

West Midlands Natural Environment Summit – breakout session notes

Attendees at the summit went into breakout sessions during the afternoon to discuss a range of questions for each topic area discussed during the morning. Attendees had the chance to answer all three sub-questions during the sessions. The notes below were captured by facilitators and through notes written by attendees during the discussions.

1. Nature-based solutions for our urban challenge

How do we make a stronger case for nature-based solutions delivery?

How do we improve our approach to **measuring and reporting** on the benefits of nature-based solutions?

- Water quality and water scarcity.
- Health data.
- Environment Agency- natural flood plain management.
- Parks Forum's Surveys.
- RICS- house prices? Role of green space.
- Peer review research.
- Rewilding Britain strategy. Explore links between previous research papers.
- What do we measure? Savings (£), recreation value, flood risk, carbon sequestration and air quality.
- UCL have conducted a study into health and nature-based solutions.
- Compare rainfall values.
- Need to work with stakeholders- such as Met Office, Sustainability West Midlands, Universities. This will allow us to work with existing data.
- Data needs to consider assts and benefits.
- Data reference?
- Benefits to health should be highlighted as a priority.
- Level of detail?
- Natural England have existing data.
- Baseline data is missing.
- Better data management structures:
 - Asset registers
 - Flows of benefits
 - Same asset data for multiple purposes: carbon, BNG, transport etc.
- Commission by WMCA to collect data sets.
- Mobile phone data- Midlands Connect.
- Return on investment. High multipliers. Public investment. Education.
- Public health data- e.g. social prescription results.

- Professor Kathleen Woolf. Green cities. Good health web.
<https://depts.washington.edu/hhwb>
- Kickstarter 2.0- sector wide apprenticeships to encourage and inspire people into the sector.
- Different data to consider:
 - Social value/impact data- together with health outcomes.
 - Environmental (carbon, air quality, UHI, biodiversity, flood proximity).
 - Economic.

How can we strengthen the **integration of nature-based solutions into policy** to support delivery?

- ‘Make a better society’ by increasing access to nature (particularly from a young age), such as through encouraging local walking. Community engagement is important, such as community planting events which helps to integrate people into nature.
- Integrate nature-based solutions into planning where there is statutory legislation.
- Engineers tend to go for the easy solution- so need to get subject matter experts in at the start, e.g. before consultation. And treat them with the same respect.
- Need to change the perspectives of engineers to have a more innovative approach and not just the ‘easy’ option’ that leaves nature behind. For example, building SuDs as the centre of a project and not just an add-on?
- Adding urban greening factor into planning.
- Local planning policies are critical. But policy needs to be backed up by investment and investable projects- e.g. GMCA funded nature elements of a project in Mayfield development. There may need to be a financial mechanism, e.g. loans, to deliver benefits.
- Need to capture evidence of benefits of public sector investment to catalyse this further in the West Midlands.
- There does need to be a shift away from just focusing on net zero and also considered nature, resilience and a just transition.
- Is there a role for devolved power for planning? LNRS perhaps lacks the weight of planning power.
- Need a national land-use strategy and a regional one too.
- Need to work on existing connections- e.g. canals, railways etc. This will increase connection to outer-urban areas. This is being done but not at scale and is fragmented.
- Need to seize the opportunity for change- taking new opportunities.
- A strategy that focuses on brownfield land and seeks to connect brownfield land across the urban area.
- Would be useful to try to quantify the impact of grey infrastructure- so we know the impact. And then we can add resilience and nature to combat the impact, particularly on valuable infrastructure assets. There needs to be a change of mindset to add a dynamic risk.
- Need officers to build the momentum to get politicians on board. 30x30 goal is a helpful hook into the land use planning.

- Need to link up more with different teams, such as landscape architects. Need to work with the policies that exist, as well as embracing existing frameworks- such as green infrastructure strategies.
- Change the framing to that of an investment, considering risk reduction too.
- How do we engage with the market? For example building a SuDs market, so there is finance for SuDs to be developed into a design phase and is a desired extra. There is an Ofwat funded market doing this in practice.
- Use market power to make developers do better. And connect systems a bit better.
- Different nature-based solutions for different buyers. For example, for asset owners, link in with net zero, e.g. alongside retrofit build in green walls and green roofs. This will help to build in multiple outcomes in development.
- How do we create nature standards- equivalent to EPC ratings, so that there is a metric to work with. Some of these indicators do already exist, such as urban drainage ratings and permeability index. More needs to be done to promote these to asset owners and developers.
- Devolved governments- such as the Combined Authority- can make unviable projects viable by unlocking funding to facilitate that delivery. An option is building in grant conditions that embed nature solutions as a requirement.
- Need to embed green infrastructure framework from Natural England and build this early into development (although this would affect viability). Must also consider blue infrastructure mapping.
- Coventry City Council have developed a design code and have layered green and blue infrastructure mapping to understand the key areas. Design code, which all local authorities are required to develop, could become a driving force. There needs to be more collaboration on design codes across local authorities.

How can delivery be improved by **devolving powers or resources**?

- Mayoral buy-in needed to push agenda (Defra)
- Review infrastructure provider /land insurance policies across WMCA and make savings by changing payment thresholds based on nature-based solutions.
- Align objectives between local transport plan and Natural Environment plan. And integrate the data used to create better mapping.
- Nature-based solutions case is well made for WMCA. Can be better articulated at a finer scale. Strong case: Health, climate, equity, nature and finance.
- Local taxes alter incentives. In planning, set common standards, floor/ceilings- e.g. set the standard for 20% BNG across the 7 constituent local authorities.
- Precedent gives surety.
- Use case studies (good and bad) to demonstrate.
- Holistic/overall whole organisation assessment of cost, impact and maintenance which extend across responsibility lines with the organisation.
- Alignment with WMCA's business. WMCA In-house KPI?
- Agility- in timeline, project scale and execution.
- Support and resources and autonomy.
- Collaboration and integration, including making green corridors, a green infrastructure strategy with LNRS and urban code and SuDs.
- Partnership working:
 - Utility- SuDs with Severn Trent Water
 - Planning and development.

- Environment Agency- catchment and FGA
- Councils- green infrastructure and regulation
- BIDS- giving a vision.

2. Nature recovery in our urban landscape

How do we deliver nature recovery in complex urban landscapes?

How do we engage policy makers and stakeholders in delivering local nature recovery?

- Community mobilisation – pester power
- Influence local plans – public consultations and bottom up pressures.
- Use the power of story to persuade and continuity of messages
- Familiarise local councillors with issues
- Sell the cross multiple benefits for nature and BNG
- Treasury doesn't price in the counterfactual costs – change that mindset
- Problem – cost vs value. Decision makers just see cost.
- Integrated government strategies and cost benefit analysis.
- EIP to include GI and LNRS as mandatory
- Make urban nature statutory – nice to do won't get done
- Develop and use measurable metrics

Examples:

- Lichfield pre BNG model
- Service policies e.g. tree planting grassland
- Wales model – Future Generations Act

How can we optimise the delivery of BNG for the benefit of nature recovery?

- Simplify – calculations / metric. how to use units. All aspects
- More linked in thinking e.g. with LNRS
- Return to mitigation hierarchy with avoidance at the core
- Widen reach of BNG metric
- Metric feedback to keep improving
- Baseline information – biodiversity and geodiversity
- More available units – 30 year timescale not an issue, but where to implement them
- Education and behaviour change to value BNG. Politicians, developers, public (wilder spaces) – make sure it is known to be mandatory.
- Guidance for species – use nature, use what is there, include more than just botany – animals too
- How does BNG work with latest government building target
- BNG units available for transformation of green spaces rather than growth in space?
- Facilitate delivery of within council units – councils cannot make legal agreement with themselves
- Increase the 10% so it is actually improving

How can delivery be improved by devolving powers or resources? (what roles and responsibilities)

- Contributes to a greater sense of regional/local identity when led by local people
- Tipping point
- Devolution can allow more positive engagement with communities

- Important to ensure that people devolving to have the skills and knowledge and capacity deliver
- Right measure, right place
- Upskilling communities to get them interested
- Enabling bottom up engagement rather than top down
- Devolution narrows the gap between the deliverers and the people we want to benefit
- Allows an areas to think about upskilling and capacity building
- Putting more trust in community groups can unlock more resource to work
- Strengthen networks of competent bodies and orgs
- Sam Friedman's failed stated – recommendations for devolution
- Opportunity for participation and engagement
- Allows for more positive journey for people involved.

3. Nature finance

What next for unlocking investment in urban nature?

How do we give confidence to the market to unlock private finance?

- Some examples of using insurance mechanisms- helps to reduce risk.
- Aggregation for scale.
- Pipeline (case studies) track record.
- Education supply and demand
- Data/transparency- proactively and long-term benefit.
- How do we move away from government funding delivery to feasibility?
- Investor education and familiarity.
- How do we build confidence in nature markets? Codes, high integrity.
- What do the investors need? Accelerator programmes.
- Blended finance- to de-risk private investors.
- Innovation and competitive advantage.
- Policy/regulation- are private finance 'have to'.
- Peer-to-peer learning.
- Proof of concept- limits on what to invest in.
- Lower returns for impact generated?
- Standardisation:
 - Consolidating methods for quantifying benefits and outcomes (specific standards) (government backing for methods).
 - Government backed 'natural capital valuation' methodology tool to help understand/standardise across regions/methods.
 - What holds supply side to account?
 - 'Rising tide, raise all boats'- peer pressure sector pathways.
- Demand:
 - Regulate- 'long, loud and legal'.
 - Listen to businesses on how to get their peers moving.
 - Government messaging on 'who should pay for what'- grants in private finance.
 - Power dynamics in supply chains.
 - Place based- show evidence case- you need critical mass.

- Data:
 - Get into risk discussion- make it clear.
- Supply side:
 - Maintenance of confidence- it will be permeant.
 - Confidence scale of seller is real/trusted counterpart.
 - Who can aggregate/underwrite?
 - Aggregation= portfolio effect.
 - Can councils derisk farms/community/landowners. Aggregate risk.
- Investors:
 - Are investors sheep?
 - Behaviour change in investors.
 - Government underwriting/revenue.
- Capacity:
 - Competent and appropriately skilled ecology sectors that has the capacity to advise and monitor.

What priority outcomes in urban areas should we focus on and how do we progress?

- Priority outcomes/strategy should be place based solutions/approaches and cross industry opportunities. Embedding nature in devolution deals also important.
- Layered outcomes linked together. Recognise different benefits and pull together to help the environment.
- Reduce environmental risk to employer investment e.g. in infrastructure and resources. How does nature benefit the?
- Identify dependencies in nature.
- Sense of place so people want to stay play, work.
- N.B. Need clarity from leadership on priorities and therefore accountability. Prioritise stakeholders and their priorities- find the synergies. Identify the benefits to corporations and therefore make them willing to invest. Identify the beneficiaries to others too.
- Quantifying benefits to lead to strategic outputs- need data/evidence to de-risk investment.
- Mapping beneficiaries with benefits and balance priorities.
- Outcomes:
 - Green- tree lined
 - Blue
 - Fresh air
 - Sustainable transport
 - Green infrastructure
 - SuDs
 - Inclusion- what do communities want? Physical/safe access.
- Ownership of nature by the community and engaged communities as important outcomes.
- 'Wilder' areas for those who want them. Something for everyone.
- Co-design by communities and stakeholders. Researching how spaces are used to incorporate into design.
- Education- e.g. benefits to health, as a key outcome.

- Identifying different expectations from communities, such as cultural maps and how it links to nature.
- 'Wildlife is thriving' is a key outcome.
- Provide funding for more open spaces. Make sure what already exists is looked after.
- Using regulation.
- Practical steps include:
 - To learn from mistakes, evolve and celebrate progress made to encourage 'buy-in' to move towards better nature.
 - At the moment there is a struggle to keep up with the changing narrative.
 - Build a guidance base so we can measure additionality. The impact of investment needs to be clear.
 - Use case studies to draw in capital.
 - Give investors confidence.
 - Horizon scan,
 - Vision- clear and ambitious.
 - Connect all the plans that exist.
 - Longer corridors connecting people with nature on the journey and at the destination.
 - Need political will.
 - Constraint and opportunity mapping.
 - Show public the benefits to their health and life span of engaging and living with nature to get consensus and 'buy in'.
 - Get youth involved in deciding what they want for their future- what they want it to feel and look like.
 - Identify buyers of outcomes- compulsory and voluntary markets.
 - Credibility.
- Education, including around design around community and place. This needs a structured audience engagement, needs resource and time and needs red lines.
- Need for alignment of project aspirations with investor expectations.
- BNG should build on BNG, with an overall assessment. Need to feed-in integrity, data, proof and evidence.
- Priority outcome could be flood mitigation- need to work on long/ very long term modelling. Surface flash flood is a threat in urban areas. Heat also highlighted.
- Need more time to derisk the early exploratory work.
- Another priority outcome to consider is aesthetics – property values/ commercial uplift. Can consider beneficiaries, including local businesses.
- Pollution reduction should be considered, especially for large manufacturing industries. There may need to be a market for this, e.g. a congestion charge.
- An outcome to consider is connectivity and also walkability.
- Social equity and health should be considered- would be important to consider the social impact of an investment.
- Consider integrated projects which deliver across more than nature. Multi-outcome may be a better way to frame.
- Another to consider is access to quality green space.

How can delivery be improved by devolving powers or resources?

- Specific investment expertise needed- can this be delivered in house? Or is there a need for a menu of what expertise you need and where to find it?
- At CA level there needs to be more integrated funding, not separate streams for housing, nature, transport etc.
- Green book valuations view nature as 'nice to have', so hard to price it in as standard.
- Local knowledge is extremely helpful, one size does not fit all.
- Both expertise in place and expertise in finance is needed!
- Don't have enough agility or autonomy in LAs- e.g. funding for grey infrastructure is too restrictive.
- Localise ability to raise funding through taxes.
- Who is in charge of convening all these partners and delivering all this stuff? Investors want to speak to one person.
- We need to devolve powers to the right level. For nature, scale is larger than local authority scale.
- Being clear about who investors need to speak to.
- Expectation that public/3rd sector organisations will fund pilots that private investors can scale and learn from, but they don't always have the time and resources.
- Levies increased centrally, local authorities cannot do this.
- Positive use-cases are really helpful- supported by data on benefits.
- Local authorities can be difficult to work with because of slow and over-complex processes. Trusted, but difficult!
- Clear expectations on LAs/CAs as to what functions they are to perform.
- Different organisations should deliver different bits of LNRS according to their functions.
- Politics can slow things down!
- Importance of Combined Authority as a trusted (and professional) intermediary between corporates and project owners.
- Revenue funding (as well as capital funding).
- For delivery, some want more freedom over decision-making. Scope of projects locked down at time A, built out at time B, by which time things have moved on but you're constrained now.
- Devolving powers is great but need leadership- it is not clear about what we are trying to achieve nationally- there is a patchy focus/disparity across the country.
- Local authorities having habitat banks. Gives investors confidence.
- How do private companies view LAs as partners? Does it matter?
- Need more coherence between different bodies and activities around place.
- Able to use local knowledge.
- Ability to drive scalability with regional decisions.
- Regional decisions on infrastructure embedding nature as integral. Local knowledge- gives needs and networks.
- Would be useful to have LA net zero and nature recovery delivery requirements with extra funding and devolved capital. Also to standardise approaches and improve VfM for delivery programmes/projects.
- Local but ensuring national support is there.
- Listen to what's needed and where and thinking about how Government can regulate/provide regulations that deliver better for people.
- Flexibility in:
 - Growing regional markets with local knowledge, with a role for devolved power.

- Growing large £ national markets, with a more centralised role.
 - Sharing knowledge and avoiding silos, with a more centralised role.
- What do we need to retain nationally- is there nationally important infrastructure in relation to the natural environment? Water?
- Ability to get the community on board and not a blocker.
- Devolved capital for experimenting in blended investment.
- Integration with other devolved policy areas- so environment is factored in.
- Making sure there is a compelling business case. Revenue must exceed cost of finance.
- Resource to carry out responsibilities. Legal powers too.
- Alignment between LNRS, local plans, strategy and groups who are able to deliver- NGO's etc. Capacity for delivery organisations to act on opportunities.
- Streamlined funding lines with flexibility (less admin and less competition).
- Combine separate funding streams to enable delivery of multiple benefits.
- Match local supply (e.g. BNG credits) and demand (local pipeline of projects).
- How to deal with catchments that straddle government boundaries?
- Needs to integrate with wider investment programme which is locally determined.
- Duty/incentives to work with neighbours.

4. Local delivery and capacity building

How do we build partnerships, skills and capacity that can include everyone?

What are the **key** opportunities for collaboration and partnerships to support nature delivery in urban areas?

- Sports and play, NHS, social prescribing, jobs centres, careers service,
- New funding/capacity building; Nature Towns and Cities from Heritage Fund
- Bring together grassroots community groups and environmental expertise
- Using existing 'non-nature' partners that are successful in areas e.g. football club outreach, arts group, theatre group, food banks etc.
- Working with faith communities, developers, health and education, culture, transport, health, planning.
- Partnerships need to reflect the make up of local community and be diverse
- Integrate actions from LNRS with Community Action Plans – outreach
- Pooling NC and delivering services at scale
- Local Wildlife Trusts – schools, universities Phd projects, college apprenticeships,
- Education – make the new Natural History GCSE really impactful and apprenticeship routes into natural environment sector
- Nature parks project funded by Department of Education – RHS and Natural History Museum – working with 6,000 schools

How do we build the skills and capacity for nature delivery, especially for diverse and under-represented groups in urban areas?

- Building the aspiration/awareness for nature type jobs at primary school age group
- A more nuanced definition of under-represented groups and the diversity of needs
- Reaching people where they're at – thematically through what people already do i.e. sports – culturally appropriate interests
- Creating ownership through co-design of outdoor spaces – the kinds of jobs that are created
- Perceptions of jobs and future opportunities – seeing nature delivery as a career pathway
- Articulate 'what does nature mean for me'?
- Under-represented groups are the same groups that all sector are trying to reach.
- More nature related jobs are needed in urban areas per square metre because more maintenance is required
- Need assess skill gaps and target opportunities
- 2-3 day working week accompanies by 2-3 day volunteering
- Encourage organisations to use National Lottery Heritage Fund recruitment toolkits
- Ecology courses are rare and few jobs to fill once qualified – BNG may change this
- Embed green skills in adult skills – bring 'green collar jobs' to the just transition
- Changes in tax policy to support volunteering
- Funding for the public jobs – LA funded wildlife management and ability to pay people for their time
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How can delivery be improved by devolving powers or resources?

- Equity of voice- structured to allow everyone to have a stake.
- Move away from rigid traditional volunteering frameworks/journeys and be more flexible
- CSR volunteering is useful but it can be paternalistic and tokenistic
- Avoid cliff edge of 3 yr/5 yr funding partnership projects. 30 year BNG is a good shift
- Empower communities to make requests and shape what training programmes that want and need
- Tend to repeatedly fund the 'gatekeepers' and not the wider community
- Nature and climate must be a feature of future devolution deals and growth plans
- Role of business improvement districts as a funder, convenor, innovator
- Often people don't lack skills and capacity, they're stretched. Need to work to rebuild skills and capacity.
- Long term businesses should be long term funders – what is mechanism?
- There is a danger there is lots of capital funding but not revenue funding. Can they be maintained, etc?
- Can we build social capital funding as part of natural capital funding?
- Enable continuity of timeline. Politically driven initiatives tend to be short term.