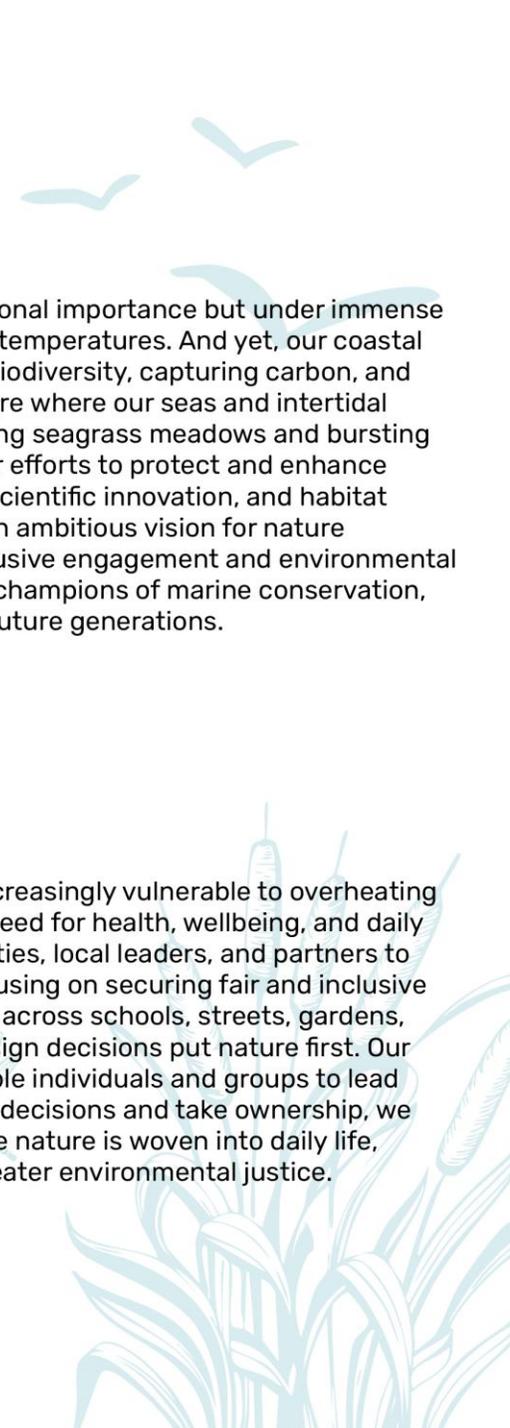


## Wilder Wight

As one of only seven UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in the UK, the Isle of Wight has a unique opportunity to lead the way in demonstrating the power of a nature-led economy to help address some of the economic challenges the Island faces. Working with partners, we aim to create a bold, innovative, whole-Island approach that acts as an international exemplar for how people and wildlife can thrive together. We aim to drive ambitious landscape-scale recovery that works seamlessly with regenerative farming. We will return missing species including beavers, create thriving habitats, and deploy nature-based solutions to tackle climate change and development pressures. We will champion circular economy initiatives, eco-enterprises and strategic planning that integrates nature recovery, sustainable land use, job creation, community prosperity, and resilience. We envision an Island where nature is central to daily life and decision-making, and where partnerships and community leadership deliver meaningful change – as a living beacon of hope for the UK.

## Wilder Rivers & Wetlands

Hampshire has some of the rarest and most important rivers in the world, but these are under huge pressure from pollution, abstraction and modification. Our vision is to restore natural, healthy, and functioning rivers, floodplains and wetlands that flow freely with clean water and support diverse wildlife. We will continue working to ensure our waterways, including our internationally renowned chalk streams, are rich in life, function naturally, and are resilient to climate change. Our priorities include seeing beavers return to our waterways, restoration of salmon populations and conservation of rare species such as southern damselfly and white-clawed crayfish. Through targeted restoration, stakeholder collaboration and campaigning for better regulations, we will fight to ensure these precious habitats are protected and polluters are held to account. We are looking to increase our presence in the Meon Valley to balance our work across all river catchments.



## Wilder Seas

The Solent and wider marine habitats are of international importance but under immense pressure from pollution, development and increased temperatures. And yet, our coastal waters and deep seas play a vital role in supporting biodiversity, capturing carbon, and sustaining livelihoods. We are working towards a future where our seas and intertidal habitats are in a far healthier state, home to flourishing seagrass meadows and bursting with colour, character and life. We aim to scale up our efforts to protect and enhance our marine ecosystems through community action, scientific innovation, and habitat restoration – joining forces with our neighbours on an ambitious vision for nature recovery across the whole south coast. Through inclusive engagement and environmental stewardship, we want to see more people becoming champions of marine conservation, ensuring a resilient, thriving seascape that benefits future generations.

## Wilder Towns & Cities

Many of our towns and cities are devoid of nature, increasingly vulnerable to overheating and flood risk, and lacking the green spaces people need for health, wellbeing, and daily connection with the wild. We will work with communities, local leaders, and partners to embed nature into the fabric of towns and cities, focusing on securing fair and inclusive access to high-quality green space, restoring nature across schools, streets, gardens, and public areas, and ensuring that planning and design decisions put nature first. Our role is to build capacity, mentor champions, and enable individuals and groups to lead action for nature. By enabling communities to shape decisions and take ownership, we will create healthier, more resilient urban areas where nature is woven into daily life, supporting both people and wildlife and fostering greater environmental justice.



## Wilder North Hampshire

The twin pressures of urbanisation and climate change are squeezing north Hampshire's wildlife and impacting important habitats including the Thames Basin Heaths, ancient woodlands and chalk streams like the River Loddon. Development along the M3 corridor and beyond is fragmenting ecosystems, while pollution and climate stress is compounding the risks. We will work with active, engaged communities to champion nature-positive development and river rights, seeking opportunities to reconnect fragmented habitats. We will collaborate with landowners and key partners to rewild landscapes and catchments and increase climate resilience – for example, through grazing management and holding more water on the land to guard against wildfire risk. We are particularly keen to identify opportunities for a flagship project to increase the Trust's presence in the north of the county.

## Wilder Chalk

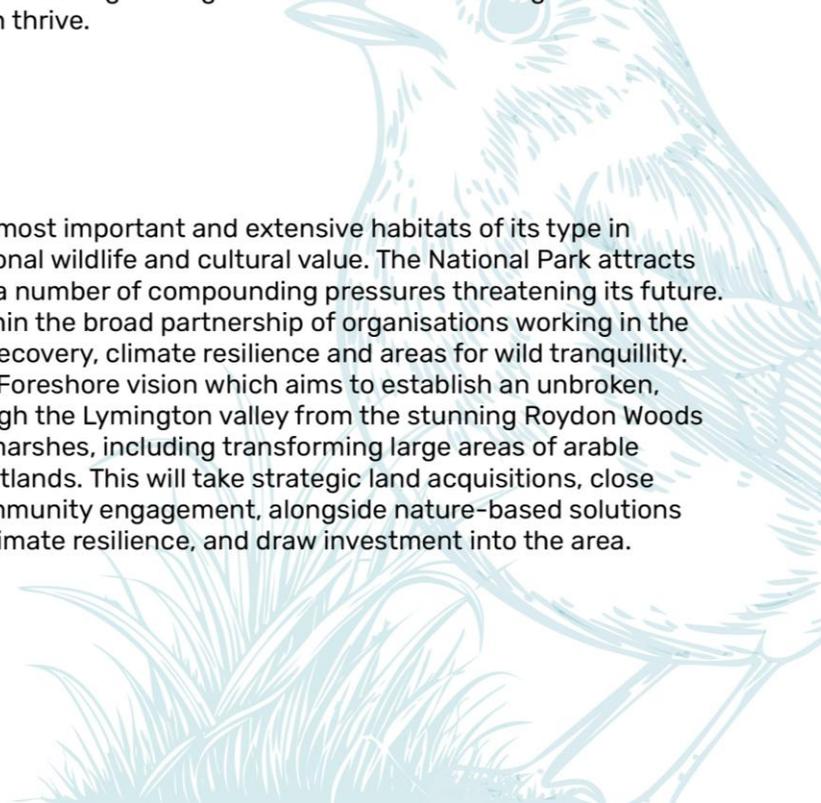
Our chalk habitats are as globally rare as they are iconic, supporting precious wildlife and sustaining people through providing water, food, and access to nature. But most species-rich grasslands are gone, and climate change is a major threat. We will work with key partners and landowners to reconnect fragmented chalk downland and woodland habitats, from Broughton Down to Noar Hill, build resilience to climate change and help specialist species of butterfly, moth and plant thrive once more. We will seek opportunities to mitigate development impacts through nature-based solutions in a way that supports both nature recovery and regenerative land use, reducing pollution into the chalk aquifers. We will work with farmers and the Big Chalk partnership to improve the balance between food production and nature recovery. A key ambition is to reconnect the severed landscape around the M3 cutting at Twyford Down and create a future-facing, wildlife rich gateway into the South Downs National Park.

## Wilder Coast

Our coastline is the place where climate risks are most acute. It is under huge pressure from relative sea level rise, erosion, pollution and urban growth, with most of our important coastal habitats, including Farlington Marshes, at risk of being lost in the decades to come. These are home to globally important populations of wintering wildfowl and wading wetland birds as well as being important to people. Our primary aim is to help wildlife adapt to these pressures – with key strategic acquisitions and creation of compensatory habitats and refuges being an urgent priority. Working with partners, we will build resilience across our coastal and estuarine areas – improving the functional connections between land and sea, safeguarding the most important areas from unsustainable development and strengthening connections between fragmented areas to ensure these ecosystems can thrive.

## Wilder New Forest

The New Forest is one of the most important and extensive habitats of its type in lowland Europe, with exceptional wildlife and cultural value. The National Park attracts millions of visitors and faces a number of compounding pressures threatening its future. We aim to play a vital role within the broad partnership of organisations working in the Forest, championing nature recovery, climate resilience and areas for wild tranquillity. A key priority is our Forest to Foreshore vision which aims to establish an unbroken, vibrant wildlife corridor through the Lymington valley from the stunning Roydon Woods nature reserve to Keyhaven marshes, including transforming large areas of arable farmland into new coastal wetlands. This will take strategic land acquisitions, close partnership working, and community engagement, alongside nature-based solutions that tackle pollution, boost climate resilience, and draw investment into the area.



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© Peter Emery



**Roydon Woods HIWWT Nature Reserve**



© George Boxall

## Lymington Reedbeds HIWWT Nature Reserve

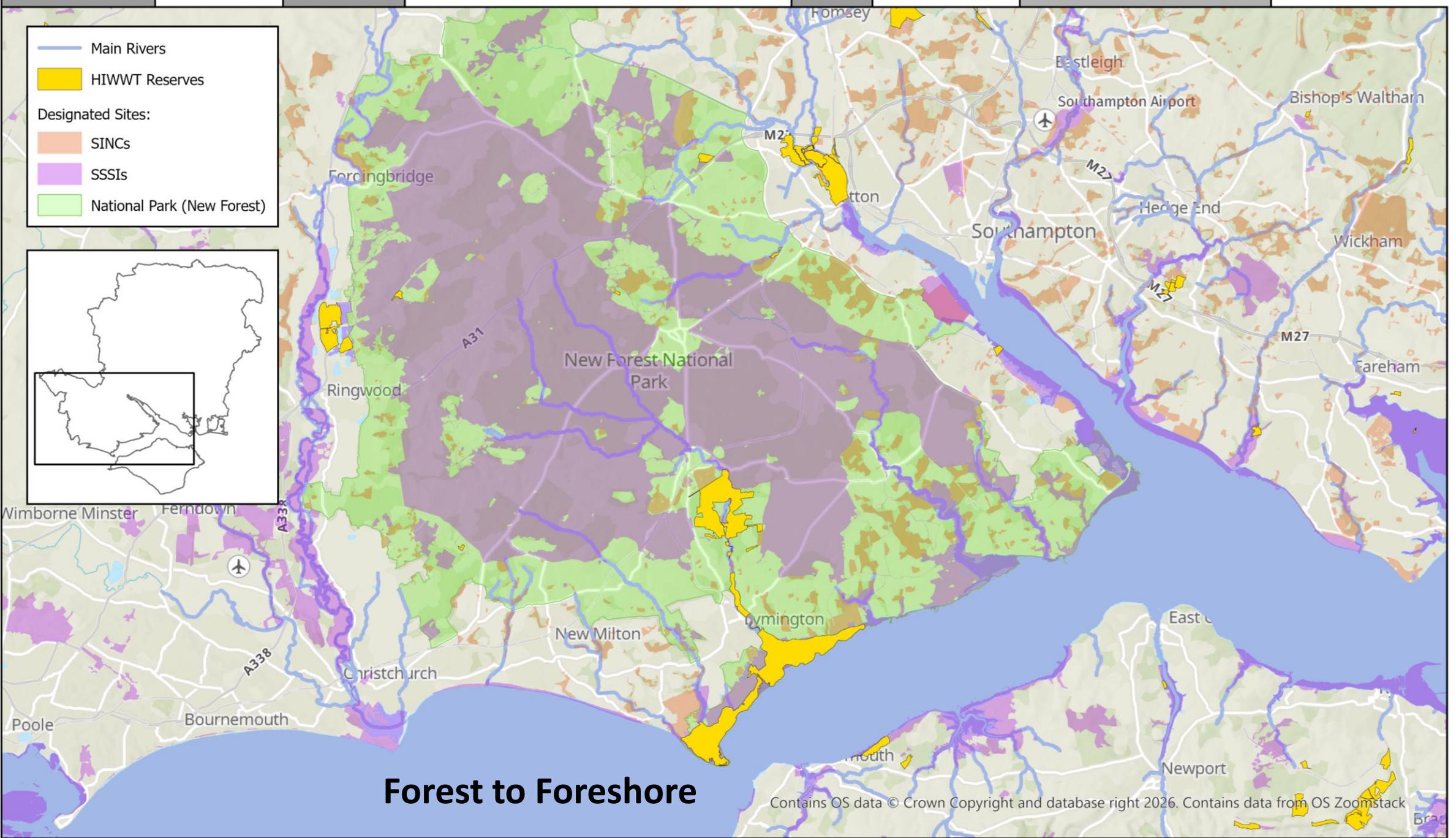


© Chris Fairhead



Arable reversion on the coast as a nature-based solution





# Forest to Foreshore

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# Pressures are intensifying

- 15+ million visits per year
- Recreation pressure increasing every year
- Highest visitor density of any UK National Park
- Development around the Forest continues to expand ~130,000 new dwellings by 2036
- Commercial infrastructure growth and pressure on transport links
- Rising wastewater and pollution loads
- Sewage discharge in rivers
- Many rivers not in good ecological condition
- Only around half of protected habitats in favourable condition
- Climate change is accelerating ecological stress



**Plan to expand city port to Waterside revealed**



ASP  
The existing Solent Gateway site, developed in 2023, created 30 acres of new operational space

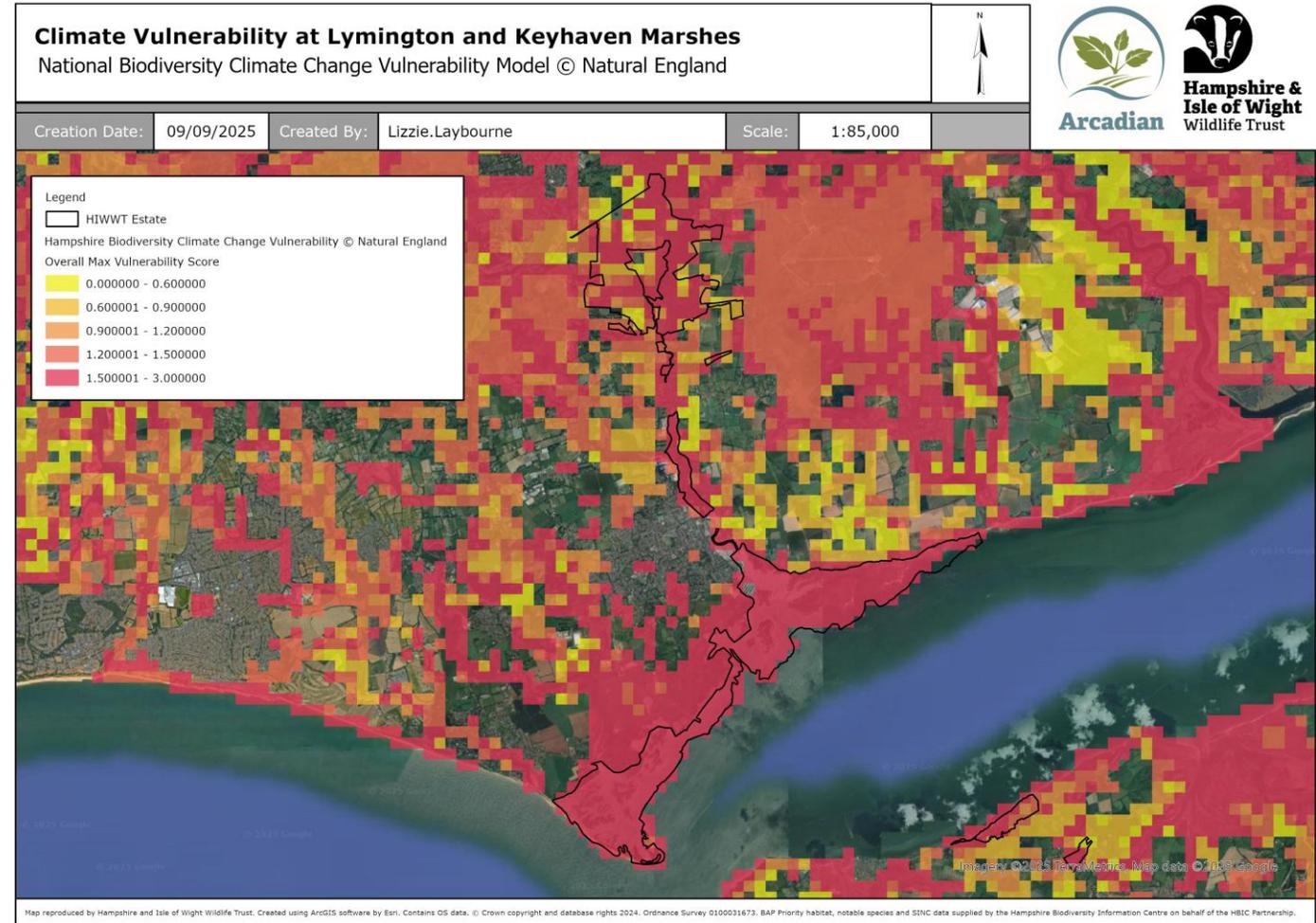


# Why this matters ecologically

- Only 53% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable condition.
- Decline in many species including ground nesting birds and breeding waders.
- Only ~42% of water bodies in good ecological condition.
- Lymington River polluted by ~2,800 hours sewage overflow in one year. E.coli levels ~80 times the safe limit for bathing.
- The Forest depends on surrounding grazing land, hydrological function, coastal processes, ecological movement across the wider landscape.
- When the surrounding landscape urbanises - ecological function declines, edge effects intensify, recreation pressure grows, pollution loads increase, traditional land management is impacted.
- The result is a protected core surrounded by intensifying pressure.
- Globally significant
- Economically vital
- Ecologically fragile

# Climate change amplifies everything

- Not just another pressure, it amplifies the others
- Hotter, drier summers
- Wetter winters
- Extreme weather events
- Implications:
- Changing hydrology: wetlands and bogs under stress
- Increased drought / increased floods
- Increased wildfire risk
- Coastal flooding and erosion risk
- Reduced dilution of pollutants
- Species struggling to move across landscapes that are increasingly fragmented





# The hard truth

- We have the strongest nature protections, excellent biological data and unrivalled local knowledge and expertise – but
- We are trying to conserve one of Europe's most important landscapes within systems that continue to drive its decline
- Economic growth is detached from ecological limits
- Governance is fragmented
- Responses are incremental while pressures accelerate
- Protection alone is not enough
- Managing decline is not recovery
- Current systems reward short-term exploitation over long-term resilience
- Planning and economic models still treat nature as a constraint, not an asset
- Funding is disjointed, short-term and insufficient
- We cannot keep pressuring natural systems and expect recovery

# The rules are all changing

LAND & NEW HOMES

**PLANNING: 'Forget bats and newts',  
Reeves tells house builders**



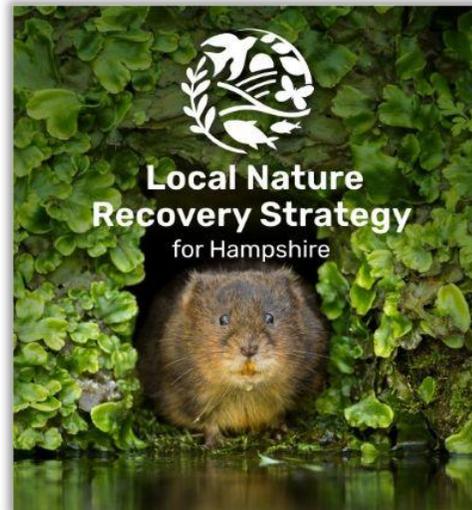
Planning and  
Infrastructure Act 2025

CHAPTER 34



**Why the Nuclear Regulatory  
Review is flawed - and how it  
could turn the nature crisis  
into a catastrophe**

January 2026



 UK  
Parliament

**Parliamentary Bills**

 HOUSE OF LORDS

 > English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

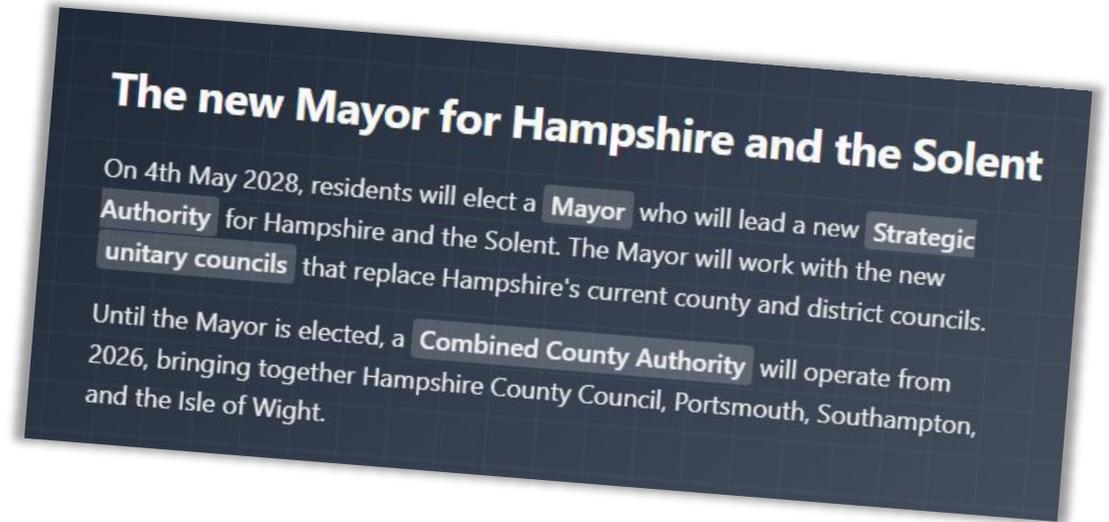
 [Bill feed](#)

**English Devolution and  
Community Empowerment Bill**

# Devolution as an opportunity

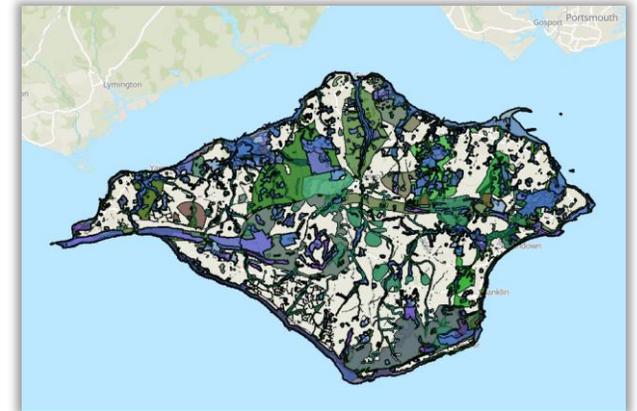
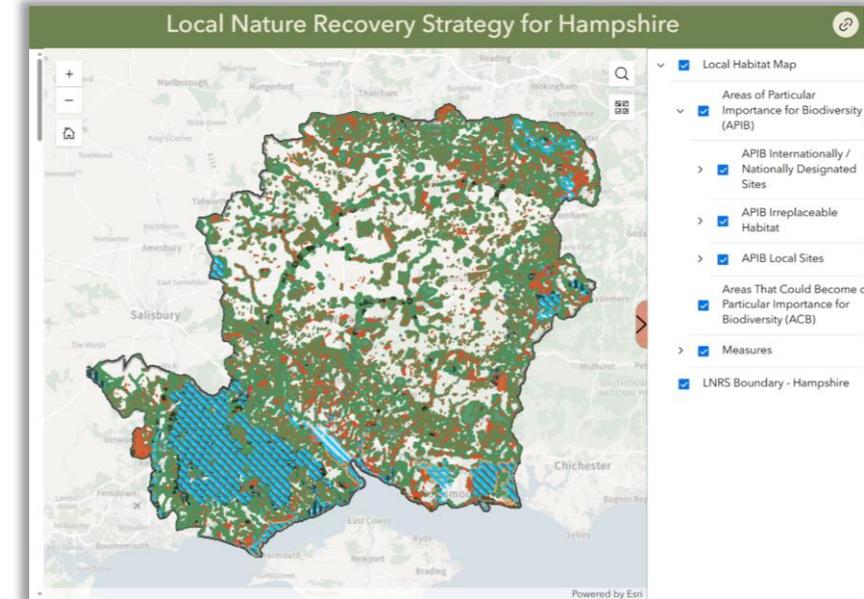
Devolution creates a strategic opportunity to:

- Position nature as core economic infrastructure
- Embed ecological resilience in regional growth plans
- Align housing, transport and water planning with nature recovery
- Invest in natural capital as risk management (biodiversity loss now recognised as security issue)
- Demonstrate the economic value of natural systems for flood protection, water security, climate resilience, public health, green jobs, tourism and local livelihoods
- But this won't happen unless we push for it



# Strategic Planning as a tool for Nature's recovery

- Strong duty for Devolved Authority to deliver nature's recovery.
- Strategic plans that **explicitly avoid** irreplaceable habitats and core wildlife sites.
- Integration of LNRS as the spatial backbone of the SDS – translated into clear spatial narratives:
  - **Protect** – core and irreplaceable wildlife sites
  - **Recover** – priority nature recovery opportunity areas
  - **Connect** – ecological networks and green infrastructure corridors.
- Green finance (Biodiversity Net Gain, EDPs and nature markets) flow to recovery priorities.
- Progress towards 30 by 30 is governed, monitored and measurable.
- Improved condition and connectivity of wildlife sites.
- Green infrastructure for community cohesion, health and wellbeing.
- Stronger recognition of nature's role (& nature-based solutions) in climate resilience, economic security and wellbeing.



# The challenge to us all

Given everything we know, we must act:

- The Forest is one of the most important and well-studied places for biodiversity in Europe with some of the best nature experts in the UK
- It is being increasingly hemmed in by surrounding development
- Recreational pressure is growing
- Water quality is poor
- Ecological risks are intensifying
- Climate change impact is accelerating

The good news is that growing numbers of people want to act for nature. The opportunity to influence systems change is emerging...

- If a landscape as important as the New Forest cannot lead a transition, where will?

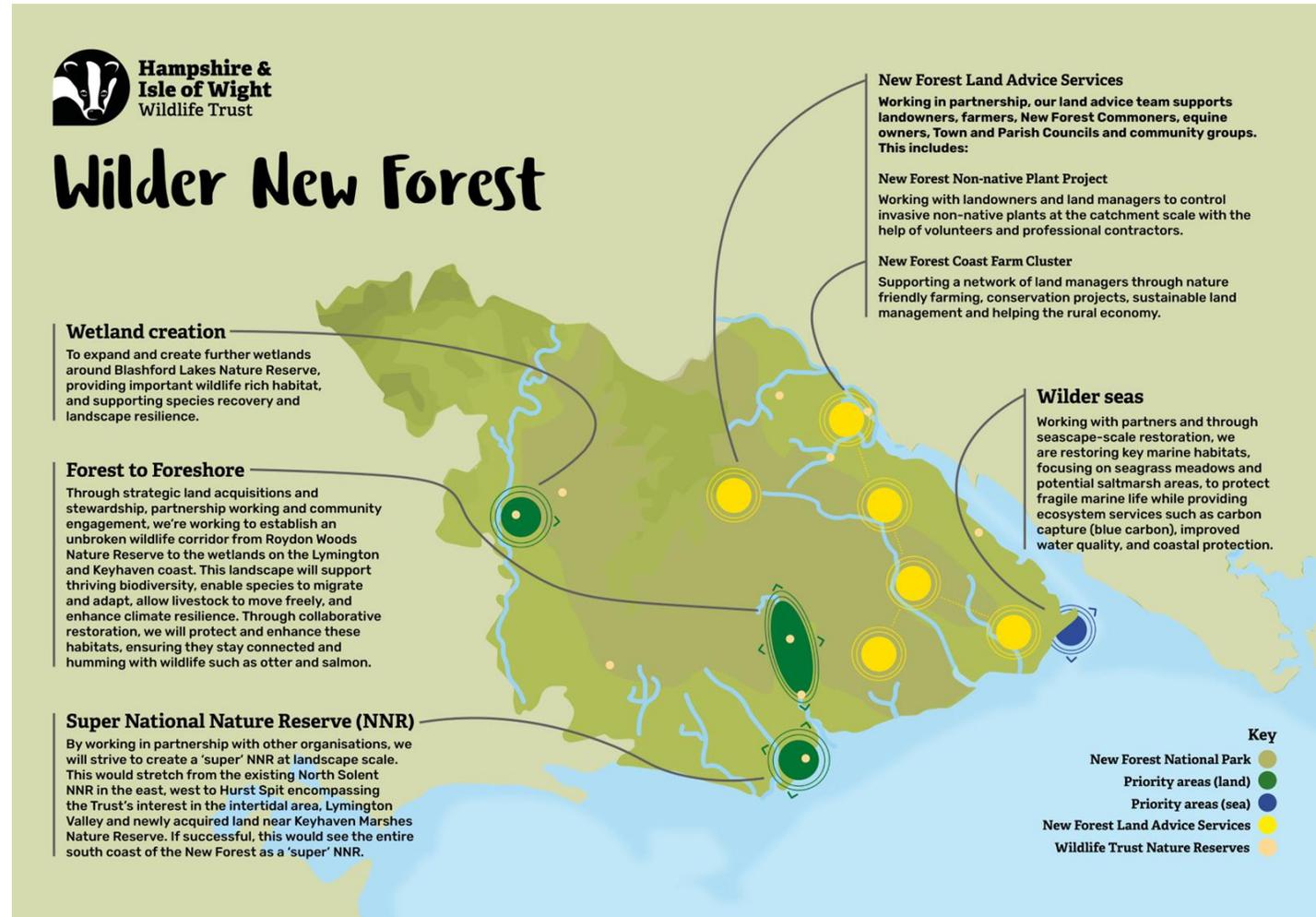
We must move from:

- Managing pressure → restoring ecological function
- Site protection → landscape recovery
- Conservation funding → natural infrastructure investment
- Fragmented projects → powerful collaborations

Bold action includes:

- Using evidence to influence
- Landscape-scale restoration
- Restoring catchment function
- Positioning ecological and climate resilience as essential economic infrastructure
- Transformative visitor management
- Nature embedded in all regional investment decisions

- Long-term stewardship of vital wildlife gems.
- Species recovery projects.
- Building ecological connectivity and climate resilience from Forest to Foreshore.
- Integrated land-sea thinking.
- Delivery of nature-based solutions.
- Embedding nature's value into strategic planning and decision making.
- Challenging inappropriate development.
- Working in powerful partnership with partners and communities.
- Local, regional and national influence.



The New Forest is not an island or a museum; its future depends on what happens all around it and the choices we all decide to make

Nature is not separate from us – it is us.  
Our living world shapes our homes and landscapes,  
Brings joy and wonder,  
Sustains our health,  
And powers our economy.

But right now, nature is in trouble – and so are we.  
We need wilder spaces,  
Healthier soils, rivers and seas,  
More room for wildlife to flourish,  
And more people willing to stand up for change.

This will take courage.  
Fresh thinking.  
And a shared belief that together, we can create a  
wilder world – for all of us.



CREATING A

# WILDER



HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT



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