

**The Sharpham Trust**  
**Strategic Plan**  
**2026 – 2031**  
**Summary**

## Our Purpose

The Sharpham Trust offers access to an inspiring, nourishing environment in order that people have the opportunity to participate and explore what gives meaning to their lives through interaction with the natural world and each other.

### **Our Principles**

The principles guiding the Trust's activities are

- *an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life*
- *a deep respect for the natural world*
- *a belief in learning through experience*
- *creative engagement and enquiry*
- *an acknowledgement of the value of stillness and awareness*

The Trust aspires to be a living demonstration of these principles in all its activities.

### **Our Vision**

“To create a more mindful, compassionate and sustainable world”

### **Our Mission**

“To connect people with nature and foster mindfulness and wellbeing”

## The Sharpham Approach

The rationale and detailed description of the 'process orientated' approach to developing the Sharpham Strategic Plan is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is an experiment in developing strategic thinking that arises from listening and seeing what is already happening at Sharpham. By deeply listening to Sharpham, the external context and ourselves we begin to see what is already emerging. This process also invites a way of developing strategy that allows a shift from our thinking and conceptual minds into sensory and embodied experience.

This way of developing strategy, begins to draw on practices that reflect Sharpham pedagogies. In particular, cultivating mindful awareness and compassion based on practices such as sensing and deep listening, contemplative inquiry, movement and embodied awareness, dialogue and open conversation, for example. In a sense, it is strategy of the heart-mind. Further, it allows a more pluralistic and participatory way of working together which is captured in the following African proverb:

'When you want to walk fast, walk alone. When you want to walk far, walk together'.

The Sharpham strategic process is beginning to evolve our understanding and practice of how change happens through shifting how we perceive the world. Thus, the cultivation of mindfulness and compassion at Sharpham highlights the relationship between inner structures of the mind and outer structures in the physical world that are often overlooked in mainstream approaches, say to climate change.

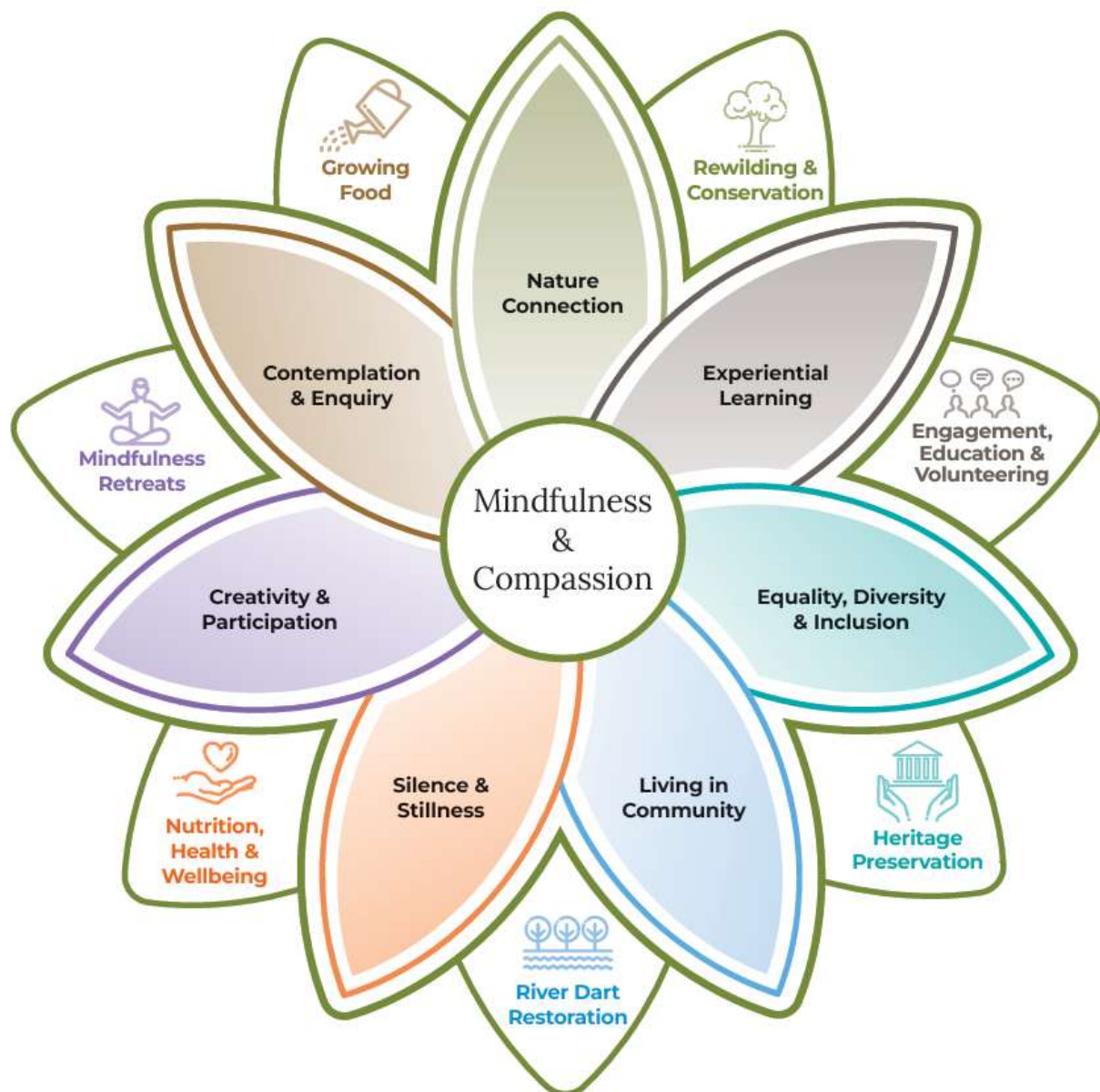
"Climate change is a physical reality, demanding urgent political and practical solutions. But its inner dimension, overlooked entirely by mainstream approaches, is a crisis of relationship...This grave shortcoming is rooted in the same pathology that drives the crisis: lack of conscious connection with ourselves, with others and with the world we share" [Bristow et. al., 2022, p.5]<sup>1</sup>.

At Sharpham, mindfulness and compassion are cultivated through various practices [such as contemplative inquiry and nature connection] in our programs and organisational life. These, and other secular practices are important ways of shifting minds and hearts to realise our deep interconnectedness with other fellow human beings and nature. The intention is to bring compassionate awareness to undermine unconscious habits, cultures and views that foster discriminating, competitive and extractive behaviours, for example.

The illustration below shows how all our work is underpinned by mindfulness and compassion which we foster through a range of practices such as nature connection, creativity and/or contemplation, and deliver through a variety of activities such as meditation retreats, growing food or engagement events. Our activities are designed to be accessible to a wide range of audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Bristow, J., Bell, R. and Wamsler, C. [2022]. *Reconnection: Meeting the Climate Crisis Inside Out*. [online] <https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/>. Sheffield, UK: The Mindfulness Initiative.



## Emerging Themes, Aims and Objectives

The 8 emerging themes and associated aims and objectives provide overall direction and purpose for Sharpham over the next five years. They offer broad direction and purpose for Sharpham looking forward which is ambitious and aspirational. The strategy is a living document and will evolve and be adapted in response to changing circumstances and priorities and to ensure operation within a balanced budget and resource capacities.

Across these eight themes there is also an interweave of other important threads. These include: radical deepening; simplicity; resilience; diversity; an indivisible rhythm between inner and outer landscapes; and evolving and learning. It is proposed that the Strategic Five Year Plan be a living document that is regularly reviewed and adapted in response to changing circumstances. This review could take place through regular 'Trustee Retreats'.

The eight key themes that guide the strategy include:

## 1. Evolving Pedagogies and Programmes

The Mindfulness at Sharpham document lays out the vision and practices of mindfulness at Sharpham. The programme currently includes secular mindfulness, contemporary dharma and themed mindfulness retreats. The Evolving Pedagogies document and working group further explores and develops the Sharpham pedagogical approach.

Various ways of deepening and reorientating the programme are proposed including a focus on life transitions; finding deeper purpose; longer programmes and progression pathways; incorporating arts and creative practice and the importance of pilgrimage. The programmes reflect Sharpham's understanding of change processes including how internal patterns of the mind are reflected in outer structures in the world [and vice versa]. For example, rewilding is both part of our sustainable land management strategy as well being part of our pedagogy that explores how encountering a rewilded landscape can provide sensory and embodied experience that challenges certain habits of the mind.

This weaving of the relationship between inner and outer worlds is a recurring theme that is integral to the Sharpham programme. Looking forward, there is greater opportunity to link Sharpham programmes to particular external challenges. The recently launched Rewilding Ourselves is an example of this. There is also potential in other areas as well such as Climate Change from the Inside Out, Decolonising our Minds, Conscious Activism, and following the plight of the River Dart through pilgrimage.

The importance of connecting space, silence and spirit in all we do and be was emphasised to create a space of refuge, sanctuary and spirit of being at the core of all Sharpham programmes.

**Key Aim: We will offer experiential learning opportunities for people to enable them to connect with nature and foster mindfulness, compassion and wellbeing.**

### Key Impacts:

- People feel connected to nature and take actions to care for it
- People have an increased sense of wellbeing in their everyday lives
- People benefit from volunteering opportunities on the Estate

## 2. Property and Buildings

Sharpham will continue to restore and maintain the built heritage across the Estate. This is critical to ensure that Sharpham remains a 'special place' that continues to inspire and transform hearts and minds. This applies as much to maintaining Sharpham's heritage landscape as well as increasing biodiversity through a variety of sustainable land management practices – including organic and regenerative farming, rewilding and reforestation. Ongoing plans for property development of the Estate assets will be undertaken with this in mind as well as to enhance user experience.

**Key Aim: We will ensure Sharpham remains a "special place."**

### Key Impacts:

- Sharpham's heritage is maintained in good condition
- People feel connected to Sharpham

## 3. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Sharpham is committed to providing an inclusive environment for all. We recognize that inequalities are woven into the structure of society and that there will be barriers that might prevent access to our

programme. We are committed to ensure that our retreats and courses are widely accessible and that people who come to Sharpham feel welcome, safe and accepted for who they are.

We recognize that celebrating diversity, difference and relatedness is at the core of creating healthy communities and ecosystems. We acknowledge that we have inherited habits, cultures and views that will sometimes result in unconscious bias, and at Sharpham we strive to uncover and undermine these. Our programmes provide opportunities to cultivate mindfulness and compassion as ways to dismantle structures within ourselves, organisations and communities that may lead to marginalization, alienation and suffering.

**Key Aim: We will increase participation in our programme by a more diverse range of audiences.**

**Key Impacts:**

- Participant feedback is positive
- Participants from under-represented groups increase
- Our programme demonstrates equality and diversity principles in action

#### 4. Land-Water

The Estate land of 550 acres and its 3 mile water frontage includes: the River Dart, soils, food, agri-wilding (rewilding and regenerative farming), forests, wild and biodiverse spaces, gardens and heritage landscape. This diversity and the sheer beauty and magnificence of the land and riverscape are recognised as being critical for Sharpham as a 'special place' for transformative experience.

Sustainable land and water practices remain at the core of the Sharpham Trust strategy and as a foundation for our programme of retreats, education and training. Over the next five years this will continue to be a priority and further developed particularly in relation to sustainable food production; fostering healthy soils and enhancing biodiversity; reducing pollution and carbon footprint; as well playing our part to improve conditions of the River Dart.

**Key Aim: We will manage the land sustainably for the benefit of all life in order to increase biodiversity and food production and reduce environmental impacts.**

**Key Impacts:**

- Biodiversity increases across the Estate
- Food production on the Estate increases
- Our environmental impacts reduce

#### 5. Financial abundance and resilience

This is a recurring theme that emerged in response to the external challenges of uncertainty and instability, and rising costs of living. This is creating internal pressures to grow in order to balance budgets which is being felt throughout the organization as reflected in various consultation documents.<sup>2</sup>

Due to good financial management, the Sharpham Trust is fortunate enough to have healthy capital reserves. A strong financial buffer and good financial investment is an important element of financial resilience moving into the next five years.

Priority is also given to diversifying income streams including developing new business opportunities, investing in education and training, expanding accommodation and facilities to host larger groups, future-proofing the Estate buildings and infrastructure, as well as exploring fundraising opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> Including the staff survey [2024]; Strategy consultation with staff, Trustees and Leaders [July 2024]; and the Sharpham Strategic Plan 2024-30 Draft V1.

**Key Aim: We will ensure the long-term resilience of the Trust.**

**Key Impacts:**

- The Trust operates a balanced budget
- We future-proof the Estate buildings and infra-structure
- Organisational resilience is increased
- Fundraising increases

## 6. Social/Community

In its widest form, community includes for example, celebrating and investing in the wellbeing of Sharpham staff, and developing our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion [including recommendations coming out of the decolonising work]. There is recognition of the busyness and stress sometimes created by the pressure to grow in order to balance budgets in the current economic climate. The importance of supporting staff and volunteers including the need of regular gatherings of staff and the wider Sharpham community is a priority.

Another priority is to strengthen the compassion aspect of our work. Suggestions include hosting compassionate conversations around difficult, contemporary issues. The Trust already works with conflict and trauma and it is recognized that there is potential to extend this work to other audiences, seeking partnerships with other organisations when appropriate. The importance of living and learning with diverse and mixed groups is emphasized.

**Key Aim: We will strengthen the Sharpham community.**

**Key Impacts:**

- People feel more connected to Sharpham and our values
- Staff feel well supported
- The Sharpham community is more diverse

## 7. Pioneering leadership and governance

There is appetite for exploring what a pioneering form of leadership and governance might look like for Sharpham. This will be explored over the next five years including how nature and greater diversity can be represented on the Trustee Board, to seeing how organisational processes might mirror the Sharpham pedagogical way.

**Key Aim: We will demonstrate Pioneering Leadership**

**Key Impacts:**

- The Trustee Board is more diverse
- EDI policies are implemented and demonstrated
- The Trust is recognized as being a leader in the fields it works in

## 8. Telling our story

Sharpham is quietly radical, living its values through practice, thought leadership and advocacy. It now has considerable experience of how shifting mindsets is an important force for making change in the external world and particularly in offering an alternative response to contemporary challenges. Over the next five years, we will continue to deepen ways to communicate our experience and to offer alternatives to dominant narratives. This could be an important vehicle to communicate the values and work of Sharpham to a wider audience for greater influence.

**Key aim: We will effectively tell our story**

**Key Impacts:**

- Feedback from programme users remains positive
- We reach a wider audience who are aware of our work and values
- Our ideas and practices feed into policymaking & decision-taking locally and nationally

## Sharpham Theory of Change

<b>OUR VISION</b>	To create a more mindful, compassionate and sustainable world			
<b>OUR VALUES</b>	An understanding of the interconnectedness of all life			
	A deep respect for the natural world			
	A belief in learning through experience			
	Creative engagement and enquiry			
	An acknowledgement of the value of stillness and awareness			
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>Mindfulness Programme:</b> Mindfulness Retreats Training Courses Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	<b>Volunteering:</b> Horticulture Conservation Archive Residential Trustees	<b>Engagement &amp; Education:</b> Events Schools Weddings Natural Burials Access routes Property Lettings	<b>Conservation:</b> Organic Farming & Growing Rewilding Woodland River Dart Buildings
<b>OUTPUTS</b>	Themed Retreats Teacher led Retreats Mindfulness Courses Training Nutrition & Health programme	Weekly volunteering days Volunteering placements Board Meetings	School visits Open Days Nature connection events Heritage events Interpretation Ceremonies	Improved Habitats Increased Biodiversity Food Production Well Maintained Buildings
<b>MEASURES</b>	No of retreats No of participants Feedback	No of volunteers No of hours	No of events No of participants Feedback	Wildlife Surveys Food Produced
<b>SHORT TERM OUTCOMES</b>	Participants learn mindfulness and meditation techniques	Participants learn new skills	Participants develop a sense of connection to Sharpham's ethos and values	Sharpham's environmental impacts are minimised
	Participants engage with the natural environment	The fabric of the Estate is cared for and conserved	Participants learn about the built and natural environment	Wildlife on the Estate is enhanced
	Participants mental health is enhanced	Participants mental health is enhanced	Participants can access the Estate in sustainable ways	Food is produced to consume on the Estate
	A wide range of audiences participate	The Trust is well governed	We build a sense of the Sharpham community	The needs of the River Dart are considered in all decisions
<b>LONG TERM OUTCOMES</b>	People feel connected to nature and take actions to care for it			
	People have an increased sense of wellbeing in their everyday lives			
	Sharpham's natural environment and wildlife is protected and enhanced			
<b>OUR IMPACT</b>	To connect people with nature & foster mindfulness and wellbeing			

