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Further details on our vision, our services, our impact and our membership can be found on our website:

<https://ecosystemsknowledge.net>

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## Executive summary

We change the way the UK's natural environment is managed for the benefit of society.

The Ecosystems Knowledge Network's vision is wellbeing and prosperity for everyone in the UK through a healthy natural environment. Our mission is to equip a diverse range of people with the necessary skills and expertise to make this a reality.

This plan identifies the following three strategic aims and describes how we are going to fulfil them:

1. To equip our members through accessible learning opportunities.
2. To equip sectors and professions to connect the environment with wellbeing and prosperity.
3. To catalyse innovative partnerships that will make a practical difference 'on the ground'.

Many factors mean that we are well-placed to achieve our mission and fulfil our objectives. These include our track record, our independence and the expertise and drive of our 1,600 members.

To deliver this plan, we will recruit at least two new staff and create reserves and working capital that ensure we are financially resilient. Over the course of this Plan period, we expect our annual income to rise from the current £100,000 to £250,000. Most of this will be from delegate fees and subscriptions.

Our *Building Prosperous Cities* Conference,  
City Hall, London, 2016



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## Our purpose

We change the way the UK's natural environment is managed for the benefit of society.

Our vision is wellbeing and prosperity for everyone in the UK through a healthy natural environment. The Ecosystems Knowledge Network's mission is to equip a diverse range of people with the necessary skills and expertise to make this vision a reality.

We exist to change the way people work; catalysing innovation, fostering new partnerships and ensuring best practice is applied.

## Our story so far

We were initiated by HM Government in response to a commitment for an Ecosystems Knowledge Network in the 2011 Environment White Paper, *Securing the Value of Nature*. We launched in 2012. With project funding from Defra, together with financial contributions from Scottish Government and others, we grew to be a leading UK-wide knowledge-sharing network.

We have a reputation for:

- Providing easy access to practical guidance, tools and examples of how to connect the environment with wellbeing and prosperity.
- Engaging sectors and professions with goals that can be more easily achieved through a healthy environment.
- Supporting local initiatives that are working towards health, economic and environmental objectives.
- Translating findings from research concerning why the environment matters in society.
- Our independence from politics and the interests of any one sector or profession.

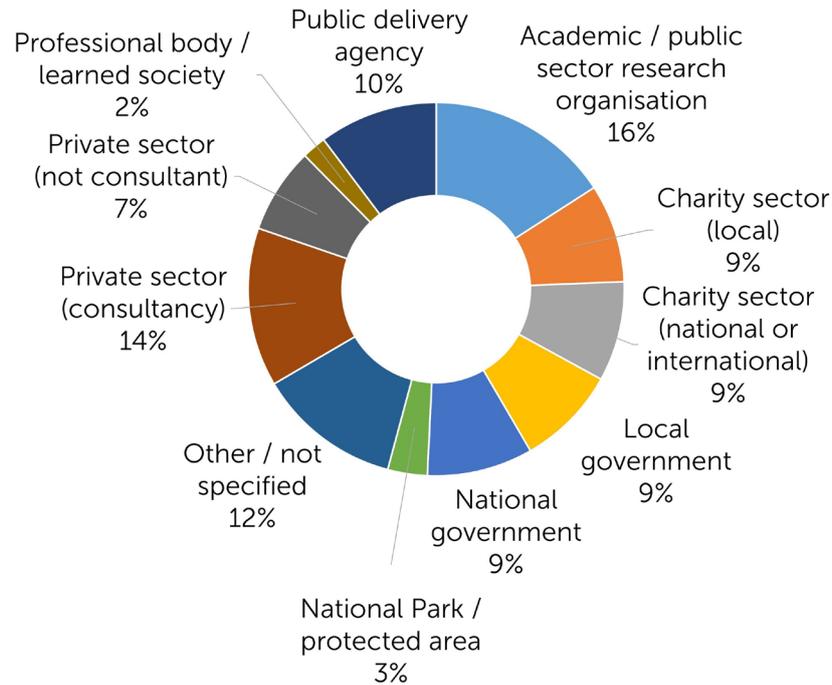
In 2015 we gained registration as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Our primary beneficiaries are our 1,500 members, most of whom work in the UK. We pride ourselves on the job diversity of our membership; extending from public health to planning and from forestry to fisheries.

Our members are the UK's driving force for harnessing all that a healthy environment does for wellbeing and prosperity. Four out of five members say we make a positive difference to the way they work.

"Four out of five members say we make a positive difference to the way they work."

*"Our focus is not the way people harm the environment, or the way the natural world harms us. To us, a healthy environment is worth investing in because of the good it does for everyone in society, including business."*

Bruce Howard, Director of the Ecosystems Knowledge Network



*Above: the types of organisation represented by our members*

## The future we will shape

### A climate of change

Over the coming decades, we anticipate:

- Weather 'extremes', from flood to drought, with all the consequences that follow.
- Ongoing social, health and economic challenges. These include mental health and the challenges of an ageing population.

If planned and managed well, features such as woodland and marine habitat and can do so much more to ensure we are resilient in the face of change. The environment can be harnessed to tackle some of society's most pressing challenges such as the obesity epidemic. We expect government, the media and the

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public to begin to recognise this opportunity much more over the coming decade. Professions and sectors that think they have nothing to do with the environment will increasingly realise their dependence on a healthy natural environment.

Public policy such as HM Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources Policy in Wales all point to a need to make the environment relevant to people in all their diversity. For instance, what does it do for their sense of wellbeing, the quality and price of food, or the value of their homes?

**"Professions and sectors that think they have nothing to do with the environment, will increasingly realise their dependence on a healthy natural environment."**

### Our role in the future

We will shape the future by being the 'go-to' place for practical learning about how a healthy environment can deliver wellbeing and prosperity. Our job is to continue sharing knowledge, catalysing innovation, fostering new partnerships and ensuring best practice is applied. We will serve as a trusted broker, bringing together sectors, professions and interest groups with no history of collaboration with each other.

In accordance with our charitable purpose, we will benefit the widest possible range of professionals and volunteers.

### What our beneficiaries need

Some of our beneficiaries are sceptical about the role of the environment in meeting their goals. This includes those driving economic development. They need to be engaged and inspired; seeing how the natural environment underpins prosperity. They need to see the business case for the environment as more than the backdrop to 'development'.

Other beneficiaries of the Ecosystems Knowledge Network are already mindful of the positive role of the environment in wellbeing and prosperity. This includes the UK's rich tapestry of local environmental initiatives. They need to know how to turn this into change for their organisation and their area of work, or outcomes that benefit those they serve and partner with.

Some beneficiaries have ideas, tools, research and good practice they want to share. We will enable them do this so that others learn.

Examples of initiatives already fulfilling our vision:



Working with local communities, The Mersey Forest has an impressive track record of improving the image of towns and cities; providing a vital foundation for attracting investment, skilled workers and tourists to the area. The Mersey Forest has secured £62 million of project investment.

*"Ecosystems Knowledge Network has enabled Mersey Forest Team to share innovation, such its GI Val tool and Natural Health Service, with a wide range of individuals and hear from others about approaches that they are taking to similar issues."* Paul Nolan, Director, The Mersey Forest

<https://www.merseyforest.org.uk/>



Transforming the lives of 1.8 million people, making the Glasgow City Region a much more vibrant, resilient and successful place.

*"Through EKN's Building Prosperous Cities Conference in 2016, we connected with the developers of the 'Building with Nature' green Infrastructure accreditation (Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust & the University of the West of England). This led to a fruitful collaboration; influencing our Green Infrastructure Policy Review Study and testing of Building with Nature on developments in Scotland."* Max Hislop, Programme Manager, GCV Green Network.

<https://www.gcvgreennetwork.gov.uk/>



From strategic planning to small community action, North Devon Biosphere is working to maintain North Devon's world class environment and the high quality of life we get from it.

The Biosphere is at the heart of delivering two of England's four Government-endorsed Natural Capital Pioneers.

*"I can see great value in the knowledge exchange that we participate in through the Ecosystems Knowledge Network."* Andy Bell, North Devon UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve Co-ordinator.

<https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>

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### Our ambition

We want to grow in our capability to fulfil our vision. This will mean working in partnership with other organisations, such as professional bodies and local organisations representing health, social welfare, economic development and environmental interests. To do this, we will make the most of the skills, experience and insight of our UK-wide network.

We will put our resources into activities that yield maximum public benefit in accordance with our charitable purpose.

Through our events and on-line services, we will grow the social enterprise element of our work. We will be sensitive to the diversity of our beneficiaries and the variations in their capacity to pay for services.

### Managing risk and ensuring success

#### *Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats*

As an established organisation, we have strengths that put us in an excellent position to fulfil our mission. Above all, the size and diversity of our membership means we are able to influence a variety of groups in different sectors.

Our experience of providing training, workshops and webinars means we are already well equipped to deliver information through a number of different forms. We must, however, continually adapt to increase the value we provide to our beneficiaries.

In our 2018 survey, members highlighted their need for opportunities for shared learning. At the same time, many of our members operate on low budgets with little time to access our learning opportunities as part of their 'day job'. By expanding e-learning options and enabling on-line networking, we can meet their need.

We recognise the need to be more resilient in terms of finance and staff to direct and deliver our work. We need grants, sponsors and social finance to get new services up and running.

#### *Wider factors*

In the UK, most public policy relating to the environment, enterprise and health is devolved to individual UK jurisdictions. While this strengthens the need for a UK-wide network like ours. Nevertheless, we recognise that not everyone sees the benefit of looking to learn beyond their own borders.

"...the size and diversity of our membership means we are able to influence a variety of groups in different sectors."

A number of our members are under financial strain. Local councils and local initiatives reliant on public sector funding are facing budget cuts and, therefore, have less time and money to spend on our services.

Businesses continue to feel pressure to demonstrate their environmental and wider 'sustainability' credentials. Traditional 'greening' activities, such as recycling and reducing energy use, are becoming standard practice. By helping businesses understand the ways they depend on the natural environment in which they operate, we can deliver value for them.

The 'natural capital approach' is now being promoted in the UK. In practice, this means in-depth consideration of the relationships between the environment, the services it supports and the benefits people receive from them.

Referring to the environment as a form of capital helps more people to recognise the economic value of features such as woodland and wetland in society. Without it, the environment may be seen as having no value. However, any line of reasoning in which the environment is presented as a form of capital, asset or infrastructure carries risks. Some nature conservationists think the natural capital approach conflicts with the moral arguments for biodiversity. They are concerned about the trading of nature and the equitable distribution of access to nature. We can help our members to navigate these risks, acting in the long-term best interests of people and the environment.

Despite public policy now supporting our vision, we have to compete with more emotive and tangible environmental 'crises', such as single-use plastics or air quality. These are more readily highlighted by the mass-media. Multi-faceted 'system' challenges, such as those underlying our vision, don't get the profile they deserve.

## Strategic aims and objectives

### 1. To equip our members through accessible learning opportunities

Our current members are on the 'front line' of delivering our vision. Through the decisions they take and the advice they give, they affect the condition of land, water and air throughout the UK. We will help them to access the best practice and latest thinking, providing space for innovation.

Referring to the environment as a form of capital helps more people to recognise the economic value of features such as woodland and wetland in society.

"...any line of reasoning in which the environment is presented as a form of capital, asset or infrastructure carries risks... We can help our members to navigate these..."

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We want to see:

- From Antrim to Andover, Cardiff to Caithness, the Humber to the Hebrides, professionals and volunteers working in different places learning from one another. They are discovering, for instance, how local environmental organisations can partner with healthcare organisations to tackle local health priorities.
- A recognition by government that our members are already at the forefront of delivering wellbeing and prosperity through a healthy natural environment. Their work should be celebrated and shared.

Our priorities for the next three years are as follows:

What we will do	How we will do it
Providing shared learning opportunities across the UK.	By working with local partners to deliver workshops, webinars, interviews and blogs that share the UK-wide experience of our members.
Identifying and sharing practical learning resources, including those produced by research centres.	Collaboration with research centres and government bodies. Producing reports and sharing them through our website, social media and newsletters.
Enhancing existing services such as Tool Assessor and the Natural Capital Assessment Gateway.	Having the resources to translate and peer review tools and case studies.

## 2. To equip sectors and professions to connect the environment with wellbeing and prosperity

Our vision cannot be delivered if a healthy environment is seen as the responsibility of 'environmentalists'. We will make a difference by broadening the types of organisation, sector and profession involved in decisions that reflect the value of a healthy environment.

We want to see:

- From housing to healthcare, a realisation that a healthy natural environment is an opportunity and not a threat. It is a contributor to the goals of businesses, charities and public bodies who don't see the environment as their primary concern.
- An understanding across professions as to what working practices, guidance and tools can change in order to ensure greater wellbeing and prosperity through a healthy natural environment.

Our priorities for the next three years are as follows:

What we will do	How we will do it
Growing our 'entry level' of membership by increasing the diversity of professions and sectors represented.	Reshape our website and communications so that it engages professions and sectors under-represented in the current Network membership such as planning, farming and public health. Design webinars, training, and resources that appeal to these professionals.
Produce reports that illustrate what our vision means for different professions and sectors.	Collaboration with professional bodies and trade associations to produce these reports.

### 3. To catalyse innovative partnerships that will make a difference 'on the ground'

A healthy environment won't happen if we rely solely on those currently involved in funding and delivering environmental restoration and protection. Initiatives such as the Green Halo Partnership (initiated by New Forest National Park Authority) are beginning to recognise this.

We will make a difference by starting conversations about the new types of collaboration and partnership that can deliver our vision throughout the UK. This means the sharing of evidence and capabilities between organisations that have not previously worked together.

## An environment for good, for everyone

We want to see:

- A move away from the 'grants culture' for environmental restoration in which the public, private and third sectors fund activities separately. Joint funding for environmental restoration based on the dependencies of organisations on the environment.
- An understanding of the role that different professions and sectors can play in the strategic management of the environment. In each case, the profession will identify one action to promote wellbeing and prosperity through a healthy natural environment.

Our priorities for the next three years are as follows:

What we will do	How we will do it
Grow the discussion about natural capital investment – financing of environmental restoration based on its value to business and wider society.	We will do this through the Natural Capital Investment Conference, the Natural Capital Investment Forum and other activities to stimulate innovation.
Share innovations in local partnerships for the strategic management of land and water, such as the Landscape Enterprise Network.	Through high quality electronic communications that engage new audiences. These will include online discussion forums, e-training events, and webpages for sharing of contacts.

## Delivering on our aims and objectives

### Income

Our income depends on the value we offer our beneficiaries. We are the UK's gateway to ensuring that wellbeing and prosperity is delivered through a healthy natural environment. We save our beneficiaries time, meet learning their needs, provide publicity for their work and facilitate new partnerships.

Since registration as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2015, our annual income has been between £85,000 and £120,000. Fulfilment of this strategy will inevitably lead to a significant rise in income levels, particularly through event fees and commissioned work. We expect that with additional staff, our income will grow to at least £250,000 over the next five years. While grants and sponsorship are vital for our core operations and service development, we expect that most of our income will be through delegate and subscription fees.

### Resources

We recognise that to deliver on this strategy we need to develop an exceptional staff who are business-minded and widely knowledgeable. To deliver on this plan we will in the short term employ an Administrator and an Events Manager. We will recruit additional staff to grow our trading, as well as work more closely with the two universities local to our office in Oxford.

We will ensure that the core staff team is flexible and able to work on all aspects of the business. They will ensure that there is resilience, including outsourcing agreements for services such as event management.

We also know that to fulfil this strategy we must become more resilient financially, able to invest in new services and manage cash flow. Over the course of this strategy, we will:

- Ensure we have three months of operating costs as reserves (current requirement £21,000, rising to at least £30,000 with additional staff).
- Build a £5,000 'working capital' fund to better manage cash flow.
- Ensure that 10% of all staff time is allocated to training, research and development.

### Brand and communications

We will develop our brand, building upon our pre-existing reputation for being a trusted source of knowledge and appealing to those for whom the environment is not their primary focus.

Our website will remain an important gateway to our services. We will extend our social media presence, including our daily use of Twitter.

"While grants, sponsorship and social finance will be vital for our core operations and service development, we expect that most of our income will be through delegate and subscription fees "

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### Judging success

Public dialogue about the environment is dominated by long-standing issues such as biodiversity loss and recycling. Progress on these topics is relatively easily measured. The Ecosystems Knowledge Network's mission involves bringing together a wide range of people and considerations. Our vision is wellbeing and prosperity for everyone through a healthy natural environment. The system change required to fulfil this is harder to measure.

Success for us is about our beneficiaries being equipped to play their part in fulfil our vision. For many people, it is about changing working practices and playing the fullest possible part in new partnerships and collaborations.

The people we equip need time to deliver outcomes that are tangible 'on the ground'. Some of the UK's most successful local environmental initiatives (see Page 4) have taken over a decade to achieve the impact enjoyed by businesses and the general public today.

"Success for us is about our beneficiaries being equipped to play their part in fulfilling our vision."

Ecosystems Knowledge Network

### Examples of what our vision means in practice

Natural solutions to reducing flood risk are used to their full potential

Local economic development plans specify the restoration of environmental assets

Natural capital accounts are the basis for decisions by land-dependent businesses

Local businesses partner to protect the natural features they depend on

Green prescriptions are routinely used to manage ill-health

Local people are at the centre of decisions to restore their environment

River catchments are managed to improve coastal waters

Blended finance for the protection of marine habitat

We will measure success by asking our beneficiaries about what they have learned and how it will impact their work. We will do this at the point of service delivery (such as an event), but also annually through our Membership Survey. This will be supplemented by case studies of outcomes that we will seek out proactively. Alongside this we will report on our activities; such as the number of events and new case studies, together with the composition of our membership.

Over the course of this strategy, we will create a written framework for assessing our social impact, taking into account our role in equipping others and the complexity of the world we seek to influence. A staff member will be given responsibility for applying this in all our evaluations.

**“We will measure success by asking our beneficiaries about what they have learned and how it will impact their work ”**

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## Acknowledgements

We are proud to have the following organisations as Corporate Partners:



We express our gratitude to the following organisations who have provided project funding and technical assistance since we gained charity registration:



Our awards



We are grateful to the partnership that first developed the Ecosystems Knowledge Network under contract to Defra, including the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, the University of Exeter, Countryside and the Natural Capital Initiative.

Thanks are due to staff at Defra for their foresight in initiating the Ecosystems Knowledge Network and for supporting its development.

## Governance and operations

Details of our Board of Trustees and staff can be found at <https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/about/team>

## Our services

The Ecosystems Knowledge Network delivers a wide-range of services throughout the UK:

- Webinars
- Conferences
- Training
- Research
- Advice
- E-News

Full details are available at <https://ecosystemsknowledge.net>

CONFERENCE | Natural  
Capital  
Investment

FORUM | Natural  
Capital  
Investment

Natural Capital  
Assessment Gateway

Tool  
Assessor

## Partner with us

We deliver value for our Corporate Partners. Find out more about the benefits this can offer to your organisation. Visit

<https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/partner>

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*The Ecosystems Knowledge Network is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered with the Charities Commission for England and Wales (No. 1159867) and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (No. SC045732).*