

# A WILD FUTURE

A summary of our  
strategy 2021-2031



BRITISH  
EXPLORING  
SOCIETY



# INTRODUCTION

**A Wild Future** is the narrative of the strategy for British Exploring Society for the next ten years. We will use this to guide our operational plans, decision making and review of progress each year.

**Together for the journey.** Our volunteer Leaders are the backbone of our community. They shared the words below with us in November 2021 to describe their vision for British Exploring Society in 2032, when we will reach our 100<sup>th</sup> year of operation.

**'Sustainable. Relevant. Courageous. Intentional. Innovative. International. Effective. Responsible. Inclusive. Dynamic. Nurturing. Exciting. Adventurous. Inspiring. Curious. Experiential. Game changing. Zero carbon. Sensitive. Caring. Regenerative. Re-wilding. Influential.'**

We hope their optimism, aspiration, ambition, and strong sense of accountability is expressed throughout this strategy.

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# WHAT WE WISH TO ACHIEVE

Over the next ten years we have set ourselves the ambitious challenge of engineering a model for purposeful, inclusive exploration for young people which we can sustain into our second century of operation. We see greater value than ever for our intense, sustained intervention through expedition, and our heritage and experience provide us unique assets to help us plan for this future.

**Our vision** is for all young people to be able to contribute confidently in the world. We want equal access to challenging learning and adventure in the wilderness as an unbeatable preparation for adult life. *Our vision for the future continues to enthusiastically embrace challenging adventure and transformative access to the wilderness for young people.* We have an obligation to deliver better, deeper experiences over time and to make the most of every precious second we have with young people, in order to deliver maximum benefit, in the most effective, sustainable way. *We will be traveling differently, and more thoughtfully.*

**Our mission** is to grow and celebrate a diverse, inclusive community of young people with the skills, resilience, and determination to make lasting positive decisions in their own lives, and to deliver community benefit and positive environmental change. *10% of the earth's wilderness has degraded in the last 20 years. It is now critical to give young people from every part of society the opportunity to experience the value of wilderness, and an appreciation of the importance of environmental sustainability.*

We have always welcomed and valued the contribution of young people from all backgrounds. We will continue – with the support of partners – to reach out to the most physically or psychologically excluded and under-represented communities across the UK to ensure they feel welcome and can be part of our community. We will challenge ourselves to offer a better welcome to future Leaders and team members who will help provide the creativity and perspectives on the world we need. *Our ambitions require us to be a more inclusive and diverse organisation than we are now.*

## Sustainability = People + Purpose + Planet

How we welcome and involve our **people**, deliver our **purpose**, better understand, and protect our **planet** are critical. This is what sustainability means to us. Our challenge, expressed through this strategy, is to **progress with our mission and vision**, framing all our decision making with a view to sustainability.





A group of young people, seen from behind, are hiking through a lush green forest. They are wearing red backpacks and various outdoor clothing. The forest is dense with trees and ferns, and the light filters through the canopy.

# THE TOOLS FOR CHANGE

## Looking back as we go forward

Many organisations are discovering ways forward from previous practice and knowledge. We have rich archives and a community of knowledge to listen to and draw from. We wish to learn from our members. Many experienced wilderness and adventure with us before charter flights, went on voyages with us which were as memorable as the destinations they sailed towards. We will be making the most of their journeys to inform our own. They have gone on to careers in science, education, communications, law, business, the outdoors, the environment, engineering and medicine. We think we have much to learn from them about how best to use the time we have with our Young Explorers in future.

## Flexibility, agility, and adaptability – but not everything is in flux

As we approach our 90th birthday, thinking ahead to our 100th year and beyond, we must be agile enough to enable the future success of many more young people. We need to ensure we are relevant and competitive, efficient and responsible. Much of what is proposed in this strategy will be difficult to achieve and subject to external contingency. We exercised our agility and established our adaptability and flexibility during COVID. Our mission and vision remain constant. We believe in the effectiveness of our work – and in the value of intense, sustained interventions – as captured in our theory of change – and

will use our growing evidence base of impact as the bedrock for our future planning. We want to extend our understanding of longitudinal impact and of the social return on the investment we make with young people, too.

## Knowledge is power

The encouragement of engagement in science is core to our past and to our future. Our archives reflect and record concerns with human impact on the planet right back to the 1930s. Curiosity about science in and about the wilderness has never been more important. A Wild Future has a necessary environmental focus, and the intensified focus of A Wild Future provides endless opportunities to develop an appetite for science and knowledge. We acknowledge meanwhile, that making science engagement meaningful and lasting for a diverse and inclusive community of young people is a significant challenge, and we must invest more to facilitate the delivery of positive science and knowledge outcomes. This year, and each year.

## Lessons learned to support our progress

Advance and Ascend is the 5-year strategy we agreed in 2016. We refined Advance and Ascend in 2019 in an increasingly challenging external environment. We called this review Firm Footing. We didn't change direction – we intensified focus on key areas of strategy. The last phase of review was called On Track in 2020. That work is now reaching completion.

# OUR PROGRESS

## In Advance & Ascend we said we would:

- Create a programme of expeditions based on the needs of a diverse range of young people
- Plan and deliver ambitious expeditions to engage wider audiences
- Invest in our corporate systems and in our staff
- Establish an approach to fundraising to safeguard our future
- Communicate our values, mission, and the quality of our work
- Develop partnerships to help us improve
- Foster our network of volunteers and members
- Embed evaluation to underpin our work

## Where we are now – a post-pandemic view

We progressed towards Advance and Ascend targets through COVID, acquiring invaluable learning along the way. We were able to provide opportunities for adventure throughout the pandemic and acquired invaluable understanding about how we could engage young people from very different starting points in the outdoors.

Our longer-term commitment to prioritising our work with under-served and vulnerable communities of young people feels more significant post-pandemic. We started to schedule programmes to help become more sustainable in 2019. As we explore new ways to enable young people to experience wild and remote locations for themselves, we acknowledge that we have a critical responsibility to do so sustainably.

We deliver a range of opportunities for adventure and expedition for a diverse and inclusive community of young people who can now experience a real adventure and the challenge of an expedition from home, at school or in other youth settings, as well as in wildernesses across the UK and overseas. Young people tell us that their experiences of and in the wilderness with us are as inspiring as ever.

Without the decisions we made in 2016 and 2019 to invest in key resources and systems, we would have struggled to operate effectively during the pandemic and been unable to offer respite or support to young people. Post-pandemic, the opportunities to work flexibly, in new ways, and in collaboration, are exciting, and we hope will support our continued development as a more inclusive employer. Like many heavily operational charities there remains tension between investment in our own sustainability and the immediate need for provision of services in the face of growing need. The pursuit of operational efficiency remains a challenge for us.

**Still in progress.** No Young Explorer pays to join us on expedition. This shift has facilitated greater inclusivity than at any time in our history. All programmes are now charitably funded. We have significantly expanded our team and the diversification of our approach to fundraising in recognition of this shift in our operating model, and in the face of the growing need we have identified for the work we do. Our new funding model is still being stress tested and needs more time to establish. Our membership engagement strategy, whilst now thoroughly rooted and based on richer, more up to date knowledge of our community, still has significant steps to take to achieve its stated aims.

Partnership working is always a work-in-progress. We rely more than ever on partnerships to bring young people to us, and to support them through their time with us. We learn from our partners and with them. We have developed a strong regional focus to ensure that where we develop new partnerships, we focus with them on areas of particularly high need for young people, as we don't have the capacity to cover the whole of the UK with equal intensity. These 'areas of vulnerability' come from the Red Cross Vulnerability Index which was developed during COVID.

## Making our strategy real – being decisive about sustainability

We will translate this high-level narrative using our existing planning process into a 3-year rolling business plan. This will be reviewed alongside our annual budgeting process and when setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). All critical decisions will be subject to a 'sustainability filter'.

**Our People** - In all substantive decisions, have we passed the test in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusion, to the standards, benchmarks, and policies we have agreed to adhere to?

**Our Purpose** - In all substantive decisions, have we passed the test and met with the criteria of our Theory of Change, sustained our commitment to delivering work of deep and long-term impact to young people and kept with our commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity?

**Our Planet** - In all substantive decisions, have we passed the test in our commitment to carbon management and to the standards, benchmarks and policies and commitment to progress we have set ourselves?





# WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT OVER THE NEXT DECADE

- Benefit far more young people, including through lighter touch interventions
- Reporting on whether we sustain longer, deeper relationships with young people by developing more touchpoints with them over time
- Development/changes in our programming as we explore more sustainable ways to embrace adventure
- Differences in the places we go, our itineraries and our journeys
- New partnerships, to help us provide sustainable, equally exciting ways to provide adventure and access to the wilderness
- A more intensive focus on how we deliver learning/knowledge/science to provide more significant benefit to more young people
- More visibility of the impact of young people in the shaping of our programmes
- Measurement of our progress in becoming a more diverse and inclusive organisation
- The exploration of 'talent pathways' beyond the Explorer journey – and adaptations to the Trainee Leader programme to improve fair access
- Reporting on our carbon footprint, our carbon legacy and on our progress in reducing our carbon output and commitment to being carbon neutral
- Progress in combining our corporate responsibility for sustainability with opportunities for learning through our programmes
- *The ultimate expression of our strategy will be a significant, future-defining expedition in 2032, our 100th year. It will be designed by and for a diverse and inclusive group of young people and Leaders to showcase the best in sustainable and challenging adventure, incorporating rich opportunities for field science, establishing a precedent for our path forward into our second century.*



The cornerstones of A Wild Future:

# SUSTAINABILITY – PEOPLE

Understanding and tackling the psychological barriers that young people face when accessing our programmes is immensely challenging. Each year we make a huge effort to welcome, understand and steward each young person we meet. We are learning about the value of having more touch points to 'hold' each young person on their journey with us.

Our volunteer Leaders are critical to this process. They engage and are authentic role models with our young people – not just for the difficult moments – but for the uplifting experiences too. We have made significant progress in becoming more inclusive, especially in terms of the young people we serve. But we are still missing out on skills and competencies – and on role models – we need and would benefit from. We are insufficiently diverse in our staff and trustee team and in our volunteer Leader team. Role modelling in all parts of our community is now more important than ever. We need it to engage and support the development of trust and to improve accessibility right across our community. We believe our programme model cannot succeed in the long term without changes to our team.

- We will seek detailed diagnostic analysis of what the issues to joining us are and what skills and competencies we need. We have already launched a Commission to challenge us to improve the diversity of our Leader community as part of this commitment.
- We will seek external advice to establish what barriers our name, image, and the language we use might constitute to candidates we want to meet and welcome.
- We will consider how we might tackle the financial barriers to volunteering.
- Our Council is overhauling its recruitment process for trustees to make it easier for people to join us and to make our Council a more equitable and inclusive environment.
- Our executive team will consider how we recruit using different assessment approaches and recruitment pathways.
- We will measure our progress based on benchmarking candidates who apply for paid-for and volunteer roles with us.

Do all substantive decisions in relation to 'people' pass the test in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and do they meet the standards, benchmarks, and policies we have agreed to adhere to?



# The cornerstones of A Wild Future:

# SUSTAINABILITY

# - PURPOSE

Our ability to deliver bespoke interventions with deep, long-term impact is critical to our purpose. Our model, or theory of change, has been developed and tested over many years. We have worked hard to ensure that this model remains relevant and fit for purpose – and have demonstrated over the last 18 months that it doesn't constrain innovation.

## Would bigger now be better?

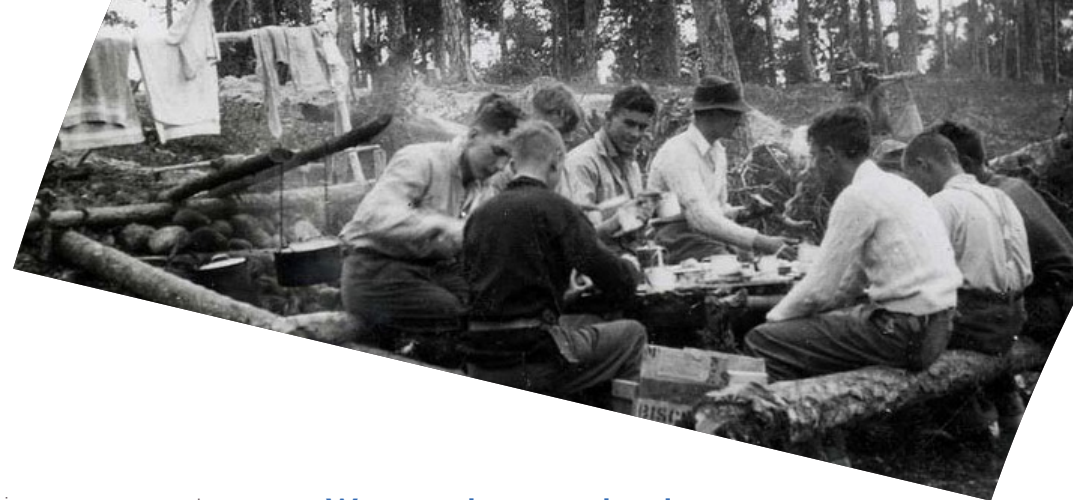
- We would want to be able to scale up to deliver life-defining impact to more young people
- We face challenges in operational resourcing and efficiency which would likely be eased if we were operating at greater scale
- As a larger organisation we could provide more development opportunities and reduce the stress on our multi-tasking workforce

## What's stopping us? Do we lack ambition?

There are some restraints on growth:

- Our model requires high levels of bespoke, one-to-one engagement and is intended to deliver considerable levels of long-term benefit as a result. One-on-one interventions do not always 'scale up' with predictable economy – not without loss of intensity or quality – they require more staff – and more overhead.

- Lighter interventions – companion programmes to our core deeper interventions – are now a part of our growth journey and help us achieve more touch points with more young people but must not be at the expense of core purpose. Intensive and sustained intervention has always distinguished what we do and is our unique offer to young people.
- As we have become more inclusive, our level of impact has increased because of the groups of young people we work with – but so has the level of support required to secure those benefits.
- Our model requires high levels of personal engagement from each young person and from the partnership organisations who sit alongside many of the young people we now work with. This is challenging to support and harder to scale.
- We are subject to the limit of the numbers of volunteers able to work without payment, willing to work in the outdoors, to support what we do and to commit the intensive training and commitment that requires.
- To provide fair access, no young person pays to participate on one of our programmes. We are more dependent than ever on the willingness of trusts and individuals to support what we do, in a particularly challenging charitable environment.



**We remain committed to driving efficiency to increase the benefit we can provide, and to support the health of the organisation.**

As part of A Wild Future we will:

- Reach out to more young people through our lighter-touch interventions
- Keep challenging the internal restraints on our growth
- Review our case for support, looking at other organisations delivering similarly deep-dive intervention to see if we can learn from them to secure funding and more operational resource.
- Understand our 'optimal scale' / strategy for achieving this; ensure continuous improvement / efficiency in our work processes.

**Do all substantive decisions in relation to 'purpose' pass the test and fit with the criteria of our Theory of Change, sustain our commitment to delivering work of deep and long-term impact to young people and keep with our commitment to equity, inclusion and diversity?**



# The cornerstones of A Wild Future:

# SUSTAINABILITY - PLANET

Our mission includes a commitment to enabling more young people to make a positive contribution to their communities and to the environment. This requires us to consider our sustainability in every area.

The model we have developed over the last 90 years – our purpose – remains powerful and effective and has also fostered a remarkable and enabling community – our people – who we hope will continue to sustain us as we move forward.

We remain committed to delivering extended experiences in wild and remote locations where we can make the case for the long-term transformative benefits to young people.

We do not believe young people should be denied the opportunity to develop a profound understanding about the world through direct, responsible engagement with the wilderness. We are committed to supporting the development of good decision-making skills for all our people and participants in relation to purposeful journeys.

Our history provides us with the rare chance to learn for the future. We are not nostalgic. We celebrate our heritage of remarkable life stories and achievements alongside the challenges which are also part of our past. This includes us embracing our carbon legacy as a community, in the most constructive way possible, and in the interests of future sustainability. As we increase our carbon literacy, for example, we can start to tackle our environmental impact.

We already understand our current and historic carbon footprint better, will now be reporting on it, and are making positive decisions to reduce our output. We are also working with external partners to develop long-term, forward-looking ways to acknowledge our impact on the planet, and to harness whatever resources we have for the greatest possible future benefit to our community.

- We want to move to, and then beyond, carbon neutral. We understand that working hard to reduce our carbon output will not be sufficient in the first instance, and that this will involve working with the best, most ethical carbon offset programmes we can find.
- We want our carbon offset partners to be part of our community for the future. Our carbon offset activity should be woven into our programmes contributing directly to the carbon and green literacy and knowledge we want to embed in programming.
- We will seek out exciting, responsible, long-term regeneration and rewilding programmes to support our commitment to tackling our carbon legacy. We wish to ensure through this strategy that we are focusing on the future, and on driving public benefit in keeping with our aims.
- We will need help. We now seek expertise in carbon management to help us identify and make the best possible operational and programme decisions.
- We will want to involve young people wherever we can in our drive to sustainability. As well as focusing our knowledge/science programmes on our growing understanding of our impact on the planet (and vice versa) we may develop carbon-challenges for our Young Explorers to tackle alongside the fundraising challenges we already have in place, for example, if our partners believe this is manageable for them.

We anticipate and are already making adaptations to our programmes. We will be undertaking training in 2022 to support this work further. We expect changes to how we travel, how long our programmes last, and where we travel to. Our plans are likely to continue to change over time, as technology and the evidence of impact of travel alters. We are already making more detailed adaptations to our on-the-ground operations as we measure and learn in detail about the potential environmental impact of every aspect of our work. As part of this strategy:

- Our tangible actions towards carbon management goals will have targets applied.
- We will shape and agree granular and corporate targets with the support and challenge of external advisors.
- We will share details of our carbon management – including what we spend – in communications including our impact and annual reports.
- We will publish an Environmental Policy in 2022.

We are not a campaigning organisation. But it is important to share as we learn.

- We will prioritise regularly communicating our decisions about carbon management and our wider commitment to sustainability with our community and be as open as possible about our progress.

**Do all substantive decisions pass the test in terms of our commitment to carbon management and to the standards, benchmarks and policies and commitment to progress we have set ourselves?**





# WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US ON OUR JOURNEY?

**British Exploring Society** has, with the help of many friends, achieved a considerable amount since its previous strategy, Advance and Ascend, providing opportunities for young people to take part in adventure and to connect with the outdoors throughout the pandemic. We are determined to continue improving, and to meet the needs of future generations of young people.

If you've been inspired by A Wild Future and think you could help us work towards our 10-year goals, please get in touch with any member of the team you know, or at [info@britishexploring.org](mailto:info@britishexploring.org).

Thank you.

## BUILDING STRONGER FUTURES

