

PRESS RELEASE

Isle of Wight Celebrates UNESCO Biosphere Announcement

Date: 19 June 2019

Today (19th June 2019) marks a special day for the Isle of Wight, as the announcement of the Island becoming the UK's latest UNESCO Biosphere Reserve was made by the United Nations Man and Biosphere Co-ordinating Council.

The Isle of Wight is only the third place in England and just the 6th area in the UK to be awarded such a status.

Put simply, becoming an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve means the Isle of Wight is now recognised as one of the best places in the world to explore the sustainable way people interact with their natural environment.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are unique areas of environmental significance in which communities strive to work hand in hand, innovatively and responsibly to protect and support the local environment and the world we all live in.

This year's Isle of Wight Mardi Gras Parade in Ryde will be in celebration of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, with over 30 schools, community organisations and off-Island carnival companies joining the New Carnival Company at 3pm on 29 June.

The Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership worked on the application for UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status (on behalf of the British Government) for 3 years to ensuring the Island is recognised for the way people and nature coexist.

Richard Grogan, Lead Officer for the IW AONB said:

'This is global recognition that our Island is not only an area of outstanding natural beauty, but that Islanders have played their part in looking after it. In spite of the modern day pressures brought about by the progress of human beings, nature continues to thrive here. '

Richard hopes that the process of development and nature working together will continue for coming generations:

'The AONB partnership will continue to encourage all Islanders to take care of the environment for our children and grandchildren, as our parents and grandparents did in their turn.'

Jonathan Bacon, Chair of the IW AONB, welcomed the announcement and the potential opportunities it provides:

'Achieving Biosphere status is like receiving the biggest gold star on offer anywhere in the world for people's relationship with the world around them. It shows that on the Island we are getting closer to finding the right balance between meeting our needs and our children's needs, while including the needs of wildlife. It is now up to us to maintain all the good things we have here and see how we can use the accreditation to support and develop local, national and international recognition of what the Isle of Wight has to offer, so as to boost our visitor economy and encourage appropriate sustainable development. All in all the accreditation gives us a fantastic opportunity, both to continue the work on the Island that has now been recognised by UNESCO as well as taking steps to further protect and enhance the place where we live.'

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Richard Grogan, Isle of Wight AONB Lead Officer
01983 823855
richard.grogan@iow.gov.uk

Bob Seely, Isle of Wight MP said:

'I am delighted that the Isle of Wight has achieved this internationally-recognised status. Gaining this award is part of the agenda to appreciate and celebrate our landscape, for our quality of life and our aspirations as an island.

We need to celebrate our unique and beautiful landscape and this award is recognition of the way we do that. We must continue to respect our landscape and preserve it for future generations.

I congratulate all those involved in securing this status for the Island.'

Minister and Ambassador of United Kingdom of Great-Britain and Northern Ireland to UNESCO, Matthew Lodge, said:

'Congratulations to the Isle of Wight for becoming a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

As an international agency of the United Nations, UNESCO seeks to build peace and a sustainable future for everyone through education, science and culture. If we are to solve the challenges we face together as a planet, we must all learn to live and work in harmony with nature -- and this lies at the heart of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves - a global network of 686 reserves in 122 countries. The Biosphere reserves play a crucial role in solving one of sustainable development's most significant issues -- the disconnection between people and nature. They reconnect people and the local economy with their environment to improve health and wellbeing; they protect and promote the area's biodiversity, land and natural beauty; they support environmental education and awareness; and, they increase community engagement through a range of projects and initiatives.

The Isle of Wight community works hand-in-hand to conserve and enhance the island's rich range of cultural heritage and natural biodiversity by bringing together many partners in their pursuit of a more culturally and ecologically sustainable future. By joining this network, the Isle of Wight will be able to learn from and cooperate with communities all over the world who are pursuing innovative initiatives of looking after our precious environment for future generations.

I am particularly pleased that this decision has been made during the Year of Green Action, a year-long project initiated by the UK Government to get more people from all backgrounds to connect with nature, and to show how we can all take affirmative action to improve our environment.'

Dave Stewart, Isle of Wight Council Leader said:

'In the Isle of Wight Council we know that the unique landscapes, coast and wildlife of the Island bring people here not just as tourists, but also to live, work and do business. We believe that the key to economic success is living and working sustainably on our island, and we are very proud of the new Biosphere Reserve status and recognition given today by UNESCO.'

Will Myles, Managing Director at Visit Isle of Wight said:

'This award is incredible, and a testament to the hard work that the Isle of Wight AONB Partnership have done – and continue to do.

The Island's hundreds of thousands of visitors recognise its unique qualities and to achieve the status of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is something that will most certainly have a positive impact on our visitor economy.'

- ENDS -

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Mardi Gras Parade takes place at 3pm on 29 June along Union Street in Ryde, Isle of Wight.

Dark Sky Status

Dark Skies are considered special areas where there is little ambient light pollution and on a clear night many stars can be seen. The Isle of Wight is working towards International Dark Sky Park status, which is designated by the International Dark Sky Association, USA.

Eastern Yar Farm Cluster

The Eastern Yar Farm Cluster brings together 10 landowners and 1863 ha of land to maintain or create habitats characteristic to the East Yar river and its floodplain. The scheme looks to maintain or improve the area for priority species including:

- Farmland birds; turtle dove, skylark and yellowhammer and wetland species including lapwing and kingfisher.
- Mammals such as; water vole, red squirrel, Bechstein's bat, common dormouse, and hedgehog.
- Fish species: Brown trout and European eel.
- Other target species will also include; field cricket, nightingale, barn owl and early gentian.

Down To The Coast

Down to the Coast, a landscape partnership scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund that is all about conserving and celebrating what makes the East Wight a fantastic place to work, live and play.

Down to the Coast comprises 16 projects grouped into four broad programmes of work:

- Conservation
- Participation
- Access and Learning
- Skills and Training

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves

Biosphere reserves are areas comprising terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Each reserve promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use.

Biosphere reserves are 'Science for Sustainability support sites' – special places for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity.

Biosphere reserves are nominated by national governments and remain under the sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located. Their status is internationally recognized.

There are 686 biosphere reserves in 122 countries, including 20 transboundary sites.

The programme recognises areas that:

- Are typical of the world's major terrestrial or coastal ecosystems
- Demonstrate innovative approaches to living and working harmony with nature
- Demonstrate how to achieve a sustainable balance between conserving natural ecosystems and biodiversity and fostering sound economic development

Biosphere reserves have three interrelated zones that aim to fulfil three complementary and mutually reinforcing functions:

- The core area(s) comprises a strictly protected ecosystem that contributes to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.
- The buffer zone surrounds or adjoins the core areas and is used for activities compatible with sound ecological practices that can reinforce scientific research, monitoring, training and education.
- The transition area is the part of the reserve where the greatest activity is allowed, fostering economic and human development that is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable.

The Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of the finest landscapes in the country. It was designated in 1963 and covers approximately half of the Island (191 km²). The IW AONB incorporates a rich variety of distinctive landscapes and is often likened to lowland England in miniature. The purpose of designation is the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. For more information call 01983 823555 or go to www.wightaonb.org.uk

The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership oversees the management of the AONB. It is an independent organisation made up of key stakeholders with a direct management role or interest in the AONB. The AONB is funded by DEFRA (Department for Rural Affairs)

The Isle of Wight Biosphere FAQ's and other information can be found at www.iwbiosphere.org

www.unesco.org.uk/portfolio/isle-of-wight