

PLYMOUTH SOUND NATIONAL MARINE PARK – UPDATE REPORT FEBRUARY 2026



Executive Summary

The last report to the Natural Environment and Growth Scrutiny Committee was in December 2024 and provided an update on the award of the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) support and the start of delivery for the Horizons programme. Over 2025 the programme accelerated across all workstreams—team development, Nature Boost, capital restoration at our Gateways, activity plan delivery, Digital Park, and Evaluation—while the long-term park entity progressed through Project Sunfish to secure a sustainable legacy.

Over the last year there has been significant activity happen across many areas of the Park which will be detailed in this report including:

- **Team development** – recruitment completed across core delivery, with additional capacity added over the summer and specialist Inclusion and Evaluation support commissioned.
- **Nature Boost** – successful continuation of the spotted rays project (featured on BBC Countryfile) and development of seahorse and native oyster work; launch preparations for the two-year "Stay Salty" nature campaign; continued development of seagrass (marine habitat) tokens.
- **Heritage restoration and repurposing** – Tinside Lido main works completed with snagging and final account in hand; Mount Batten Centre and Tower plateau under construction; Mount Batten Pontoon contractor appointed with completion programmed for 2026; Garden Battery shutters installed and main works procurement progressing.
- **Activity Plan** – thousands engaged through Meet the Marine Park, community anchor points at Firestone Bay and Ernesettle, coastal cleans and citizen science; Sea in Our School (SIOS) delivered benchmarking and visits for 37 classes in the autumn term; Seafest 2025 delivered across sites despite severe weather impacts (c. 12,000 visitors).
- **Digital Park** – "Sea for Yourself" progressed: Commission 1 (David Cotterrell) and Commission 2 (artist duo selected) moving into delivery; Artist Residencies active (including 'Let's SEA Your Tatts' and '...and breathe'); new website in build for 2026; CRM upgraded to support engagement.
- **Evaluation** – risk and wellbeing monitoring embedded; behaviour-change pathway (Marine Citizenship) refined; illustrative park map completed; inclusive practice strengthened with Improving Lives Plymouth as inclusion consultant.
- **Volunteer programme** – The volunteer programme has expanded significantly in 2025, supported by the rollout of Rosterfy and a 250% increase in volunteer recruitment. New initiatives, including Volunteer Plus and enhanced wellbeing and training opportunities, have improved accessibility and volunteer confidence. Monthly social events and knowledge-building sessions have strengthened skills, cohesion, and partnerships. The programme has also broadened its reach to priority audiences, with strong representation from diverse communities.

People remain at the heart of Horizons. Across 2025 we enabled more—and more diverse—participants to get in, on, under and beside the National Marine Park, while improving environmental outcomes, strengthening heritage assets, and building the long-term entity to sustain the UK's first National Marine Park.

Throughout 2025 within the Horizons project, we have;

- Engaged with 37 school classes across Plymouth, connecting to 970 students to Plymouth Sound National Marine Park through the Sea in our School programme
- Recorded 12,156 hours of volunteer time spent across the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park
- Brought the National Marine Park to 4,308 individuals with Meet The Marine Park, across a wide range of community events, collecting valuable data on public knowledge, perceptions, suggestions, and barriers to accessing PSNMP.
- Enabled over 350 people onto the water through tailored activation at the Mount Batten Centre.
- Successfully engaged 2,043 participants across a diverse programme of events with Plymouth Active Leisure at Tinside Lido. With Swim Safe accounting for 102 of these participants, the strongest programme being Tinside Youth Night with 1,353 participants.
- Increased our social media connections with a net audience growth of 4,219, attracting +4million impressions with +142,000 engagements. With an additional +462,000 views across reels and TikTok.
- Engaged with more residents digitally through our website generating 58,200 views (a 6.4% increase from 2024) with a total user value of 20,500, 20,300 of these being new users.



It has been a year ramping up activity and learning and adapting the programme so it responds to the needs of our communities. This report provides a more detailed update on all the points above and an insight into the 2025 work programme.

I. Nature Boost

The Nature Boost programme is looking to deliver a transformative project for people, place and planet. We are focusing on key species and habitats found in Plymouth Sound and looking at awareness raising and piloting new interventions to restore the nature of the Sound. It fits into the NMP behavioural change programme by providing an inspiring and engaging focus on nature that enables people to learn about the nature and get involved in programmes to help enhance it. Key species for us in 2025 were a successful rays and skates programme detailed below and work on developing resources for seahorses and the Allis shad.

Species Boost

At the start of the year we delivered, with key project partners (the Marine Biological Association (MBA), The Shark Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust) an ambitious programme to hatch out rays and skates. The eggs were laid at the MBA Research Aquarium. The Rays were then grown on in tanks before being released back into Plymouth Sound from the MBA research vessel, Sepia. The release and work at the research aquarium were filmed by BBC Countryfile (6 million audience) along with a citizen science ‘Great Egg Case Hunt’ at Wembury Beach with partners. Media coverage and reach (Q2 of 2025) are given below:

OTV - 5,863

Western Morning News

Rays of hope as young fish raised and released

By STEPHEN BAKER

AN AMBITIOUS project to hatch out rays and skates in Plymouth Sound has got underway. The project, led by the Marine Biological Association (MBA) and the Devon Wildlife Trust, aims to restore the natural balance of the Sound by releasing young rays and skates back into the water.

The project is part of a larger initiative to protect and restore the marine environment in Plymouth Sound. The MBA and the Devon Wildlife Trust have been working together for several years to develop a plan for the Sound's future.

The plan includes a range of measures, including the release of young rays and skates, the creation of artificial reefs, and the implementation of a strict no-fishing zone in the Sound.

The release of young rays and skates is a key part of the project. The MBA and the Devon Wildlife Trust have been working together to hatch out young rays and skates in the Sound's tanks. The young rays and skates are then released back into the Sound, where they can grow and reproduce.

The project is expected to have a significant impact on the Sound's marine environment. It is hoped that the release of young rays and skates will help to restore the natural balance of the Sound and protect it for future generations.

OTV - 200,000

BBC SPOTLIGHT

OTV - 7,500

FishFocus

AQUACULTURE / CATCHING / PROCESSING

BBC COUNTRYFILE CAPTURES MOMENT OF CONNECTION AS YOUNG RAYS ARE RELEASED INTO PLYMOUTH SOUND

BBC Countryfile captures moment of connection as young rays are released into Plymouth Sound

The event marks a key moment in the 'Little Rays of Hope' project - a collaborative initiative from the Marine Biological Association (MBA) and Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, supported through the Nature Deal Programme and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The video footage of the project aims to provide expert advice for local people to engage with these species, to learn about them and to explore the possibility of using their own patterns for identification, when across the need for tagging.

During the filming, Nick Harvey joined BBC Countryfile Aquarist at the MBA, and the Aquarist team shared the 4000+ eggs in the released young skate project. This material is from the National Marine Park. These eggs had been taken from the MBA's spawning, offering a new chance for people to see the species up close and learn more about their lives - from eggs to pup - in a carefully monitored environment.

OTV - 944,000

BBC RADIO Devon

OTV - 20,606

BBC COUNTRYFILE MAGAZINE

19 April Plymouth Sound National Marine Park is the first of its kind in the UK. John Craven explores the Wembury coastline's remarkable aquatic habitat, just as the waters start to warm and the marine park carries out a coordinated release of spotted rays.

OTV - 25,000,000

BBC NEWS

Baby rays bred in captivity released into the sea

The spotted rays have been reared in captivity for the last six months

Fifteen young spotted rays have been released into Plymouth Sound as part of a project to raise awareness of the marine life around the South West.

The fish were bred in captivity as part of the Little Rays of Hope project, a partnership between Plymouth Sound National Marine Park and the Marine Biological Association (MBA).

Ally Harvey, aquarium manager at the MBA, said it was impossible to conserve species and protect the coastline without projects which encouraged others to learn more about specific sea creatures.

Ms Harvey said spotted rays had unique markings "like a fingerprint" and the released fish had been photographed so the MBA team could track them.

Elaine Hayes, chief executive of Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, said the aim of the project was to "boost nature, reconnect people to their environment, and get them to advocate for nature and look after it better".

She said one of the ways of doing this was to continue to monitor the progress of the rays, whose progress had been reported from eggs to six-month-old pups.

Ms Harvey said she hoped divers would be able to capture the fish on underwater cameras.

She said "I really do hope we get some footage of them, it would be absolutely fantastic."

*Coverage for the PSNMP Little Rays of Hope project			
	PR Audience Opportunity to View	PR AVE Overall in GBP	Number of pieces achieved
Coverage Total	32,177,969	2,376,750	7

Developing into 2026 the National Marine Park Horizons Project will be working on a Seahorse programme scoped with experts. Early in the year the PSNMP connected 30 experts in the field for a one-day workshop to share ideas and knowledge. The day generated several innovative ideas we are looking to promote within Plymouth Sound.

Additionally in 2026 we are looking to develop the species boost programme by working with the University of Plymouth on an animated film using the Allis shad's amazing journey from the Eddystone to fresh water to lay their eggs. The Allis Shad is a very rare fish species that is found within the NMP. The project is currently in the design phase.

Habitat Boost

The Nature programme commissioned studies on biogenic reefs and mudflats in Plymouth Sound. These reports, commissioned from the University of Plymouth, considered the historical coverage and potential enhancement of these important habitats. We are developing proposals for native oysters and mudflat interpretation.

As part of the mudflat engagement programme, work has begun on developing a simple Wader Watch survey to raise awareness of the importance of mudflats across the Sound as they support amongst other things an abundance of bird life. We are developing the Wonderful Wader Watch, bringing together local experts and community groups to develop the project and determine the best approach. The Ranger Team have received bird ID training and are leading 'wader walks' at Ernesettle Creek. We are also undertaking a biodiversity survey at Ernesettle with ideas for saltmarsh. This work focuses on identifying and enhancing the habitats that support our iconic species and explores how key habitats can be boosted through restoration programmes, landscape improvements and community engagement.

Seagrass Tokens

This element of the project is developing a new way to fund marine habitat restoration in Plymouth Sound which could eventually be replicated across the UK. The approach uses "Seascape Tokens," where each token represents a small 3m x 3m area of seabed. Businesses and organisations can buy tokens to fund restoration work such as seagrass planting, maintenance, monitoring, and research. The first pilot site is at Jennycliff Bay. The aim is to create a simple, transparent method for

supporters to see what they are funding and what environmental benefits it delivers, including carbon storage, improved biodiversity, and healthier coastal ecosystems.

This token model is a stepping stone towards wider national marine nature markets. Over time, it could expand to other important habitats such as kelp forests, mudflats, oyster reefs, and biogenic reefs. Alongside this, partners are investigating building a “Seascape Platform” to show restoration opportunities in a clear map-based format and make it easier for responsible funders to invest in UK marine recovery. The project seeks to attract new, mission-aligned investment, support long-term environmental management, and strengthen Plymouth’s role as a leader in marine restoration and the UK’s first National Marine Park.

Over the last year the project has been developing the Seagrass donation token model refined into clear system work-packages with partners; with the concept presented at national fora (e.g., UK Seagrass Symposium) with positive engagement from Crown Estate and Duchy of Cornwall. The plan is to plant the first area that could attract investor interest in 2026.

Strategic Mitigation Plan (SMP)

The SMP is a requirement for the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) for the project and has an agreed series of mitigation and monitoring measures including all parts of the project (from Capital work building controls, ecological surveys, marine communities). The SMP has been analysed and included in work programmes. The SMP for the National Marine Park complements existing HRA requirements for Plymouth Sound and we are looking at common delivery across PCC and working with Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum (TECF). The progress on the SMP is reported to the Programme Board and Horizons Board with an annual summary submitted in December 2025.

Nature Campaign

Working with Leap Media Ltd we will be launching the Nature Campaign, Stay Salty in April 2026. The campaign is a key part of the behaviour change strategy for the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park and looks to highlight and challenge the relationship the people of Plymouth have with their amazing natural heritage on their doorstep and promote ways to become involved. The campaign will provide toolkits for the team, partners and collaborators to spread the Stay Salty message.

2. Capital Restoration and Repurposing

Capital works remain fundamental to inclusive access and activation of PSNMP Gateways.

Front-loaded delivery in 2025 ensured momentum across all three anchor sites:

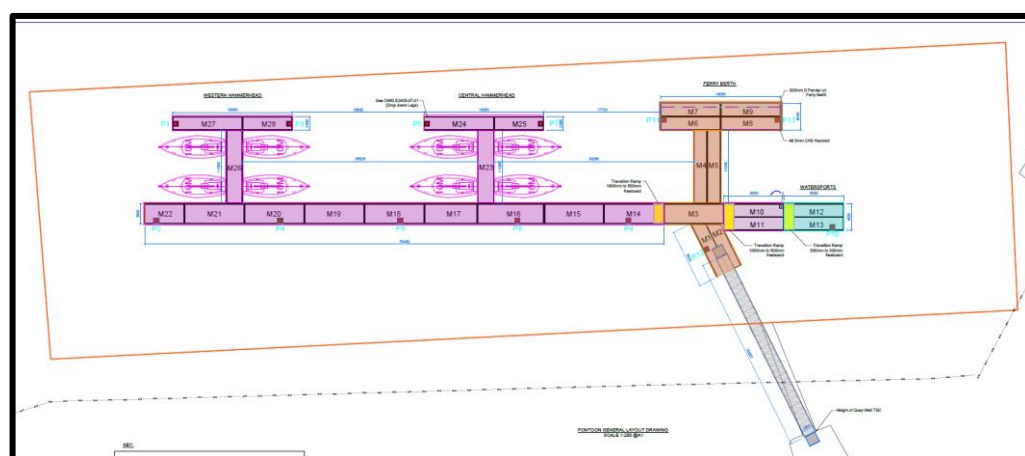
Tinside Lido – The Tinside capital works completed in 2025, opening new spaces for young people and the community. It has brought the first floor of the Lido back into use as a flexible, multi-purpose space for youth activities, digital learning, training and events, supported by a new kitchen and bar facility. The sun terrace has been revitalised with a café pod and a pop-up event space with ramped access to ensure everyone can enjoy some of the best views across Plymouth Sound. In addition, the smaller building that provides both pool and cove access, has been remodelled to provide a youth space with improved accessibility and changing facilities. The changes will enable more people to enjoy the NMP and ensure the community offers and the quality of the restoration is sustained in the long term.



Mount Batten Peninsula – Construction activities have been the focus in 2025 getting ready for the centres physical transformation. Works are currently in progress at both the Mount Batten Centre and the Mount Batten Tower plateau. Additional funding has been secured, enabling the project scope to be expanded to include essential variations which include the refurbishment of the kitchen , café glazing and some other essential works. The completion date for these works is April 2026 when key elements of the exciting new Centre will open.



Mount Batten Pontoon – The contract for the Mount Batten Pontoon was awarded to TMS (October 2025), following extensive design work and additional funding been obtained to support delivery of the pontoon project. The project includes public realm, pontoon for the Mount Batten ferry and vital repairs to the bridgehead (where the bridge to the pontoon comes ashore) which had severely degraded. The pontoon includes berthing for the Mount Batten Centre and an accessible pontoon with hoist to improve disability access to the water. The design process has begun on both the main pontoon design and the temporary pontoon which will be used once the existing pontoon is removed. Completion is expected in summer 2026 project. The pontoon bridgehead design incorporates settlement tiles to encourage marine life to colonise those are as part of the nature enhancement of the project. Below is the design of the new pontoon.



Mount Edgcumbe Garden Battery – Progress on the Garden Battery has been deliberately phased, with 2025 focused on installing protective shutters to safeguard the amazing heritage structure ahead

of winter weather. A delivery programme is now being developed for summer 2026, which will include works to separate the main gallery from the rear ammunition rooms, enabling bat roosting in line with ecological requirements. Initial protective works, including shutter installation and blast-cover repairs, have already been completed.



Community Access Points – In 2025 permission was obtained from the NLHF to break down the capital budget into smaller parts targeting community-identified needs, expanding boundaries, and adopting an Asset Based Community Development approach integrated with work to enable communities to more easily access the NMP from different parts of the City. Current plans for Ernesettle Creek include extending the existing pathway to improve accessibility, adding benches, handrails, and some vegetation management, with support from local groups and Kawasaki for site access and equipment storage. A condition survey of the historic causeway has been commissioned to prevent disrepair and ensure safety and this will inform any repair works needed to ensure the causeway is safe into the future.

3. The Activity Plan Delivery

The Activity Plan continues to drive community engagement, placing Marine Citizenship at the centre. 2025 delivery combined city-wide pop-ups with place-based work and targeted health and youth provision. Highlights include:

Meet the Marine Park (MTMP) is a mobile, free-to-access education and engagement stand designed to connect Plymouth residents with the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park (PSNMP). In 2025, MTMP visited every ward in the city and engaged 4,308 individuals across a wide range of community events, collecting valuable data on public knowledge, perceptions, suggestions, and barriers to accessing PSNMP.

Visitor feedback revealed strong interest in learning about PSNMP's wildlife and available opportunities, while common barriers included transport limitations, financial constraints, and physical inaccessibility. These insights highlight the importance of inclusive design and targeted outreach.



Pathways to the Sea The Pathways to the Sea programme is designed to help physically connect people with the NMP. It continues to develop and routes have been suggested after consultation with: Public Health, Active Devon, Active Travel, National Trust, Plymouth Active Leisure, The Ramblers Association, The Outdoor Partnership, South West Coast Path, The TAMARA project, and PCC PROW officer.

The process of identifying suitable routes involved socio-economic heatmap analysis to identify priority audience areas and existing community hubs. There has then been an initial assessment of Accessibility, links to existing walking groups, access to green and blue space along the route, links

with existing routes/pathways and possible interpretation/digital options. These routes are now being assessed further for what might be needed in terms of any wayfinding, stakeholder engagement and alignment with other projects including the possibility of building citizen science projects or other activities into the trail.

Rockpool Encounters Throughout 2025 rock pooling is an activity that has been used by PSNMP Rangers to provide an initial engagement with the amazing marine life that calls Plymouth Sound home. Groups from YMCA, Scouts, Improving Lives Plymouth and The Kings Trust have all had opportunities to explore and learn about life in rockpools. In 2026 a partnership is being developed with The Rockpool Project to deliver monthly public events at Firestone Bay. This partnership will enable more members of the public to take part in these free events.

PSNMP volunteers have progressed beyond basic rock pooling and are supporting data collection on the marine life in the sound by regularly taking part in Shoresearch surveys, a programme developed by The Wildlife Trusts and now being delivered by PSNMP Rangers in Plymouth Sound.

Coastal Cleans – The PSNMP Ranger team carry out monthly MCS Beachwatch surveys at Blagdons Meadow and Tinside Cove. Coastal cleans have been used by the team throughout 2025 as an activity to engage communities with some of the pollution problems facing Plymouth Sound. These activities are always well supported and receive good feedback from participants. In the past year rangers have also explored the wellbeing benefits of this activity and at Tinside started a session called Walk, Talk and Tidy Up, which was an accessible coastal clean-up that combines environmental action, physical activity, and social interaction. This has been continued every other week throughout the winter, and a regular group of 5 -10 participants are now involved in helping to keep the area clean but also reporting improved mental health through a sense of shared purpose.



Festivals: Seafest

PSNMP again partnered with Plymouth Waterfront Partnership for Seafest 2025 and delivered a vibrant, citywide celebration across Plymouth's waterfront, attracting an estimated 12,000 visitors despite challenging weather conditions that required several programme changes and cancellations. The festival achieved significant digital reach, generating over 1 million social media impressions. Popular activities included the 90p Tinside swims (774 participants), the whale theatre at Royal William Yard (245 visitors, sold out sessions), Mount Batten Tower (175 visitors) and Mount Edgumbe house tours and walks, all receiving enthusiastic public feedback. Sustainable travel initiatives also proved successful, with nearly 1000 people taking the opportunity to use the discounted Mount Batten ferry or Shark & Ride.

Survey responses reflected strong public engagement: 95% of visitors were likely or highly likely to recommend the event, 86% said they were more likely to revisit locations, and 84% felt more inspired to learn about the National Marine Park. Public feedback comments praised the friendliness, educational value and uniqueness of the activities—particularly the whale theatre, tower tours and history walks.

**Festivals: Community Access Weekend**

The inaugural PSNMP Community Access Weekend in March 2025 marked a major step forward in widening inclusion and reducing barriers to engagement with the National Marine Park, welcoming 1,341 attendees—an impressive 89% of the 1,500 invited community group participants. Designed specifically for families from low socioeconomic backgrounds, health conditions or impairments, ethnic communities, and older residents, the event offered tailored accessibility measures such as adjusted lighting, BSL, Polish and Romanian interpreters, a mobile changing facility, and free children's meals.

Engagement was strongest from PL1 and PL5, and 67% of visitors opted for paper entry, highlighting local digital poverty and the importance of nondigital formats. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants praising the supportive environment and opportunities for first time engagement. The event also surfaced critical learning around inclusivity, staff training, and the need for cocreation with community groups. As a result, the weekend not only expanded the reach and relevance of the NMP but also generated clear next steps, including establishing a DEI working group, procuring an inclusion consultant, and embedding accessibility more deeply into future events, programmes, and infrastructure.

SeaWell (BlueMind) - The SeaWell programme has emerged as a cornerstone of the National Marine Park's wellbeing mission, integrating inclusive, trauma informed blue health activities that help people build confidence, connection, and long-term engagement with Plymouth Sound. Rooted in the Five Ways to Wellbeing and designed to break down physical, financial, social, and cultural barriers, SeaWell supports priority groups through accessible activities such as Safe and Sound cold water wellbeing sessions, Blue Connections group activities, coastal cleans, and nature-based youth programmes. The flagship Safe and Sound programme at Tinside demonstrated particularly strong impact, with 92% of participants more likely to return, 96% reporting improved water safety skills, and 79% gaining new wellbeing tools.

Participants consistently reported increased confidence, reduced loneliness, and a strengthened sense of belonging, with one attendee sharing: "I never thought I'd feel safe in the water again now I'm floating, swimming, and volunteering too." Through partnerships with health providers, community organisations, and wellbeing specialists, SeaWell is successfully transforming one off engagement into sustained blue health participation, reducing inequalities, enhancing resilience, and ensuring that everyone, regardless of background or ability, can experience the therapeutic benefits of Plymouth Sound.

Sea in our school – Our Formal School Offer

The Sea In Our School (SIOS) programme delivered a full year of activity in 2025, completing the first cycle of cohort engagement and initiating preparations for the 2025/26 academic year. Across the year, 37 classes took part in benchmarking sessions, National Marine Park (NMP) visits, and follow-up learning activities designed to support Marine Citizenship through hands-on, creative, and curriculum-linked experiences.

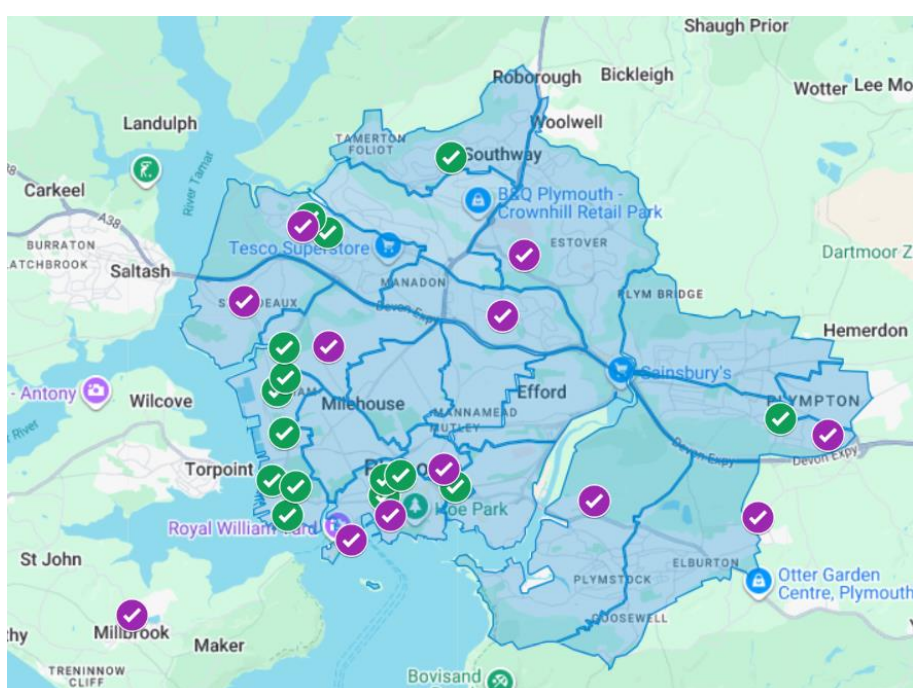
During the spring term, external specialists delivered sessions to all 37 classes (970 pupils), offering a menu of six experiential workshops ranging from sustainable local seafood cookery to engineering challenges, digital storytelling, dance inspired by marine species, and environmental problem-solving. In the summer term, all classes accessed a suite of live virtual experiences, with the SIOS team broadcasting from key locations across the Sound—including Smeaton's Tower, seagrass beds, Mount Batten rockpools, the fish quay, and the Brittany ferry. These sessions were recorded and requested by schools for continued classroom use.

The autumn term focused on benchmarking and site visits. All 37 classes completed baseline evaluation activities and attended structured visits to NMP gateway locations. Cohort A schools undertook an active programme at Mount Batten Watersports and Activities Centre—bell boating,

coastal walks, archery, rockpooling and exploration of the historic tower—while Cohort C schools completed an investigative learning journey at the National Marine Aquarium, including a Code Breaker challenge on local marine heritage.

School engagement concluded in June with evaluation sessions led jointly by PSNMP's Schools Lead and the evaluation portfolio team. Delivery then paused over the summer to enable planning for 2025/26 cohort selection. Cohort A schools continued their multi-year involvement, selected using PCC indicators such as pupil premium and free school meal eligibility, while Cohort C schools were chosen to ensure a broad geographic and demographic spread across the city (Please see a map below highlighting which schools are being worked with within this programme).

Overall, SIOS has successfully embedded structured marine learning, strengthened connections between young people and the Sound, and provided a platform for longer-term monitoring of progression along the Marine Citizenship pathway.



PSNMP Volunteers

Since December 2024 the volunteer programme has developed and evolved greatly. In late 2024, we launched our volunteer management system, Rosterfy. Integrating this system with our volunteer programme has streamlined our approach to volunteer coordination and supported the 250% increase in volunteer recruitment since 2024.

We have also seen large scale development of multiple projects within the volunteer programme. Volunteer plus is a programme created to enhance volunteer opportunities for those who require more support through language barriers, disabilities or long-term health conditions. Our programme has adapted to support our diverse cohort of volunteers with 92% stating they find our volunteer programme accessible.

Additionally, we have placed greater focus on volunteer upskilling and wellbeing. On a scale of 1-5, 64% of volunteers felt they were completely comfortable in their volunteer team (5), 36% felt mostly

comfortable (3/4). So far, we have hosted 17 monthly social events for volunteers to feel connected, and comfortable within their team. These events have supported our partnerships across the city with six other volunteering groups being invited to participate monthly.

As well as this, we began a new project in autumn 2025, providing weekly knowledge building sessions to the volunteers. The feedback from these sessions has been significant, with volunteers speaking of enhanced physical and social wellbeing, team cohesion and skills improvement.

A survey from July 2025, showed 71% of volunteers feel they have gained skills through volunteering with PSNMP. To increase this, we have been working to release further and more in-depth training opportunities for volunteers, as well as co-developing with a volunteer working group, event leader and ambassador roles, which will be rolled out in March 2026.

We are also incredibly pleased to have furthered our reach with our priority audiences:

- 16% of volunteers identified themselves as Asian or Asian British, Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, Mixed, or 'other'. – Plymouth 2021 census highlights just 5.1% identifying themselves as the above.
- 5% with disability, but 81% answered 'prefer not to say'
- 3% under 18, 49% 18-35, 21% 36-60, 27% 60+

PSNMP Community Grants – Blue Sparks

Across 2025 the PSNMP launched its Community Grants programme, Blue Sparks. Plymouth is full of passionate people who are proud of their city and particularly the areas in which they live. One of the principle aims of the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park (PSNMP) is to encourage these communities to connect to and engage with the sea, and coastal surroundings.

The Blue Sparks scheme will allow grass root organisations to initiate and develop their own targeted project that will have a focus on improving their wellbeing, natural or heritage assets within and around Blue Spaces in the PSNMP.

Grants of this type are extremely valuable in contributing to a sense of ownership and inclusion in the PSNMP ensuring what is important to people is reflected in their involvement. It will bring communities together, adding their voice to the Park in a lasting way that can be enjoyed by all. Ultimately helping people rekindle that connection to the sea, exploring old traditions and creating new ones.

The Blue Sparks Programme sparked huge interest in it's first year, with significant community response, 37 projects registered their interest requesting a total value of £123,229.19, of which 33 of these were invited to submit a final application for review.

The programme was only initially budgeted to grant £20,000 to the community in the first round, however due to the significant impact and community subscription to this programme, officers reviewed the funding total with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and were able to allocate an additional £20,000, allowing a total of £40,000 to be granted in the first year of the Blue Sparks programme.

In December of 2025 10 organisations were selected by an advisory panel to be granted the funding, these organisations will develop their projects in 2026. These community-led projects collectively strengthen marine citizenship, heritage understanding, environmental action, and wellbeing across Plymouth and surrounding communities. Each takes a different approach—creative, cultural, environmental, skills-based or research-driven—to help people connect with Plymouth Sound National Marine Park.

PSNMP Gateways Activation

PSNMP Swim Safe & Safe and Sound Plymouth Active Leisure (PAL) –

The capital refurbishment has transformed Tinside from a summer-only destination into a year-round, multi-use space for the city. The improvements include a new multi-purpose youth, community and events space on the previously derelict first floor; a revamped building between the lido and Tinside Cove providing a base for youth workers, rangers, and volunteers; a renovated terrace overlooking the Sound, with public seating, a coffee pod, and a dedicated event space available for private hire.

Delivered in partnership with Plymouth City Council Youth Services (YS), the PSNMP and Plymouth Active Leisure (PAL) successfully engaged over 2,000 participants across a diverse programme of events in 2025. The most popular initiative, Youth Night, accounted for 1,353 attendees, demonstrating strong demand for youth-focused, inclusive evening activities.

Swim Safe continues to develop in engaging residents across the city to ensure they have the skills to be safe in the water. A particular attendee with neurodiverse needs joined the programme with low confidence and self-esteem. Through consistent support and encouragement, they not only developed their own skills but voluntarily began to demonstrate skills to other attendees. This act of peer support not only reflected their growing confidence but also contributed positively to the learning environment for others. Attending these sessions has given them a clear sense of purpose and direction.

They are now preparing to take an entry-level pool helper/teaching qualification, enabling them to build on his progress and inspire other swimmers.

This outcome demonstrates the programme's success in improving participants' skills, confidence, and social engagement, while also developing future contributors to the swimming community.

Safe and Sound Sessions were specifically focused on inclusivity and accessibility. As a new addition to the Swim Safe programme, Safe and Sound introduced adult sessions focused on the benefits of cold-water swimming and essential water safety. Plymouth Active Leisure (PAL) delivered Swim Safe content, while a Blue Health Coach Ranger, from PSNMP, led the wellbeing elements with support from NMP volunteers.

Two groups from Devon Mind (over 55s - 99 participant slots filled over 7 sessions) and Improving Lives Plymouth (153 slots filled over 11 sessions). participated in Safe and Sound sessions every Wednesday morning. During the in-water session, participants were also encouraged to practice mindfulness techniques and thinking.

Activate @ Mount Batten – Despite significant capital works at the Mount Batten Centre, the programme maintained strong levels of engagement through a combination of free and subsidised activity days, targeted partner outreach, and adapted delivery using temporary welfare facilities. Across the year, 171 session attendances were enabled to take part in new experiences, with participants reporting clear improvements in physical and emotional wellbeing, including increased feelings of calm, happiness, and connection to the natural environment.

While access to some facilities—such as the pontoon hoist used for inclusive watersports—was restricted during construction, the Centre continued to deliver tailored sessions for priority groups. This included activity days for Friends and Families of Special Children Plymouth, enabling young people with physical health needs and those with ADHD/autism to participate in bell boating and land-based activities, alongside four sessions for Improving Lives Plymouth supporting adults with ADHD, autism and social isolation.

During the school summer holidays, the Centre delivered three weeks of targeted outreach for young people from socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods including Stonehouse, Keyham and Ernesettle. Working with established partners such as Pembroke Street Youth Centre, Connecting Youth CIC and Wolseley Trust, 180 activity places were provided. Young people took part in kayaking or paddleboarding with a focus on sea safety, complemented by rockpooling at Mount Batten Bay, coastal cleans and visits to the historic Mount Batten Tower. These sessions strengthened long-term partnerships and continued to expand equitable access to blue-space experiences during the redevelopment period.



Community Anchor Points: Firestone Bay and Ernesettle Creek

The PSNMP Rangers have continued to work in the Community Anchor Points of Firestone Bay and Ernesettle Creek delivering a wide-ranging mix of public events and targeted community engagement, successfully strengthening local connection to coastal habitats, citizen science, and marine heritage. Across Firestone Bay, *112 participants* took part in *13 public events* including coastal cleans, social gatherings, history walks, bioblitz activities, and creative ocean-themed sessions, while *167 participants* engaged through six community-group partnerships ranging from Scouts and Timebank to Moondogz and youth clubs. The Stonehouse Scouts programme proved especially impactful. Sessions supporting 25 young people at a time to build coastal awareness, species ID skills, teamwork, and citizen-science confidence, culminating in the group earning their Junior Coastal Ranger badges. Feedback highlighted enthusiasm and joy, with Scout leaders reflecting that young people “always come back with big happy smiley faces”.

Thank you all for the fantastic experiences you and your team have given our young people. They have all really enjoyed the session and our parents have been telling us what a great time they have had which is lovely to hear..... It has been such an amazing and educational time for our young people and it's great to see them exploring their local environment. Scout Leader

Wellbeing sessions collaborating with mental health charity Moondogz created powerful emotional and social outcomes, supporting people experiencing anxiety, PTSD, social isolation, and burnout, with participants describing feelings of safety, belonging, and transformation—one attendee calling the group their “tribe” after finding acceptance and confidence on the water.

At Ernesettle Creek, *89 participants* joined public nature-based activities such as bird walks, pathway maintenance, history walks, and bat surveys, while *86 people* engaged through Millford SEND schools, Connecting Youth CIC and Timebank.

The Timebank groups in Ernesettle and Stonehouse played an important role in the programme development, with *14 participants* joining co-designed sessions that explored personal relationships with local blue spaces, coastal memories, and barriers to accessing the Sound. Activities included a creek-inspired watercolour workshop and a foraging session at Devil’s Point. Insightful feedback revealed the needs and preferences of different groups: the Ernesettle cohort, predominantly older residents with mobility challenges, expressed enthusiasm for painting workshops, maritime history, and birdwatching, while the Stonehouse group identified transport, mobility, and confidence as key barriers and preferred group-based outdoor skills sessions such as identification, foraging, and beach cleans, as well as quiet aquarium sessions. These appreciative enquiry style sessions are helping to not only shape the activity programme going forward but also contribute to the development of the capital interventions for these areas.

Moving into 2026 the PSNMP Rangers will be starting work with the community adjacent to Kinterbury Creek and exploring the opportunities here for the next anchor point of the park.

4. 2025 Marcomms Overview

As we continue to build on our communications and marketing year-on-year, we can see clear trends emerging from the new approaches we've been trialling to engage our community online. Most recently, on 4 January 2026, Organic Social sessions spiked far above the expected levels and is likely linked to a highly successful marine park jobs, marketing campaign on Facebook, which saw a 67,700% week-over-week uplift.

These social and website insights are strong indicators that we are not only broadening our reach and engagement but also creating content that resonates strongly with our audiences.

In Q4 we released new brand guidelines and worked with key partners to agree on a new narrative. These documents have brought much-needed consistency to previously varied messaging about PSNMP. Shared with partners and stakeholders, they will support continuity and a consistency understanding going forward, helping to further strengthen our communications and brand identity. We have also continued to create digital pathways and support teams with interpretation projects, including the PSNMP map, and have assisted with the rollout of the Stay Salty, Nature campaign.

Toward the end of 2025, we secured a number of key press moments, celebrating the capital works at Tinside, reflecting on the summer, and highlighting the year-round coffee pod. This generated valuable coverage, including in the Plymouth Herald and on BBC Spotlight, both excellent opportunities to showcase PSNMP and the tangible impact of completed projects. Alongside this, press and collaborative activity with key city stakeholders continued, including Marjon University's PSNMP Minecraft project, which attracted tabloid interest across Devon. Combined with key moments from the Nature Campaign, such as Rays of Hope, BBC Countryfile, and BBC News, these helped position PSNMP prominently across both nature and heritage narratives.

Marcomms Strategy 2026

As we look ahead to 2026, we can continue building on our efforts to cultivate strong press relationships and secure positive exposure for our upcoming projects. With our Marketing Strategy nearing completion, we also aim to work in a more strategically planned way strengthening our profile and further shaping stakeholder and public perceptions of the Park. Our previous experiences and successes will underpin the delivery and evaluation of this work, ensuring it remains effective, consistent, and evidence-led.

5. Digital Park

Sea for yourself - Plymouth Culture and Horizons progressed the four-year 'Sea for Yourself' programme.

- Commission 1 – David Cotterrell has shared an updated proposition for the commission 1 that sets out the development of a central data systems using water/tidal data which then produces creative/digital outputs including 1) public realm interventions 2) digital screen displays and 3) an immersive experience. It is now proposed that rather than splitting delivery across two phases the work will be more impactful if launched at the same time in April 2026.
- Commission 2 – 6 shortlisted artists were invited to Plymouth for interview which included a partner panel interview and a community group facilitated session. The panel and community representatives unanimously selected an artist duo for the commission, and they have already started working.

- Artist residencies – A further two residencies have now been contracted and the behind-the-scenes work is beginning. One focuses on the Mount Batten centered working with intergenerational participants and the second sharing the stories through an audio work of 'Migrant Mothers'. Both works will come to fruition in summer 2026.
- Creative Health – The creative health network was launched in partnership with the Wellbeing Hubs Network with a guest speaker from the National Centre for Creative Health. A thought leadership article is in development and will support a national conversation about the value of creative health with a particular focus on Blue Health/Mind.

Website

Work has been progressing in 2025 to build a new website for the NMP that enables a fantastic and inclusive users experience. It is due for completion in spring 2026. It will offer a more user-friendly experience for our marine park users/advocates. Creating a digital pathway to the PSNMP It will allow users to explore the park narratives, visually explore elements of the park and engage with events.

As an addition to the website build, we will be including a Stay Salty Scale (see below) as part of the Nature Campaign roll out, as noted below, this is envisaged to help us evaluate behaviour change, as NMP users move through the salty scale, based on their personal journey and actions. This will link this to our CRM system to enable peoples progress on the salty scale to be used as a behaviour change evaluation tool.



Stay Salty Scale will be implemented, to help measure behaviour change. Extra Salty being the best outcome.

This scale will also be used across PSNMP projects such as SIOS.

This will be linked to the events and tracked in the CRM. To track how salty users are over time. This can then be used for evaluation.

6. Evaluation

2025 has seen the programme consolidating its approach and continuing to build engagement and action. Building on the foundations created during the 2024, the programme has shifted from early establishment and high-volume engagement towards deeper, more targeted and more inclusive delivery. With capital works progressing and the Nature Campaign framework strengthening evaluation, the programme is now well positioned to consolidate learning and accelerate impact in 2026.

Across the programme's five delivery strands - Activities, Digital, Interpretation, Nature Boost and Capital - clear progress is emerging in wellbeing, skills development, access to blue spaces, marine citizenship, and the integration of heritage into everyday life.

Delivery teams, partners, volunteers and community groups have all contributed to strengthening the reach, relevance and impact of the programme. Evidence from monitoring data, project-level evaluations, participant surveys, ranger reflections, and the Plymouth City Survey

2025 demonstrate that the Marine Park has the potential to grow into an important asset for the wellbeing, identity, education and cultural life of the City.

Key learnings from the 2025 review include:

- Inclusion and delivery practice have strengthened, with inclusion now embedded as a cross-cutting function, more adaptive ranger-led engagement, and wider partner collaboration improving access for disadvantaged groups.
- Capacity and evaluation remain key risks, with the programme highly dependent on ranger capacity and limited by fragmented data systems; introducing dedicated monitoring support will enhance insight, learning and programme evolution.
- Place-based, equitable delivery and marine-citizenship development are progressing, supported by Community Access Points, targeted community partnerships, and the introduction of the Salty Scale as a structured behavioural-change framework.

Based on some of these learnings the recommendations provided for 2026 include, but are not limited to;

- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation by prioritising CRM implementation, and refocusing reporting on progression and engagement quality, using tools such as the Salty Scale.
- Build delivery capacity and coherence through renewal of the inclusion officer post, clearer coordination across workstreams, and embedding progression pathways that support repeat engagement.
- Align resources and communications by undertaking a full budget review to reflect the programme's evolving focus on wellbeing/blue health and developing a targeted monitoring and evaluation plan for marketing and communications.

7. The Development of the Park

In an incredibly busy year of Horizons delivery, we have been working hard behind the scenes to build the structure needed that will become the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park for the future. The Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) which was established in late 2023 is now building momentum with the appointment of additional trustees to complement the founding ones. A skills audit is in development for 2026 so we can ensure the Board has all the necessary skills to take the PSNMP forwards. A lively and productive workshop in December enabled the new trustees to be immersed in the challenges and opportunities for the CIO.

The main focus of the CIO has been on the development of the plan for the legacy of the Horizons Project. This is complex and multi-layered piece of work as we want not only to ensure that the progress made through the Horizons programme is sustained but we need to think about how we can broaden and deepen our impact. Alongside this we are creating a financial plan and a fundraising plan to ensure that we can sustain the CIO into the future.

Whilst Horizons delivery has been significant this year, the PSNMP has also partnered with a number of organisations to deliver some additional projects. These have included:

- Collaborating with the university and others on the Plymouth Fishfinger
- Development of the NMP Minecraft world working with a group of neurodivergent young people from the city
- Growing the NMP Alliance to 1000 members.
- Supporting our PhD students in their research

For 2026 our priorities are:

- To build the CIO into a robust and resilient entity
- To seek funding through the fundraising strategy to secure the financial position
- To develop a clear delivery plan for 2028 onwards for the CIO
- To move forward the integration between the Horizons programme legacy and the CIO
- To continue to support projects across the city that align with PSNMP objectives.

8. Plans for 2026

In 2024 we were looking forward to a year of firsts as we started to deliver against the NMP aspirations. The last year has been a year of building, physically with the capital works at Tinside and Mount Batten, plus building our teams, our partnerships and our programmes. As we look forward to year three, we are excited about a year of growing our impact. We are building from great foundations put in place during the first few years and learning from work to date. This all enables 2026 to be the year where we deepen our impact and increase the reach of the NMP benefits.

Highlights for 2026 will include:

Activity Plan

- Embed community-designed capital improvements at Ernesettle and Firestone Bay, fully integrated with the Pathways to the Sea programme.
- Expand and diversify volunteering within the PSNMP, introducing structured Volunteer Leader and Volunteer Ambassador roles to build capacity, strengthen community stewardship and support year-round activation.
- Develop and launch enhanced skills pathways through the PSNMP Inspire programme, enabling young people and adults to gain transferable blue-skills linked to nature, heritage, digital, and maritime sectors.
- Deepen inclusive practice through sustained partnership with Improving Lives Plymouth, ensuring accessible design, targeted outreach and co-produced engagement with people facing health conditions, sensory barriers or disadvantage.
- Increase activation at the Mount Batten Centre following completion of capital works, utilising new and improved facilities to scale participation, blue-health activity and gateway programming.
- Commence delivery of the first group of Blue Spark community projects, supporting environmental action and cultural connection across Plymouth's communities.

Nature Boost

- Launch the 'Stay Salty' nature campaign, supported by a suite of toolkits and partner-led delivery, to inspire pro-nature behaviour's, strengthen identity with the Sound and improve community wellbeing.

- Delivery of the Seahorse Species Programme, including public-facing guidance to support citizen awareness and conservation.
- Roll out of the Wader Watch initiative, creating accessible entry points to mudflat nature, and enabling communities to be involved in species monitoring.

Capital Restoration & Repurposing

- Complete the Mount Batten Centre and Tower Plateau work, progress construction of the new Mount Batten pontoon, and continue to activate Tinside Lido with a sustainable operational model through winter and off-peak periods.
- Initiate Phase 2 development at Mount Edgcumbe, progressing planned heritage works to enhance access, interpretation, and environmental resilience at the Garden Battery and associated areas.

Digital Park

- Delivery of the first public outputs of Sea for Yourself, enabling city-wide creative experiences that connect residents to the Sound through digital, cultural and immersive engagement.
- Launch of the new PSNMP website.
- Implementation of the upgraded CRM, aligning digital platforms, interpretation and evaluation systems.

Interpretation

- Installation of artwork in the new interpretation space being developed as part of the Mount Batten Centre capital works.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation – It is recommended that the committee note the PSNMP update and support the ongoing delivery as set out in the report.

Reason – The Horizons project is progressing well against its ambitions, and the Park's development and the projects legacy work is well underway. Support for both the project and the legacy work is still required.