
NATURAL - NARRATIVE

The NATURAL investment portfolio will enhance the value of Dorset's natural capital on land and at sea, unlocking £285m of investment over the next 10 years.

Natural capital is often defined as the world's stock of natural resources, such as living things, soils, oceans, coast, lakes and rivers, which directly or indirectly underpin value to humans.

Goods and services that derive from natural capital include fish, timber, farmed food and drinking water, and also recreational activities like walking, fishing or canoeing.

Dorset's natural capital, where two thirds of the county is identified as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, has an estimated annual value of £1.5 billion.

The prospectus aims to enhance that value on land and at sea, amplifying Dorset's environmental distinctiveness through investments in aquaculture, agri-tech, clean energy and skills, while meeting the challenges of the global climate emergency and achieving a net zero carbon economy by 2050.

And it builds on firm foundations. In the last five years Dorset has invested more than £11m in the Natural agenda and secured 'High Potential Opportunity' (HPO) status for its thriving aquaculture sector from the Department for International Trade.

The HPO scheme identifies opportunities to attract foreign direct investment into emerging sectors, regions and clusters, creating new jobs and growth.

The ambition now is to make Dorset the aquaculture capital of England, capitalising on a global market projected to be worth £173 billion by 2022, with aquaculture predicted to be the main source of seafood by 2030.



Dorset already has a successful aquaculture industry, with an established marine service supply chain, excellent inshore water quality and sheltered locations. And it is home to Cefas (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science), a world leader in marine science and technology.

The Dorset investment prospectus outlines ambitions for a National Aquaculture Centre of Excellence, and a Dorset Aquaculture Park focused offshore. The sector is also involved in Dorset Council's 5G RuralDorset project, with planned trials looking at water monitoring and live underwater image data.

Other investments in Dorset's Natural portfolio include the flagship £6.7m University Centre and Rural Business Hub at Kingston Maurward College near Dorchester, to complement the College's £1.2m agri-tech centre completed in 2016.

A new agri-tech innovation centre is being created on the Dorset Innovation Park at Wool, and a new 10,000 sq metre agri-tech growing facility has been built at Christchurch.

Factfile:

- The Dorset Natural programme will unlock £285m of investment over the next 10 years with a potential £5bn uplift in GVA.
- The estimated annual value of Dorset's natural capital is £1.5 billion.
- Two thirds of Dorset is identified as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Aquaculture is projected to be the primary source of seafood by 2030.

NATURAL INVESTMENT - SOME HIGHLIGHTS SO FAR

University Centre and Rural Business Hub

Project budget: £3.5m

Creation of a £6.7m flagship facility at Kingston Maurward College near Dorchester as a hub for university education within the rural business and agri-environment fields. A dedicated rural business centre will support local businesses and increase opportunities with the college's rural business, tourism and heritage land management programmes. Supported via Dorset LEP with £3.5m from the Getting Building Fund

Agri-tech Innovation Centre

Project budget: £2.4m

Creation of an agri-tech research and innovation centre at Dorset Innovation Park, Wool. The project is led by the draperVENT company to further develop computerised climate control systems for the agricultural sector. It will also create an apprenticeship programme with local colleges to encourage young people into the agri-tech sector. Supported via Dorset LEP with £740,000 from the Growing Places Fund.

Stewarts Agritech Glasshouse

Project budget: £3.1m

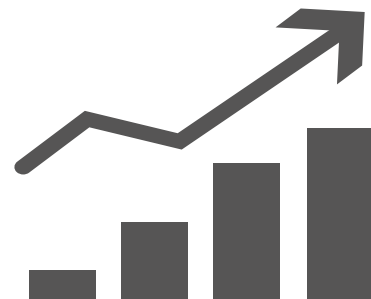
Agri-tech growing facility in Christchurch covering 10,000 sq metres with automated features computer-controlled heating and shading zones, and low carbon technology to enable increased turnover and more

sustainable horticultural production. Includes an educational facility open to the public. Supported via Dorset LEP with £297,000 from the Local Growth Fund.

Agri-tech centre, Kingston Maurward College

Project budget: £1.2m

Completed in 2016, the contemporary agri-tech centre positions Kingston Maurward College at the forefront of agricultural training facilities in the region. As of 2020, 162 apprentices had been trained with 290 more forecast between 2020 and 2025. 874 students have been trained to date and the College is on course to train 350 more by 2025. Supported via Dorset LEP with £900,000 from the Local Growth Fund.



FOCUS FOR 2021/22

Over the next 12 months the LEP Board has indicated that the focus of the Natural agenda from the investment prospectus should be on developing the **aquaculture** sector.

Much work has already been done in defining Dorset's 'offer' through the High Potential Opportunity and this can underpin a credible narrative about the ambitions for the sector and the role Dorset can play in meeting the global challenge of sustainable food production (in much the same way that the county is positioning itself as helping to meet the global challenge of healthy ageing).

The Implementation Plan points to further feasibility and development work for the sector, and potentially some bespoke support via Dorset Gateway and alignment with the proposed Smart Challenge Fund.

While this work is underway the LEP should identify, with its partners, aquaculture related stories such as R&D projects, company successes and inward investments via the HPO which can be highlighted and used to reinforce the core narrative and position Dorset favourably for future Shared Prosperity Fund bids.

The sector is also actively involved in the 5G RuralDorset trials and this likely to yield further communications opportunities around aquaculture, linked to the **Smart** theme.

It is important however not to lose sight of other important narrative strands like **agri-tech**, especially given recent investments in this area that will come to fruition in the coming year, and how these investments can reinforce the argument for a regional Rural Productivity Deal.

Renewable energy is another area that should not be neglected, particularly with the focus on the Green Industrial Revolution and the Prime Minister's 10-point plan, and the G7 summit happening in the South West.