

The Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

Strategic Plan 2016-2020



Wheal Coats © Nina Constable

2016

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Wildlife Trust**

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**Environmental Records Centre for
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
Strategic Plan 2016-2020**

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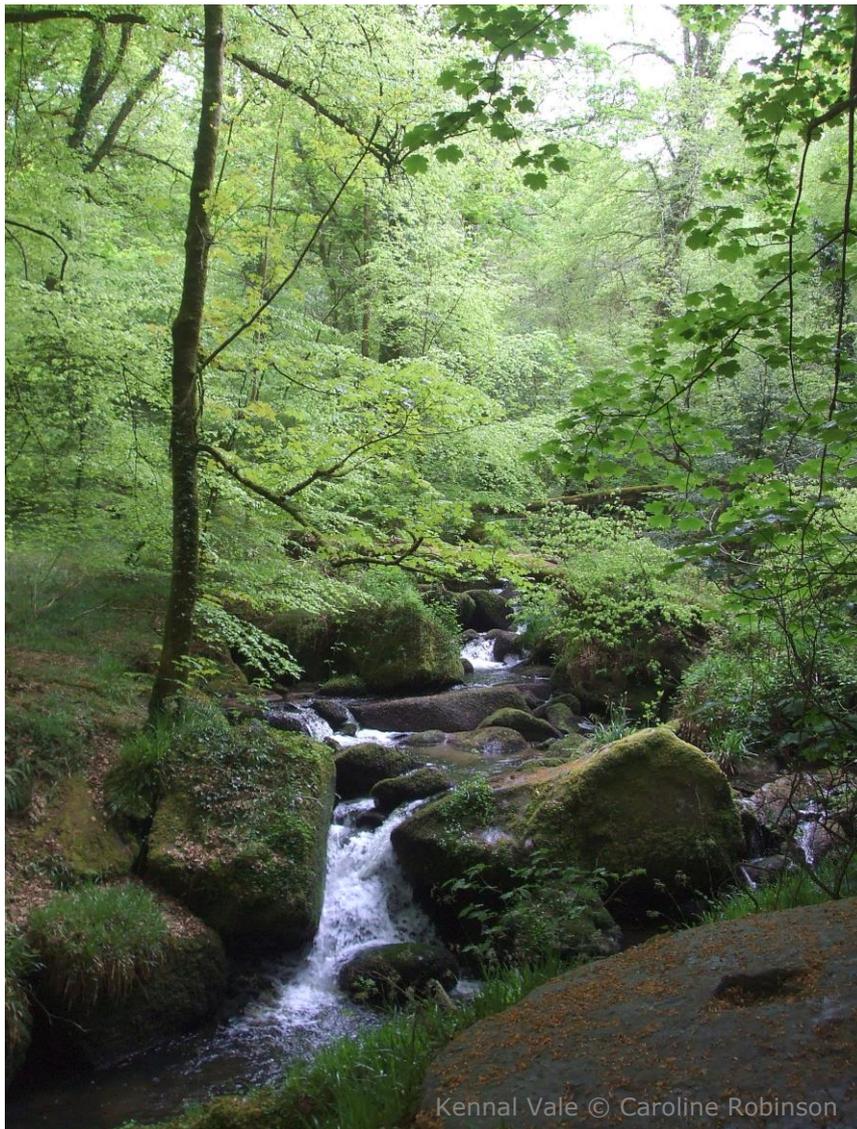
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1. Current Management Structure
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Executive Summary

The aims and objectives of the previous Development Plan 2011-15 were achieved within the timescale set and this has placed ERCCIS on a firm footing. The key objective was to embed a Data Officer in the organisation. The period covered by this Plan will see ERCCIS consolidate the achievements already made and take the organisation to the next level; the ambition is to be recognised as a leader in the field.

- During the period 2016-20, the following key achievements are planned:
- Work to ensure ERCCIS is recognised as the single point of contact for biodiversity and geodiversity data for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.
- Work to ensure ERCCIS has access to core sustainable funding.
- Develop ORKS to a level where it can deliver the requirements of an NBN for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.
- Increase ERCCIS' footprint.
- Improve and increase Recorder Support.



Introduction

1. The county of Cornwall covers over 3500 km², and the variety of land use, climate and geology combine to form an unusually high diversity of habitats. These habitats support a wide range of species, many of which are important on a national, European and global scale. The Isles of Scilly is the only archipelago in England, with over 200 low-lying granite islands and rocks. The unique combination of its relatively isolated location, long history of human occupation and extreme maritime climate has resulted in the development of an island complex of international wildlife importance. Current, comprehensive information concerning these habitats and species, as well as the rocks and fossils, is essential if well-informed decisions concerning their future are to be made, and if they are to be safeguarded for future generations.
2. There is a growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity information in informing better governmental, commercial, voluntary sector and personal decision making. There is also a large body of legislation requiring both statutory and commercial organisations to take account of nature conservation in their work. However, if biodiversity and geodiversity information is to influence decision-making processes then this information must be credible. To achieve this, information must be complete and accurate, well-maintained, readily accessible and current. It must also be presented in ways that make it easy to use and, most importantly, it should seek to inform the future and not simply describe the past.
3. The Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (ERCCIS) provides a focus for the collection, collation, management and provision of local biological and geological information. This focus requires expansion to take greater account of user needs, as well as the requirements of the recording community (data suppliers).

Overview

4. This Strategic Plan covers the period from 1st March 2016 to 28th February 2020, and outlines how ERCCIS will operate, be managed and resourced, and how services will continue to be developed to meet both user and data supplier needs.
5. This five year development plan seeks to focus on:
 - The delivery of biological and geological information within Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly through the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (ERCCIS)
 - The needs of both users and suppliers of data, and how ERCCIS can meet these needs through its service delivery
 - Increasing the partner/stakeholder base of ERCCIS
 - Achieving, and maintaining, the standard level of accreditation as agreed by Natural England and the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC).
 - Ensuring ERCCIS work helps towards the delivery of both the Living Landscapes and Living Seas strategies as outlined by the Wildlife Trusts
 - Ensuring robust and flexible data management systems are in place
6. Annual work plans will be derived from this strategic plan.

ERCCIS Aims and Objectives

Aim:

7. The primary aim of ERCCIS is to collate, manage, authenticate, interpret and disseminate comprehensive information of high quality on the flora, fauna, geology and geomorphology of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. In fulfilling this aim and delivering the key objectives, ERCCIS will provide a quality service to both users and providers of information, and it will be run in accordance with the proposals for Local Records Centres operating within the National Biodiversity Network and the agreed accreditation criteria (V2 approved 2015). A copy of the accreditation criteria can be accessed on the ERCCIS website.

Key Objectives:

8. ERCCIS has a suite of key objectives to enable it to achieve its primary aim:
 - To organise and store information on plants, animals, habitats, geology and geomorphology
 - To organise and store information on other related and relevant environmental matters
 - To help coordinate biological and geological recording in Cornwall and Scilly and to maintain the profile of recording and its importance
 - To work closely with, encourage, credit and support those involved in the collection of biological, geological and other relevant environmental records
 - To work closely with the users of environmental information and to provide them with appropriate services
 - To make information available and accessible to as wide a range of organisations and individuals as possible
 - To work with partners to interpret, disseminate and publish information and promote a better understanding of the wildlife and geological heritage of Cornwall and Scilly
 - To relate local information to that available nationally and internationally

ERCCIS Structure

Location

9. ERCCIS is currently housed at the Cornwall Wildlife Trust headquarters at Allet, near Truro, and is situated in a dedicated building at Two Burrows providing a large office space including a separate library. It is an integral part of Cornwall Wildlife Trust, but operates as a clearly defined unit within the organisation. The Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

ERCCIS Advisory Board

10. The ERCCIS Advisory Board is established as part of the Centre's management structure (Appendix 1) to ensure that it operates and develops in a way that is relevant to users and providers of biological, geological and other appropriate environmental data. Terms of Reference for the Advisory Board are at Appendix 2, and the current Board Members are at Appendix 3.

ERCCIS Staff

11. At present there are five permanent, dedicated ERCCIS staff posts: Manager (full-time), Wildlife Information Service (WIS) Manager (full-time), WIS Officer (part time 3 days), Data Manager (full-time) and a Data Officer (full-time). Management and development support for ERCCIS is provided by CWT's Head of Conservation. This arrangement ensures that ERCCIS functions are closely connected to the data management and use needs of the conservation organisations in Cornwall and Scilly. The IT Manager for CWT provides invaluable computer support, although he is not a dedicated to ERCCIS. Additionally, CWT provides key support in other areas – HR, Finance, Administration etc and there is support from partner organisations and the wider recording community.
12. Additional staff can be employed on short term 'contracts' to undertake specific projects managed by ERCCIS. These posts are usually dependent on specific funding criteria, and, consequently, cannot normally be used to cover routine ERCCIS business.
13. ERCCIS calls on the effort of a number of volunteers. Tasks undertaken include validating and managing the data received, assessing the state of marine information, maintaining the library and newspaper articles and entering species records onto a computer database. This resource, whilst extremely valuable, is variable and cannot be predicated against core output.

ERCCIS Key Deliverables

14. There are five main work strands undertaken within the Records Centre:
 - Collecting Wildlife and Earth Science Information
 - Managing Information
 - Disseminating Information
 - Management, Administration & Resources
 - Projects
15. A brief overview of each of the key deliverables is outlined below:

Collecting Wildlife and Earth Science Information

16. To be credible, ERCCIS must have access to all environmental records within the area. It is essential that robust relations exist with all stakeholders and partners to ensure the full range of records are received. It is particularly important that the large group of volunteer/amateur recording groups and individuals are mentored and feel included in the process of data collection and delivery.
17. During the period 2016-20 ERCCIS will:
 - Provide support to both individual recorders and recording groups
 - Continue to develop and promote ORKS
 - Identify under-reported species and habitats and work to address that imbalance. Additionally, look to fill gaps on a geographical basis
 - Develop a more strategic/monitoring approach to data collection, specifically with regard to Local Sites and CWT Reserves
 - Improve communication with national, regional and local recording schemes and societies

Managing Information

18. It is essential that data, once received, are validated, input and stored electronically in a manner that makes them easily accessible and malleable. Without this process in place, the key deliverable of dissemination will be made more problematic. Management of large amounts of data requires full time effort; any less makes the output historical and increasingly irrelevant.
19. During the period 2016-20 ERCCIS will:
 - Create a single over-arching website to incorporate all ERCCIS related data and information
 - Enable records to be searched electronically more efficiently through the development of IT systems and processes
 - Develop a tool to facilitate analysis of both species and habitat data

Disseminating Information

20. The dissemination of information is a key deliverable of ERCCIS. Information is disseminated through a number of outlets:
 - As part of a funded agreement with a stakeholder/partner through SLA or MoA, such as the provision of GIS data layers to conservation partners such as Natural England, Cornwall Council and the Environment Agency.
 - Through an agreed, priced contract to other organisations such as ecological consultants
 - Through approved access within ORKS to view species and habitat data
 - Through suitably screened availability to recorders and the general public either by a data search or via the Wildlife Information Service (WIS) which allows questions to be answered via the web or the telephone
 - Through the production of documents and reports either directly by ERCCIS or indirectly when ERCCIS data is used by other organisations eg Landcover 2005 and County Wildlife Site Summary Sheets
21. Work with the NBN will be a key continuing development area during the period with ERCCIS looking to upload more datasets to the NBN Gateway.
22. The Wildlife Information Service (WIS) is the one focus of disseminating information managed by ERCCIS and is the key customer facing element of the organisation.
23. During the period 2016-20 ERCCIS will:
 - Work to place all records on the NBN Gateway at an agreed resolution
 - Develop a suite of desk study packages to suit all customers, both paid and free of charge
 - Improve access to most species records for both SLA partners and the recording community through ORKS

Management, Administration & Resources

24. Delivery of the first three outputs is dependent on a robust underlying management and administrative framework. This will formulate the wider work programme and initiate processes and practices designed to make ERCCIS a viable organisation. Equally, in order to deliver the full suite of outputs, suitable resource, both finance and personnel, needs to be in place.
25. During the period 2016-20 ERCCIS will:
 - Achieve, and maintain, the standard level of accreditation for LERCs
 - Ensure sufficient funds are available to provide required deliverables
 - Work within agreed budgets
 - Increase the ERCCIS footprint across Cornwall and IoS

Projects

26. Holdings of comprehensive datasets will allow specific projects to be undertaken. ERCCIS is well placed to host the development and delivery of discrete project work

either by ERCCIS staff or through specially recruited project staff. As a function of ERCCIS, projects will be identified, prioritised and resourced as appropriate.

27. During the period 2016-20 ERCCIS will:
- Identify Projects that support the wider remit of its outputs, including Landcover for both Cornwall and IoS. Outline project proposals will be held ready to be worked into full bids should the opportunity arise.
 - Bid for funding in support of those Projects
 - Provide support for other Projects that work towards the delivery of Living Landscapes and Living Seas
 - Support publication projects that provide recorders with information on the distribution and abundance of wildlife species within the area

Prioritisation of Output

26. In the event of there being insufficient funding to deliver all elements of this Plan, key deliverables will need to be prioritised. Priority work areas will be identified through consultation with the Advisory Board and CWT Council.

Budget

27. During the period of the last Development Plan 2012-16, ERCCIS managed to work within budget. CWT provides accommodation, services and other supporting functions as their contribution towards the running of ERCCIS; these costs need to be taken into consideration when calculating the total cost of delivering ERCCIS.
28. During the period 2016-20 ERCCIS will:
- Work within allocated budgets to deliver outputs. If income is reduced, outputs will need to be prioritised in consultation with the Advisory Board.

Conclusions

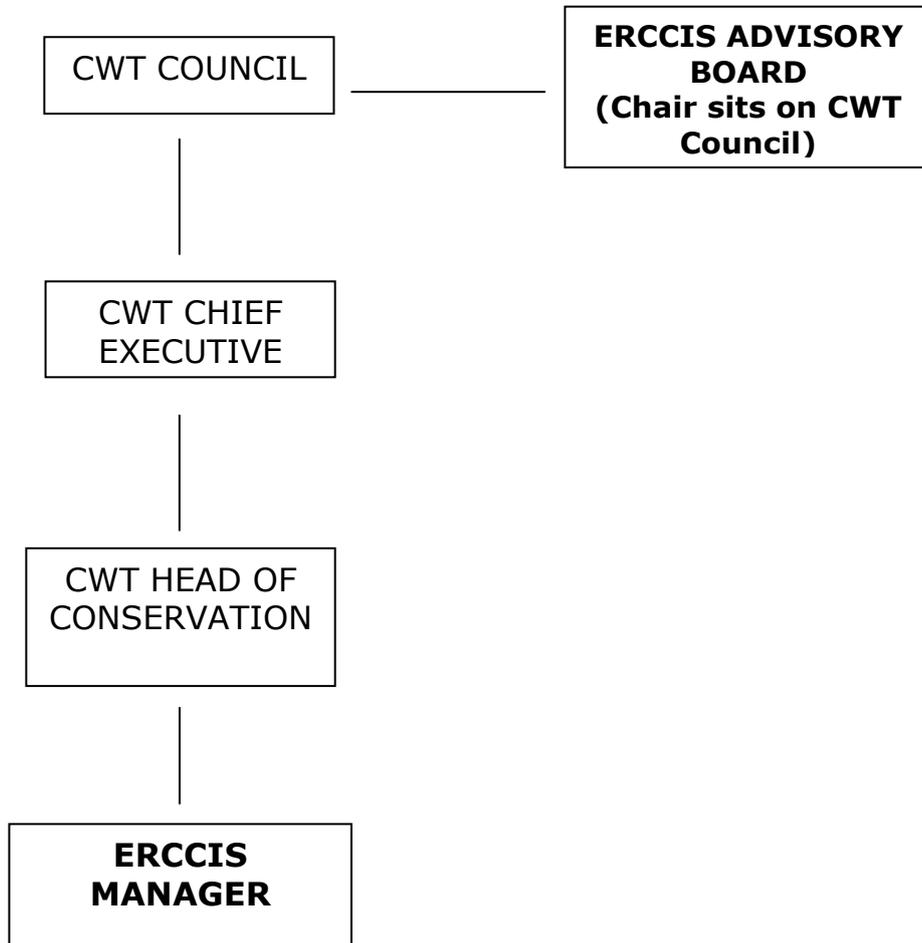
29. The maintenance and renegotiation of SLAs/MoA with current funding organisations should be given high priority. Additional funding sources are required to achieve full and sustainable core funding.
30. Achieving the standard level of accreditation as agreed between NE and ALERC will give ERCCIS the additional nationally recognised status in helping it achieve sustainable core funding.

Recommendations

31. The 5 Year strategic deliverables should be prioritised and agreed by the Advisory Board.
32. Maintenance of existing funding SLAs and MoAs is crucial to the aim of achieving long term sustainable core funding for ERCCIS.

Appendix 1:

ERCCIS - Current Management Structure



ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS CENTRE FOR CORNWALL AND THE ISLES OF SCILLY (ERCCIS) ADVISORY BOARD

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Composition of Board

1. The ERCCIS AB will comprise representatives from the following organisations:
 - Cornwall Council
 - Natural England
 - Environment Agency
 - Royal Cornwall Museum
 - CiSFBR
 - Local Recorders (2 representatives)
 - Combined University of Cornwall
 - Cornwall Geo-conservation Group
 - CWT Head of Conservation
 - ERCCIS Manager
 - Secretary (Non voting and provided by CWT)

Additionally, there are 2 corresponding members:

- South West Water
 - National Trust
2. The Chairman will be selected from one of Advisory Board members and can be rotated as agreed. Additionally, the Chairman will sit on the Cornwall Wildlife Trust Council as a Trustee.
 3. The ERCCIS Advisory Board is established as part of the Centre's Management Structure to ensure that the Centre operates and develops with an individual identity, hosted by CWT, in a way that is relevant to users and providers of biological, geological and other appropriate environmental data.

Frequency

4. The Board will meet quarterly, usually at CWT headquarters.

Key Objective

5. To advise Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT) with regard to the running and operation of the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Primary Tasks

6. The ERCCIS Advisory Board has the following primary tasks:

- To assist in the formulation of a strategic plan and operations manual for the Centre, ensuring that these are in line with the agreed aims and objectives.
- To monitor the work and development of the Centre, ensuring that it maintains and enhances data sets to a high standard, provides a quality service to data users and providers and that it operates within the National Biodiversity Network guidelines.
- To agree annual and longer term work plans and advise on the prioritisation of activities/output to meet data users' and providers' needs.
- To monitor management standards for all Centre activities/outputs.
- To advise on the resources needed (both human and financial) to effectively achieve the objectives of the Centre and to prioritise output based on the level of resource.

Appendix 3:

Members of the Advisory Board (as at March 2016)

CWT Trustee

Steve Crummay (Chair)

Cornwall Council

Natasha Collings-Costello

Natural England

Vaughan Robbins

Environment Agency

Emily Hillman

Royal Cornwall Museum

Sara Chambers

CiSFBR

Adrian Spalding

Local Recorders (2 representatives)

Ian Bennallick

Sally Corbet

Cornwall Geo-conservation Group

Frank Howie

Combined University of Cornwall

Ilya MacLean

Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Victoria Whitehouse

ERCCIS Manager

Gary Lewis

Secretary (Non-voting and provided by CWT)

Linda White

Appendix 4:

ERCCIS Staffing – February 2016

Manager

Gary Lewis

Wildlife Information Service Manager

Nic Harrison-White

WIS Officer

Laura Fox

Data Manager

Martin Goodall

Data Officer

Niki Clear