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## WMCA Environment and Energy Insights

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We're Greener Together!

Hello, and welcome to the March Edition of our Environment & Energy Insights bulletin.

In the bulletin, you'll find coverage of the diverse work underway across the region, including air quality, retrofit and climate adaptation.

We will be bringing you a number of editions across 2025 on a bimonthly basis, so please let us know if you have got any stories or news you would like to share in a future edition of Environment & Energy insights. Get in touch at [environment@wmca.org.uk](mailto:environment@wmca.org.uk)

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### News from WMCA

#### Tree Planting: 2,000 trees to be planted

For tree-planting season this year, which is from November to March, the WMCA are building on last years success by giving out 2,000 saplings across the region. Following the publication of the i-Tree Eco survey and the recently released [Tree Equity](#) mapping, the WMCA are working with the Woodland Trust to provide saplings of native species to be planted in gardens, community spaces, schools, and at other nature sites.

Included in the recipients is the Tree Sanctuary in Coventry, [where Mayor Richard Parker braved Storm Darragh to plant a tree alongside Coventry MP Mary Creagh](#). The Mayor said: "Planting nearly 2,000 trees will make a real difference to local communities, creating greener spaces for families to enjoy and improving air quality for everyone."

"I'm committed to delivering a cleaner, healthier region, and this tree-planting programme is just one way we're working to tackle climate change while making our neighbourhoods better places to live."



The WMCA is leading efforts to grow the current population of five million trees by encouraging residents and businesses to register the trees they have planted on the Virtual Forest. The number of new trees registered since 2020 is now approaching 650,000. Residents and community groups can register an interest in saplings or hosting a tree giveaway event in their area at [www.wmca.org.uk/campaigns/forest-partnership/](http://www.wmca.org.uk/campaigns/forest-partnership/)

### Climate Adaptation: Understanding the impacts and risks of climate change

As Storm Darragh demonstrated, climate impacts are already affecting the West Midlands. We all have a role to play in ensuring we are prepared. Over the past 6 months the WMCA have been building a substantial evidence base on the risks and impacts of climate change facing the region as well as the adaptation solutions available for stakeholders and members of the public to deliver.

The recently announced [West Midlands Adapt \(WM-Adapt\)](#) project is a £2m UKRI-funded research project that is being led by the University of Birmingham in close collaboration with the WMCA. Over the next two years the project will drive a step change in local adaptation delivery through three key workstreams:

1. Community-scale adaptation
2. Climate Risk & Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) data enhancements
3. The convening of a Regional Adaptation Network (RAN)

The costs of climate change equate to 0.25 - 0.5 of the additional GVA growth required in the WMCA area to match the UK average growth.



As part of the evidence building work, the WMCA have published an economic impact assessment of climate change on the West Midlands economy. The study quantifies the economic and financial impacts associated with:

- Three historic severe weather events: Storm Doris of 2017, the 2022 summer heatwaves, and the flash floods of 2023
- Different global warming scenarios
- A range of climate risks selected from the national Climate Change Risk Assessment

(CCRA3) which would particularly affect business and industry in the region

The study highlights the significant economic impact that climate change will have on the West Midlands, making a clear case for climate adaptation. To find out more, please read the Executive Summary document [here](#).

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### Community Energy - Get involved

The WMCA has been working to better understand and support community energy groups in the region going forward; learning about the work these groups do, the impact they have on their communities and the latent potential in the region to deliver the ambitions of Great British Energy and the Local Power Plan.

By connecting with community energy groups, the WMCA hopes to gain an understanding of the challenges these groups face, enabling them to work with partners to establish how ensure the necessary support is available, to help them overcome these obstacles and continue to do such great work.

If you are part of a community energy group or have an energy or environment-focused project, we want to hear from you! Please reach out to Rohil Aurora as soon as you can at [rohil.aurora@wmca.org.uk](mailto:rohil.aurora@wmca.org.uk) to share your experiences and challenges. Your input is invaluable in helping us support and empower our local community groups.

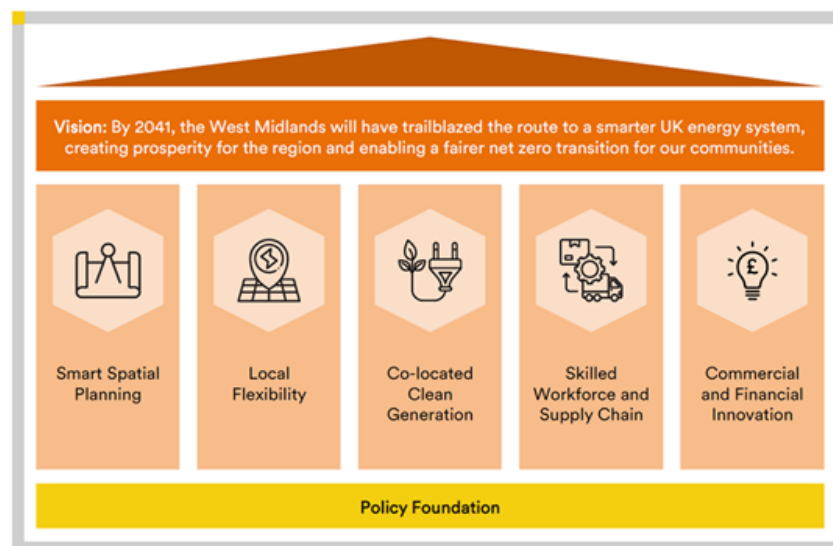
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### New Regional Energy Strategy

On 7th February, the West Midlands Combined Authority Board approved the refreshed West Midlands Regional Energy Strategy. The strategy has been in development since September 2023, and reflects significant changes to the regional context since the first strategy was adopted in 2019.

The new strategy sets out a vision that by 2041, the West Midlands will have trailblazed the route to a smarter UK energy system, creating prosperity for the region and enabling a fairer net zero transition for our communities. It identifies five areas – Smart Spatial Planning, Local Flexibility, Co-located Renewable Energy, Skilled Workforce and Supply Chain, and Commercial and Financial Innovation – that the region will need to prioritise to ensure that the energy transition meets the region's net zero obligations, is affordable, is fair and just, and provides opportunities for investment.

Energy Capital will be producing a range of briefings over the coming months to help stakeholder groups understand what the Regional Energy Strategy will mean for them, including any opportunities to get involved with the delivery in partnership.



### Air quality: delivering a sensor network and behaviour change

The start of 2025 has seen the final installation of the WMCA's air quality sensor network, with the West Midlands now home to one of the biggest sensor networks in the UK, with 90 sensors located across the region. Thanks to funding from central government, this will help provide a better understanding of air pollution in the region, with greater spatial resolution on air pollutant concentrations. The sensor data, along with more information on air pollution in the West Midlands, is now available on the new WM air quality website: [cleanair.wmca.org.uk](https://cleanair.wmca.org.uk)

Alongside the installation of the air quality sensor network, the WMCA has also been engaging with communities on the wider issue of air quality. For example, a local artist has hosted workshops with community groups to develop exhibits which communicate the issue of air pollution faced in the region.



Image shows exhibits developed to show health implications of air pollution on the health of the population across the West Midlands.

The funding from government has also supported the delivery of behaviour change trials, focusing on reducing particulate matter pollution as well as personal exposure to pollution. Trials delivered over 2024 and into 2025 have been on a range of topics, from assessing what messaging resonates most with people to make changes to improve air quality or reduce their personal exposure, to looking at which methods encourage sustainable travel methods within community groups. The WMCA hopes to use the results of trials to upscale projects in the region and use the learning to deliver impactful behaviour change which reduces the level and impact of air pollution.

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## Retrofit Funding and Delivery Success

In April 2025, the WMCA will be beginning a new approach to funding retrofit in the region, having secured an agreement with government for a [Devolved Retrofit Pilot](#). This new approach between national government and the WMCA will devolve funding for grant-funded retrofit schemes to a local level. As the beginning of the Pilot in April edges nearer, the Energy Capital Delivery team are celebrating their progress to date. Across all consortium partners, by the end of March the region will have delivered a total of 11,000 retrofit measures in more than 3,000 homes, utilising £72 million worth of funding.

Beyond April, the Devolved Retrofit Pilot will provide £167m of funding to the region. During a visit to Friar Park in Wednesbury, Sandwell, where 200 social homes are now being improved, the Mayor announced plans for the Pilot, including £36m to improve the efficiency of public sector buildings such as schools and emergency services, and targeting up to 10,000 of the oldest and coldest homes in the West Midlands for upgrades. The funding is expected to unlock further investment in housing of around £80 million from councils and their housing providers.

For more information, please visit our [Devolved Retrofit Pilot](#) website.



Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands, with Holly Farmer, one of thousands of local people whose homes are being retrofitted

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## Greener Together Citizens' Panel

For the past two years we've been working with the Greener Together Citizens' Panel to inform and influence our energy and environment work. The Panel has been influential in ensuring citizens voices are heard and reflected in our policy making. We've engaged with 44 panel members over the two years who have been instrumental in shaping our approaches to air quality, retrofit funding, climate adaptation, bus franchising and most recently, how transport funding could be reallocated to create a climate resilient transport system. You can read more about this in this [Involve UK](#) blog, which can be found [here](#).



While the Panel have been influential in shaping regional policy, it has also been a valuable and interesting experience for each member of the Panel. We have produced a video to hear directly from the Panel members on how they have found being part of this participatory and deliberative process: <https://youtu.be/eggU9usIbD0>

The WMCA was delighted to celebrate the contributions of the Panel at a celebration event on the 30th January, with the Greener Together Panel coming to an end. Given the success of the Panel, we will now be exploring avenues of embedding a citizens' panel within the wider WMCA.

You can see all of the Panels work on our website [here](#).

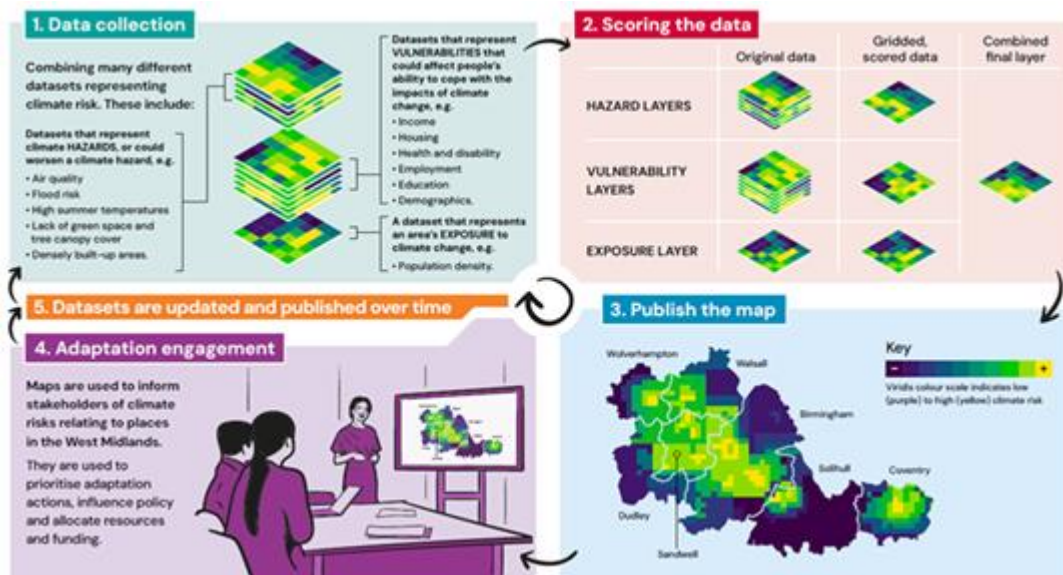


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#### Environment and Net Zero Data Dashboard:

At the end of 2024 the WMCA published the latest phase of the Environment and Data Dashboard, building on the previous phase of the project. The initial phase of the project saw data on the region's greenhouse gas emissions and energy statistics. This latest phase sees data on a broad range of environment themes, such as air quality, circular economy and natural environment.

The dashboard is now also host to a regional Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA), developed in collaboration with the University of Birmingham. The CRVA tool pulls together data relating to climate hazards, fourteen indicators of socio-economic vulnerability and population density across the WMCA area. These datasets are mapped, scored and combined to provide an overall risk and vulnerability scores for different areas – see the infographic attached. The CRVA data has been published at lower super output area (LSOA) resolution to help users identify areas of hyperlocal high climate risk and the factors that contribute to this. To find out more about how this risk and vulnerability assessment has been completed, access the methodology document [here](#).



Finally, the dashboard also captures the locations and variety of the community projects that have received funding through the Community Green Grants and Community Environment Fund.

To view the dashboard, click [here](#).

## Thousands set to benefit from specialist travel support across the West Midlands

Transport for West Midlands is encouraging businesses to apply for the latest discounted ticketing scheme for bus travel.

TfWM is working with local bus operators to get people back on to the network. The Government funded initiative provides free or discounted travel for a set period of time and is open to those who do not use public transport regularly or who are currently driving to their place of work.

By signing up for this support you will be offering your staff an additional choice of how to travel to work and you will also be helping to cut your Scope three carbon emissions. Please note that you can only register an interest as a decision maker on behalf of an organisation and not as an individual.

Should you require any further information or would like to sign up to the scheme, please email [BehaviourChangeHub@tfwm.org.uk](mailto:BehaviourChangeHub@tfwm.org.uk)

## Energy Collaboration Days

Energy Capital host monthly Collaboration Days to encourage businesses, universities, local authorities and community groups to work together towards the vision of a smarter energy system set out in the Regional Energy Strategy. Our February Collaboration Day was held at STEAMhouse in Birmingham, where we heard from partners at National Grid Electricity Distribution, National Grid Electricity Transmission and the National Energy System Operator on the theme of Energy Infrastructure. This highlighted the importance of our strategy's Smart Spatial Planning pillar, as the importance of coordinating inputs to planning processes across local and national

scales became clear. More than 70 people attended in person and online, with plenty of fascinating conversations leading to potential future collaborations across and beyond the energy sector.

In March, Energy Capital will be running its Spring Event to showcase its upcoming work programmes and highlight ways for stakeholders to partner with us. Registration details can be found on the [Energy Capital website](#).

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## Events

The West Midlands Business Festival is taking place this week in March, run by Business Growth West Midlands in partnership with a number of regional organisations. There are a number of relevant events taking place this week:

- Sustainability West Midlands: Weathering the Storm- Climate Resilient Business, 6th of March. Register [here](#).
- Sustainability West Midlands: The Arts & Heritage Sector: Key to Talent Retention and ESG Success, 7th March. Register [here](#)
- Sustainability West Midlands: From Steel to Silicon: Past Lessons, Present Opportunities, Future Visions, 10th March. Register [here](#)
- University of Birmingham Business Club: Sustainability and Decarbonisation, 11th of March. Register [here](#).
- Wolverhampton City Council: A Sustainability and Circular Economy workshop, 13th of March. Register [here](#).

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Thank you for reading this latest edition of the Environment & Energy Insights bulletin. If you would like to hear more about our work, get involved or have any stories or news you would like to share in a future edition, please get in touch at [environment@wmca.org.uk](mailto:environment@wmca.org.uk)

**ENERGY CAPITAL**

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