



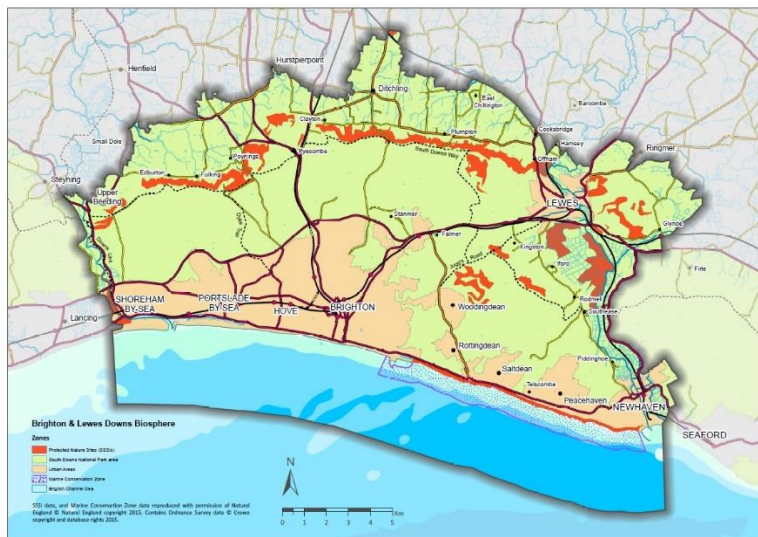
Brighton & Lewes Downs
UNESCO World Biosphere Region

The Living Coast – The Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere

Background

The Living Coast is the name of the Brighton & Lewes Downs UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. It is a place of bustling towns, rolling Downs and rich coast, where local people and organisations live and work alongside nature, to support a strong and resilient natural environment that enables sustainable social prosperity.

The Living Coast is a spatial designation, recognising our important natural habitats and heritage, but also how people live, work and learn sustainably in the area. The Living Coast is based upon the chalk block of the South Downs in the UK, between the River Adur in the west and the River Ouse in the east with the city of Brighton & Hove at its centre. It covers approximately 390 km², stretching North over the South Downs to the village of Ditchling and also extending 2 miles offshore.



The Living Coast is proud to be the UK's only urban Biosphere. Our unique natural environment is home to more than a third of a million people and provides our water, local food, open space for recreation, health, wellbeing and natural inspiration.

We share our Biosphere with a wealth of wildlife, particularly across the species rich chalk grassland priority habitats of the South Downs and amongst the intertidal and off shore

chalk reef. These include rare species like the beautiful Adonis Blue butterfly and the Short-snouted Seahorse.

These natural assets, combined with a strong cultural offer, have helped to create a thriving visitor economy that forms a significant part of our local economy.

What is a Biosphere?

Biosphere Reserves are areas of world-class natural value, designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere programme (MAB). Their purpose is to trial innovative approaches and demonstrate the best examples of people working in harmony with nature for the benefit of all and in doing so they show how we all have responsibility for our natural environment. Biosphere Reserves are designated to be international best practice, living & working example areas of sustainable development.

Knowledge gained through trials, projects and partnerships within a Biosphere Reserve contributes to the global advancement of sustainable development through sharing learning with the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Brighton & Lewes Downs was designated as a Biosphere Reserve in 2014. In 2017 it was branded The Living Coast but is sometimes referred to as 'Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere Reserve' within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Living Coast is one of seven Biospheres in the UK. There are currently over 700 Biospheres across the globe, connected via the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

All Biosphere reserves across the globe share three overarching objectives:

- Conservation of nature and culture;
- Sustainable development;
- Learning, awareness and engagement.

Governance & Delivery

The Living Coast is a regional partnership, bringing together local authorities, businesses, organisations, charities, universities and the community to work together to achieve the three global Biosphere objectives. It is overseen by a Board representing a broad spectrum of local and national organisations. The Board meets at least three times per year and guides the strategic direction of The Living Coast, in order to make decisions about project development and delivery, in conjunction with the wider Living Coast partnership.

UNESCO designations, such as Biosphere Reserves, contribute significantly to the UK economy as well as having far-reaching, beneficial impacts on communities, culture and nature. They protect our heritage, generate knowledge and provide opportunities for innovation. UNESCO designations also contribute to delivering the UK's commitment to

creating a more sustainable, peaceful and equitable future at local, national and international levels.

Having the official status as a UNESCO designation enables The Living Coast to attract additional income to the area through: recognition of the UNESCO status as a driver for tourism; international recognition for the global importance and significance of an area; educational and innovative projects and initiatives; the ability to access and benefit from global networks; and governance mechanisms such as strong, multi-sector partnerships. The designation also enables our local communities to engage in the United Nations' values locally, nationally and internationally.

Alongside leveraging financial benefits, The Living Coast's broad and diverse partnership, representing organisations engaged in business, local politics, national conservation and policy, arts and culture, education and charities, enables the development of novel collaborations under the objectives of the Biosphere. The Living Coast is occasionally able to instigate and lead projects but more commonly plays a stronger role as a facilitator and intermediary, strengthening existing or enabling new partnerships, and as a contributor and supporter of wider, relevant projects. The Living Coast also plays a strategic role in informing policy, as a key environmental partnership for the local area, as well as contributing to the national, international and global network of Biosphere Reserves, sharing and receiving learning and experience.

This strategic plan is produced by The Living Coast's Board and partnership to guide its work, identify priorities and to provide a context for partners and stakeholders to deliver programmes and projects in support of the sustainable development of The Living Coast. It has been developed to complement and synchronise with the production of relevant partner's plans (e.g. Local Authorities, South Downs National Park, Sussex Local Nature Partnership) and statutory plans for the area such as Local Development Plans, and River Basin Plans for the Water Framework Directive.

UNESCO monitors and evaluates overall progress against the global Biosphere objectives every ten years, when each Biosphere is assessed for re-designation as a Biosphere.

In line with the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, The Living Coast is non-statutory, politically neutral and non-campaigning.

Vision

To support a thriving world-class environment, to be enjoyed by all – forever.

The mission of The Living Coast is: to connect people and nature to inspire a positive future, today.

Our long-term goal for The Living Coast is that:

The local communities and visitors to The Living Coast are knowledgeable and proud of its designation. Visitors come here to experience a thriving example of a sustainable society, surrounded by the highest quality natural environment that is truly valued by the communities that live and work here. The community is enhanced by equitable development which has not only put nature first, increased the resilience and quality of its ecosystems, and effectively mitigated and adapted to the impacts of climate change, but improved public health and wellbeing. The Living Coast Brand continues to drive development, business and ideologies that support its objectives, and generates further prosperity for The Living Coast, wider area and World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Strategic Themes

The Living Coast has identified the following strategic themes, to guide our decision making and project work in the short, medium and longer term over the next five years. This period includes our review by UNESCO to be re-designated as a Biosphere in 2024. These themes are linked to the global Biosphere objectives and aim to support a strong and resilient natural environment to enable social prosperity. They will also help identify how our actions are contributing to delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our short to medium term actions have been developed with consideration of our changed global outlook in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the aim of supporting a sustainable and prosperous recovery throughout The Living Coast.

Conserving nature & culture



There is evidence of human settlement on the South Downs going back thousands of years. As an urban Biosphere the impacts of the pressure of humans on the environment such as fragmented high-quality habitats, or invasive alien species, is made more visible. Our combination of rural, urban and marine habitats creates opportunities to understand and explore solutions to these impacts whilst promoting learning and awareness of our environment and cultural heritage amongst our communities.

Urban Greening

Key actions:

- Increase awareness of and engagement with our species rich chalk grassland, improve access to nature for urban residents and visitors, provide food for urban pollinators and new skills in wildflower propagation and management through the Changing Chalk Greening The Cities project.

- Support and promote projects and opportunities to improve green and blue infrastructure such as community food growing, private gardens, green roofs, verges, trees, hedgerows, vegetated shingle and permeable surfaces across the urban environment of The Living Coast.

Key organisations:

Local Authorities, South Downs National Park, Shoreham Port, Southern Water, Brighton & Hove Buses, Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, local businesses, local residents, local community groups.

Strengthening Our Natural Capital

Key actions:

- Develop a nature recovery network plan for The Living Coast to strategically inform future project development.
- Promote, support and contribute to the development and implementation of the Sussex Local Nature Partnership Natural Capital Investment Strategy.
- Support and collaborate with stakeholders working innovatively to improve water quality and quantity of the chalk aquifer.

Key organisations:

Local Authorities, South Downs National Park, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Southern Water, Adur & Ouse Catchment Partnership, Sussex IFCA, The Aquifer Partnership, University of Brighton, University of Sussex, Environment Agency, Natural England, local farmers and landowners.

Sustainable Development



The Living Coast is home to more than a third of a million people with 12 million more visiting the area annually and contributing to our important visitor economy. However, the area also has social challenges such as inequality and the affordability and quality of housing. As an international model for sustainable development we have the potential to benefit and influence a wide audience.

There have been and continue to be many impacts to our communities and economy as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and we believe it is integral to utilise the assets of The Living Coast support a sustainable recovery.

Thriving Communities - Health, Wellbeing & Economy

Key actions:

- Develop, support and invest in the sustainable, experiential visitor economy based on the environmental and cultural heritage of The Living Coast through the Bio Cultural Heritage Tourism project.

- Promote sustainable, local businesses and producers whilst increasing awareness of the Biosphere through #WeAreTheLivingCoast.
- Collaborate with partners to promote and enable health & wellbeing through nature, particularly in socially diverse communities.
- Explore opportunities with partners, stakeholders and producers to enable increased consumption of locally produced food.

Key organisations:

Destination Management Organisations, Local Authorities, South Downs National Park, Brighton & Hove Buses, Cultural organisations, Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, Shoreham Port, Sussex IFCA, local producers, community organisations and groups, Universities & education organisations.

Climate Change & Carbon

Key actions:

- Work with partners to contribute to achieving climate neutral targets across The Living Coast.
- Promote and support nature-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Key organisations:

Local Authorities, South Downs National Park, Shoreham Port, Southern Water, Brighton & Hove Buses, The Aquifer Partnership, Adur & Ouse Catchment Partnership, University of Brighton, University of Sussex, community energy groups.

Knowledge, Awareness & Engagement



The Living Coast is designated to be a living and working example of sustainable development, contributing to and gaining from shared experience locally, nationally and internationally. As an urban Biosphere, our local communities provide great opportunities for sharing and gaining knowledge and experience. By utilising The Living Coast for research, monitoring and education we can further develop and share innovative approaches for supporting our local and global natural environment to enable social prosperity.

Awareness, Understanding & Engagement with The Living Coast

Key actions:

- Promote active community engagement with and understanding of our natural environment through projects such as Nature2020 and the City Nature Challenge.
- Review how we talk about The Living Coast to support greater public awareness and engagement.

- Participate in public events to raise awareness of and engage our communities in The Living Coast.
- Support and utilise a broad and creative approach that draws on the city's arts sector and the use of sustainable materials for arts production, particularly to communicate about and encourage engagement with The Living Coast.

Key organisations:

Destination Management Organisations, ONCA Gallery, Fabrica, University of Brighton, University of Sussex, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Cobb Digital, Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust, South Downs National Park, Local Authorities, local cultural organisations, local community organisations, educational organisations.

The Living Coast as a Site for Research & Knowledge Sharing

Key actions:

- Successfully complete our 10 year review for redesignation by UNESCO.
- Identify key research needs and delivery mechanisms to refresh and implement The Living Coast Research & Monitoring Strategy.
- Utilise our assets to build knowledge and strengthen The Living Coast Partnership.
- Support the utilisation of The Living Coast and UNESCO designation for school sustainability education programmes such as the Brighton & Hove Environmental Education programme.
- Actively participate in knowledge exchange with other Biospheres and UNESCO initiatives in the UK and globally through the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Key organisations:

University of Brighton, University of Sussex, South Downs National Park, Local Authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, Sussex Wildlife Trust.

