# The Brecks National Character Area (NCA) Regenerative Tourism Framework v1.0

## About this framework

This framework provides a shared, destination-level way of understanding how tourism can contribute to the long-term flourishing of the Brecks NCA. It supports the Brecks NCA's aspiration to become a regenerative tourism destination. It is not a certification scheme, organisational checklist or finished action plan. Its purpose is to offer a common language, shared direction and practical basis for judgement, collaboration and learning.

The framework was developed with and for the Brecks NCA through a participatory research process. It draws on regenerative tourism theory, an organisational baseline survey, co-design workshops, detailed work with participating organisations and visitor research. Version 1.0 brings together the voices and experience of key stakeholders, including visitor-economy organisations, land managers, conservation and heritage bodies, community-facing organisations, public partners and visitors. The process sought as broad and varied a contribution as possible, while recognising that no first version can represent every voice or future condition. The separate **Methodology** explains the research, evidence base and limitations in full.

In this document, '**we**' refers collectively to the people and organisations who live, work, host, care for and help shape tourism in the Brecks NCA. The framework belongs to this wider community of place. It will be reviewed and updated regularly as participation broadens, evidence develops, and circumstances change.

# How to read and use this framework

This is primarily a shared framework for the Brecks NCA as a destination. It helps different organisations and communities see how their roles connect without expecting everyone to do the same work or begin from the same place. Here, 'visitors' includes people exploring the Brecks for leisure from nearby communities as well as overnight and longer-distance guests.

In this framework, responsible and sustainable practice provides the necessary foundation. The living place provides the context; the North Star gives a shared direction; the non-negotiables emphasise what must not be traded away; the principles guide choices; and the six regenerative dimensions show where tourism can contribute. Relationships, reciprocity and working together connect the dimensions. Guidance is provided to show how to adopt this framework into practice.

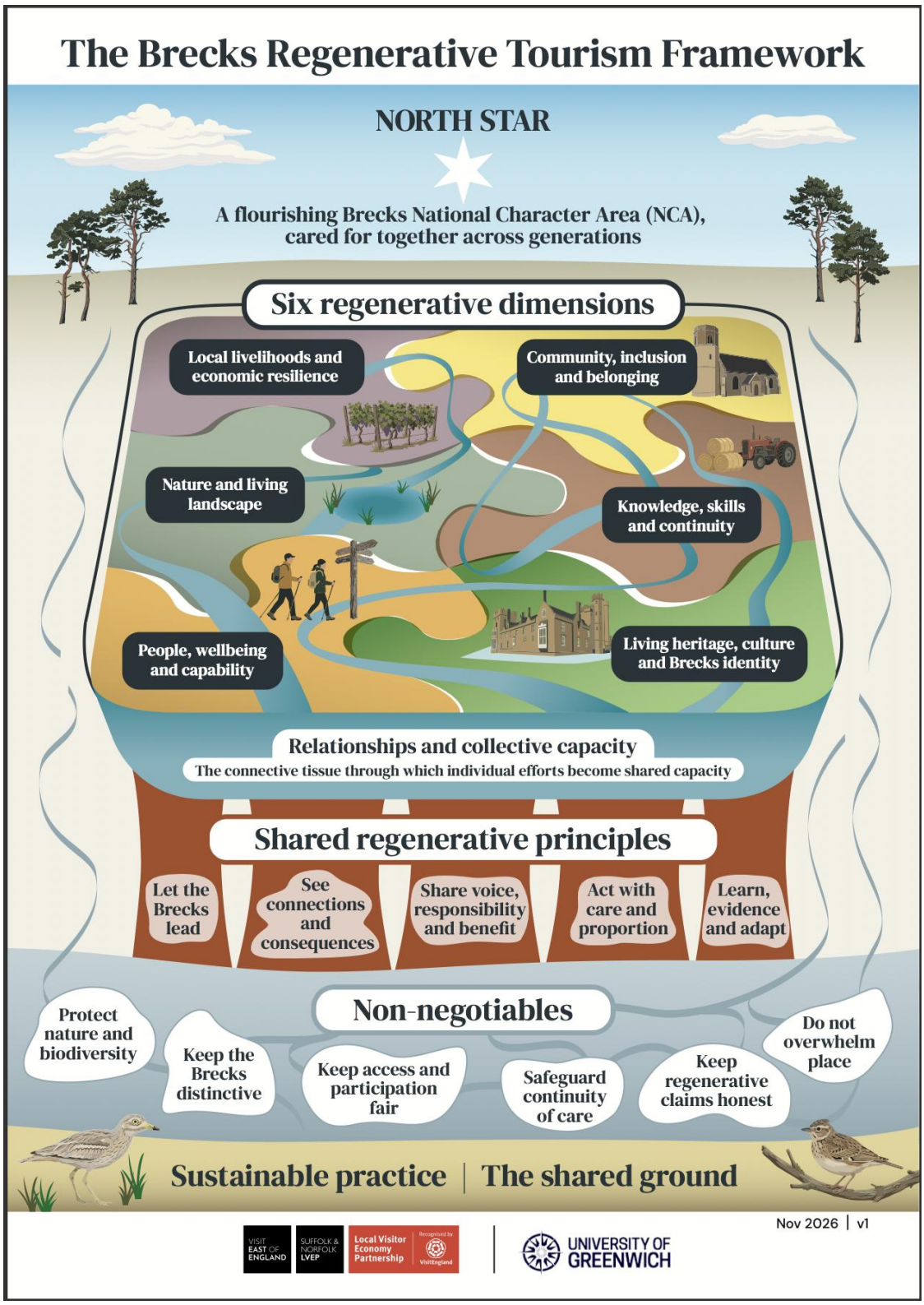
Use the framework to notice what is already strong, what is under pressure, what is missing and what tourism can realistically influence. Every action should respect the non-negotiables, work towards the North Star and consider consequences across the wider Brecks NCA. Organisations seeking to identify their own starting point and next

action should use **Start your regenerative tourism journey: a guide for Brecks organisations**, supported by the **case studies** and practical **toolkits**.

## What regenerative tourism means in the Brecks NCA

Regenerative tourism in the Brecks NCA means tourism taking its place within a living, layered and worked landscape. It builds on responsible and sustainable practice, respects what must not be traded away and contributes, through care, reciprocity and collaboration, to the flourishing of nature, people, communities, culture, knowledge and livelihoods across generations. According to what the place needs, it may protect what already thrives, restore what has been diminished, create what is missing or change practices and relationships that no longer serve the Brecks NCA. Across these directions, regenerative tourism can help strengthen the Brecks NCA's capacity to anticipate pressure, respond collectively, adapt and renew, rather than simply return to what existed before.

# The framework visual (v.1)



# Understanding the framework

## Sustainable practice as the foundation

Regenerative tourism does not replace the responsibilities of sustainable and responsible tourism; rather, it builds upon and extends them. Legal compliance, careful resource use and sustained efforts to reduce harm remain the minimum foundation. This includes addressing carbon and energy, water, waste, biodiversity, procurement and the impacts of travel. A regenerative approach goes further by asking how tourism can strengthen the living systems, relationships and capacities on which the Brecks NCA depends.

## The Brecks as a living place

The Brecks NCA is a living, layered and worked place, where biodiversity, farming, forestry, heritage, settlements, communities and livelihoods have shaped one another over time. Tourism and its visitors are part of this wider web of life and activity, contributing to the place rather than sitting at its centre.

The Brecks NCA is also an open living system, continually shaped by forces that cross the destination's boundaries, including climate change and extreme weather, catchment-wide water use, farming and land-use change, housing and development, transport, planning and infrastructure, and wider social and economic change. Tourism cannot control these forces, but it can help the Brecks notice emerging pressures, strengthen shared capacity, contribute evidence, coordinate responses and adapt without losing what makes the place distinctive. The framework therefore treats resilience as an outward-looking capacity to notice these pressures, understand dependencies, coordinate with actors beyond tourism and adjust course as conditions change.

## The North Star - a flourishing Brecks NCA, cared for together across generations

Through care and collaboration, tourism and its visitors contribute to a flourishing Brecks NCA, where the living landscape, people, communities, culture, knowledge and livelihoods thrive together for generations to come.

## The non-negotiables

The non-negotiables define the red lines for regenerative tourism in the Brecks NCA. They prevent benefits in one area from being used to excuse avoidable harm elsewhere. Their application will vary by place and circumstance, but none should be treated as optional.

| Non-negotiable | What it means in the Brecks |
|---|---|
| **Protect nature and biodiversity** | Tourism must not diminish the Brecks NCA's habitats, species, soils, waterways, ecological connections, wild spaces, dark skies or quietness. Ecological integrity cannot be traded for visitor growth or commercial gain. |
| **Keep the Brecks distinctive** | Tourism must not reduce the Brecks to a generic countryside offer. Its living, layered and worked character, shaped through nature, farming, |

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| | forestry, flint, heritage, settlements and community life, must remain visible and respected. |
| **Do not overwhelm place** | Visitor activity must not create pressures that sensitive landscapes, communities, working places or organisations cannot sustain. This includes ecological disturbance, loss of tranquillity, conflict with working land, disruption of community life and demands that exceed available capacity. |
| **Keep access and participation fair** | Tourism must not make access to nature, heritage, participation or benefit available only to people with money, mobility, confidence or prior knowledge. Nor should visitor needs routinely displace local access, community use or belonging. |
| **Safeguard continuity of care** | Tourism must not exhaust or undermine the workers, hosts, volunteers, community partners, viable livelihoods, knowledge and skills on which long-term stewardship depends. Short-term activity is not regenerative if it weakens the capacity to care for the Brecks NCA in the future. |
| **Keep regenerative claims honest** | Regenerative language must not exaggerate impact, conceal harm or substitute attractive storytelling for real practice. Claims should be supported by evidence and must not be used to greenwash tourism activity. |

## Shared regenerative principles

These shared regenerative principles bring together what we value and how we seek to act. They guide judgement rather than prescribe one model, helping us work towards the North Star, respect the non-negotiables and respond to different places, roles and starting points across the Brecks NCA.

| ***Shared regenerative principle*** | ***What it means in the Brecks NCA*** |
|---|---|
| ***Let the Brecks lead*** | We begin with attentive care for the Brecks itself: its living systems, layered histories, communities, working landscapes, rhythms, local knowledge, needs and possibilities. Tourism takes its cues from place rather than importing a ready-made model. |
| ***See connections and consequences*** | We recognise that nature, people, communities, heritage, knowledge and livelihoods depend on one another. We consider who and what may be affected across the six dimensions, relationships, places and generations. We are specific about what tourism can genuinely support, fund, interpret, connect or enable, without claiming wider change as its own. |
| ***Share voice, responsibility and benefit*** | We make space for people affected by tourism to help shape it and for different kinds of knowledge to count. |

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| | Those who benefit from the Brecks should also contribute to its wellbeing, but voice, responsibility, opportunity and benefit should be shared fairly and reflect different roles, means and capacities. |
| ***Act with care and proportion*** | We match action to ecological sensitivity, community needs and consent, working rhythms and organisational capacity. Greater scale is not automatically greater ambition: protecting, consolidating, staying appropriately small, slowing down, pausing or choosing not to develop may be as regenerative as restoring, creating or changing. |
| ***Learn, evidence and adapt*** | We distinguish what is already established, what is emerging and what remains an aspiration. We combine evidence with local knowledge and experience, remain open about progress and limitations, and adjust as knowledge, relationships and circumstances change. Regeneration is an ongoing practice, not a finished state. |

## The regenerative dimensions

The six dimensions draw on evidence from the project's early-adopter organisations, together with workshops and surveys involving wider Brecks stakeholders and visitors. They reflect forms of regenerative tourism already taking shape in the Brecks, including practices that organisations may not previously have described as regenerative, as well as areas where there is potential to go further.

The dimensions show where tourism can contribute to the flourishing of the Brecks NCA. They are interdependent, and no organisation is expected to address all six equally. **Relationships and collective capacity are not a seventh dimension; they are the connective tissue through which activity connects and grows across the Brecks NCA.**

The illustrative organisations in the third column were selected to reflect different organisation types, locations and relationships with the Brecks NCA. They are examples rather than complete models, and several appear across dimensions because their work is interconnected. The case studies explore their practice, tensions, limitations and future potential in greater depth.

| *Regenerative dimension* | *How it is emerging through tourism in the Brecks NCA* | *Illustrative case studies* |
|---|---|---|
| ***Nature and living landscape*** | **In the Brecks NCA, tourism contributes to nature and living landscape regeneration when it helps sustain and renew the place as a living, layered and worked landscape.** Visitor income, interpretation, volunteering and citizen science already support habitat recovery, wildlife monitoring, climate resilience and | **Lackford Lakes; Wendling Beck Wildscape; Oxburgh; Thetford Forest** |

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| | responsible farming and forestry. They also help people understand the relationships among soils, water, habitats, seasons, productive land and long histories of human care. Tourism can deepen this contribution by enabling visitors to participate in recovery and stewardship, and by making the ecological work behind the visitor experience more visible.<br><br>Place-based resilience can involve retaining water, improving soils, reconnecting habitats and adapting land management as climate conditions change. For example, Oxburgh's moat reveals linked effects on heritage fabric, vegetation, wildlife and access, while Wendling Beck's runoff attenuation, groundwater recharge and habitat restoration strengthen landscape capacity. Tourism's proportionate role is to help fund, interpret, monitor, connect and involve people in this wider work (UN Tourism, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2026). | |
| ***People, wellbeing and capability*** | **Regenerative tourism in the Brecks NCA supports the wellbeing and capability of visitors, workers, hosts, volunteers and wider communities.** Slower nature-based experiences, mindfulness activities and practical encounters create opportunities for restoration, reflection and reconnection. Some places express a deeper relationship: the landscape can help restore or heal people, while people's care can support the land's recovery. Supportive working cultures, flexibility, staff development, meaningful volunteering and opportunities for young people build confidence, purpose, capability and belonging. Together, these practices connect personal and community wellbeing with the people and skills needed to care for the Brecks NCA in future. Meaningful experiences can deepen | **West Lexham; Bush Adventures; Westacre; Lackford Lakes** |

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| | authentic and reciprocal connections with the Brecks, encouraging reflection, learning, care and appropriate contribution during and beyond a visit. | |
| ***Community, inclusion and belonging*** | **In the Brecks NCA, tourism has regenerative value when it strengthens everyday community life rather than operating as a separate economy for visitors.** Markets, pubs, estates, creative hubs, volunteering, social enterprises and accessible nature and heritage experiences can act as shared social infrastructure, bringing residents, visitors, schools, producers and community groups together. Tourism assets can also provide spaces, networks and convening capacity that other local organisations may not be able to offer. The potential lies in widening affordable and accessible participation, strengthening local voice and pride, and enabling communities to shape and benefit from tourism while sharing their place with visitors. | **Bush Adventures; Euston Estate; Westacre; Wyken Vineyards** |
| ***Living heritage, culture and Brecks identity*** | **Tourism is already giving the Brecks' layered heritage new life, treating the past as something to use, practise, question and reinterpret rather than simply preserve or display.** Historic buildings remain inhabited and useful; archaeology is reconstructed and tested; and farming, food, crafts, estates, family memories and vernacular materials become part of visitor experiences. Experimental archaeology and adaptive reuse show that **continuity** can involve rebuilding, changing use and revisiting previous understandings. Tourism can give this living heritage new audiences, purposes and economic life while strengthening recognition of the Brecks as a place in its own right and carrying its rich and sometimes complicated histories forward. Here, continuity means keeping heritage alive through use and | **West Stow; Oxburgh; College Farm; The Granary** |

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| | reinterpretation, rather than preserving it without change. | |
| ***Knowledge, skills and continuity*** | **In the Brecks NCA, knowledge lives through practice and comes with responsibility. Tourism creates ways for it to be shared and carried forward.** Guided experiences, crafts, archaeology, outdoor skills, production stories, conservation volunteering and wildlife recording move knowledge between specialists, residents, staff, volunteers and visitors. Knowledge held by land managers, families and long-serving staff can become vulnerable when concentrated in a few people or unsupported by training and paid career pathways. Visitor participation can range from noticing and learning to citizen science and skilled volunteering. The regenerative potential lies in sustaining knowledge through intergenerational exchange, institutional memory and future opportunities, while allowing new evidence and experience to extend what is understood. | **West Stow; Lackford Lakes; College Farm; The English Distillery** |
| ***Local livelihoods and socio-economic resilience*** | **Across the Brecks, socio-economic resilience is part of stewardship: viable visitor businesses, farms and local enterprises create the capacity to invest in people, heritage, community and landscape.** Local sourcing, employment, markets, circular exchanges, adaptive reuse, apprenticeships, business diversification and cross-referrals already help tourism value circulate through the area. Visitor income can also sustain conservation and heritage work, education, community facilities, creative enterprises and specialist skills. The aspiration is not simply greater visitor volume, but a visitor economy that encourages longer stays and wider exploration, sustains good local work, enables enterprises to adapt and reinvest, and carries viable livelihoods and skills forward. | **Wyken Vineyards; Elveden Estate; The English Distillery; Westacre** |

## The relational connective tissue

### *Relationships and collective capacity*

**Across the Brecks' organisations, relationships are already acting as connective tissue between different forms of regenerative activity.** Businesses recommend one another, local producers supply visitor-facing places, conservation organisations work with land managers, volunteers carry knowledge and care between roles, and visitors can become returning supporters, citizen scientists or volunteers. These existing practices show how individual efforts can begin to build collective capacity across the Brecks.

Relationships operate within organisations, between businesses and producers, across estates and landscapes, and among communities, visitors, volunteers, public bodies and conservation organisations. Trust and coordination allow knowledge, skills, assets, access, opportunities and responsibilities to move through these networks. They can support shared routes, referrals, calendars, volunteer networks, learning and landscape-scale stewardship that no single organisation could deliver alone.

Collective capacity requires time, communication, coordination and accountability. It does not mean that everyone must agree or work in the same way. Differences in priorities, land use, ethics, resources and power need to be recognised and worked through. The purpose is not collaboration for its own sake, but a stronger shared ability to care for the Brecks and act on what matters.

Together, the six dimensions and their relationships build the Brecks NCA's capacity to respond to disruption, adapt as conditions change and renew the ecological, social, cultural and economic foundations of flourishing.

The finding also showed that collective capacity does not sustain itself. Bringing organisations together created relationships and possibilities that were unlikely to emerge through isolated action. Ongoing convening, visible leadership and dedicated coordination are needed to involve more organisations, turn informal relationships into shared practice and avoid progress depending on a few individuals.

# From shared vision to living practice

This section explains how that shared understanding of the framework moves into practice: recognising work already under way, facing what remains under pressure, navigating tensions, using the Regenerative Compass to choose a direction and recognising progress without treating regeneration as a finish line.

## The Brecks is already on the journey

The Brecks NCA is not starting from zero in regenerative tourism. Across reserves, estates, farms, forests, heritage sites, hospitality and community enterprises, people were practising regenerative tourism before using the term. Instead, they use stewardship, continuity, care, healing, keeping something alive, leaving it better and preparing for the next generation. This work is uneven and unfinished, but it gives the framework firm roots in the place.

Early participating organisations offer distinctive examples. At Lackford Lakes, former gravel workings have become a wildlife-rich wetland, while visits can develop into learning, repeat support and trained volunteering. West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village keeps heritage alive through experimental reconstruction, crafts and archaeological enquiry. Bush Adventures uses commercial outdoor experiences to help fund inclusive education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, while extending care to its workforce. Westacre links habitat recovery and reused farm buildings with creative enterprise, visitor stays and community space.

Other examples connect working land, livelihoods and wellbeing. Wyken Vineyards brings farming, conservation, local food, employment and a farmers' market into one visitor economy. At Elveden and Euston estates, visitor experiences, local produce and employment sit within longer traditions of caring for land and heritage. West Lexham's hospitality and Wendling Beck's landscape recovery express a reciprocal idea: people may find restoration through place, while their participation helps care for land in return. College Farm and the Granary use small-scale hospitality to keep historic buildings, relationships and place knowledge in living use without making expansion the measure of success.

These are not perfect models, and no organisation demonstrates every dimension equally. They show different forms and scales of regenerative potential. In the organisational baseline survey, around three quarters considered regenerative tourism very or extremely important, although much activity remained informal. Previous visitors surveyed reported strong satisfaction, wellbeing and connection with the Brecks. These are valuable foundations, not proof that a regenerative transition is complete.

Tourism is one participant in this living place. Its role is to support and connect wider stewardship, not to place itself at the centre or take credit for every positive change. Its contribution becomes credible when visitor income, employment, interpretation, local purchasing, responsible behaviour, referral, learning or participation sustains and extends care already taking place. The **Brecks case studies** examine these contributions, including their limits, tensions and unfinished work.

## Why change is still needed

Strong individual practice does not yet add up to a widely understood or consistently connected regenerative destination. The Brecks is often encountered through separate places, such as Thetford Forest, Oxburgh, and Euston, while the wider landscape remains difficult to see. Its character is subtle: rare species can be elusive, species-rich dry grassland may look like an ordinary field, a damaged chalk stream may resemble a ditch, and the work sustaining nature, heritage, people and communities often remains hidden from visitors.

The route from a visit to stewardship often begins with attention*: attention can lead to discovery; discovery to understanding; understanding to appreciation; appreciation to respect; and respect to care*. Visitors need help to understand what they encounter and why care sometimes takes unfamiliar forms. In Thetford Forest, felling, seasonal restrictions and open-habitat management may look destructive without explanation. At Oxburgh, the moat is historic fabric, habitat, water infrastructure and part of the visitor experience; its health depends on the River Gadder and decisions beyond the estate, while restoration relies on neighbours, specialists, funders and volunteers. Neither place can regenerate in isolation.

Visitor evidence adds a clear visibility challenge. Among the 239 previous visitors surveyed, almost two thirds had not noticed regenerative practices, and only 5.4% recognised work related to workforce wellbeing and inclusion. Yet respondents strongly supported environmental restoration, local economic benefit, resident voice and community wellbeing. The gap lies less in values than in recognition and accessible ways to act on them.

Change is also limited by time, finance, staffing, transport, permissions, maintenance, insurance, safeguarding and uneven readiness. The organisational baseline identified time and finance as leading barriers; the visitor sample was largely car-dependent and day-based. Longer stays, seasonal spread and wider exploration may help only where they circulate value locally and remain within ecological, community and organisational limits. The direction is not generic growth, but a shift from passing through to dwelling and noticing, from isolated sites to a connected but varied destination, and from more tourism to more value for place.

## Working honestly with risk, tensions, barriers and frictions

Regenerative tourism in the Brecks NCA does not remove difficult choices. It brings them into the open, relates them to shared principles and limits, and allows them to be revisited as conditions change. Evidence from the co-design process, participating organisations and surveys points to five recurring challenges.

**Welcoming people while protecting place.** Meaningful encounters can build understanding and care, yet access, promotion and higher use can disturb wildlife, erode tranquillity, compromise privacy or exceed local capacity. Visibility must not cost the Brecks NCA the qualities people are invited to value.

**Building viability without exhausting capacity.** Income supports jobs, maintenance, conservation, community activity and succession, but pressure for growth can encourage unsuitable scale, simplified stories or exhausted staff and hosts. Time and finance are practical constraints, while affordability matters for residents and visitors. Viable livelihoods, workforce wellbeing and the freedom to remain appropriately small are part of the capacity to care.

**Inviting participation without transferring burden.** Visitors show interest in learning and lighter forms of contribution, while sustained volunteering requires training, coordination and trust. Participation also brings costs involving staff time, transport, insurance, safeguarding, risk and accessibility. Good opportunities must be proportionate for visitors and realistic for those who host them.

**Connecting the destination without flattening it.** Shared stories, referrals and infrastructure can help the Brecks NCA become more legible, but coordination can obscure local difference, favour stronger voices or add work to already stretched organisations. Collaboration requires clarity about purpose, authority, workload, benefit and who may be missing.

**Working within systems tourism cannot control.** The condition of the Brecks NCA is also shaped by climate change, catchment-wide water use, farming and land-use policy, housing and development, public transport, planning and infrastructure. Tourism cannot resolve these systems by itself. It can make dependencies visible,

change its own practices, contribute evidence, convene partners and advocate for choices that support the place, while remaining honest about where responsibility and authority lie.

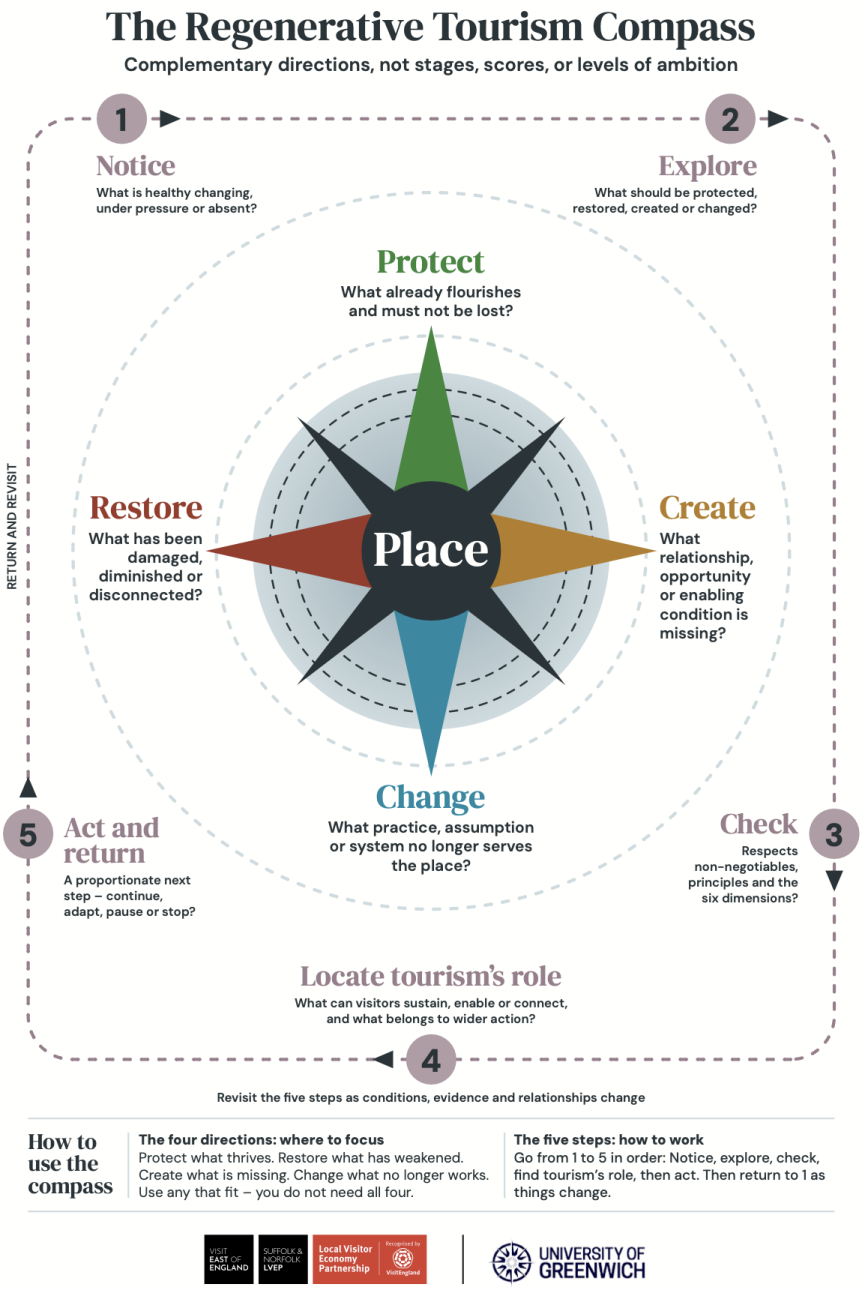
These challenges are not signs that the framework has failed. The non-negotiables set boundaries; the principles guide judgement; the Compass helps choose a direction; and the questions for recognising progress test the consequences. The case studies explore how these choices are negotiated in particular settings.

## Finding direction through the Regenerative Compass

Developed with Brecks stakeholders in the co-design workshops and refined against evidence from participating organisations and visitors, the **Regenerative Compass** turns the framework into a way of making place-based choices. It can be applied to an experience, site, partnership, investment decision, regenerative dimension or destination-wide issue. It asks:

- **Protect:** What already flourishes and must not be lost?
- **Restore:** What has been damaged, diminished or disconnected?
- **Create:** What relationship, opportunity or enabling condition is missing?
- **Change:** What practice, assumption or system no longer serves the place?

These are complementary directions, not stages, scores or levels of ambition. Several may apply at once, and no initiative has to demonstrate all four. Protecting a healthy relationship, choosing restraint or leaving a sensitive place undisturbed can be as regenerative as creating something new. The Compass should be revisited as conditions, evidence and relationships change.




**Protect**

Across the evidence, biodiversity emerged as the clearest shared red line. It sits within a wider Brecks understanding of protection that includes rare species and wild spaces; rivers, soils and dark skies; quietness and a slower pace of life; flint, archaeology, farming and local food; storytelling, accessibility and community character. What people want to protect is not simply a collection of assets, but the relationships through which the Brecks remains a living, worked and distinctive place.

A consistent pattern across participating organisations is that protection requires active judgement. It can involve seasonal habitat closures, late hay cuts, carefully timed grazing, succession planting, retaining deadwood, varying routes with wildlife and farming conditions, keeping private or sensitive areas outside the visitor offer, or rejecting commercially easier stories when they misrepresent a place. In a working forest, protection may require active felling to sustain open habitat; elsewhere it may mean reducing disturbance or choosing not to intervene.

Protect therefore asks: **What already carries life, meaning or the capacity for future care, and what could not readily be recovered if it were lost?** It is not a call to preserve everything unchanged. It is an active stewardship choice, informed by the ecology, history, use and capacity of each place.

**Restore**

Restoration is understood more broadly than repairing damaged habitat. The evidence points to the recovery of soils, hedges, waterways, dark skies and biodiversity, but also local food systems, traditional crafts, overlooked stories, pride in Brecks towns, access to nature and history, community spaces, volunteering, collaboration and connections between generations. Restoration concerns the capacity of places, people, cultures and relationships to recover and renew.

This direction is already taking tangible forms in the Brecks. At the English Distillery, changes in river management, including ending routine dredging, have allowed willow and birdlife to recover. Oxburgh is reconnecting fragmented land and renewing parkland, habitats and water systems around the hall and moat. Thetford Forest restores heathland, wetland and other open habitats within a productive forest. Across participating organisations, restoration also includes reintroducing grazing, rebuilding hedges, improving soil, bringing neglected buildings back into use and renewing skills that might otherwise disappear.

Restore therefore asks: **Where has the capacity for ecological, cultural, social or economic life been weakened, and what would help it recover?** Recovery does not always mean returning to a fixed or idealised past. A changed landscape may develop into a new living system; a historic building may survive through a different use; and cultural knowledge may be renewed through experiment rather than reproduced unchanged. Tourism contributes when its role in funding, interpreting or enabling participation in that recovery is clear.

**Create**

Ideas emerging across the project include more local food outlets, practical experiences, education about Brecks history and geography, linked itineraries, art trails, community orchards and opportunities for visitors to help nurture landscape and wildlife. These respond to genuine gaps, but the evidence also suggests that what the Brecks most needs to create may not be another attraction.

As attention moved from aspiration to delivery, stakeholders identified a need for shared volunteer support, coordinated event and conservation calendars, mutual promotion, local supplier connections, transport itineraries, seasonal discovery resources and common guidance for safe participation. Named commitments to contact, recommend and work with one another began to turn general support for collaboration into practical relationships. This shifts Create from producing isolated experiences towards developing the connective infrastructure through which existing places, knowledge and opportunities can work together.

Create therefore asks: **What is missing between the Brecks' existing assets, organisations and communities, and what new capacity would help them flourish together?** New visitor experiences may still be valuable, particularly where they bring local food, culture, learning and care for nature into relationship. However, they should answer an evidenced need rather than add novelty or duplicate what already exists.

Visitor evidence adds an important qualification. People broadly support responsibility towards place, but differ in the time, confidence, ability and effort they can offer. What is created should therefore provide a range of ways to participate, from noticing, learning and local spending to citizen science, practical activity and sustained volunteering. In practice, this means prioritising accessible entry points such as interpretation, storytelling, learning, local purchasing, donations and simple acts of care, while offering more intensive restoration, volunteering and co-design as optional pathways.

**Change**

The strongest calls for change challenge a "transactional only" approach, narrow competition, tourism understood as purely economic, visitors treated simply as paying customers, and the assumption that everything presented to visitors should appear perfect. The language of "my guests" and "my customers" can also obscure a visitor's wider relationship with the Brecks and with other organisations.

A recurring image across the research is the Brecks as a corridor: somewhere travelled through rather than travelled to. Its richness is subtle and distributed across ecology, farming, forestry, food, heritage and community life. Visitors may recognise individual attractions without understanding how they belong to the same place or seeing the work required to sustain them.

Organisational evidence reveals practical reasons why these patterns persist. Limited public transport, planning decisions, insurance and liability, catchment-wide water pressures, shortages of staff time and funding, and separation between conservation and visitor-facing teams cannot be resolved through a new tourism product alone. Some change must happen within organisations, across the destination or through institutions beyond tourism.

The surveys sharpen this picture. Visitors place strong value on nature, heritage, wellbeing and responsibility, but the community, workforce and relational work behind their experiences is less visible. Support for regenerative ideas does not automatically translate into additional time, spending or practical participation. Cost, information, accessibility, convenience and the clarity of the invitation all shape what people can realistically contribute.

The shifts emerging from the evidence include:

- from passing through to staying, returning, noticing and recognising the Brecks as a place in its own right;
- from the visitor as consumer only to a guest, learner, supporter or contributor, where appropriate;
- from tourism operating outside the place to tourism understanding its particular role within wider stewardship;
- from hidden care and polished outcomes to credible accounts of practice, uncertainty and long timescales;
- from isolated competition or general calls for collaboration to named relationships, mutual referrals and shared capacity;
- from generic rural marketing to stories rooted in the Brecks' distinctive ecology, materials, histories and ways of life;
- from visitor volume as the default measure of success to appropriate scale, local value, wellbeing, ecological recovery, continuity and relationship health.

Change therefore asks: **Which assumptions, relationships or wider systems keep reproducing outcomes that the Brecks NCA no longer wants, and where is there enough influence to begin shifting them?**

Across the evidence, meaningful change is understood as incremental: small actions, trials, greater confidence, use of existing plans and the freedom to revise decisions as knowledge develops. Organisations also have different capacities and appetites for change. Promotion that benefits one place may overwhelm another, and participation that works well at one site may be unsafe or impractical elsewhere.

Change is not the most advanced point on the Compass. It is appropriate when a practice, assumption or system continues to reproduce harm, fragmentation or exclusion. In other circumstances, the more regenerative choice may be to protect what is flourishing, restore what has been weakened or create the missing conditions through which existing good work can continue.

## Using the Compass

The Compass supports a repeatable process:

1. **Notice:** What is healthy, changing, under pressure or absent?
2. **Explore:** What should be protected, restored, created or changed?
3. **Check:** Does the direction respect the non-negotiables, reflect the shared regenerative principles and consider effects across the six dimensions and their relationships?
4. **Locate tourism's role:** What can visitor activity genuinely sustain, enable or connect, and what belongs to wider land, community or policy action?

5. **Act and return:** What is proportionate to current capacity; who must be involved; what happened; and what should continue, adapt, pause or stop?

Visitor evidence also shapes how this process is communicated. Environmental forms of Protect and Restore are relatively easy to recognise, while the social, cultural, workforce and relational meanings of Create and Change need clearer stories. Contribution should be offered as a spectrum, from responsible behaviour, attention, learning and local spending to citizen science, practical activity, repeat volunteering and advocacy. The aim is not to push everyone towards the most intensive role, but to make an appropriate next relationship with the Brecks easier to understand and enter.

## A shared journey with many starting points

The Compass asks what direction is needed; it is not a maturity ladder or an organisational action plan. Some organisations already practise long-term stewardship without using regenerative language. Others are testing one activity or relationship, have ambitions but lack resources or permission, or need to consolidate and protect capacity rather than expand. No organisation needs to cover all six dimensions. Its most meaningful contribution should grow from its purpose, place, relationships, resources and realistic sphere of influence.

Roles are complementary. Tourism businesses influence employment, sourcing, interpretation, referrals and visitor behaviour. Land managers and conservation bodies bring knowledge of ecological limits and long timescales. Communities help define wellbeing, belonging, consent and how pressures are experienced. Public and destination bodies can convene, align policy and remove shared barriers. Education and research partners support skills, evidence and challenge. Visitors can contribute at different levels. Destination regeneration depends on these contributions becoming connected without asking each participant to do everything.

The framework provides the shared map; **Start your regenerative tourism journey: a guide for Brecks organisations** extends the Compass by helping an organisation identify its starting point, choose a realistic focus and turn direction into a next action. The **case studies** show varied and unfinished journeys, while the **practical toolkit collection** supports implementation.

## How we recognise regenerative progress

Success at destination level cannot be reduced to arrivals, spend, a checklist of projects or the sum of organisational badges. Nor should the difficulty of assessing a living system become an excuse for vague claims. The Brecks needs an approach that is accountable and usable while respecting relationships, context, different timescales and forms of knowledge.

The North Star defines the direction as a flourishing Brecks NCA, cared for together across generations. In the co-design workshop, stakeholders shared a vision for 2036: a Brecks NCA that is recognisable without being over-packaged; connected without being over-controlled; economically alive without relying on volume; richer in nature, knowledge, community life and viable livelihoods; and able to carry care and responsibility into the next generation. Possible signs include visitors understanding the Brecks NCA as a connected place, stronger relationships among organisations, stewardship becoming easier to see, and overnight or return visits increasing where they benefit place. These are prompts for future evidence, not claims of present achievement.

The six questions below combine the project's theoretical foundations, with later research on plural knowledge, destination stewardship and mixed evidence over time; this literature supports clear, locally meaningful assessment while cautioning against reducing a living destination to a universal index or single score (Becken and

Kaur, 2022; Bellato et al., 2022, 2024; Dredge, 2022; Hajarrahmah et al., 2024; Dragin-Jensen et al., 2025; Das and Mishra, 2026).

## Six shared questions for recognising progress

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|---|---|
| 1. Are we staying within shared limits? | Are tourism decisions respecting the ecological, cultural, social and organisational non-negotiables? Evidence may include habitat and water condition, pressure on sensitive places, heritage integrity, tranquillity and dark skies, visitor flows, affordability, community consent and the capacity of staff, hosts and volunteers. A breach cannot be offset by stronger performance elsewhere. |
| 2. Are place and people flourishing together? | Are net-positive outcomes becoming visible across the six dimensions, and do they reinforce rather than undermine one another? Evidence may connect ecological recovery with visitor restoration, workforce and host wellbeing, community belonging, inclusive access, living heritage, skills, viable local work and succession. A strong environmental story should not conceal exhausted people or weakened communities, or vice versa. |
| 3. Is tourism giving back to the Brecks? | Can visitor activity be credibly connected to the care, recovery or future capacity of the place? Visitor contribution should be considered in experience design. Contributions may include reinvested income, donations, local purchasing and referrals, responsible behaviour, interpretation, citizen science, practical activity, volunteering or longer-term support. The test is what tourism genuinely enabled, sustained or connected, not its proximity to positive work. |
| 4. Are value and voice circulating fairly? | Are local workers, suppliers, producers, makers and communities benefiting, and can people affected by tourism influence its direction? Evidence should look beyond total spend to where value travels, what it sustains and who carries the cost. It may include local procurement and employment, access, affordability, community participation and recognition of unpaid or less visible care. |
| 5. Are relationships and capacity deepening? | Is the Brecks NCA becoming better able to act together and sustain care? Partnership counts are not enough. Evidence may include repeated collaboration, reciprocal referrals, shared resources, joint problem-solving, volunteer pathways, |

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| | skills exchange, succession, distributed leadership, and less dependence on a few overstretched people. |
| 6. Are we learning, adapting and building resilience together? | Is evidence changing future choices? Are we learning from internal and external change, anticipating emerging risks and opportunities, and adapting practices and priorities? Evidence may include feedback from diverse voices, ecological and social monitoring, shared learning across organisations, circular resource flows and resource sharing, and honest records of what was adapted, paused or stopped. Learning should strengthen the non-negotiables. Over time, this should increase the Brecks NCA's collective capacity to respond, recover and renew. |

These are destination questions, not an audit of individual organisations. Organisations, communities, land managers, public bodies, visitors and researchers contribute action, evidence and interpretation, but the judgement concerns change across the wider Brecks NCA and tourism's genuine role within it. A proportionate evidence portfolio should combine ecological, climate, water, resource-use, heritage and visitor-flow evidence; workforce, volunteer and community experience; local employment and value flows; visitor awareness, travel and participation; relationship mapping; and case studies, local knowledge and records of tensions or unintended effects.

The organisational baseline and visitor survey provide starting evidence, not permanent truths or complete representations of the destination. At a periodic destination review, partners can bring this mixed evidence together, test tourism's contribution, consider who benefits or carries a cost, use the Compass to agree priorities, and record what should continue, adapt, pause or stop. Claims should match the evidence: **commitment made; practice under way; contribution becoming visible; or change being sustained**. In this way, every credible step can be recognised without turning the destination into a score.

A successful regenerative destination is therefore understood as a pattern: shared limits are upheld; place and people flourish together; tourism gives back; value and voice circulate more fairly; relationships and capacity deepen; and learning changes what happens next.

## Keeping the framework alive

Regeneration is an ongoing relationship with place, not a project that can be completed and filed away. Version 1.0 is a shared starting point. The North Star, non-negotiables and shared regenerative principles provide continuity; case studies, tools, participation routes and evidence can evolve as conditions and understanding change. The framework is collectively owned by the people and organisations who live, work and care for the Brecks. The framework will be reviewed and updated regularly. Reviews should retain disagreement, unsuccessful

experiments and choices not to proceed, because restraint and course correction are also learning. Sustaining this work will require dedicated coordination, staff time and future funding, alongside continued commitment from partners, so that review, participation and shared action do not depend on goodwill alone.

## Where to go next

This framework is one part of a connected family of resources. Each output has a distinct role, so readers can move from shared direction to commitment, action, learning or transfer without asking one document to do everything.

| Resource | Its role |
|---|---|
| **Brecks Regenerative Tourism Framework v1.0** | Provides the shared destination-level meaning, direction, boundaries, decision lens and approach to recognising progress. |
| **Start your regenerative tourism journey** | Helps Brecks organisations understand their starting point, choose a realistic focus and develop their next actions. |
| **Brecks Regenerative Tourism Pledge** | Expresses voluntary shared commitment. It is not a certification or organisational performance badge. |
| **Brecks case studies** | Show varied and unfinished journeys, including practice, tensions, limitations, learning and transferable ideas. |
| **Practical toolkit collection** | Supports implementation through specific tools, contacts, learning resources and participation opportunities. |
| **Guide to developing place-based regenerative tourism** | Shares the development process for other destinations without presenting the Brecks as a template to copy. |
| **Methodology** | Records the research process, evidence base, theoretical foundations, limitations and approach to future updating. |

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