

# Isle of Wight Events Compass

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a guide for public arts organisers



# About this Events Compass

In June 2025, a group of producers from the south west of England, led by Creative Island, attended *Oerol*, Europe's largest site-specific arts festival, which takes place on the Island of Terschelling, in the ecologically-sensitive Wadden Sea region of the northern Netherlands.

Inspired by *Oerol*'s 'Ecological Compass' which puts nature centre stage in order to move towards a more sustainable festival, the team returned with the idea of creating a set of principles for the Isle of Wight.

**Simply put, we believe that good cultural work should do more than simply avoid harm, and that this is even more important on a small island**

The following 5 principles, supported by checklists, aim to deepen connection, support wellbeing, celebrate local identity and ultimately leave places better than we found them:

- 1: Care for place and nature**
- 2: Care for people, access and participation**
- 3: Use resources wisely**
- 4: Honour local culture and distinctiveness**
- 5: Leave a positive legacy**

## Acknowledgements

Content: Ian Boyd | Alison Ford | Nick Green | Jo Ridley | the *Oerol* festival team  
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## Find out more

[oerol.nl/en/about-oerol/sustainability](https://oerol.nl/en/about-oerol/sustainability)

# 1: Care for place and nature

Every event takes place somewhere, on land that already has a life of its own which might include wildlife, working landscapes, footpaths, neighbours, histories and seasonal rhythms. Small choices about lighting, sound, waste, access or timing can make a big difference to how a place is supported before, during and after an event. By thinking ahead and making careful choices, we can reduce harm, support biodiversity and show respect for the places that host our creative work.

## Before

- Get to know the site. Check for animals and birds (including nesting or breeding activity), waterways, nearby homes, and areas that might be sensitive to noise, light or footfall
- Plan lighting to be low-impact (warm, down-lit and time-limited) and where possible avoid illuminating land, trees, water or areas where animals or birds might be
- Plan power based on what is actually needed and avoid bringing more equipment than necessary
- Think ahead about weather risks (heat, rain, wind) and how people and the site will be cared for if conditions change

## During the event

- Keep sound and lighting within agreed limits and times
- Switch off lights, sound and equipment when not in use, especially between programme moments
- Keep an eye on waste, litter and movement across the site

## Afterwards

- Walk the site and check for any damage or disturbance
- Remove all temporary structures and signage
- Leave the site clean and in the same or better condition than you found it

In 2019, the Isle of Wight was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – one of only seven in the UK and part of a global network. This status recognises our unique mix of plants and animals, rich and valued environment and the sustainable way of life led by the Island's communities.

Additionally, the Isle of Wight Local Nature Recovery Strategy, published in May 2025, sets out a plan for nature recovery across the Island. The plan was developed through Island-wide collaboration and reflects the knowledge, experience and commitment of Islanders working together for the recovery of our wildlife and habitats.

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## Find out more

[iwbiosphere.org](http://iwbiosphere.org)  
[islandnature.org](http://islandnature.org)

## 2: Care for people, access and participation

Cultural activity is at its best when it feels welcoming and inclusive, and this provides a richer experience for everyone involved – audiences, artists and communities. If we consider access, affordability and participation at the outset we avoid creating barriers that can unintentionally exclude people.

### Before

- Choose venues that are easy to reach by public transport, walking or cycling where possible, and promote carpooling or ridesharing
- Where possible, consider how pricing and booking choices might affect who is able to attend
- Share clear travel information on all listings and tickets
- Signpost to secure bike parking and EV charging where available
- Think about access early: step-free routes, clear signage, quiet spaces and seating
- If describing work as ‘community-led’ or ‘youth-led’, make sure this includes real decision-making power and leadership opportunities
- Where it makes sense, involve community groups early and make space for local initiatives to be part of the programme
- Where it fits the event, consider making space for the local community to share work, skills or ideas as part of the programme
- Default to e-tickets where possible. If you’re using passes or wristbands, choose recyclable or bio-based materials and set up a simple return point
- Brief staff and volunteers on welcoming, inclusive practices, for example how to offer help, give clear information, and respond kindly to questions or requests

### During the event

- Make it clear who is on hand to help, for example by having visible staff or volunteers people can approach

### Afterwards

- Check whether access arrangements worked in practice
- Thank volunteers and contributors and share any next steps

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### Find out more

[weareunlimited.org.uk](http://weareunlimited.org.uk)  
[culturalinclusion.uk](http://culturalinclusion.uk)  
[arts-emergency.org](http://arts-emergency.org)

## 3: Use resources wisely

How we use energy, materials, food and money matters – not just environmentally, but financially and socially too. By choosing local suppliers, reducing waste and reusing materials we can keep costs down, support local economies and reduce unnecessary impact.

### Before

- Communicate your sustainability initiatives to attendees, suppliers, and partners to ensure everyone is on board with the event's eco-friendly objectives
- Plan water refill points so they're easy to use and reduce the need for single-use plastic
- Set up clear recycling and waste stations that are easy for people to find and use
- Use digital formats where possible. Keep printing to a minimum, use recycled or FSC-certified paper
- Work with local makers or fabricators where builds are needed, and plan for materials to be reused or stored
- Prioritise local food traders, suppliers and makers
- Agree packaging and servingware expectations in advance, avoiding single-use sachets and non-recyclable or non-biodegradable containers, and planning for reusables and returns where possible
- Plan in advance how any surplus food could be donated rather than wasted

### During the event

- Monitor energy use and switch off when not needed
- Help audiences and teams use waste systems correctly
- Keep refill points visible and well used

### Afterwards

- Donate or reuse leftover materials and food
- Recycle and compost as much waste as possible to reduce the amount sent to landfills
- Note what worked well and what could be improved next time

The Isle of Wight faces significant environmental challenges which are linked to its unique geography. It is an area of water scarcity, and during hot summers demand increases due to tourism, which puts extra pressure on supply. As an Island it has less space for waste, so it makes sense to reduce what we need to dispose of.

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### Find out more

[isleofwight-nl.org.uk](http://isleofwight-nl.org.uk)  
[theatregreenbook.com](http://theatregreenbook.com)

## 4: Honour local culture and distinctiveness

Events are strongest when they feel rooted in the places they happen. Local stories, voices, food, heritage and creativity give cultural work depth, meaning and authenticity. Honouring place doesn't have to be big or expensive – small, thoughtful choices can make a real difference.

### Practical ways to do this

- Work with local artists, makers, growers and storytellers
- Reference local history, landscapes or language in programmes or design
- Credit local contributors clearly
- Use venues and spaces that reflect local character, while staying accessible
- Where appropriate, make space around events for local storytellers or community climate and nature initiatives

The Isle of Wight has a rich and varied cultural identity, shaped by its history, coastal location, landscape, and a strong sense of community. Its vibrant carnival tradition began in the Victorian period and is one of the longest-running in the UK, attracting tourists, bringing together communities and expressing local pride and identity. The mix of tradition, creativity, literature, music, festivals, and arts and crafts all contribute to the Island's distinctive character.

We recognise that each of the Island's 33 Parishes has its own unique cultural and natural character. By valuing the best of the past and demanding the best of the future, we can add new content and traditions which enrich our sense of place and develop our own local stories.

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### Find out more

[creativeisland.org](https://creativeisland.org)

[iwbiosphere.org/principles](https://iwbiosphere.org/principles)

## 5: Leave a positive legacy

Every project creates learning, skills and relationships. Thinking about legacy helps ensure the benefits of cultural work last longer than the event itself. This might mean new skills, stronger partnerships, reused materials or funds to support local priorities.

### Practical ways to do this

- Build learning and skills into projects for volunteers and young people
- Reuse equipment, signage and materials across events
- Where possible, contribute to local regeneration or creative development
- When booking accommodation, try to source options which demonstrate a commitment to sustainability
- Share learning openly so others can build on it

In 2021, the Isle of Wight Council released its 'Mission Zero Strategy' which is a key part of creating a sustainable future for the Island. One of the stated aims is for all public events and festivals on the Island to work towards zero overall footprint.

Protecting our Island's status as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and realising its full potential requires cooperation from everyone who lives, works and visits here. The 9 Biosphere principles can help organisations and individuals increase their 'biosphere thinking' and ensure a positive legacy.

### Biosphere principles

- Value our Island heritage
- Protect and sustain nature
- Restore Island ecosystems
- Share biosphere knowledge
- Celebrate local distinctiveness
- Build a liveable Island
- Embrace a new economy
- Take climate action
- Safeguard future generations

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### Find out more

[togetherformissionzero.co.uk](https://togetherformissionzero.co.uk)  
[juliesbicycle.org/take-action/resources](https://juliesbicycle.org/take-action/resources)  
[iwbiosphere.org](https://iwbiosphere.org)

# CREATIVE ISLAND

Working on an Island, we are keenly aware that everything we create goes somewhere. You can't throw stuff away. It's not enough to just tidy up behind ourselves. We need to be doing more. Giving back. Making things better through the things we do.

*Gavin Stride, Creative Island*

