



Strategic Plan

2025-2028



We are SERT, the river restoration charity for South East England

We want to see clean and beautiful rivers flowing through every catchment. We want healthy rivers effectively protecting communities and nature from flood, drought and pollution, helping to combat the effects of the climate emergency.

We know that using science and evidence to identify issues and solutions for rivers is the best way to improve them – we use this to deliver the right interventions in the right places.

And we know that engaging local people with their local rivers is vital to growing how much healthy rivers are understood, valued and protected in the future. We do this through inspirational education and opportunities for everyone to actively make a difference.

Our catchment based approach and plans aim to bring together everyone who impacts rivers to work towards a united response to improve our precious rivers.

With so many differing views, needs and pressures facing everyone involved, we know it's not easy. But with 0% of south east England's rivers in good overall health, we are determined to act with urgency.

To do so our work to 2028 will be more focused on areas where we see the most opportunity; be better organised; and will increase our influence and impact on river health in the south east.

The next pages introduce our refreshed vision, mission and strategic goals to make this happen.

We believe that when rivers thrive, so do people and nature

SERT Theory of Change: how we make a difference

We use data, evidence, expertise and experience to identify issues facing the South East's rivers and effective ways to improve them. We use this to...

..Engage and influence those with money and power to invest in improvements and make the right decisions for rivers and catchments...

..Engage and educate local communities and to connect people to rivers so that they care for them, creating future protection and advocacy...

...This provides the money, access, resource and support for us to restore rivers and their catchments and contributes to better decision-making and behaviour change from stakeholders and the public in the longer term

Rivers in the South East become cleaner, healthier and richer in biodiversity



Our Vision: Rivers across the South East are clean, healthy and rich in biodiversity.

Our Mission (in brief): To restore and protect rivers & their catchments against multiple threats & a dramatically changing climate.


Our Mission (in full):

To restore and protect rivers and their catchments against multiple threats and a dramatically changing climate. We do this by:

- delivering evidence-based and nature-based solutions on land and in rivers;
- inspiring and empowering more people to protect rivers for the future.

We use data and local knowledge to understand how the climate crisis, development and other pressures impact rivers across the South East. These impacts include agricultural, sewage and road pollution and the major issues of water scarcity and flooding in the region.

We design and deliver solutions to these problems. We rewild rivers and create wetlands to restore natural processes, habitats and species. We create water storage, water saving and natural flood management systems to build resilience against major threats. We partner with businesses, industry and government to drive more investment and better decision-making for rivers and catchments. We work in partnership with local communities, schools and groups to empower everyone to take action for rivers.



Our 5 Strategic Goals:

1 To continually build our knowledge & evidence base

2 To influence river catchment decision-making & investment

3 To empower communities to protect rivers

4 To be the leading deliverer of nature-based & evidence-based solutions for rivers

5 To grow our team, our funding & our impact, on solid foundations

1

To continually build our knowledge & evidence base

We will do this through research, citizen science and our partnerships. This will ensure we are the trusted expert voice on the issues facing every river catchment in our area and the most effective solutions needed to improve them. Our expertise and evidence are the commodity that gives us credibility and influence.



What does success look like?

The rivers in SERT catchments are well mapped and monitored providing clear data about the state of land and rivers and effectively overcoming the lack of government-led monitoring. This data is analysed and used to identify and target project opportunities and develop a pipeline of shovel ready projects that demonstrate specific impacts and benefits. A single, regularly updated and easy to use platform stores this data.

Internally we know our rivers inside-out and are confident ambassadors for catchments; externally we share this data to support our goals of influencing and engaging key stakeholders, funders and communities. We are the go-to information source for rivers in the South East.

2 To influence river catchment decision-making & investment

We will use our evidence base and independence to influence and engage those with power, land and money, and support others who are strategically placed to lead in this area. Our influence will be evident through our leadership of catchment partnerships and other collaborative relationships resulting in our recommended projects and catchment plans being adopted and funded by industry, local government, landowners and other local stakeholders.



What does success look like?

SERT influences the decisions affecting rivers and catchments at every level. We have dedicated local teams who have the knowledge and relationships to engage key stakeholders in a shared ambition for each catchment. We lead all 12 Catchment Partnerships and Plans in our region, which include stakeholders such as farmers, the water industry, local government and community groups.

Regionally we target and build relationships with strategic senior stakeholders across the water sector, business and government by showcasing our work and expertise. Nationally we work with the wider Rivers Trust movement and others to influence government and raise the profile of rivers and the issues they face.

Our effectiveness is demonstrated in our influence on decisions affecting rivers such as planning, AMP schemes and local government prioritisation, and through the funding and support we secure to make our projects happen.

3 To empower communities to protect rivers

We will connect a diverse range of communities to their local rivers and the issues they face. We will do this through programmes and partnerships which educate and inspire about the importance of rivers to the health of people, nature and planet. This will grow advocacy for the right solutions plus resources and support to make them happen. It will strengthen the future protection of rivers and water resources through behaviour change and the influence of an informed and inspired electorate.

What does success look like?

SERT engages local communities in all 12 catchments through a range of opportunities including citizen science and education programmes, community and corporate volunteering, and through compelling information and content. These opportunities connect people to their local river and inspire future stewardship through behaviour change, direct action, and advocacy.

Programmes target catchment-specific issues to create a clear link between our evidence-based Catchment Plans and community impact. Education and engagement is a key part of our projects embedding long term impact and adding social value to our restoration work.

Through our partnerships, activities, campaigns and digital presence the number of people that we reach has trebled, and the diversity of people that engage with us fully reflects the communities living on our rivers. The SERT website is the go-to resource for river and catchment information in the South East.



4 To be the leading deliverer of nature-based & evidence-based solutions for rivers

We will expand our capacity and expertise in the design and delivery of high quality restoration for rivers and land. This will improve the resilience of river ecosystems, delivering value and multiple benefits. We combine our restoration expertise and innovative approach with our evidence base to identify the best solutions for issues in our catchments. We deliver outstanding restoration projects in-house and in partnership with others. We support a pipeline of new projects and improve how we measure and maintain the impact of our work.



What does success look like?

Professional project management systems and capabilities ensure the design and delivery of projects is agile, effective and responsive. Our capacity is optimised through solid training and succession pathways, and strong subcontractor relationships.

To ensure the ongoing development of our teams and to showcase our work, we deliver a range of projects each year from small scale weir removal to landscape scale schemes. To support our growing profile and community engagement we have flagship demo sites across the region. We scope projects that include new and innovative approaches, engagement opportunities, and monitoring and impact measurement wherever funds can support it.

Our reputation and relationship with funders, industry and landowners is strong and this helps ensure a continual pipeline of opportunities. Our local knowledge, evidence base and ability to offer multiple benefits give us a competitive edge in securing funding.

5 To grow our team, our funding & our impact, on solid foundations

We will generate sufficient income from diverse sources to fund the projects and programmes that will deliver our mission and fund the resourcing and development of the charity and our people so that we can do more for rivers, faster. We will continue to secure the restricted funds that enable us to deliver projects, lead catchment partnerships and connect with communities. Through full cost recovery and unrestricted income growth we will enable the personal and business development that will ensure the high performance and satisfaction of our team, the pipeline of future work and develop mature systems which support our operations.



What does success look like?

SERT's supporting infrastructure is robust and supports a collaborative catchment-based approach. Processes and policies are understood and used consistently by all ensuring high standards, good compliance and low risk.

Staff enjoy a range of training opportunities, support for their wellbeing and an inclusive culture. Trustees and other volunteers feel part of the organisation and their skills are used to enhance our capacity and development.

Finance and project management systems are integrated and provide a shared understanding of project budgets, milestones and risk. Improved finance systems deliver accurate and timely reporting and support full cost recovery and strong bid management.

SERT is a sustainable organisation with sufficient restricted and unrestricted income to cover core costs plus surplus to support the ongoing development of the organisation and the pipeline of projects that will cumulatively see SERT making a positive difference to rivers and catchments in the South East.

Our Top Ten KPIs

We recognise that there are many ways to measure our impact as an organisation. This includes our impact on rivers and catchments, our impact on people and communities, our internal impact and our impact through partnerships.

The following Top Ten reflects our priority areas of ambition and impact. We recognise that some of these are harder to measure - rivers are dynamic and so are the results they give us.

By 2029:

50 staff;
turnover at
<15%

£4m income;
10%
unrestricted

100 priority
stakeholder
relationships

1 GIP for
the SERT
region

5000 social
media
followers; 3000
newsletter subs
pa

1000 volunteer
engagements;
5000 young
people pa

Min. 30,000m³
water stored
through NbS pa

6Ha of
habitat
created or
restored

5km of river
restored or
enhanced

20km of
river opened
up to fish
passage

