

South West Business Council

# CIC ANNUAL REPORT

2024



Support our Charity  
Partner for 2024/25 at  
[southwestcoastpath.org.uk](https://southwestcoastpath.org.uk)



**South West  
Coast Path**

# Introduction

## Paul Coles, CEO of South West Business Council



### Welcome to the South West Business Council's 2024 Annual CIC Report.

This year, we have continued to champion the South West by creating opportunities for our members to Convene, Inform, and Connect. Our efforts have been marked by robust partnerships and innovative initiatives that align with our core objectives, addressing the needs and leveraging the strengths of our diverse community.

Our work spans a variety of sectors and involves significant collaboration with both public and private stakeholders, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of economic development and innovation. Through these partnerships, we've nurtured a supportive environment for businesses, educational institutions and community projects; fostering growth and resilience throughout our region.

As you explore this report, we hope you will gain insights into the significant strides we have made in 2023/24 and share our excitement for the future. We thank you for your continued support and engagement.

Warm regards,

Paul Coles,  
CEO, South West Business Council



***We hope you will gain insights into the significant strides we have made in 2023/24 and share our excitement for the future.”***



# Our Year in Focus



New Website Launch

SWBC Social Mobility conference

SWBC AI conference

Annual dinner 2023

Annual dinner 2024

Tech South West Awards 2023

South Devon College Skills Summit



*The wide range of issues addressed by the SWBC and associated networking opportunities reflect the quality of people involved and the culture of the organisation."*

Julian Gray,  
Director, South West Coast  
Path Association



Image credit South Devon College

## Acting as the Economic Partnership for the South West of England



*Working closely with South West Business Council has proven to be a major boon to our partnership working. I urge all businesses in the region to take up membership with SWBC."*

Ian McFadzen,  
CEO, Plymouth Science Park



We have fortified partnerships with key organisations like the Institute of Chartered Accountants for England and Wales, Hydrogen South West, and the National Composites Centre, driving regional innovation and growth. We've also deepened our engagement with local universities and colleges, promoting the integration of academia and industry to develop talent and skills.

Our strategic conferences have addressed critical topics such as social mobility, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence, generating national attention and promoting discourse across the region. Key collaborations included facilitating discussions on smart marine platforms between the University of Plymouth and the University of Bristol.

We continue to champion the technology sector through our sponsorship of the Tech South West Awards and the Grand BAME Gala Awards. In partnership with Business West, we tackled broad strategic challenges, ensuring the South West remains a dynamic hub of economic activity.



# Training, Learning and Skills Development

By deepening our partnership with universities and colleges to align educational programmes with industry needs, we can ensure a robust pipeline of skilled talent for the region.

Our board members actively participate on academic boards, fostering strategic exchanges that shape responsive and forward-thinking curricula. This included our involvement in the South Devon College's Skills Summit, where we highlighted emerging sectors like Floating Offshore Wind and Hydrogen.



By expanding the Young Enterprise's Inspiring Futures programme we have been able to further educational opportunities in underserved communities. We also collaborated with the Police and Crime Commissioners and the Home Office on projects providing meaningful skills development for offenders, such as sustainable housing construction.

Our new role on the board of the Exeter Science Centre supports the creation of a science-focused educational network, enhancing regional scientific capabilities and education.



***The College is a long-standing member of the South West Business Council who we have always considered as one of the most effective networks of businesses."***

Laurence Frewin,  
Principal & CEO, South Devon College



***Celtic Sea Power values SWBC as a vital partner in helping businesses in the South West prepare for the opportunities presented by Celtic Sea FLOW."***

Phil Johnston,  
Business Development Manager, Celtic Sea Power



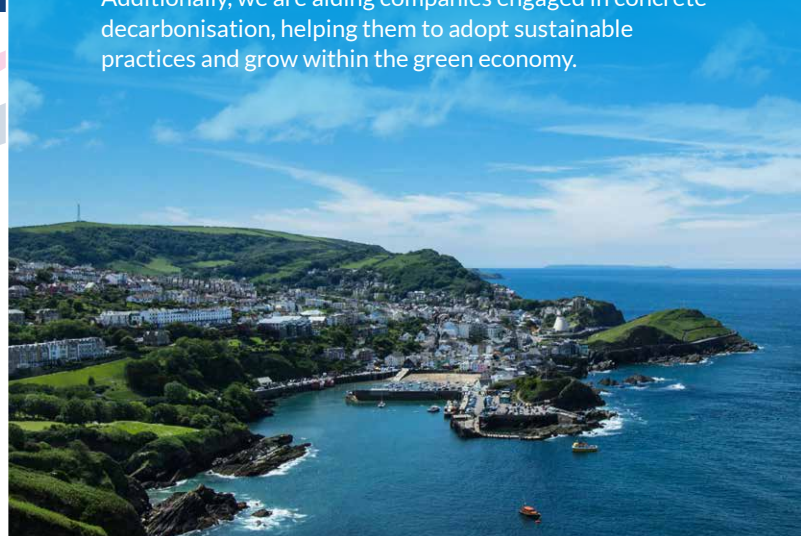
**CELTICSEAPOWER**  
PWYMAORCELTAYDD | NERTHMORKELEK

## Development of Commercial Opportunities for the Clean Growth Agenda

SWBC actively supports the integration of economic growth with environmental sustainability. We have played a pivotal role in aiding Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) projects in the Celtic Sea, enhancing their ability to secure business and integrate into regional economic strategies. These efforts extend to examining how these projects can advance the aims of the North Devon Biosphere, ensuring that economic activities complement environmental conservation.

In the hydrogen sector, our efforts have been centred on linking hydrogen producers with potential off-takers, particularly in maritime and logistics applications. Our partnership with Hydrogen South West has been vital in fostering a robust market for hydrogen as a clean energy source.

We supported the Crown Estate's sustainable development ambitions and explored innovative initiatives like marine carbon sequestration, aligning them with desalination projects to maximise environmental benefits. Additionally, we are aiding companies engaged in concrete decarbonisation, helping them to adopt sustainable practices and grow within the green economy.





# Promotion and Support of Trade Mission Opportunities

This year, we have intensified our efforts to bolster trade mission opportunities, enhancing both economic growth and international partnerships.

One highlight was our sponsorship of the Diversity Business Incubator's Annual Awards. This key event supports the enhancement of trade relations between the UK and other global territories, reinforcing our commitment to international trade development.

Additionally, we have proactively engaged with international investors, offering strategic support to help them establish and thrive in the South West. Our tailored assistance ensures these international projects are effectively integrated into our local economy, fostering growth and opening new opportunities for regional businesses.



***The South West Business Council champions our mission and helps us make a difference in the BAME community."***

Jabo Butera, Managing Director, Diversity Business Incubator



## Support of Inward Investment Opportunities

We effectively leverage our professional services network to enhance inward investment, particularly in energy transition and natural capital sectors. We've assisted members in accessing diverse funding sources to foster business growth across the South West.

We supported the Great South West's efforts to organise and deliver a compelling series of events at UK REiF in Leeds. These events showcased the region's capabilities and potential to a national audience, further attracting interest and investment.

Our involvement with the Gravity project, especially around the new Agratas battery plant, has opened supply chain opportunities for local businesses with significant industrial developments.





## Conferences and Networking Events

By organising and participating in a series of impactful conferences and networking events over the past year, we have fostered collaboration across key regional issues.

We partnered with the South West Mobility Commission to host a highly successful Social Mobility Conference, chaired by Sir Michael Barber. This event featured discussions led by Pennon Group, The Times and The University of Exeter, enhancing our understanding and strategies around social mobility.

Our focus on cutting-edge technology led us to organise a major conference on Artificial Intelligence, where then Shadow Minister for AI and IP, Matt Rodda, was the keynote speaker. This conference attracted widespread media attention, including coverage from BBC TV and Radio.

We also launched a series of networking lunches that brought together leaders from business, academia, local government, and the third sector to discuss ongoing economic developments within the region.

Our 2023 Annual Dinner at The Box in Plymouth gathered over 110 senior stakeholders and featured a keynote speech by Bridget Rosewell CBE from the National Infrastructure Commission, promoting dialogue on infrastructure and regional development.

Our 2024 Annual Dinner at the same cultural venue was held on the night of the general election and included a keynote speech from Vice Admiral Andrew Burns CB OBE, Fleet Commander of the Royal Navy.



***Our membership of SWBC provides us with a focused view of the South West economy, including new and growing sectors, to benefit our mission of developing skills pathways to meet employers needs."***

Chris Evans, Interim Director of Innovation, Impact and Business, University of Exeter



***SWBC is an amazing organisation bringing expertise and a credible board with a wide reach within the South West. They really do champion our region."***

Pete Woodward,  
CEO, Securious Limited

**SECURI!OUS**  
Network and data security

## Stakeholder Engagement

### Activities include:

Regular engagement with MPs, Members of the House of Lords and central government departments on matters relating to the South West.

Support of our board members in joining the board of regional focussed entities in order to share insight and learning.

Collaboration with other business membership networks including ICAEW, the South West Tourism Association, the National Composites Centre, Engineering UK, the Chambers of Commerce, and the FSB.

Maintenance of a diverse board to ensure our strong reach into a very broad set of stakeholders.

Represent the South West, alongside other regional stakeholders, by sitting on the board for the Centre for Resilience in Environment Water and Waste.

# Operations Team



ANDREW SEARLE  
Head of Operations

Andrew looks after member invoicing; supplier payments and the accounting function in general. He also works with the rest of the team to support the South West Business Council's growing network of members and is principally responsible for managing key accounts.



PAUL COLES  
Chief Executive Officer

Paul leads the South West Business Council team and oversees the delivery of core strategic objectives. He acts as the main interface, alongside our Chair, with members and key stakeholders. Paul has a passion for innovation and digital which he brings to bear when seeking to advance the South West economy.



LEAH ERDRINK  
Marketing and PR Manager

Leah is responsible for day-to-day digital marketing and PR activity for the South West Business Council and plays a key role in the development and implementation of creative and strategic campaigns.



JO HATT  
Membership Coordinator

Jo works closely with the CEO, Operations Manager and Boards to support the South West Business Council's operations. She also liaises with members and helps organise events, including quarterly conferences and the SWBC Annual Dinner.



EMMA ANDERSON  
Marketing & PR Executive

Emma is responsible for supporting the delivery of day-to-day digital marketing and PR activity for the South West Business Council and provides assistance to the Marketing and PR Manager in delivering regular creative and strategic campaigns.



***We value SWBC's broad national and international perspective, its advocacy on behalf of the region, its engagement with emerging and existing sectors, and its organisation of conferences and other meetings."***

Sally Basker, CEO, Exeter Science Park



To find out more about becoming a member of the South West Business Council, please visit: [www.southwestbusinesscouncil.co.uk/membership](http://www.southwestbusinesscouncil.co.uk/membership)



Unit D3, Apollo Court Neptune Park,  
Plymouth, Devon, PL4 0SJ

Tel: 01752 395665 Email: [info@swbc.co.uk](mailto:info@swbc.co.uk)

@swbctweets @South West Business Council

[www.southwestbusinesscouncil.co.uk](http://www.southwestbusinesscouncil.co.uk)