

Terra Firma – English Riviera Geopark Review – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Report to Cabinet on 15 July 2026

Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board met on 6 May 2026 to consider a report and presentation on the Terra Firma project and the future governance and delivery of the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark from the Cabinet Member for Tourism, Events & Culture and Corporate Services - Councillor Jackie Thomas and the Chair of the English Riviera Geopark Organisation – Nick Powe. Key points included:
 - The Terra Firma project was intended to strengthen governance, clarify delivery arrangements and improve long-term sustainability of the Geopark.
 - Proposals included transitioning the English Riviera Geopark Organisation into a Community Interest Company (CIC), with clearer roles, governance and accountability.
 - Geological and cultural heritage were closely linked to tourism and place promotion, and Torbay's Geopark status remained under-promoted.
 - The Geopark revalidation process was outlined, including submission deadlines, evaluation visits and decision-making timescales.
2. Members raised the following questions:
 - How frequently would the re-established Geopark Board meet and what themes would it focus on?
 - How was specialist geological expertise being provided in the absence of a dedicated geologist?
 - Would the lack of a geologist impact future UNESCO revalidation?
 - How would the Community Interest Company improve awareness and interpretation of the Geopark for residents and visitors?
 - What future funding streams were anticipated once current grant funding ends?
 - What was the timetable and process for the next UNESCO Geopark revalidation?
 - How would schools and young people be supported to engage with Geopark learning?
 - How will partner organisations' roles be clarified and strengthened?

3. The following responses were received:
- The Geopark CIC Board was expected to meet four times a year, with themed meetings covering tourism, community engagement and education etc.
 - Geological expertise was currently provided through partnership working with academic institutions e.g. Plymouth University, and this has been sufficient to date.
 - It was confirmed that existing expertise and co-ordination arrangements were considered adequate for revalidation purposes.
 - The CIC model was intended to provide clearer governance, improved communication, stronger branding and a more visitor-focused approach.
 - Long-term funding will require a mixed model, including grants, partnerships and alternative funding sources; it was acknowledged that while continuing Council funding was vital, remaining the sole funder was not sustainable.
 - Revalidation documentation must be submitted in January 2027, followed by evaluator visits in mid-2027 and a final UNESCO decision in 2028.
 - Educational engagement will focus on toolkits, digital resources, school partnerships and improved website content.
 - Core partnerships will be refreshed with clearer terms of reference and expectations around delivery and leadership roles.
4. The background papers can be found at [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Board on Wednesday, 6 May 2026, 5.30 pm](#)
5. The Board formed the following recommendation to the Cabinet. On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried unanimously.
- 6. Recommendation**
- 6.1 That the Cabinet be recommended to review the signs for UNESCO English Riviera Geopark to ensure that they are up to date and fit for purpose and report back to the Board on any progress to implement this.

For information only:

That the Board welcomed the direction of travel for review of the Terra Firma – English Riviera Geopark Review and the proposed creation of Community Interest Company (CIC) and requested that the Board receives an update on the progress of the Review in the Autumn.