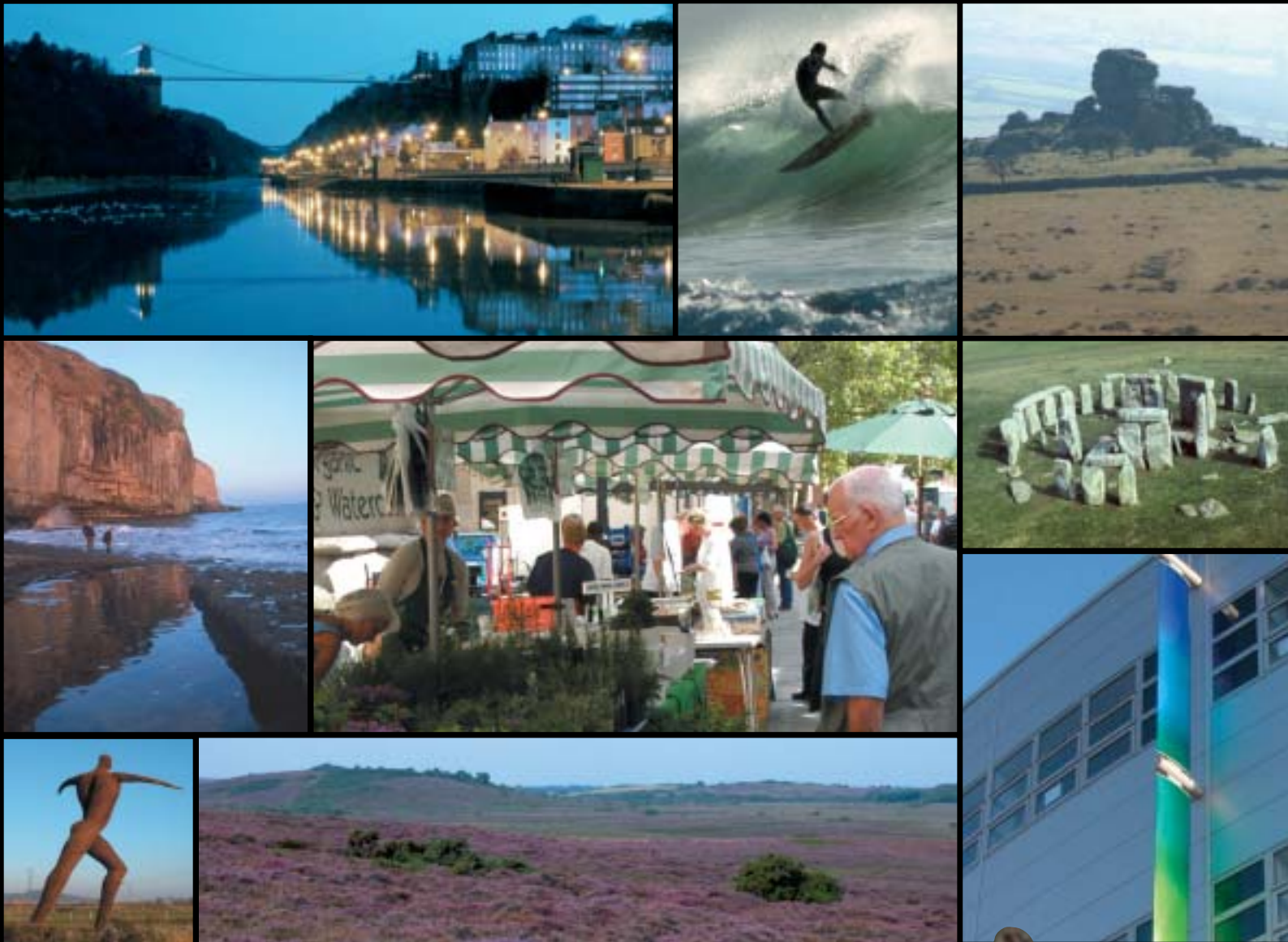


# *Our Environment: Our Future*



**SOUTH WEST**  
*Regional Assembly*



*The Regional Strategy for the  
South West Environment 2004 - 2014*

## Executive Summary



# *Our Environment:* **Our Future**

*The Regional Strategy for the  
South West Environment 2004 - 2014*

## Executive Summary

South West Regional Assembly in  
association with the South West  
Regional Environment Network

## *Our Environment: Our Future, The Regional Strategy for the South West Environment*

### **Executive Summary Our Environment: Our Future**

*The beauty of the South West – the quality and variety of our environment – is our greatest asset. It is one of the key features that make the region particularly distinctive and attractive to live in, work in and visit.*

The South West has a wealth of environmental resources, including sixty percent of England's protected coastline, over one third of the land nationally designated for its landscape quality, internationally important wildlife sites and a host of locally distinctive features. The region also has two National Parks, three World Heritage Sites, the largest concentration of built heritage in the country and a variety of urban environments and townscapes.

Our environment matters to the millions of people who have made their homes here, and to those who flock here every year on their holidays. It matters to the industries that make a living from our land and seas, and to the businesses

that invest in the South West. And yet, the beauty of our environment, and the abundance of our resources, are severely threatened by our activities, our choices and our lifestyles.

This is the first time that people and organisations in the South West, led by the Regional Assembly and the Regional Environment Network, have come together and agreed what matters about the South West's environment and what needs to be done to protect and enhance it.

#### **This Strategy aims to:**

- ➔ *Provide a Vision and Aims for the environment in the future;*
- ➔ *Identify Pressures threatening the environment;*
- ➔ *Identify key Issues to be tackled.*

A separate Implementation Plan outlines priority actions required to deliver the Strategy by 2014.

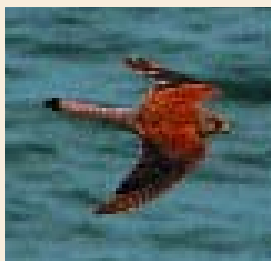


## 1. Background and Context

The Regional Sustainable Development Framework<sup>1</sup> (RSDF) sets out the vision and challenges for achieving sustainable development in the South West, and is the starting point of the Regional Environment Strategy. The Environment Strategy builds on the key environmental issues identified in the RSDF, and sets out in more detail the priorities and action needed to tackle these. The Environment Strategy also has clear links with the Regional Economic Strategy, which identifies the environment as a driver for the region's economy; and Regional Planning Guidance 10, which sets out the spatial context for future growth and development in the region whilst safeguarding its environmental assets.

As well as setting the environmental context for other activities, the Environment Strategy provides an 'umbrella' for a range of more specific action on our environmental assets, including the Historic Environment Strategy, the Biodiversity Implementation Plan and the Protected Landscapes Prospectus.

The Environment Strategy will feed into future regional policy development by informing other regional strategies. For example, it provides the environmental component of the Integrated Regional Strategy. Finally, the Environment



Strategy will provide the regional context for the development of Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and sub-regional/local economic strategies.

The Environment Strategy was developed over eighteen months of close working between the Regional Assembly and the Regional Environment Network, and through two public consultations.

<sup>1</sup> *A Sustainable Future for the South West (2001)*, [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com)



## 2. Vision and Aims

We want a region where people benefit from an excellent environment in which to live and work, now and for the future. This means: protecting and enhancing our distinctiveness and diversity; continuing to benefit from the richness of our landscapes, wildlife and habitats; minimising pollution and contamination; using our natural resources wisely; acknowledging the benefits of our natural, historic and built environments; and encouraging access.

The Environment Strategy sets out a number of Aims to be pursued, within the context of wider sustainable development:

### **Landscape and Historic Environment**

- ➔ *Conserve and enhance the landscape and historic environment as assets for everyone to enjoy;*
- ➔ *Safeguard and manage the elements of the environment that underpin local distinctiveness.*

### **Natural Resources**

- ➔ *Use natural resources efficiently and wisely;*
- ➔ *Manage waste better, by minimising the amount of waste produced;*
- ➔ *Protect and improve the quality of our air, soils and water;*
- ➔ *Develop a low carbon economy.*

### **Nature Conservation**

- ➔ *Protect and enhance biodiversity and geological features across urban, rural, coastal and marine environments;*
- ➔ *Maintain and restore ecosystems so that they function in a way that will support the region's wildlife;*
- ➔ *Sensitively manage existing habitats;*
- ➔ *Increase the area of existing habitats and re-establish links between fragmented sites.*

### **People and Their Environment**

- ➔ *Improve the quality of people's living environments;*
- ➔ *Manage flood risk to land and property; improve sustainable access for everyone to a thriving and enhanced environment;*
- ➔ *Increase people's sense of responsibility towards the environment through greater understanding and enjoyment of it.*



### 3. Assets

The South West has a wealth of environmental assets spread across urban and rural areas, including the region's landscapes and townscapes, historic environment (including built environment), natural resources, nature

and the interaction of people and their environment. These are illustrated in the map overleaf. It is the combination of these assets, which makes the region so special and distinctive.



|  |   |                     |   |
|--|---|---------------------|---|
| Clifton Suspension Bridge,<br>Bristol                |   | Surfer,<br>Cornwall | Tor, Dartmoor<br>National Park                      |
| Jurassic Coast,<br>Dorset<br>© Environment<br>Agency | Farmers Market, Bristol                   |                     | Stonehenge,<br>Wiltshire<br>© English Heritage      |
| Wicker<br>Man,<br>Somerset                           | Hartland Moor, Dorset<br>© English Nature |                     | Great Western<br>Hospital,<br>Swindon,<br>Wiltshire |

## 4. Key Issues for Action

The South West is facing significant changes, particularly in relation to population and employment growth and the increase in single households. As a result of the region's geography, economic potential varies widely: the South West has the greatest disparities in economic performance within any English region.

Other challenges come from outside the region – globalisation, the reform of the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies, climate change and the introduction of new legislation will all affect the way communities live and work in the region, to some degree.

Analysis of the key environmental assets in the region, and the pressures operating on these assets, has led to the identification of six key issues for the environment of the South West. These issues need to be seen within the context of a developing region.

Four issues relate to areas providing the greatest opportunities to deliver environmental benefit, but where existing pressures and trends could also cause the greatest damage. These are:

- ➔ *Food, Farming and Forestry;*
- ➔ *Tourism and Leisure;*
- ➔ *Spatial Planning;*
- ➔ *Transport.*

Two issues are cross-cutting; to be effective, action will have to be taken across the whole region and by all sectors. These are:

- ➔ *Climate Change;*
- ➔ *Wiser Use of Natural Resources.*



# The South West

## Environmental Designations

- ADMINISTRATIVE BORDERS
- SPA, SAC, cSAC, Ramsar
- WORLD HERITAGE SITE
- NATIONAL PARK
- HERITAGE COAST
- AONB
- SSSI

### People

Highest population growth of any English region.

Best local environmental quality of all English regions.

Over half of all visits to the countryside are within five miles of home.

### Urban

About two thirds of the region's population lives in urban areas of 10,000 people or more.

66% of jobs in the Principal Urban Areas.

12 Green Flag Awards for parks and green spaces.

### Heritage

Three World Heritage Sites at Stonehenge and Avebury, the City of Bath and the Jurassic Coast.

287 historic parks and gardens.

1,509 Conservation Areas.

### Air

Good air quality in the South West.

8 local areas require Air Quality Management Plans.

### Water

Very good water quality.

Bathing water quality consistently exceeds European standards.

River quality is excellent.

### Built environment

Many settlements of considerable archaeological and architectural importance.

Variations in the 'feel' of our cities, towns and villages is a distinctive asset for the South West.

# South West's Environment



## Economy

Over 12% of the regional economy relies on the land, landscape and sea.

78% of holiday trips to the South West are motivated by our special environment.

Environmental technologies and services are an emerging regional sector.



## Rural

Tranquillity is considered to be a regional asset.

The most rural of the English regions.

One of the least light-polluted regions of the country.



## Landscape

7% of the region designated National Park.

30% of the region designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

638km of heritage coast.



## Marine

One of the best wave and tidal resources in the UK.

42% of England's commercial fishing operations and half of all shellfish waters.

Significant maritime archaeological resource.



## Resources

Rich in mineral resources.

Over 200,000 hectares of woodlands and forests.

More than 11 million tonnes of waste are produced every year.



## Wildlife

7% of the region designated as nationally or internationally important for wildlife.






























46 National Nature Reserves.

25 globally important species and over 700 nationally important species.




All images ©Peter Friend 2004  
Stonehenge, English Heritage Photographic Library  
Standing Puffin (map), ©English Nature/Paul Clendon


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Hazard No. 010038233, Produced 2004


|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Climate Change</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Greenhouse gas emissions</li> <li> Rising sea levels</li> <li> Loss of wildlife</li> <li> Changes to landscape &amp; historic environment</li> <li> Lifestyle changes</li> </ul> |
| <b>Wiser Use of Natural Resources</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Water quality</li> <li> Air quality</li> <li> Diffuse pollution</li> <li> Waste</li> <li> Mineral extraction</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Food, Farming and Forestry</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Farmland birds</li> <li> Sites of Special Scientific Interest</li> <li> Field Boundaries</li> <li> Woodland</li> <li> Farmers markets</li> </ul>                               |
| <b>Tourism</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Bathing water quality</li> <li> Visitor pressure</li> <li> Car use</li> <li> Local distinctiveness</li> <li> Access to open spaces</li> </ul>                          |
| <b>Spatial Planning</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Greenfield development</li> <li> Historic building resource</li> <li> Flooding</li> <li> Dark skies</li> <li> Local environment quality</li> </ul>                     |
| <b>Transport</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Traffic growth</li> <li> Alternative fuels</li> <li> Local air quality</li> <li> Tranquil areas</li> </ul>  |

The opposite table illustrates the key pressures affecting the region's environment.

The colours indicate the significance of the issue.

 = pressures that are negative and are expected to continue;

 = areas of uncertainty or potential problems;

 = trends that are positive or expected to improve.

## Key Issues for Action



## 4.1 Climate Change

© Countryside Agency



The objective is to minimise greenhouse gas emissions and respond to the risks, challenges and opportunities presented by climate change.

In the South West, work on the impacts of climate change is co-ordinated through the South West Climate Change Impacts Partnership. They predict hotter, drier summers, placing a greater strain on the region's water resources, and altering natural habitats. Winters are expected to become

wetter, with increased risk of flash flooding and storm damage. Sea levels are likely to continue to rise, bringing flooding. On the other hand, warmer temperatures and a longer growing season could lead to increased productivity.

### Priorities for action

- ➔ Integrate climate change into regional strategy and policy development;
- ➔ Reduce the causes of climate change;
- ➔ Adapt to changes in climate that are now unavoidable.



© Countryside Agency



## 4.2 Wiser Use of Natural Resources

The objective is to ensure our natural resources are used sustainably, with minimum environmental damage and waste generation, so as to reduce pollution and protect the quality of the region's environment.

The air, water and land of the South West is generally of good quality. For example: the region consistently exceeds European standards for bathing water quality, only eight local areas require Air Quality Management Plans, and we have relatively low levels of contaminated land. We have a wealth of natural resources that can be commercially exploited, including minerals and wood. Our environment has other, less obvious, functions: our uplands are important water catchment areas; lowland farmland and woodlands can provide areas for flood storage; woodlands and wetlands absorb greenhouse gases; and our rivers, lakes, estuaries and seas absorb pollution.

We need to protect the quality of the South West's natural resources and enable them to be used efficiently, with as little environmental damage as possible.

### Priorities for action

- ➔ *Promote a strategic approach to management of our natural resources;*
- ➔ *Promote sustainable use of our natural resources;*
- ➔ *Reduce pollution;*
- ➔ *Minimise waste;*
- ➔ *Support delivery of integrated coastal zone management.*



### 4.3 Food, Farming and Forestry

The objective is to enhance the ability of the food, farming and forestry sectors to provide the environmental and social benefits that people in the region need and expect, and help to secure a viable future for them.

In environmental terms, the food, farming, forestry and fishing sectors are some of the most important in the South West. Our landscapes and wildlife are the result of centuries of farming and woodland management. Fishing has shaped the identity of many of our small coastal communities. The growth in supermarkets and large-scale distributors, and the intensification in agricultural practices, have increased pressures on our environment in recent years. However, economically viable farming activity, especially grazing with extensive livestock systems, is essential for sustainable management of our landscapes and habitats. Farmers and landowners in the South West have taken greater advantage of agri-environment schemes than those in any other region: nearly one third of our eligible land is covered by such schemes, bringing £40 million to the rural economy. Careful management of forestry and fishery resources provides equally important economic and environmental benefits.



#### Priorities for action

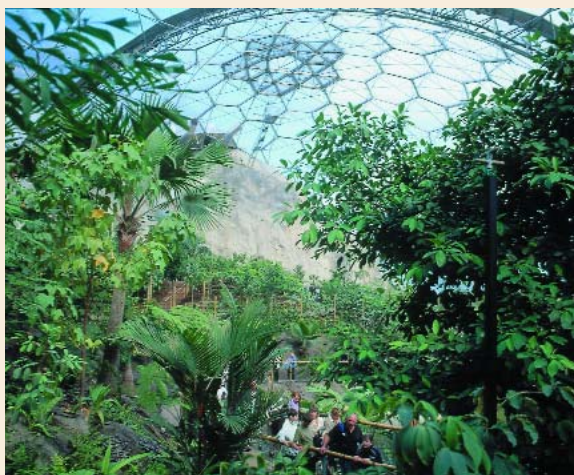
- ➔ *Encourage outstanding environmental management in the region's farming and forestry businesses;*
- ➔ *Develop an integrated rural land use system to support better delivery of environmental benefits;*
- ➔ *Develop environmentally-focussed supply chains to provide healthy, profitable food and drink and an enhanced environment.*



## 4.4 Tourism and Leisure

The objective is to promote a tourism and leisure industry that conserves and enhances the environment and recognises the region's distinctiveness.

The South West is the leading region for tourism in the UK; over 20 million visitors came to the South West in 2002. Tourism is a key part of the regional economy, and will continue to develop in importance with predictions of 80% growth in the next 20 years. It is estimated that nearly 80% of all holiday trips to the region are motivated by our environment – the coast, countryside and built heritage – and the atmosphere they create. While this boosts the economy and supports economic growth, it also has an impact on our natural resources: greater use of energy and water, increased production of waste and physical impacts on the landscape itself.



### Priorities for action

- ➔ *Better understanding of the impacts of tourism and leisure on the environment and communities;*
- ➔ *Enhance the environmental resource;*
- ➔ *Reduce the impacts of tourism and leisure on our environmental assets.*



## 4.5 Spatial Planning



The objective is to promote the wise use of land and a safe and healthy environment for local communities, through the provision of well designed, resource efficient development, contributing to sustainable development through environmental enhancement and ensuring that the South West remains a region of diverse and distinctive heritage, wildlife and landscapes.

One of the major challenges for this region is planning to accommodate pressures for development and growth. Population growth over the last 20 years has been the highest of any region, and it is predicted that the region will need to accommodate a further 500,000 people by 2015. 37% of new houses were built on previously developed land between 1991-2000, well below the regional target of 50%. Increased development brings with it pressures on the environment

including more waste, higher levels of noise and light pollution, and a greater demand for resources like minerals, water and energy.

Regional Planning Guidance already has a framework in place to accommodate the social and economic objectives of the region whilst protecting its environmental assets. However, there will be a time-lag before its provisions will take effect. Development is expected to be focussed on the Principal Urban Areas, but spatial planning will also need to establish how to accommodate growth around our towns and cities without compromising the rural-urban fringe. Sensitively located, balanced development is needed to support rural regeneration and to maintain thriving rural communities.

### Priorities for action

- ➔ *Planning for people – giving communities a greater say in the changes they want in their local environments;*
- ➔ *Positive planning for the environment – maximising opportunities for environmental benefits;*
- ➔ *Integrating environment considerations into planning.*



## 4.6 Transport

The objective is to minimise the environmental impact of the travel and transport necessary to support the social and economic needs of the region.

Transport cannot be separated from the spatial planning issues raised in the previous section. The transport requirements of the South West are affected by a number of factors, not least it's settlement structure, rurality and the geographical constraints of a peninsula. It is also subject to high levels of seasonal traffic due to its popularity as a tourist destination.

The region has the highest number of journeys made on foot and the greatest number of people working from home. However, pollution from road transport has increased significantly in the last 20 years, and road transport is predicted to increase by up to 53% by 2026. Trains tend to be used more for long distance journeys than local ones, while ports and water-borne transport are particularly important for freight. Access to and from the region by air is also popular. The number of passengers flying from the South West rose by 88% between 1997 and 2002, higher than for England as a whole.

Regional policy on transport is set out within Regional Planning Guidance, but the integration of land use and transport is essential to support more sustainable travel choices.

### Priorities for action

- ➔ *Minimise the impact of transport on the environment;*
- ➔ *Provide safe, integrated transport systems accessible to all;*
- ➔ *Provide alternatives to fossil-fuelled transport.*



## 5. Delivering the Regional Environment Strategy



Delivering the Regional Environment Strategy will require collective action from a range of organisations, and in many cases, changes in society and individual behaviour.

The Implementation Plan sets out the priority regional actions to tackle the six key issues identified. In addition, there are a number of generic areas where action is needed:

- 5.1** Conserve and enhance the South West's stock of environmental assets;
- 5.2** Support and enhance partnership working;
- 5.3** Co-ordinate actions between regional and local partners to improve delivery;
- 5.4** Identify the resources needed to deliver agreed regional priorities;
- 5.5** Integrate environmental objectives into regional strategies;
- 5.6** Raise awareness, education, skills and training;
- 5.7** Improve our evidence base through research and information sharing.



## 6. Monitoring and Review

The development of this Strategy is obviously only the beginning. The Regional Assembly and delivery organisations will then need to work with partners to implement the actions agreed, and monitor delivery of the Strategy.

In the initial stages of the Strategy's implementation, there will need to be synergies with existing programmes and aims of delivery agencies if early successes are to be achieved. Links to current programmes and priorities are therefore important. Successive iterations of both regional and agency strategies will bring about greater alignment over time.

Monitoring the Strategy will involve two elements: monitoring environmental outcomes in relation to the targets and indicators set out in the Strategy, and monitoring delivery of the actions identified in the Implementation Plan.

The Regional Assembly will produce a short report annually which will describe to what extent these actions have been carried out. This will be set within the context of the State of the Environment report produced by the environment module of the South West Observatory<sup>2</sup>.

The combination of monitoring against environmental indicators and delivery of actions will enable an assessment to be made of whether the Strategy is moving the region towards achievement of the Vision and Aims for the South West's environment, and in reacting to changing priorities. A formal review of the Strategy will be undertaken on a three-yearly basis.

<sup>2</sup> [www.swenvo.org.uk](http://www.swenvo.org.uk)





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GOVERNMENT OFFICE  
FOR THE SOUTH WEST



**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY**



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