



Environment and Energy Board

Date	7 December 2022
Report title	WMCA Environment Programme Update
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Environment Board is recommended to:

- 1) Note the progress across the WMCA environment programme
- 2) Suggest any areas for future update at the Environment and Energy Board meetings

1. Purpose

To provide an update to the Board on the progress across the environment work by the respective team at the WMCA, including a forward look on priorities over the next 3 years.

2. Background

The Environment Programme

2.1 The WMCA environment programme has grown significantly over the last 3 years and our work is increasingly being noticed at a national level and receiving recognition for its quality and ambition. The most recent example of this was securing the A score from the Carbon Disclosure Project, which now gives international recognition for our work. The programme has 5 strands, with associated plans or strategies produced or in development:

- #WM2041 green paper – this paper outlined the direction for the WMCA's net zero and environment agenda – published January 2019 - <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s3856/Appendix.pdf>



- Behaviour change – July 2021 – not published
- WMCA Natural Environment Plan – published September 2021 - <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/zi2jv0s5/natural-environment-plan.pdf>
- WMCA Circular Economy Routemap – published September 2021 - <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s5989/Appendix%202.pdf>
- Summary of Climate Impacts for the WM – published November 2022 - <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/d2pons0q/summary-of-climate-change-impacts-in-wmca-area.pdf>
- Air Quality Framework – in development

2.2 Over the next 3 years, our priority is to transition the programme (summary overview in Appendix 1) from planning into a delivery/investment phase, as well as influencing and advising other areas of activity through integration. This paper provides updates on a selection of WMCA environment programme key initiatives from the above programme areas for discussion at the Environment and Energy Board.

Natural Environment

2.3 The work on natural environment is delivering across a range of programmes, including Community Green Grants (an update came to the Environment and Energy Board in September); tree planting; and establishing the West Midlands Walking Trail. We are also engaging strategically with Defra on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and financing for natural environment projects across the region.

2.4 **Community Green Grants.** To date, we have awarded just under £245k in grants: 9 small grant projects funded (5 Birmingham, 2 Walsall, 1 Wolverhampton, 1 Coventry) and the first large grant (£100k). We are working to identify funding to extend and broaden the programme to support community environment projects more generally.

2.5 The Environment Team is developing the following programmes to accelerate and coordinate tree planting across the region:

- **West Midlands Forest Partnership**, funded through the Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Fund, aimed to bring different organisations together to coordinate more effectively on tree planting. There is an additional paper on the Partnership at this Board meeting.
- **Virtual Forest.** The website (www.wmvirtualforest.co.uk) allows everyone who has planted a tree in the region to register its location and type, so that we can track planting numbers. The site also hosts advice and links to partners involved in tree planting across the region. Current planting total since January 2020 is just over 270,000.
- **Community tree giveaways.** The Environment Team is attending a number of community events to give out trees provided by the Woodland Trust.

2.6 The **West Midlands Walking Trail** is listed in our Natural Environment Plan. An outline route has been developed and we are preparing a business case to take the trail forward for funding.

- 2.7 Strategic programmes. There are two main projects:
- The **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**. The WMCA has been invited to be the responsible authority for an LNRS. We are awaiting the guidance from DEFRA to finalise approach.
 - **Natural Environment Investment Fund**. This is a further commitment in the Natural Environment Plan. An 'invitation to tender' will be published shortly to identify a partner to help us understand the route to establish a Fund. This will set about scoping the potential range of options for natural environment projects and initiatives in the WM region that may be suitable to explore further to develop investable propositions that could attract private finance. This is also part of the TDD asks to DEFRA.

Circular Economy update

- 2.8 The Environment Team has been working to deliver commitments made in the September 2021 WMCA Board paper that accompanied the Circular Economy Routemap. There are three key pieces of work underway: the industrial symbiosis business case, a framework to support repurposing of buildings and a business case to reduce construction waste.
- 2.9 **Industrial symbiosis** is an approach to industrial decarbonisation which involves the direct reuse of one company's waste streams, as another's raw products, and is a proven method of creating significant business savings, whilst also reducing carbon emissions and contributing to a region's competitiveness and supply chain resilience. A business case for a regional industrial symbiosis programme has been created, alongside business partners, local authorities, and central government. We are now pursuing funding options.
- 2.10 **Repurposing to Zero**. Building repurposing is the process of reusing an existing building, for a purpose other than that for which it was originally designed. When a building is repurposed, it can also be retrofitted to improve its energy efficiency; this can reduce the carbon emissions associated with schemes by up to 70% and reduce the costs by 10%. A 'Repurposing to Zero Framework' has been prepared to offer guidance on how to approach a repurposing project.
- 2.11 **Zero Waste Construction Hubs** would see a materials recovery hub operating in the West Midlands, to reclaim usable materials from building sites which would otherwise be sent to landfill (the construction sector is currently responsible for around 55% of all waste produced in the region). Consultants were appointed in August 2022 to support the WMCA in creating an investible model for a Zero Waste Construction Hub in the region.

Air Quality Framework

- 2.12 In February 2022, the WMCA Board approved the development of an Air Quality Framework for the region. This will complement the Air Quality Action Plans currently led by the constituent local authorities. The development of the Framework is timely, given that we are anticipating new air quality targets from the Environment Act (2021). These will include new targets for pollution from particulate matter.

- 2.13 The Framework is being developed in conjunction with Environmental Health, Planning and Public Health Officers in the local authorities. The work is being led by a secondee from WSP, who is sitting within the Environment Team at the WMCA. The work is supported by the University of Birmingham's WM-Air team who were also instrumental in producing the paper that went to the February CA Board. The Framework was due to return to the CA Board early next year, but the delay to the publication of the national air quality targets will result in delays to finalising the Framework.
- 2.14 Whilst the Framework might be delayed, work is continuing on planning for significant behaviour change campaigns linked to reducing air pollution from particulates, particularly from domestic log burning. This is being initiated through winter and spring 22/23; this work will hopefully form the precursor to a DEFRA air quality grant of just under £1m. An application for the grant was submitted in September (with the outcome due in March) to support monitoring and behaviour change campaigns in all 7 constituent authorities of the WMCA.

Climate Adaptation

- 2.15 Climate adaptation has received much less attention and resource as part of the climate emergency, compared to the journey to net zero. The planet has already warmed by 1.1°C since the industrial revolution and is on course for 3°C temperature rise, far above the advisable Paris Commitment target of 1.5°C. As extreme weather events become more common and severe, people, infrastructure and the environment will be adversely affected with significant knock-on implications for our economy. Adaptation will become an increasingly important part of the climate emergency response.
- 2.16 WMCA commissioned work earlier in 2022 to begin our work on adaptation. This has included:
- Summary of climate change impacts for the WMCA area – this was recently published to coincide with COP27 adaptation day.
 - An Adaptation Plan for the WMCA – we have a plan for how our directorates can build adaptation into their programmes and will be working with them to support next steps.
 - Financing adaptation interventions – we are finalising some work on how adaptation can be funded to help unlock investment in measures.
 - We are engaging with regional partners through WM Adaptation Group funded by Environment Agency.
- 2.17 Adaptation also forms part of the devolution deal proposals for DEFRA. It is in two parts:
1. A clear responsibility and funding for local and regional authorities in relation to climate adaptation. Our recent work indicates that the West Midlands will be particularly vulnerable to extreme heat and surface water flooding in the future. This will affect communities and infrastructure.
 2. Funding to make communities more resilient to the future effects of climate change.

Cross-cutting Work

- 2.18 To mobilise the different parts of the environment programme relies on finance, behaviour change (including community engagement) and business engagement. This work is woven into the different programmes of activity, but there are some key areas that it are important to highlight here.
- 2.19 **Finance.** There are two approaches to sustain the work that has begun through the Environment Team: 1) funding applications (this relies on funding being available to support specific parts of the programme) and 2) identifying routes to different types of investment. With regard to the latter, the work around natural environment financing is probably the most mature, and this was highlighted in Paragraph 2.7. We are also exploring commercial opportunities linked to the circular economy programme, through the business case development, and the Green Finance Institute have supported a piece of work on financing climate adaptation (this also has overlaps with the natural environment financing).
- 2.20 The **behaviour change** work is:
- Delivering **specific campaigns** across programmes. Examples include: the Right Tree, Right Place campaign with community outreach events; a campaign on 'Is Your Home Ready for a Heat Pump?' to ensure homeowners are equipped with knowledge when thinking about retrofit; and, initiating work on air quality behaviour change campaigns.
 - A **Net Zero Citizens' Panel** will also be up and running at the start of 2023. The WMCA will be working with Involve to deliver this. Involve has previously run the national Climate Change Citizens' Assembly for the Climate Change Committee.
 - The **Greener Together Forum** will also continue to meet in different locations across the West Midlands. The Forum is open to anyone to attend and the agenda setting will now be supported through a new Advisory Board that will ensure an inclusive and representative input into the Forum.
 - The **Carbon Literacy Commonwealth Games legacy training** has launched and is freely available for 2,500 members of the public. Learners complete three e-learning modules and one facilitated session online to achieve the Carbon Literacy certificate and accreditation. Training is available until at least 2024.
- 2.21 Finally, the **Net Zero Business Pledge** is working to support West Midlands businesses of all sectors and sizes to be part of the regional journey to net zero. We are working with Sustainability West Midlands as our delivery partner and 2023 will see the launch of a new website to support the Pledge, as well as a toolkit to provide practical support for the business community. 80 businesses have signed up so far.

3. Financial Implications

None from this report.



4. Legal Implications

None from this report.

5. Equalities Implications (*)

There are no specific equalities implications from this report – these will be assessed as project plans and business cases are progressed in more detail.

6. Inclusive Growth Implications

We see the delivery of our environment programme as being very closely tied to the WMCA Inclusive Growth Framework; this will form a key part of the projects and programmes developed. Ensuring our work on environment is fair and provides opportunities and improvements in quality of life for people across the West Midlands is a fundamental part of our approach to delivery. There are significant co-benefits related to health, well-being and economic opportunity, including jobs and skills, linked to the different projects outlined in this report. The whole programme will aim to improve outcomes for people living in the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

7. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

The focus of the activity is on the constituent local authorities of the WMCA. Some of the work will inevitably benefit from a broader geographical reach to the non-constituent authorities.

8. Other Implications

None.

9. Schedule of Background Papers

Note; (*) denotes mandatory field

Appendix 1: Environment Programme





March 2023

March 2024

March 2025

March 2026

