

Plymouth Marine Park Briefing Paper

Prepared by Plymouth University's Marine & Coastal Policy Research Unit ([MarCoPol](#))
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Purpose

The purpose of this briefing paper is to outline a vision of what a Plymouth Marine Park (PMP) might be and what questions need to be addressed for the concept to progress further.

Context

Plymouth is Britain's Ocean City. The sea, coastline and maritime heritage are some of Plymouth's greatest assets. Plymouth is world renowned for marine science and engineering and home to the National Marine Aquarium, Plymouth Marine Laboratory, Marine Biological Association, The Marine Institute, The Sir Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science, the Diving Diseases Research Centre, The Shark Trust, UTC Plymouth, the naval base, port and the new Oceansgate development. Plymouth has a prestigious place in the Nation's maritime heritage. Together these make Plymouth a world leading centre for marine research, education and maritime cultural heritage.

However, the full potential of Plymouth is yet to be realized. In 2020 we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower setting sail for the North America with pilgrims in search of a new life. This event is just one of the many moments in history which makes Plymouth a centre for marine and maritime heritage. We now have an opportunity to connect all that is marine with the people of Plymouth and visitors under the provisionally titled banner of "Plymouth Marine Park".

What is a Marine Park?

A Marine Park (MP) may be an ocean and coastal space defined by local knowledge to recognise its special importance for community wellbeing, with the intention of encouraging greater prosperity and responsible enjoyment, deepening knowledge, appreciation and respect. The management of this blue space focuses on nurturing greater community involvement in caring for and safeguarding its long-term health and integrity.

PMP will not be a new type of marine protected area. It is not a marine reserve. A range of existing managed spaces already exist in the Plymouth area with a focus on biodiversity conservation.

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Therefore, the PMP entity could not be criticised as a 'paper park' since the objectives are not focused on biodiversity conservation. By enhancing the marine profile of the area, PMP would allow broader socio-ecological objectives to be met without additional legislation.

Comparison to Terrestrial National Parks

There will undoubtedly be a comparison between a marine park and the current Terrestrial National Parks (such as Dartmoor National Park). National Parks in England and Wales are very much based on a multi-user, socio-economic concept, with priority given to economic utilisation through agriculture, tourism and outdoor recreation.

Q. To what extent can or should we use the terrestrial model to design a marine park?

Complementing existing conservation objectives

A wide variety of statutory conservation designations already exist which recognize Plymouth's rich natural and cultural heritage. The aim of the marine park would not be to add to existing conservation designations but to enhance socio-economic activities whilst respecting these designations and potentially utilizing them to attract visitors and increase awareness and appreciation of Plymouth's abundant environmental endowment. The vision is therefore to include people and economic activity in the marine environment rather than exclude by regulation.

Q. How could existing conservation designations be used to attract visitors and enhance education opportunities and potentially (indirectly) further conservation targets?

Socio-economic opportunities

One of the main objectives of the marine park branding would be to enhance socio-economic opportunities for the city and its population. One of these opportunities may be the expansion of sustainable tourism and marine recreation. Hotels, restaurants, marine sports and other related businesses are likely to benefit from an enhanced profile of Plymouth through PMP branding. The Jurassic Coast branding demonstrates the great potential for economic benefits.

Q. How do we ensure main commercial interests are not affected by a marine park?

Q. Who are the key stakeholders to benefit from such a branding exercise?

Q. How can any commercial benefits be fully realized?

Q. Are there any potential losers? How can any losses be mitigated?

Recreation

With PMP providing increased awareness and education towards the marine environment there should be a significant increase in the uptake of marine related recreational activities such as sailing, kayaking, diving and coastal walks for locals as well as visitors. Research has established that these activities will enhance socioeconomic opportunities (for marine and supporting businesses), but additionally help the city and the South West region address a pressing health and well-being agenda.

Health and Well-being

The Plymouth Plan promotes the target of Plymouth as a healthy city. By 2031, Plymouth's health and well-being will be significantly improved enabling all of the city's people to enjoy an outstanding

quality of life, including healthy, safe and fulfilled lives. Blue space has been defined as ‘health-enabling places and spaces, where water is at the centre of a range of environments with identifiable potential for the promotion of human wellbeing’¹. Preliminary evidence suggests that positive relationship between health and well-being and exposure to blue spaces can be linked to a number of factors: physical activity, social contact and stress reduction and happiness.

Q. How can a PMP brand be used to maximize health and well-being opportunities in Plymouth?

Education

As outlined, Plymouth is a world-leading marine research hub with a distinguished natural and cultural heritage. By bringing all marine-related activities under one banner, the branding of a marine park gives rise to the opportunity of extending research and education opportunities to the local community, schools and visitors through increased activities and education exhibits/initiatives. The aim would be that through increased knowledge and understanding would develop enhanced recognition of value and caring for the marine and coastal environment furthering the desire for more understanding (Figure 1) and increasing marine stewardship and ocean citizenship.

Q. How can a marine park be used to enhance awareness, knowledge and understanding of the marine environment?

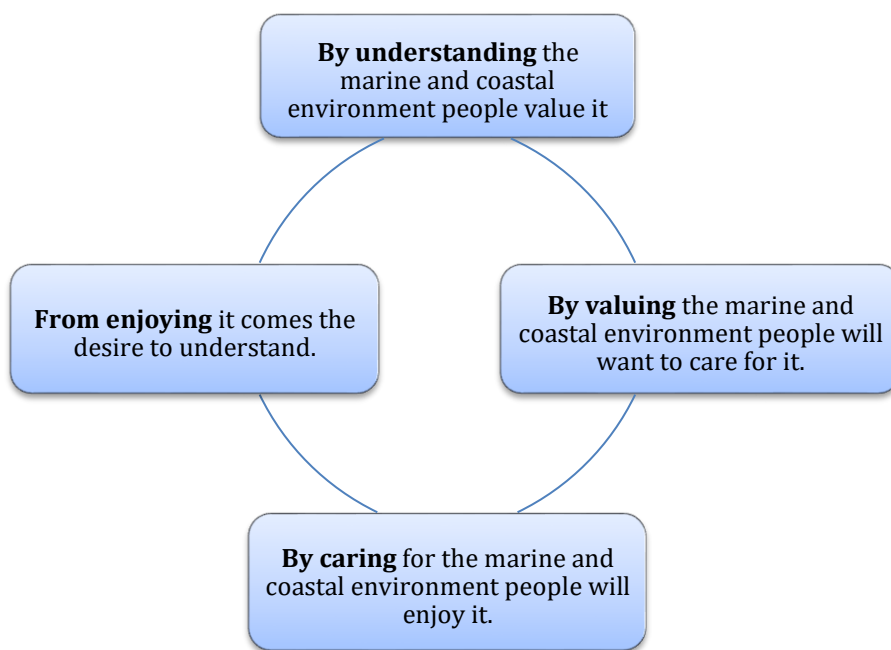


Figure 1: A positive feedback circle for people and the marine environment.

Adapted from Historic England Business Philosophy

Governance

Securing parliamentary time for new statutory provisions to underpin marine parks is extremely unlikely, particularly if this branding is to occur in time for the Mayflower celebrations. Therefore, the feasibility of establishing a marine park in Plymouth as a non-statutory, purely policy-based

¹ Foley, R. and Kistemann, T. (2015): Blue Space geographies: Enabling health in place. Health Place: Sep35: 15765. doi: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.07.003.

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initiative, merits evaluation. There are existing precedents that would suggest such an initiative is entirely feasible (e.g., green belts and heritage coasts).

MNPs could be co-managed through a multi-sectoral local partnership working toward specific and diverse objectives consistent with sustainable development. Consultation must include not only Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council but also Cornish local authorities and many others too since Plymouth Sound and Estuaries has complex governance.

Q. How will the marine park be governed/managed?

Q. Can, or should, existing local governance structures (e.g. Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum and Port of Plymouth Marine Liaison Committee) be modified to provide governance for PMP?

Marine Spatial Planning

A marine Park would aim to encourage public engagement and connection. It would therefore need to be locally relevant. If a Marine Park were to be designated there are a number of questions which would need to be addressed around spatial planning.

Q. How will a marine park fit into the wider national vision of marine spatial planning?

Q. How could boundaries be decided? Should this be done by distance from a Plymouth landmark (e.g., Smeaton's tower) or must it include certain features? Q. How does this branding affect villages, towns within the area?

Concluding thoughts

There is clearly enormous potential for the 'Marine Park' branding of Plymouth to bring increased socio-economic activity, engagement, awareness and well-being to the city and its population. The vision is one of inclusivity of people in their marine and coastal environment. For this potential to be fully realized and lead to a prosperous and sustainable future for Plymouth, a number of key issues need to be addressed, namely: governance, marine spatial planning and funding. If to be promoted as a promising vision for Plymouth, the next steps in how to proceed must be agreed. This could firstly involve the establishment of a steering committee with key stakeholders represented.

Q. Should a steering group be established?

Q. If so, how should it be constituted?

Q. How would the process be funded?

As a next step, all relevant local authorities should discuss the proposal, interests and shared objectives followed by diverse community group consultation and exploration of opportunities for local businesses.

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