

# City folk are invited to dip a toe in the water

The Westcountry is on course to host the first national marine park. Keith Rossiter reports from Plymouth

**A** SHOCKING statistic lies behind plans to turn Plymouth Sound into Britain's first National Marine Park - 17% of the Plymouth public has never been to the seaside.

In 2003 the Barcelona architect David Mackay, in his Vision for Plymouth, noted that the city appeared to have turned its back on the sea.

Now the partners behind an ambitious project to create a National Marine Park centred on the Sound hope to show locals and visitors alike what's there - and how to access it.

Plans for the country's first National Marine Park take a giant stride forward tomorrow when city leaders, experts in the marine and maritime sector and other partners from the public, private, and voluntary sector sign a pledge to make it happen.

And on Saturday the public will have a chance to share in the excitement.

Plymouth City Council has been given a year by the government to come up with a blueprint for the park.

If ministers like what they see, the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park will get the go-ahead, and the

model created in the Westcountry will be offered to other parts of Britain.

The park aims to showcase to the world the unique and fantastic assets that Britain's Ocean City has to offer, including an estimated 1,000 different species of marine life, and help boost the economy, attract more visitors, enable funding for research and a range of other benefits.

The idea of a National Marine Park was first mooted by Professor Martin Attrill in a Guardian article in 2012.

It wasn't until last year that it was brought to life when the Blue Marine

*'The park will improve access to the water for local people and for tourists'*

**TUDOR EVANS**

Foundation staged a conference with international speakers at the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth, with the backing of the city council and Labour MP Luke Pollard.

Council leader Tudor Evans said: "We have a unique combination of



**> A spiny spider crab in Plymouth Sound** Paul Naylor

assets in Plymouth Sound - 1,000 species of wildlife, nuclear submarines, fishing boats, pleasure craft. And we are in a unique position to exploit these assets.

"A marine park will help to raise awareness of the marine environment, and that's worth having.

"One of the jobs the park will do is to improve access to the water for local people and tourists.

"A shocking 17% of the public in Plymouth have never been to the seaside. We've got a long way to go to ensure that Plymothians enjoy their birthright.

"I know people will worry that we'll be slapping protection orders on everything, but the protection orders we have already are good enough."

Cllr Evans stressed that the park would not try to stop people from doing what they do already.

Lewis Pugh, the Plymouth-born UN Patron of the Oceans, will be in the city for Friday's signing.

Mr Pugh said: "In the past Plymouth launched many great voyages that changed the history of the world.

"It is my hope that, in the future, people will look back at Plymouth as the ocean innovator that set the standard for national marine parks in Britain and across the globe.

"The future of our planet will be determined by what happens in our oceans.

"I have always been proud to be born in the greatest of maritime cities. Today I am particularly proud to see Plymouth leading the charge on ocean protection with this important national marine park initiative."

Charles Clover, executive director of the Blue Marine Foundation, said: "Ours is a great maritime nation

which tends to forget its links to the sea.

"There is nowhere better to rediscover them than in Plymouth Sound, the departure point for so many historic voyages and a natural harbour of great beauty, above and below water.

"Congratulations to Plymouth for creating the first national marine park."

Stuart Elford, chief executive of Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, said: "This is a really exciting opportunity to raise the profile of Britain's Ocean City and it will be fantastic for the local economy, bringing more visitors, opening up funding opportunities for research and other important projects, and attracting investment and more jobs.

"It would also demonstrate once again that Plymouth is an innovative, forward-thinking city."

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