



The Forest of Dean UNESCO Biosphere

A Boost for Local Business

Summary of the potential Benefits to Local Business • 2026

This document summarises the main benefits of a Forest of Dean District biosphere to local businesses within the Forest of Dean District. This summary is based on wider research exploring the local economy and potential prosperity indicators.

Further information and regular updates are provided through the biosphere webpages

[Forest of Dean's UNESCO Biosphere Bid - Forest of Dean District Council](#)

A Boost for Local Business

Business performance in the Forest of Dean District is shaped by more than sector output. Turnover, recruitment costs, supply chain depth, insurance exposure and investment confidence are influenced by the condition of the local economy's foundations. Housing availability, skills retention, transport reliability, service stability and environmental quality all affect commercial outcomes.

In a Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) dominated, place anchored economy, businesses and households operate within the same economic system. When that system is stable, value circulates more effectively, labour markets are more reliable and operating risk reduces. When it is fragile, costs surface through staff churn, supply chain disruption, reduced demand strength and income leakage. In other words, a focus on our own specific economy and wider prosperity for residents give us the opportunity to support local businesses, keep money in the area and ensure Foresters enjoy the benefits of their own economy.

The biosphere framework draws on a set of prosperity indicators designed specifically around the unique place and economy that is the Forest of Dean District. It concentrates on strengthening those commercially material conditions so they can benefit everyone. It provides a governance structure that supports productive assets, improves local value retention and reduces structural volatility. These factors directly influence profitability, resilience and long term competitiveness.

What follows sets out how this translates into measurable commercial advantage for the Forest of Dean Districts businesses.

1. Local Income Retention Drives Turnover

The Biosphere Boost: Biosphere designation creates a formal partnership structure across councils, anchors and major landowners, making it easier to align procurement policies, agree local supply chain targets and coordinate branding under a recognised international designation. That coordination increases the share of institutional and visitor spend captured by locally owned firms.

The Forest of Dean District has high employment but relatively weak workplace containment in higher-paid roles. When income is earned outside the district or profits are extracted externally, local spending power thins out.

For businesses, this affects:

- Retail and service turnover
- Business to business (B2B) trade between the Forest of Dean Districts firms
- Multiplier strength from local growth

Improving income retention increases effective demand density. Even small increases in locally circulating income have measurable impact in SME-dense economies.

Evidence in Practice: Preston & Community Wealth Building:

Between 2013–2017, Preston shifted major anchor procurement (council, university, NHS, police) toward local suppliers.

Results:

- Local procurement by anchor institutions increased from 5% to 18%
- Spend within Lancashire rose from 39% to 79%
- An additional £200m+ was retained in the regional economy over five years
- Preston “most improved city” on the UK’s “Good Growth for Cities” index (PwC/Demos)

For the Forest of Dean Districts businesses, even modest improvements in income retention and procurement alignment can materially increase B2B trade and local turnover.

2. Workforce Stability Lowers Operating Costs

The Biosphere Boost: Biosphere status strengthens bids for skills, transport and housing funding by demonstrating clear integrated place governance. It also provides a platform for employers to co design workforce initiatives with education providers and councils, improving retention and reducing recruitment volatility.

Recruitment and retention pressures are linked to structural factors:

- Housing accessibility
- Care availability
- Transport reliability
- Connectivity

When these are unstable, employers absorb the cost through:

- Staff turnover
- Absenteeism
- Reduced productivity
- Increased recruitment spend

Tracking and strengthening these upstream conditions improves labour-market stability and reduces hidden cost pressures.

Evidence in Practice: Manchester & The Good Employment Charter

Reported outcomes from participating firms include:

- Reduced staff turnover among participating firms

- Lower recruitment costs
- Improved productivity and retention in tight labour markets

Research indicates that replacing an employee costs between 20–30% of annual salary in recruitment and productivity loss, depending on the role.

Improving housing access, care reliability and transport stability in the Forest of Dean District reduces the churn cost employers already absorb.

3. Local Ownership Increases Revenue Effectiveness

The Biosphere Boost: A formal, recognised Biosphere Partnership can formalise collaboration between anchor institutions and local suppliers, support cooperative and SME networks, and embed local ownership objectives within strategic planning frameworks, increasing the proportion of turnover that recirculates within the district.

In externally owned sectors, profit and procurement decisions are often made outside the district. This reduces reinvestment and weakens supply-chain depth.

Where ownership is local:

- Spend recirculates more frequently
- Supplier relationships deepen
- Shock resilience improves

Indicators that strengthen local ownership, procurement alignment and SME collaboration increase retained value per pound of turnover.

This improves economic efficiency, not just activity levels.

Evidence in Practice: Clevedon & Evergreen Co-operatives

Results:

- Millions in anchor procurement redirected locally
- Wealth-building for residents in low-income neighbourhoods
- Demonstrable increases in local recirculation compared to externally owned supply chains

New Economics Foundation Local Multiplier 3 (LM3) research shows locally owned firms can retain 2–3 times more value per £1 spent compared to national chains.

For the Forest of Dean District, with its high SME density, strengthening local supply-chain depth increases economic effectiveness without requiring new external growth.

4. Service Resilience Reduces Commercial Risk

The Biosphere Boost: Biosphere governance requires cross sector coordination on land, infrastructure and service management. That coordination enables earlier identification of

transport, care and infrastructure pressures, allowing preventative action before disruption impacts employers.

Business continuity relies on stable surrounding systems.

Fragility in:

- Health and care
- Local transport
- Utilities
- Community infrastructure

This translates into operational disruption.

Monitoring service resilience enables earlier intervention and improves day-to-day reliability for employers.

Predictable operating conditions reduce investment hesitation.

Evidence in Practice: Bristol & The Resilience Strategy

Bristol's resilience planning integrated flood management, infrastructure risk mapping and community preparedness.

Outcomes:

- Reduced insurance exposure in high-risk zones
- Greater investor confidence in redevelopment areas
- Increased inward investment linked to climate resilience positioning

Research on UK resilience investment, including Environment Agency analysis, indicates that every £1 invested in flood and climate resilience can save between £4 and £10 in avoided damage.

In rural economies like the Forest of Dean District, service fragility (transport, care, infrastructure) similarly creates commercial vulnerability. Early monitoring reduces downstream cost.

5. Environmental Condition Protects Sector Advantage

The Biosphere Boost: Biosphere status brings monitoring obligations and stewardship standards that improve long term land and water management, rubber stamping the stewardship already at work in the Forest of Dean District. It also strengthens access to environmental investment funding, protecting the natural assets that underpin manufacturing, agriculture and tourism.

Many of the Forest of Dean Districts sectors are land- and reputation-dependent:

- Manufacturing and engineering (site stability, logistics reliability)
- Agri-food and land-based industries
- Construction
- Tourism and visitor services

Environmental degradation increases regulatory exposure, insurance risk and asset vulnerability.

Stewardship indicators protect long-term sector viability and investment confidence.

Evidence in Practice: Lake District, World Heritage & Stewardship Model

Environmental stewardship strengthened the Lake District's global brand positioning.

Economic outcomes:

- Tourism value £2.4bn annually
- Strong premium branding for local produce
- Investment stability linked to landscape protection

For manufacturing and agri-food sectors, natural capital condition also affects:

- Water security
- Soil stability
- Supply reliability
- Compliance costs

Environmental indicators protect both nature and productive assets.

6. Clarity Improves Investment Decisions

The Biosphere Boost: International designation signals clear long term strategic continuity and recognised governance maturity. Investors and lenders interpret that as reduced policy volatility and clearer direction, lowering perceived risk for expansion and capital investment.

SMEs invest when future costs and constraints are visible.

The indicators track:

- Labour stability
- Housing and service access
- Supply-chain depth
- Natural capital condition

- Value retention

This improves foresight and reduces uncertainty.

Capital investment is more likely when risk factors are measured and governed rather than left implicit.

Evidence in Practice: Copenhagen, Integrated Sustainability & Economic Strategy

Copenhagen integrated climate, infrastructure and economic indicators into municipal investment planning.

Results:

- Strong inward investment in green technology sectors
- Consistently high international competitiveness rankings
- Reduced long-term infrastructure cost volatility

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research shows that cities with integrated long-term environmental and economic planning experience:

- Lower borrowing costs
- Higher investor confidence
- Stronger productivity growth over time

For the Forest of Dean Districts businesses, measurable structural conditions reduce uncertainty and support capital investment decisions.

7. What Businesses Gain

If the framework works as intended, employers should see:

- Stronger local demand
- Reduced recruitment volatility
- Deeper B2B trade
- Lower indirect operating costs
- More reliable infrastructure
- Increased investor and funder confidence
- Enhanced brand positioning through Biosphere status

The Boost to the Bottom Line:

- Stronger local demand through higher income retention and better procurement alignment.

- Lower recruitment and churn costs through improved housing, care and connectivity stability.
- More effective turnover as local supply chains deepen and value circulates more frequently.
- Reduced operating risk through earlier coordination on infrastructure, service and environmental pressures.
- Improved investment confidence through clearer long-term governance and strategic direction.
- Stronger brand positioning for place-dependent sectors via internationally recognised designation.