



Severn Estuary Partnership

Business Plan 2023 -2027



Foreword



I am delighted to endorse and share with you our five-year SEP Strategic Business Plan for 2023-2027. This Plan, which outlines key actions for the Partnership, is most timely: there is mounting and renewed interest in our Estuary from multiple and diverse stakeholders, alongside increasing pressures from climate change. Alongside SEP's continuing and valuable role raising awareness of the Estuary and associated management endeavours, there are many exciting projects which SEP is involved in at local and strategic levels. All these activities are important to the well-being of those living and working around the Estuary, and we encourage you not only to find out more about these, but also to collaborate with us on these and future projects, if you are able.

We particularly hope that you will engage with the discussions related to our revised management framework and delivery model. Within the broader context of the Inner Bristol Channel and Severn Catchment, effective, transparent and collaborative governance arrangements are not only vital to the Partnership but are also essential for securing the Estuary's future resilience and sustainability.

On behalf of the Partnership, I look forward to working closely with you as well as others, including our partners and members, to implement the delivery of this business plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rhoda C. Ballinger".

Rhoda Ballinger, Chair, Severn Estuary Partnership

June 2023

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1. Executive Summary

Established in 1995, the Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP) is an independent, Estuary-wide non-statutory initiative led by local authorities and statutory agencies. SEP works to promote the sustainable management of the Severn Estuary and its surroundings, enhancing and protecting the area for the benefit of the community, the environment, and the economy. It operates at a strategic coastal management level, providing a network for closer working relationships, information dissemination and discussion of topical coastal issues.

This Strategic Business Plan sets out a framework for the activities of the Severn Estuary Partnership over the period 2023 -2027. The Plan details the activities of the Partnership by:

- identifying key actions that will provide the benchmark against which future progress will be measured and
- outlining the current and possible future management framework and delivery model by which aims will be achieved.

This plan is for the whole Partnership including funding partners, members, and the SEP staff team. Priority actions for SEP over the five-year period 2023-2027 are set out in the Severn Estuary Partnership Action Plan (2023-2027) in Section 10 and will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis by the Management Group, to reflect the evolving role and work of SEP.



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2. Background

The Severn Estuary is one of the largest coastal plain estuaries in the UK, at the mouth of three major rivers: the Severn, the Wye and the Avon. Not only is it Britain's second largest Estuary, but it also boasts the highest tidal range in Europe with a tidal regime which causes strong tidal streams, mobile sediments and the famous Severn Bore. This immense tidal range and classic funnel shape make the Severn Estuary unique in Britain and rare worldwide.

Dynamic and diverse, it has fascinating natural, cultural and geographical features, managed and used by a wide variety of organisations and individuals. The Estuary provides resources for communities around its shores through recreation, transport, trade, and materials. It supports activities ranging from sailing and fishing to dredging. It offers opportunities for renewable energy generation and is home to some of the largest infrastructure projects and proposals in the UK: the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station and the Deep-Sea Container Terminal at Bristol as well as other urban and industrial interests.

The Estuary contains a variety of landscapes and seascapes including salt marshes, cliffs, islands and tidal flats, and supports nationally and internationally important habitats and species, as well as being a key migratory route for salmon and other migratory fish species. The extensive mudflats, saltmarshes and coastal grazing marshes make it one of the most important estuaries in the UK for its numbers of wildfowl and wading birds, with over 80,000 birds visiting every winter, resulting in designations under the Habitats Regulations, Ramsar Convention and the Wildlife and Countryside Act. However, the Estuary is a fragile habitat, with significant low-lying areas, vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and therefore needs to be sustainably managed and looked after for future generations.

The dynamic physical environment of the Severn Estuary, combined with the border between England and Wales, makes the land and sea jurisdictional interface particularly complex and while Estuary and its catchments are in a degraded state¹, innovative large-scale conservation projects, such as the environmental compensation scheme at the Steart peninsula and the network of fish passes on the River Severn via the "Unlocking the Severn"² project are working to improve environmental conditions around the Estuary.

Over recent years, there has been rapid expansion of marine and coastal policy in England and Wales including the introduction of a new system of marine planning and the publication of the first Wales National Marine Plan (2019) and the South West Marine Plan (2021), which deliver a commitment to an ecosystem approach and integrated planning and management across the Estuary. There are also various strategic plans for changing land use patterns for flood prevention, biodiversity improvement and carbon management, alongside economic development and social improvement in the South West of England and South Wales. These issues – and their inherent complexity – demand strategic, adaptable and locally-relevant solutions. These can only be identified and delivered through collaborative processes – whether they be for wellbeing, welfare, health, climate resilience, nature recovery, ocean sustainability, blue economy or community cohesion. The challenge for the governance of the Estuary is therefore to co-ordinate and drive the delivery of social, environmental and economic benefits for coastal communities where the impacts of the challenges above are most keenly felt, making the coordinating role of SEP more important than ever.

Set up in 1995, SEP is an independent, Estuary-wide, non-statutory initiative led by local authorities and statutory agencies. SEP works with local stakeholders to promote a sustainable approach to the planning, management, and development for all who live and work around the Estuary, both now and in the future. As an independent, long-established and well-recognised coastal partnership with a politically neutral status, SEP is well placed to provide a platform for cross-sectoral communication and partnership working. It provides support to many organisations who

¹ <https://severnpartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/10/SOSER.pdf>

² <https://www.unlockingthesevern.co.uk/>

have responsibilities or interest in the Estuary, including local authorities and statutory agencies which it brings together on a regular basis.

Since its inception, SEP has consistently maintained a neutral position with regard to issues affecting the Estuary. This neutrality is a key strength and enables the organisation to facilitate both evidence gathering and equitable and in-depth debate when issues arise, ensuring that perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders are explored and considered. It also allows SEP to comment on the inclusiveness, transparency and likely effectiveness of policy developments, processes and systems.

The area covered by SEP is shown on the map below (Figure 1), stretching from just north of Gloucester to Hurlstone Point near Minehead on the English coast and Nash Point on the Welsh Coast. The Partnership's landward boundary has never been specifically defined, enabling the Partnership to tackle a range of issues related to features and activities that have an integral relationship with the marine environment.

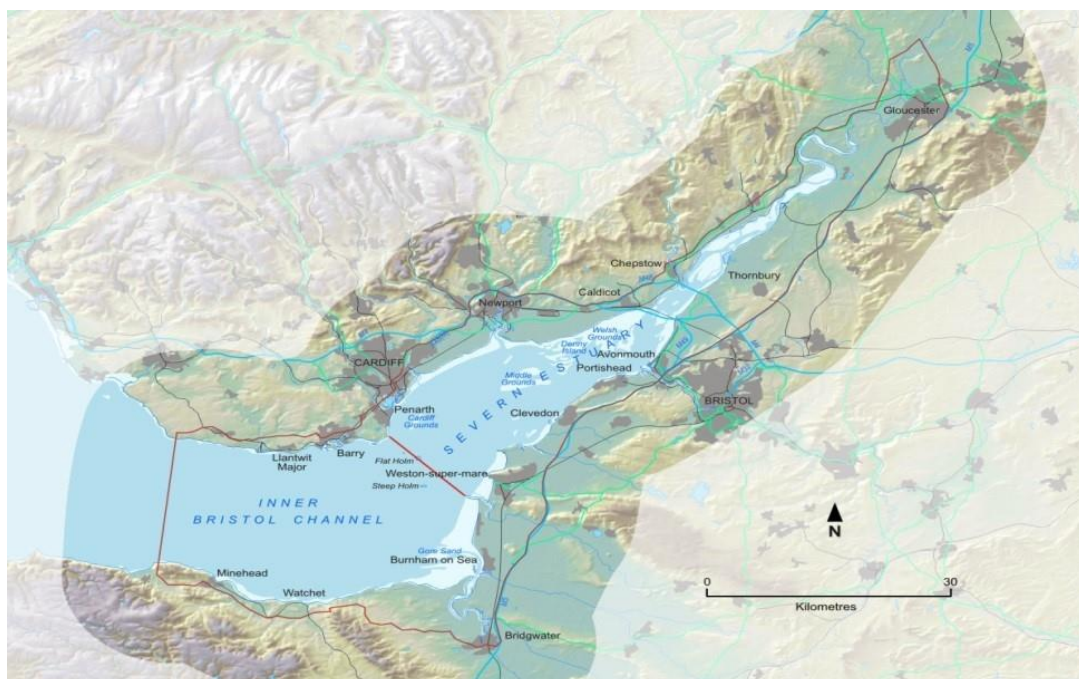


Figure 1: The Severn Estuary Partnership boundary.

3. Organisational Details

Organisation Name: Severn Estuary Partnership

Address: Severn Estuary Partnership, c/o School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Cardiff University. Main Building. Park Place. CF10 3AT.

Telephone number: 02920 874713

Email: Severn@cardiff.ac.uk

Website: www.severnestuarypartnership.org.uk

4. Aims of the Partnership

The Partnership brings people together to resolve problems and realise opportunities for the Estuary and its communities. Our key aims are to:

1. Facilitate effective communication across and between organisations and individuals with an interest in the Severn Estuary.
2. Embed the Severn Estuary Strategy's common principles for sustainable estuary use via partners' and associates' strategies, policies and action plans.
3. Act as a co-ordinating body to assist the effective and efficient delivery of agreed estuary-wide actions.
4. Promote and publicise the Estuary at a local, national and international level.
5. Add value and fill gaps to contribute towards effective Estuary management, providing extra capacity when required.
6. Identify and deliver project work that contributes to the evidence base for decision-making and supports those who have an interest in the Severn Estuary.

5. Strategic Business Plan (2023-2027)

This Strategic Business Plan sets out a framework for the activities of SEP over the period of 2023 to 2027. The Plan outlines the Partnership's management structure, key activities, and the associated Action Plan.

The Plan also assesses SEP's strengths, weaknesses, future opportunities, and threats in order to define the Partnerships' future direction, making it a robust and effective organisation capable of delivering significant outputs on behalf of partner organisations and the wider Estuary community. The production of this Strategic Plan has been informed by discussions with SEP Management Group members (September 2021-September 2022) and builds on the widely consulted 2017-2027 Severn Estuary Strategy (Section 3).

It should be recognised that the Strategic Business Plan is a Plan for the whole Partnership not just the SEP staff team. As such the Plan is relevant to core funding partners, together with membership organisations and individuals. Whilst it is not a plan solely for the staff team, SEP staff will lead on some areas and directly deliver many actions outlined in the Business Plan and corresponding Action Plan.

Material to inform this Business Plan has been collated from a wide range of sources, including:

- 2014-2017 review of Strategy for the Severn Estuary (2001)
- Review of stakeholder engagement activities that informed the Severn Estuary Strategy (2017-2027)
- Management Group Workshop (November 2021)
- Expert advice from other Coastal and Estuary Partnerships (CEPs)
- Outputs from the Championing Coastal Coordination (3Cs) projects (2022)
- Direction from Partnership through Management Group discussions (September 2021 -September 2022)
- Professional advice from the SEP Staff Team (ongoing)

6. The Severn Estuary Strategy (2017-2027)

The first Severn Estuary Strategy (2001) and was revised and relaunched to reflect new and emerging policies and developments in 2017. Following a period of development (April 2015 to April 2017) which included 6 weeks of public SEP Strategic Business Plan 2023-2027

consultation (September to November 2016) and various stakeholder workshops, the [2017-2027 Severn Estuary Strategy](#) was published online.

The revised and streamlined 2017 Strategy provides a framework to inform coordinated policy development, practices and strategies for the Severn Estuary. Building on the principles of the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#)ⁱ and taking account of key drivers such as climate change, this bespoke strategy provides an ‘estuary’ context to inform and support decision-making including that associated with Estuary uses and proposed developments, including those related to maritime uses, minerals and marine renewable energy.

This Strategy is for the whole of the Severn Estuary region and for the members and associates of SEP. For the Strategy to be fully successful, all those with an interest in the estuary are actively encouraged to adopt it as a strategic management framework to inform their approach/policy/contribution to the future sustainable management of the Estuary. Through this commitment, the Strategy ensures that a more integrated and joined-up approach to management of the Severn Estuary is taken.

The Actions outlined in the Strategy are incorporated into this new five-year Strategic Business Plan (2023-2027). The Strategy consultation process has also informed identification of key priorities for SEP to focus on over this next 5-year period.

Future direction:

SEP will seek to address the actions set out in the Strategy, collaborating with other organisations to encourage adoption of the strategy as a strategic management framework to inform their approach/policy/contribution to the future sustainable management of the Estuary. Progress against the actions will be reviewed annually. Any revisions will be considered and incorporated into the Business Plan, where appropriate.



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7. The Role of the Partnership

7.1 SEP Communications & Information Dissemination

SEP is uniquely placed to receive and disseminate information on Estuary-wide activities, developments and news, also offering the opportunity for partners to publicise information about developments in their area. SEP currently creates and disseminates a range of communications, not only for existing members but also for a much wider audience of interested parties including “harder to reach” stakeholders. SEP also acts as the main communication channel for both the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) and the Severn Estuary Coastal Group (SECG). Our communication platforms include:

- The SEP annual [Forum](#) to share the latest research and policy developments involving the Severn Estuary and its future.
- The Joint Estuary Day, which brings together Estuary-wide groups (e.g. the Severn Estuary Coastal Group, the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities and the Bristol Channel Standing Environment Group) on an annual basis.
- Up-to-date information and news via SEP social media – [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Linked In](#).
- Monthly SEP [E-News](#) – updates of the latest Severn Estuary and wider UK coastal news, consultations and events, distributed to organisations and individuals.
- Distribution and promotion of the annual [Severn Tidings Newsletters](#).
- Development and maintenance of the [SEP Website](#)³, including ‘[Estuary](#)’ webpages which provide up to date information on the use, nature and management of the Severn Estuary, including links to relevant Estuary Groups.
- Events and [projects](#).

SEP also has links and participates actively with wider national groups such as the [Coastal Partnership Network](#) and both the Welsh and English the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Officers’ Networks as well as regularly attending a range of external events. Such activities not only increase the visibility and awareness of SEP but also ensure that the Estuary’s needs, including cross-border issues, are adequately voiced and discussed at both regional and national levels.

Quarterly meetings of the SEP Management Group, the annual Joint Estuary Day and the annual Severn Estuary Forum attract a wide cross-section of organisations and individuals and help to maintain the momentum of the organisation.

Future direction:

Working with partner organisations and local communities, SEP will maintain its core activities and seek out new opportunities to deliver strategic outcomes in our Strategy, underpinned by our agreed principles, based on best practice and in partnership with others, supporting collaboration and coordination around the Estuary. To increase the visibility and awareness of SEP a new Communications Strategy will be developed incorporating the work of ASERA and SECG. Attendance at external events will be prioritised. To facilitate this new display materials and leaflets about the Estuary will be produced including bilingual material in both English and Welsh.

³ <https://severnestuarypartnership.org.uk/>

7.2 Severn Estuary Partnership Website

SEP maintains its own [website](#) and those of a number of other Estuary groups and projects. These include the websites for the [Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities](#), [Severn Estuary Coastal Group](#) and [Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset](#).

The Partnership [website](#) provides a vital portal to a significant resource of easily accessible, accurate information on the Estuary and covers a wide range of themes from ports and shipping to water quality. The website also provides access to information on current and past projects that SEP and partners have undertaken.

Future direction:

Following a successful relaunch of the website in 2021, SEP will work to expand the website to act as an information hub for the Estuary. Working with partner organisations and wider stakeholders, SEP will develop and share content relevant to the Estuary and its catchments, ensuring this information is accessible to all stakeholders, as well as providing bilingual content where appropriate, in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993. An additional key focus during the lifetime of this strategic plan will be to ensure that all information on the website continues to be accurate and up to date.

7.3 Severn Estuary Forum

The [Severn Estuary Forum](#), a key annual event organised and delivered by the Partnership, has been running since 2006. This engaging event is intended for all those interested in learning about the latest research, planning and policy developments affecting the Severn Estuary and its future. Lively and informative, the day consists of a series of presentations and talks, with opportunities for networking, discussion and debate. The Forum attracts over 100 delegates each year from a wide variety of organisations including Local Authorities, Statutory Agencies, industry, consultancies, and residents. All Forums to date have been well received and are considered an important part of the organisation's activities.

The Forum takes a significant level of planning and requires a substantial amount of the SEP staff team's time, especially during the preceding three months as well as planning input from a Management Sub-Group. In recent years, Cardiff University student placements have provided invaluable support, helping to plan and organise the event.

Future direction:

SEP will continue to develop the Forum, working with partner organisations and wider stakeholders to ensure that content and format remains relevant to the sustainable management of the Estuary.

7.4 Severn Estuary Beach Cleans

Marine litter is an increasing problem with millions of tonnes of litter ending up in our ocean every year. Through our projects, community beach clean groups and campaigns SEP works to:

- Empower local people, businesses and communities to take action to reduce beach litter and improve bathing water quality.
- Encourage organisations and individuals to get involved with local beach cleans
- Educate about the impact of litter and water quality
- Promote positive solutions and share our successes, results, and research

SEP coordinates two Estuary-wide cleans per year, providing advice, equipment and support to community beach cleans and working in partnership with other organisations to promote and align with ongoing initiatives, such as those led by The [Marine Conservation Society](#), [Keep Wales Tidy](#) the Wales Clean Seas Partnership, with the aim of

contributing to Good Environmental Status (GES) for marine litter under the UK Marine Strategy⁴ as well as actively engaging local communities in the management of the Estuary. This activity has expanded over the last 12 months (September 2021-September 2022) to include working with existing Catchment Partnerships (Severn Vale, Bristol Avon and Somerset Catchment Partnerships) to highlight the 'source to sea' pathway of marine litter and to help advocate for catchment-wide cleans.

SEP also works to support a number of local beach cleaning groups through the Litter Free Coast and Seas Somerset project.

Future direction:

SEP will continue to promote and expand our annual beach clean events over the lifetime of this strategic plan as well as SEP's continuing engagement with the Wales Clean Seas Partnership and the local Plastic Free Communities and will work to expand our flagship Litter Free Coast and Seas Somerset project around the Estuary. It is anticipated that a further project will be developed and funded within the timescale of this business plan for SEP to develop its work on the issue of marine litter and plastics/micro plastics in the sea.



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⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-strategy-part-one-uk-updated-assessment-and-good-environmental-status>

7.5 Joint Estuary Day & Estuary Groups

Over twenty years ago, a number of groupsⁱⁱ with an Estuary-wide remit on the Severn formed the **Joint Estuary Groups Initiative** (JEGI) through a [Memorandum of Understanding \(2001\)](#). Since then, the groups have endeavoured to coordinate their activities and approaches through joint meetings and communication between relevant group Chairs. The value of such liaison was reaffirmed by a formal review of the Chairs in 2015 alongside a redefined role and modus operandi of the JEGI.

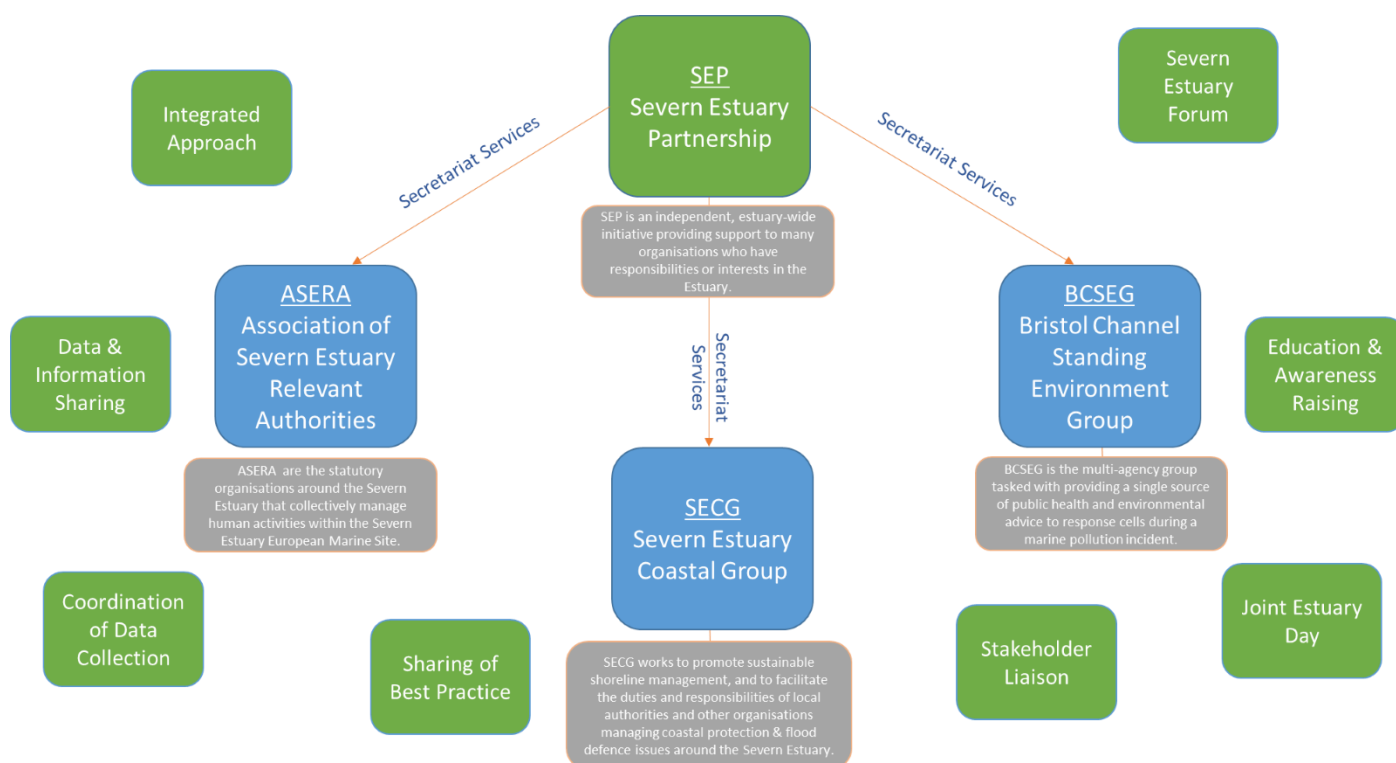


Figure 2. Estuary Groups supported by SEP

A key part of SEP's co-ordinating role is the staff support and secretariat services it provides for the Joint Estuary Groups' Initiative, which includes the following groups: the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA), the Severn Estuary Coastal Group (SECG) and the Bristol Channel Standing Environment Group (BCSEG). Having an overview of the work of these groups enables SEP to:

- input and guide the various work programmes where appropriate
- avoid duplication and overlap and helps promote effective communications and
- raise awareness of the linkages between the work of various groups and organisations in the area.
- **[Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities \(ASERA\)](#)** is made up of the statutory organisations (Relevant Authorities) around the Severn Estuary that collectively oversee and manage human activities on the Severn Estuary European Marine Site (EMS) through a Management Scheme. The Management Scheme sets the framework within which activities (governed by Competent or Relevant Authorities) are managed in ways compatible with the nature conservation objectives of the EMS.
- **Bristol Channel Standing Environment Group (BCSEG)** provides environmental and public health advice in the event of a major maritime pollution incident.
- **[Severn Estuary Coastal Group \(SECG\)](#)** works to promote sustainable shoreline management, and to facilitate the duties and responsibilities of local authorities and other organisations managing coastal protection and flood defence issues around the Severn Estuary.

Future direction:

SEP will continue to support the work of the Estuary Groups through provision of ongoing secretariat and project support and will work to re-energise the Joint Estuary Groups Initiative, as a key mechanism for bringing in or re-engaging stakeholders.

7.6 Public Consultation and Representation on External Groups and Networks

Many policies and plans that underpin the management of the Estuary are developed at a large catchment or national scale, such as the Severn River Basin Management Plan and the two Marine Plans covering the Estuary. SEP therefore requires recognition and representation at a national level in order to influence decisions and successfully promote the sustainable use of the Estuary as well as providing an invaluable platform for cross-border information and knowledge sharing⁵.

At a national level SEP is an active member of the Coastal Partnerships Network (CPN) and has previously held Chair and Vice Chair positions. CPN offers increased opportunities for learning and influence, strengthening and supporting Coastal Partnership Officers and encouraging stronger representation of the value of the work of Coastal Partnerships to their supporting partners and other coastal stakeholders and initiatives. SEP has increased its involvement in this network over the past few years, promoting its activities, sharing best practice with other Coastal Partnerships and engaging in national projects. Another of CPN's core roles is to provide a common platform for Coastal Partnerships in relation to communications with national organisations, including Defra and the Marine Management Organisation.

In Wales, SEP is an active member of the Wales Coast and Seas Partnership (WCaSP) (previously known as the Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group). WCaSP provides advice to the Welsh Government in relation to the delivery of the Marine Transition Programme. The group brings together a broad range of strategic marine/coastal interest groups to ensure effective and meaningful engagement in Wales's marine and fisheries sector through collaborative working. WCaSP also includes a marine planning sub-group (Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group) which SEP actively engages with, to steer the development and implementation of the Welsh National Marine Plan. Following SEP's engagement with the production of the first two marine plans covering the Estuary (South West Marine Plan, 2021 and the Welsh National Marine Plan, 2019) through stakeholder workshops (2016-2018) SEP will continue to engage with the MMO and Welsh Government as the two plans are revised and reviewed to ensure compatibility of marine planning across the Estuary.

Future Direction:

As a non-statutory organisation, SEP must ensure that its aspirations are delivered through incorporation into the activities and documentation of its partners. To this end, SEP must continue to:

- Actively input into consultations promoting sustainable Estuary principles and ensure that actions are compatible with *Severn Estuary Strategy (2017-2027)* and this Strategic Business Plan. For example, not all strategic planning documents recognise the Estuary as a single ecosystem and in these cases the need for integrated cross-border management needs to be championed.
- Ensure representation on relevant groups/networks which influence the management of the Estuary.

⁵ [The implications of Hinkley Point C for Wales' environment and its people](#)

- Increase awareness and membership of SEP to ensure that its core principles are adopted into the action plans, policies and approaches of more organisations around the Estuary.

7.7 Facilitation and Secretariat Services

Both the SEP staff team and the Chair are regularly requested to provide facilitation for external events and wider consultation processes as well as secretariat services to national groups and fora as a result of the neutral status, wide-ranging knowledge and professional facilitation skills and experience of the team. Notable examples include:

- Wales Flooding and Coastal Erosion Committee (including Resources and Policy and Legislation Sub-Committees)
- Swansea and Carmarthen Bay Coastal Engineering Group (SCBCEG) and Severn Estuary Coastal Group - Shoreline Management Plans (SMP2)
- Welsh Government & Marine Management Organisation – Cross-border Marine Planning Workshops
- Marine Management Organisation – South West Marine Plan Issues & Evidence Workshop
- Environment Agency – Severn Estuary Flood Risk Management Strategy
- Severn Estuary Climate Change Advisory Group (SECCAG) – Climate Change
- And numerous workshops within each of our local, national and European projects.

Future direction:

The provision of facilitation and secretariat services provides a key source of funding for SEP as well as ensuring SEP remains informed and engaged with key developments affecting the current and future management of the Estuary. Maintaining this facilitation service will be a key activity for the SEP staff team.

7.8 Projects

SEP has carried out project work in a number of different areas with a range of local and international partners, enabling SEP to develop key outputs of benefit to Estuary stakeholders, as well as reflect on its own approaches, learning from and sharing best practice with partners. Improvements to the SEP website through the State of the Severn Estuary Report (SOSER) as well as increased engagement with ‘hard to reach’ communities through the *Discover the Severn* project are just some of the key benefits from such project involvement. To date, projects and/or project collaborations have included:

- [Championing Coastal Coordination](#) (2021-2022)
- Diverse Values (2021-2024)
- [Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset](#) (2019-2025)
- [Discover the Severn](#) (2018-2019)
- [Marine Planning Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement Project \(2017-2019\)](#)
- Wales Coastal Directory (2013-2016)
- [State of the Severn Estuary Report \(SOSER\) \(2011\)](#)
- DeltaNET INTERREG IVC: Sharing estuary best practice in Europe (2010-2013)
- [IMCORE INTERREG IVB: Climate change adaptation and scenarios in Europe](#) (2008 – 2011)
- The Beacons for Wales Project: Climate change adaptation outreach in Wales and England (2009-2011)

- [COREPOINT INTERREG IIIB: Creating a sustainable framework for Integrated Coastal Zone Management \(ICZM\) \(2000 – 2006\)](#)*COASTATLANTIC INTERREG IIIB project: coastal planning (2003 – 2006)

Future direction:

Project funding is an important source of income for SEP and a means by which SEP can deliver its target actions. Seeking project funding will be a key aim for SEP over the next Business Plan period.



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8. Delivery

8.1 Management Framework

The SEP Staff Team is currently made up of the Partnership Manager, the Severn Estuary Partnership and European Marine Site Officer, the Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset Officer, the Coastal Officer and the SEP Administrative Assistant. Placement students and volunteers assist the staff team in delivery of the Partnership's Work Plan on a regular basis.

The work of SEP is guided by the SEP Management Group, led by the SEP Chair, and comprised of the core funding partners (those who contribute >£1000 per annum) and those who provide significant in-kind support. The Management Group meets quarterly to provide advice and guidance on the work of SEP and the development and progress of key documents, such as the Severn Estuary Strategy 2017-2027, the Strategic Business Plan and associated Action Plans. Members of the Management Group also act as ambassadors for SEP. Sub-groups are frequently formed as Task and Finish groups to provide specific operational guidance to the team. Current members include representatives from local authorities and government agencies from across the Severn Estuary area.

The SEP Staff Team is hosted by the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences (EARTH), Cardiff University with EARTH providing a range of in-kind support, as well as representation on the Management Group.

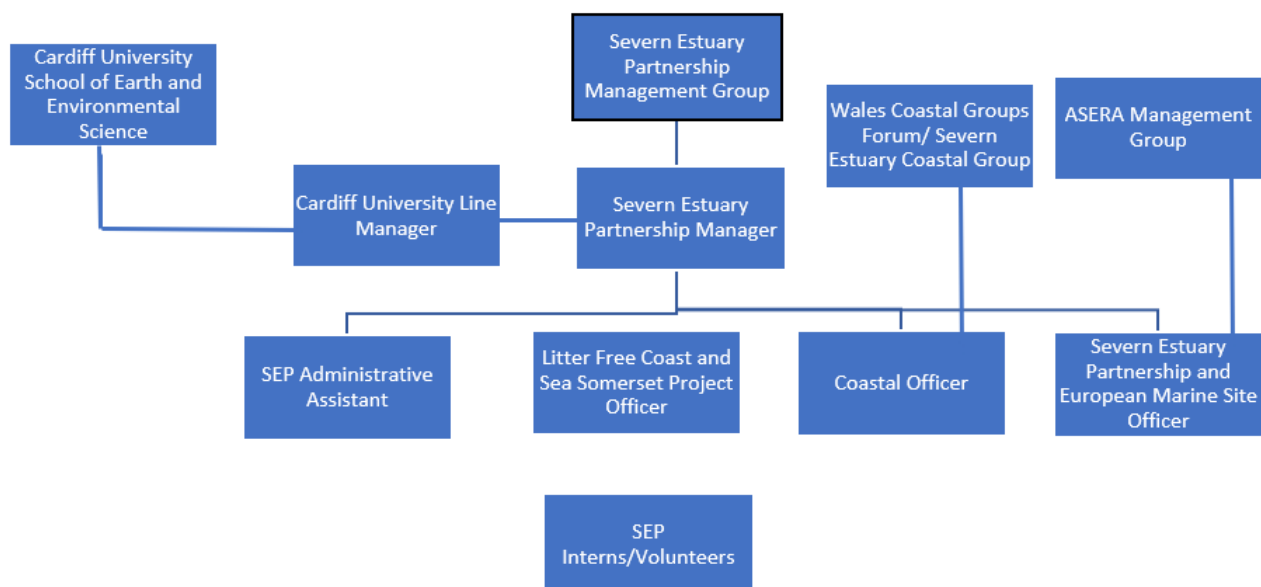


Figure 3. SEP Operational Structure 2022

Future direction:

This structure has proved successful over the lifetime of SEP; however, the SEP has been constrained by a lack of organisational buy-in at higher levels within partner organisations. To achieve a higher level of buy-in, SEP will scope and deliver a two-pronged approach to improved engagement. This will include the establishment of:

- a high- level SEP Advisory Board
- an annual round table for local authority elected members

It is envisaged that the SEP Advisory Board will be comprised of cross-border elected members and senior managers from relevant organisations. The group will meet on an annual basis to:

- review the work of the Partnership
- provide feedback and direction on relevant activities
- promote the Partnership and its work, both within their constituent organisations and more widely.

Secondly, the convening of an annual round table for elected members in local authorities will provide an opportunity to share updates on estuary wide issues and developments and encourage greater cross-border and cross-organisational collaboration.

8.2 Organisational Status & Hosting Arrangements

SEP is a voluntary partnership with an informal structure and membership and no constitution or legal status. It has operated in this way since it was established in 1995.

SEP is hosted by School of EARTH in Cardiff University, an arrangement that has been in place for 25 years and one which has been highlighted as best practice by Welsh Government and others.

Both SEP and the University mutually benefit from current arrangements. SEP provides EARTH with unique opportunities for applied research, enhances the educational experience of students through training and opportunities for applied learning, and raises the profile of the School and Cardiff University as a national and international leader in multi-disciplinary, applied coastal research. Additionally, EARTH provides SEP with office space, links to research expertise and access to university administrative assistance, most notably financial and human

resource services, as well as line management of the SEP Manager and other associated benefits to staff as employees of Cardiff University.

A revised Benefits Realisation Paper and MoU between SEP and EARTH were formally agreed by both partners in August 2022. This will be reviewed on an annual basis under the SEP EARTH Academic Director to ensure that, in discussion with the Research, Teaching and Outreach leads within EARTH, the actions continue to be relevant and deliver benefits for both parties. (Joint Benefits Paper 2022 is available upon request).

Despite the successful hosting arrangements to date, the lack of legal status of SEP restricts access to additional funding resources, potentially limiting opportunities for SEP to grow and deliver more widely. The ability to access funding from trusts and foundations to cover core staffing costs and provide greater flexibility to develop projects, could build a stronger, more active partnership and help SEP to realise its full potential, supporting and facilitating cross-border collaboration.

Future direction:

A key activity within the lifespan of this Strategic Plan will be to explore options for a separate appropriate legal status for SEP. However, it is recognised that scoping and delivery of this work represents a significant resource and therefore a Task and Finish group will need to be established by the SEP Management Group to take this work forward.

The SEP Team will also continue to review and develop the joint SEP and EARTH Benefits Realisation Paper on an annual basis, ensuring strong and mutually beneficial links are maintained and developed between SEP and Cardiff University and formalise and secure support for a Student Placement Strategy, identifying placement opportunities and highlighting the benefits of placements with SEP.

8.3 Membership

Current SEP membership is drawn from the local authorities around the Estuary in addition to the statutory agencies and Cardiff University as the host organisation. SEP has run several wider membership schemes in the past; however, formal SEP membership is currently limited to core funding partners. A Membership Scheme was developed in 2008 and relaunched in 2010 resulting in several individuals, private sector organisations, NGOs and Town, Parish and Community Councils joining SEP, although administration of the scheme has proven difficult to sustain given existing staffing and resource levels.

Future direction:

It is important that SEP has a good balance in its membership, with representation from people and groups that span all marine sectors, relevant authorities and non-governmental organisations and conservation interests. To achieve this, a revised two-tier membership scheme will be scoped and developed by a Task and Finish group and relaunched during the lifetime of this Plan. This will include:

- Management Group Representation – comprised of core funding partners and an elected representative from third sector organisations and local communities.
- Wider SEP Membership

The renewed scheme will offer Management Group membership to core funding partner as well as elected members representing third sector organisations and local communities. Wider membership of SEP will be free and open to remaining stakeholders, with a focus on including members with a vested interest in the Severn Estuary and developing closer and more joined up working relationships with other organisations. Whilst the former will have an opportunity to guide the work of SEP the latter will secure benefits such as inclusion on the SEP mailing list, opportunities to share information on relevant projects and opportunities to network with other SEP members.

8.4 Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring and evaluation of progress on actions identified in this plan are carried out through the Partnership management structure. Minutes of all meetings are recorded. A comprehensive review of progress on this Business Plan is carried out annually.

Future direction:

An annual review of progress against actions identified in Appendix 1 will be undertaken as well as an annual horizon scanning exercise undertaken by SEP staff. This will include a survey of SEP members, ensuring that the Partnership can stay abreast of shorter-term developments that may occur within the five-year lifespan of the Business Plan and helping to inform SEPs work programme and annual programme of events and meetings.

9. Resources

SEP can only deliver its services effectively if it is well managed. Some of the biggest challenges to SEP's success are related to organisational management and structure, including ong-term finance and retention of staff as noted below.

9.1 Funding

Funding of SEP currently primarily relies on core funding from partner organisations, currently local authorities and government agencies, with a smaller proportion of additional funding coming from the secretariat service provided to other estuary groups and from *ad hoc* project work (section 5.7).

SEP relies on these multiple sources to continue its work and provide ongoing engagement with volunteers, stakeholders and community groups. However, the short-term nature of funding and associated commitments, particularly the annual contribution model for core funds, means that these vital activities are potentially vulnerable to funding changes. There is also a significant time resource required to manage the complex financial portfolio which underpins these activities. Forward planning and long-term, strategic commitments are also undermined in these circumstances.

Despite several former members re-joining SEP in the past 12 months, it is anticipated that partner annual funding contributions may continue to be difficult to sustain in the current economic climate.

The independent nature of SEP enables it to have greater flexibility, being more adaptive than statutory organisations. As a result of this SEP has often been contracted to deliver services or develop projects which require a more flexible and timely approach than could be delivered through any one partner organisation. Notable examples include consultation facilitation work and the development and maintenance of websites for Estuary Groups.

A range of other outputs and activities are enabled by additional grant support for individual projects. SEP has a proven track record of maximising the value of core funds by drawing in additional project funding which has not only enabled the maintenance and expansion of the SEP Staff Team but has also enabled various other benefits and outcomes to be realised.

Future direction:

The extent of funding received ultimately affects the extent of projects and activities that can be carried out. To ensure the future of SEP, additional time needs to be dedicated to securing long term funding as well as obtaining funding from other sources.

To date, consultancy type work has been a marginal element of the SEP's work but has brought in additional funding required to stabilise and maintain SEP's finances. There are numerous opportunities for the Partnership to extend its

services to other organisations - in effect acting as a consultancy. However, this must not impinge on SEP's neutral status or be at the expense of SEP's core principles of facilitating wide and impartial communication and joint working.



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9.2 Staff

The SEP staff team is currently made up of the Partnership Manager, the Severn Estuary Partnership and European Marine Site Officer the Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset Officer, the Coastal Officer and a SEP Administrative Assistant as well as an Academic Lead, based in EARTH. Placement students and volunteers assist the staff team in delivery of the Partnership's Work Plan. The knowledge and skills contained within the Staff Team include:

Knowledge:

- Understanding of physical, social and economic processes and an appreciation of the importance of an integrated approach to estuarine management
- Knowledge of legislation, policies and administration in both terrestrial, marine and coastal environments
- Knowledge and experience of multi-agency partnership working
- Understanding of how regional and national Government operates
- Detailed working knowledge of conservation designations, in particular European Habitats Directives (1992) and Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)
- Knowledge and experience of the voluntary sector

Skills:

- Proficiency of public engagement and event organisation
- Good written and oral communications skills
- Experience of sourcing and securing project funding, including European funds
- Project management skills and experience

- Financial management skills and experience
- Proficiency in the use of IT packages, including databases
- Proficiency of web design and development
- Expertise in social media management

These skills are supplemented by those of staff from the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences Cardiff University. University staff have over the years contributed substantially to the development of SEP through their knowledge, experience and networks. In addition to assistance from the University, considerable additional knowledge and skills are available within the partner and member organisations.

In the past there have been several times when staff positions have been vacant for extended periods, largely as a result of the ending of key large-scale projects and associated financial resources in addition to the impact of COVID-19. Staff vacancies can result in loss of work streams or loss of ability to deliver on agreed actions. In addition, if staff are not available to continually promote the work of the partnership by attending events, sending SEP communications and responding to consultations the momentum and contacts built up will be lost and the core messages of SEP will no longer reach the required audience.

Future direction:

SEP must ensure it has the staffing resources to enable it to deliver agreed actions, therefore a key action within the lifetime of this strategic plan will be to maintain a continuous programme of projects, in order to maintain and expand the SEP staff team, securing longer term contracts, appropriate training and ensuring sufficient capacity and expertise to deliver against the actions outlined in *Appendix 1*.



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10. Annual Corporate Cycle

In order to maintain and keep this Strategic Business Plan up to date and relevant, as outlined elsewhere in this document a clear corporate year needs to be understood and agreed. The Management Group has agreed a forward plan of meeting dates for the next year (2023/24) which forms the basis of the annual cycle of meetings. In relation to the review and updating of the Strategic Business Plan it is therefore recommended that the following approach is adopted:

Month	Event	Reporting	Financial Planning	Forum Planning
January	Annual Work Plan	Produce Annual Action Plan for coming year. Incorporate workshop session in to meeting if required to work on specific aspects.	Annual Financial Planning	Agree key themes and speakers. Promotion /marketing plan and CPD opportunities agreed. Budget to be discussed.
March	SEP Management Group		Report on final membership for the year.	Seek contributors from agreed Forum speakers.
April		Start of Business Plan Year and sign off Annual Action Plan.	Annual financial reporting	
April	Severn Estuary Spring Clean			
May	Joint Estuary Day	Update estuary groups on SEP plans for the coming year. Invite comment and input from groups, as and where appropriate. Facilitate networking and promote integration between estuary groups.		
June	SEP Management Group			
June	Severn Estuary Forum	Provide updates on various projects.		Severn Estuary Forum event.
August	Review of Benefits Realisation activities			

August	Horizon Scanning			
September	Big Beach Clean SEP Management Group Meeting	Report on Action Plan progress and delivery.		Discussion on success and lessons learned for the Forum. Agree location and possible themes. Establish subgroup
October	Severn Tidings			
November	Elected Members Annual Round Table			Discuss location, venue, possible themes and potential speakers.
December	SEP Management Group	Report on Action Plan progress and review plan to determine whether amendments are required. Input to Business Plan roll forward. Produce Annual Action Plan for coming year.		

11. Acronyms

ASERA	Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities
BCSEG	Bristol Channel Standing Environment Group
CPN	Coastal Partnerships Network
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EARTH	School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Cardiff University
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
JEGI	Joint Estuary Group Initiative
LFCSS	Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset
MCS	Marine Conservation Society
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
SECG	Severn Estuary Coastal Group
SEP	Severn Estuary Partnership
SOSER	State of the Severn Estuary Report
WCaSP	Wales Coast and Seas Partnership
WCGF	Wales Coastal Groups Forum
WMAAG	Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group
WG	Welsh Government

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-marine-policy-statement>

ⁱⁱ THE ASSOCIATION OF SEVERN ESTUARY RELEVANT AUTHORITIES, THE BRISTOL CHANNEL COUNTER POLLUTION ASSOCIATION, THE NORTH DEVON AND SOMERSET COASTAL GROUP, THE SEVERN ESTUARY COASTAL GROUP, THE SEVERN ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP, AND THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF SEVERNSIDE LOCAL AUTHORITIES.