



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

# West Midlands Natural Environment Plan: 2021 - 2026

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Protecting, restoring and enhancing  
our region's natural environment

September 2021

# Forewords

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## We can make the West Midlands the green heart of the UK

It's been an exciting year for environmental policy in the West Midlands. In March, we approved our first Five-Year Plan, setting out a comprehensive set of actions to put us on course to reach net zero by 2041. In May, I was re-elected for a second term with a manifesto that put tackling climate change front and centre. In July, we hosted the International Net Zero Summit alongside UK100, demonstrating to Government Ministers the crucial role of local leaders in cutting emissions. We recently launched a transport Green Paper, showing how we intend to cut transport emissions and provide better alternatives to the car. And very soon we'll be launching our Circular Economy strategy, outlining the steps we can take to cut waste and create a more sustainable region.

These actions will prove crucial in tackling both the climate and air quality emergencies, but just as important to our net zero plans is the third strand of our strategy – that of tackling the ecological emergency. Our region's patchwork of post-industrial landscape, dense urban neighbourhoods and picture-perfect greenbelt is teeming with wildlife and greenery. This vast ecological diversity holds huge potential to mitigate the effects of climate change in all sorts of ways, from reducing the risk of flooding to directly removing carbon dioxide from our atmosphere. But until now, the drive for economic growth has often come at the

expense of our natural environment. Decades of expansive development on our greenbelt and nature-negative city planning has forced wildlife out, hampering our ability to fight climate change.

That is why our Natural Environment Plan is so important, and why I am delighted to be outlining a set of actions that will help restore this region's biodiversity. The plan focusses on four priority themes: access to greenspace; tree and hedgerow planting; wildlife corridors and what we call 'enablers', such as our Natural Capital Investment Plan. It also highlights the important benefits of nature for people's health and wellbeing – something the Covid pandemic has shone a light on, especially for those living in our denser urban areas with little access to greenspace. Addressing these challenges will be tricky, but doing so will create new jobs and with them, new training and apprenticeship opportunities for West Midlands residents.

This plan is underpinned by our ongoing work to create a programme of Community Green Grants, drive tree planting with our Virtual Forest initiative, and support the creation of a West Midlands National Park. Central to our efforts are our public and private sector partners across the region, and I am grateful to each and every one of them for their input and ongoing support. I hope this plan does justice to our aspiration to bring biodiversity back to our region, and I look forward to the work that lies ahead.

**Andy Street**  
Mayor of the West Midlands





Natural capital, including water, clean air, trees and wildlife, is a central part of the region's work on improving the environment and tackling climate change. Important in its own right, nature is also central to creating better places for all of us. This could be a green corridor that we cycle along as part of a morning commute; easy access to a park for our children to play in; or a local woodland to walk in as part of our leisure time.

Our local authorities are already making fantastic progress in delivering great natural capital schemes and some of them are included in this plan as examples of leading national and regional best practice. Regional environmental NGOs are also delivering some great programmes of work involving communities and young people in improving their local environments, providing opportunities to gain valuable skills and training in the process. We will encourage and support acceleration of existing initiatives that build public awareness and engagement to create a regional momentum and national profile for our activity.

We can no longer separate the natural environment from other parts of the work we do across the region; it now needs to be fully integrated with our social and economic agendas. For the plan we are presenting here to be successful, it will need to be linked into our work around housing, skills and transport in the way we are now seeing with other work on environment, for example our work on net zero.

Further, as our climate continues to change, natural capital and nature-based solutions will be key to improving regional resilience and providing a means for us to adapt. This might be through cooling provided by increased urban tree-planting or through natural flood mitigation measures. This plan makes a commitment to better understanding the role that natural capital can play in this context.

This first five year Natural Environment Plan for the region will seek to coordinate efforts across the combined authority area. We will need to work with constituent and non-constituent authorities; business; communities and with environmental NGOs and third sector organisations. Our activities will celebrate the work that is already happening and find new opportunities for collaboration.

I am excited about the work we are presenting here. It is ambitious, but so important that we work together towards shared outcomes that address both the climate as well as the ecological emergencies that we are facing.

**Councillor Ian Courts**  
Chair of the WMCA Environment and Energy Board

# Partners

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WMCA would like to thank the following partners for their contribution to the development of this plan.





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# Executive summary of the Natural Environment Plan actions

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In delivering the Natural Environment Plan over the next five years, the WMCA will:

- Launch a **Community Green Grants** programme that provides communities with funding to deliver projects that improve access to, and quality of, green and blue spaces for those that need it most.
- Build on the launch of the **West Midlands Virtual Forest** to co-ordinate an ambitious regional tree planting programme, starting with the planting of the Commonwealth Games 2022 Legacy Forest by Severn Trent Water.
- Set up a **Wildlife Corridors Commission** to develop a 'doorstep to landscape' vision for the region, maximising the connectivity, for both people and wildlife, through green and blue corridors.
- Develop regional **natural capital data capture and mapping** to better understand the state of the region's nature and prepare the foundations for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Produce the first **West Midlands Natural Capital Investment Plan** that prioritises investment opportunities, funding requirements and routes to delivery, for the protection, restoration and enhancement of the region's natural environment.
- Explore ways to ensure **biodiversity net gain across new transport infrastructure and other developments** funded by the WMCA.

WMCA will work with regional partners on key initiatives that will:

- Develop the West Midlands National Park concept and implement the awards programme
- Create a new national walking trail in the West Midlands
- Support the enhancement of the region's world famous canal network
- Provide natural capital apprenticeship opportunities
- Give people better understanding of how to get involved in local initiatives that can improve their natural environment

## 1.0 Context: where are we now?

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The West Midlands has ambitious and exciting plans to protect, restore and enhance its natural environment. We have already laid out our plans to tackle the climate emergency through our work on #WM2041, and the natural environment plays an important role in that, but this plan also focuses on how we will simultaneously address the ecological emergency. It outlines the actions that we will prioritise over the next five years to improve the region's biodiversity and access to green and blue space for our communities. This is our first five year plan for the natural environment, but we are committing to a long-term vision for nature, with subsequent plans that will build on success, but also address ongoing challenges to the region's biodiversity.

We know that we are not beginning from a standing start – there is a huge amount of work happening at a local and regional level already, and we have highlighted a number of

these projects in this document. Addressing some of our most important challenges around the natural environment will require a sustained collective effort from a whole range of organisations, many of whom already have established projects and programmes in place.

To understand what the West Midlands can achieve in terms of expanding, restoring and enhancing its natural environment, we need to take account of the regulatory and policy environment that we are operating in. This is the case in terms of national, regional and local contexts. This section reviews policies, plans and projects that have the power to strengthen and enable our regional natural capital ambitions.

## 1.1 Supporting national policy

Urgent action is needed to address the rapid decline in the UK's biodiversity. The **UK's State of Nature**<sup>1</sup> report provides a detailed look at how the natural environment is changing across the UK against a 1970 baseline. The most recent (2019) report showed the following:

- 15 per cent of species are under threat of extinction
- The average abundance of wildlife has fallen by 13 per cent with the steepest losses in the last ten years
- 41 per cent of UK species studied show a decline in numbers and 133 species have already been lost from our shores.

In addressing the challenges faced by nature in the UK, the **Environment Bill** is expected to provide a statutory framework for work on natural capital and biodiversity net gain. As a combined authority, we will be looking to play our part in the delivery of this and the **25 Year Environment Plan**<sup>2</sup>, which has stated the urgent need for this generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it. Of the 6 themes prioritised in the 25 Year Environment Plan, this Natural Environment Plan particularly picks up on:

- using and managing land sustainably;
- recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of nature; and
- connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing.

It will also support the delivery of the national **Nature Recovery Network**<sup>3</sup>, with its focus on enhancing landscapes; improving connectivity between wildlife-rich places; climate resilience; protection of existing natural environments and supporting access to nature for health and well-being.

As the Environment Bill receives royal assent in autumn 2021, the plan provided here puts the West Midlands Combined Authority in a strong position to respond to challenges around the natural environment. Local Nature Recovery Strategies, with their focus on comprehensive habitat mapping and biodiversity net gain, will be central to this. These are themes that run through all our work on the natural environment. Our focus is on genuine net gain, not just covering losses from new development. There will also be a commitment to following the mitigation hierarchy to avoid impact where possible before moving through 'minimise, restore and offset' (with the latter as a last resort).

Ahead of this formal requirement, however, we are looking to implement actions that could support the principles of biodiversity net gain, both through a better understanding of the data that we already have available as well as the implementation of some practical projects. We will work with regional stakeholders, including our local authorities, environmental NGOs, LEPs and private developers as a key element of our work on biodiversity net gain.

In addition to supporting measures around biodiversity protection and enhancement, this plan also identifies the importance of connecting people and nature more effectively. This emerged as a priority in The **Landscapes Review 2019**<sup>4</sup> (also known as the Glover Review). The report called for innovation in the way we think about our national parks and landscapes, how we connect them to urban communities, and how we ensure that there is representative diversity and inclusivity in their management. The **West Midlands National Park** (launched in July 2020) is cited as a positive example within the Landscape Review as a form of new, urban national park and we are working to turn the vision for this national park into a reality.

Finally, the fundamental benefits of our natural environment were highlighted in The **Dasgupta Review**<sup>5</sup> on the Economics of Biodiversity, a landmark report commissioned by HM Treasury and released in February 2021. It calls for urgent and transformative change in how we think, act and measure economic success to protect and enhance our prosperity and the natural world, and puts forward ways in which we should account for nature in economics and decision-making. Its headline messages serve as a critical reminder of the importance of nature:



- “Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all depend on our most precious asset: Nature.
- We have collectively failed to engage with Nature sustainably, to the extent that our demands far exceed its capacity to supply us with the goods and services we all rely on.
- Our unsustainable engagement with Nature is endangering the prosperity of current and future generations.
- The solution starts with understanding and accepting a simple truth: our economies are embedded within Nature, not external to it.”

We will be taking this thinking into a **Natural Capital Investment Plan**, proposed as part of this plan.

Recognising the many co-benefits from investing time, energy and resources into the natural environment, this plan will support delivery against the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals<sup>6</sup>:

We will also explore the potential of working with other internationally agreed frameworks, for example in October 2021, parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity will meet to determine the post-2020 global biodiversity framework<sup>7</sup>. The outcomes of this could have an important bearing on our actions, including scale and pace.



## 1.2 The regional context

In June 2019, WMCA declared a climate emergency and in July 2019 a target date of 2041 was established for the region to achieve net zero carbon emissions. In January 2020, the WMCA strategy (**#WM2041: Actions to meet the climate crisis with inclusivity, prosperity and fairness<sup>8</sup>**) was launched. This plan cut across the different actions that would be required to achieve the 2041 goal in a way that supported inclusive growth across the region. The natural environment played a key role in the strategy in terms of supporting resilience and adaptation; providing a route to mitigate climate change; and recognising the importance of green space for people across the region as part of a balanced and inclusive West Midlands.

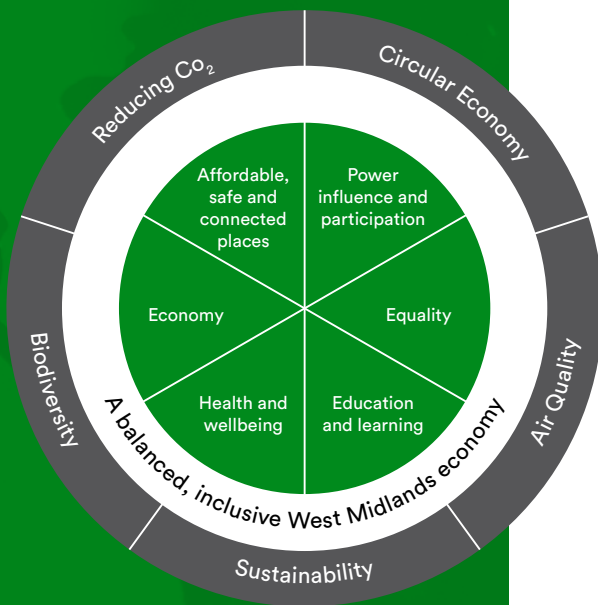
The recognition of the multifunctional benefits of nature continued in the follow-up paper that went to the Combined Authority Board in June 2020 (WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery<sup>9</sup>). This paper set out the urgent activity and need for the WMCA and stakeholders to produce five-year delivery plans (four in total) in support of delivering the zero carbon target for the West Midlands by 2041. The first of these WM2041 Five Year Plans (FYPs) was approved by the WMCA Board in March 2021 and has implications for regional natural environment programmes.

In terms of our natural environment specifically, we know that we need to work hard to address inequalities of access to green and blue space that were magnified during the first Covid-19 lockdown. In response to this, the WMCA commissioned the New Economics Foundation (NEF) to produce a report on access to green space across the West

Midlands. The data provided through the NEF report has now been turned into a publicly accessible data platform<sup>10</sup> that highlights parts of the WMCA (by Lower Super Output Area) where there is low access to green space. Addressing these issues of inequality is an important part of our work on the natural environment; the **Community Green Grants** scheme that we are establishing will be a route to support action to redress the inequalities identified.

The WMCA has also launched the **Virtual Forest** website<sup>11</sup>, as part of the commitment to plant more trees across the region. This is providing a focal point for people to register trees that have been planted and to share information about events and opportunities. This will be increasingly important as the WMCA accelerates delivery based on evidence in the first **WM2041 Five Year Plan<sup>12</sup>**. This indicates that there needs to be a significant uplift in the tree planting effort across the region to support delivery of the net zero target – our FYP indicates that this will mean planting an additional 5.7 million trees by 2026.

We have taken a broad approach to the natural environment in this plan and, through other work that we will be undertaking, will also be exploring the potential for using natural capital to support adaptation to climate impacts as well as improving air quality.



## 1.3 Mapping activity across the West Midlands

During the stakeholder engagement it became clear that there is already a considerable amount of work underway across the region under different natural capital thematic areas:

### Trees

- 1 Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan
- 2 Solihull Urban Forest Strategy
- 3 Wolverhampton Tree Strategy
- 4 Coventry Tree Strategy (under consultation)
- 5 Black Country i-Tree project researching the urban forest.
- 6 Solihull Planting Our Future Arden Forest vision

### Parks and Green Spaces

- 7 Rethinking parks NESTA/National Lottery programme (Sandwell, Walsall and Coventry)
- 8 Future Parks Accelerator (Birmingham)
- 9 Garden City (Wolverhampton/Black Country)
- 10 Black Country UNESCO Geopark
- 11 Love Solihull (Solihull, including tree schemes)
- 12 Linear Park (Coventry)

### Habitats

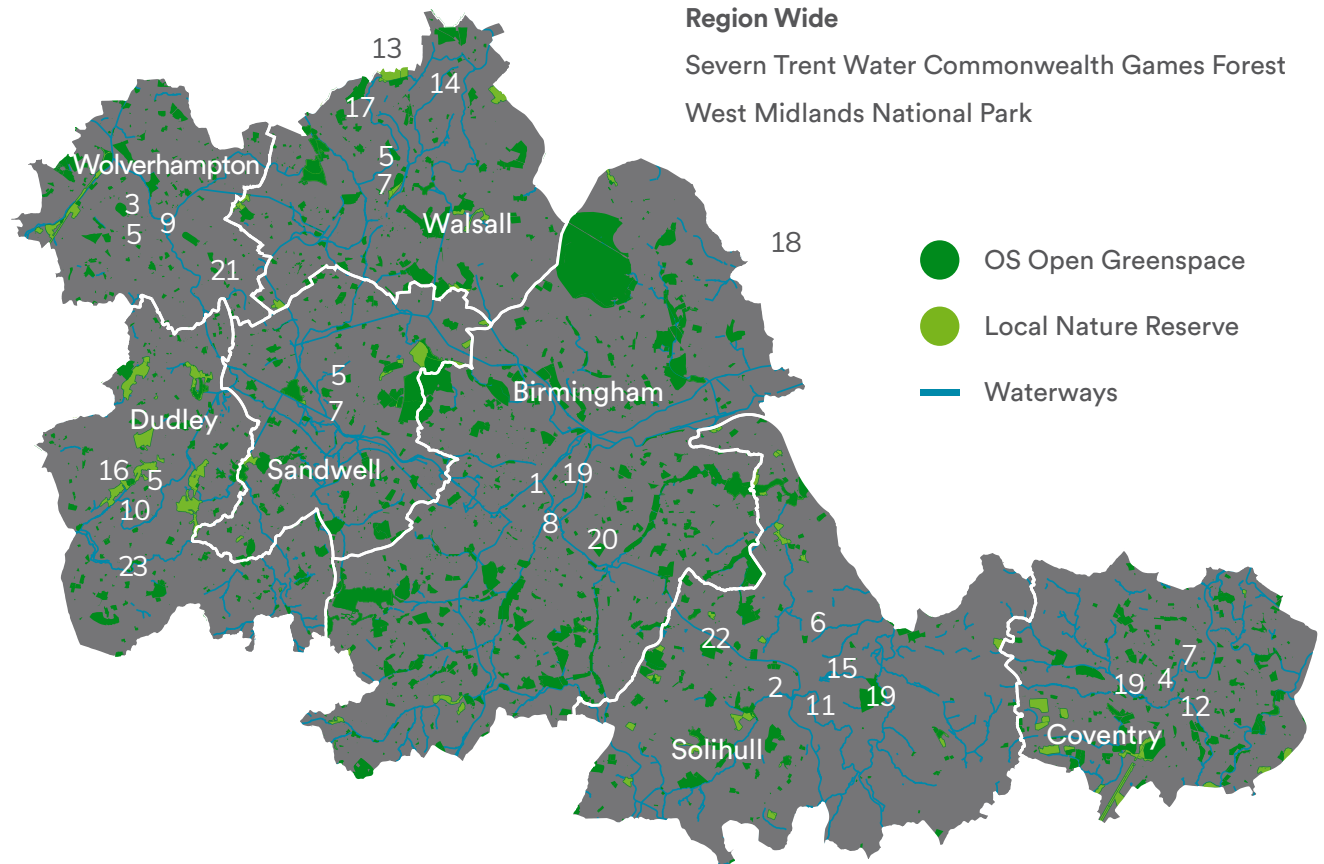
- 13 Natural England's Midlands Heathlands Heartlands opportunity mapping
- 14 North Walsall Heathlands
- 15 Highways green infrastructure planning (e.g. Wildlife Ways Solihull)
- 16 Fens Pools and Buckpool Nature Reserve, Dudley
- 17 Heathland restoration projects (Cannock Chase, Walsall, and South Staffordshire)
- 18 Thame Valley Wetlands Nature Improvement Area

### Rivers

- 19 Opening and de-culverting (Rea, Sherborne, Alder Brook)
- 20 Development of corridors (Cole, Tame and Severn partnerships)
- 21 Flood management and restoration (Illey Brook, Smestow Brook, Tipton & Swan Brook)
- 22 Habitat restoration (River Blythe)
- 23 Habitat restoration (River Stour)

### Region Wide

- Severn Trent Water Commonwealth Games Forest
- West Midlands National Park





## 1.4 Key stakeholders

Delivering this regional Natural Environment Plan will require the involvement of a range of different stakeholders from the public, charity and voluntary, research and private sectors. A number of them have been involved in the development of this plan. These include:

- **Government organisations:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and Natural England
- **Local authorities:** the seven constituent authorities have been consulted to date, although we also commit to work with our non-constituent authorities on delivery
- **LEPs:** Black Country Consortium, Greater Birmingham and Solihull, Coventry and Warwickshire
- **Local Nature Partnerships:** Birmingham and Black Country LNP and Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull LNP
- **Regional nature organisations and partnerships:** The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Canal and River Trust, Woodland Trust, Local Nature Partnerships within WMCA region
- **Private sector:** working with individual businesses as well as with business-facing organisations (e.g. Business in the Community, Sustainability West Midlands, Growth Hubs)

- **Voluntary sector:** 'Friends of' groups, tree warden groups, volunteer groups
- **West Midlands communities:** Supporting and working with residents across the West Midlands to get involved in protecting, enhancing and restoring nature will be critical to the success of this plan.

As this work develops, it is clear that our engagement will need to stretch beyond this initial group, bringing in others that will be necessary to help us achieve the scale of intervention required. This will also include broadening the range of businesses involved; bringing significant landowners on board; and stakeholders who can support with understanding the routes to financing.

We are also proposing to establish a Natural Capital Board to oversee the work as part of the WMCA's formal governance structure (see Section 4.2)





## 2.0 Vision and outcomes

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The natural environment plays an important role in helping the region achieve net zero by 2041. Our aim is to use our convening power to achieve biodiversity net gain across the region.

Our vision is of a West Midlands where everybody can enjoy the benefits of the natural environment and that, through careful planning and collaboration, we protect, restore and enhance the region's natural capital to address both the climate and ecological emergencies.

Our Natural Environment Plan sets out to deliver the following outcomes:

- 1 Everybody can access high quality green space within a 300m walk of their home.
- 2 Forestry cover should be increased from approximately 1.5% today to 13%, aligning as much as possible with the long-term aims for England (this equates to planting an additional 5.7m trees by 2026 and 19m by 2041)<sup>13</sup>.
- 3 Creation /restoration of 6 wildlife corridors along the Rivers Cole, Rea, Sherbourne, Stour and Blythe and HS2 development in line with our key stakeholder's priorities. We will also support work on the region's canals as important wildlife corridors.
- 4 All rivers to be restored to good condition by 2030, targeting 5 by 2025.
- 5 Support the creation of 200 jobs in natural capital by 2026 (and 700 by 2041), in line with the evidence in the Five Year Plan.

We know additional outcomes will need to be considered with the publication of the Environment Bill, for example the anticipated requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain in all new developments. We also plan to take forward strategies that have overlap with this Natural Environment Plan, for example a regional adaptation strategy that will identify an important role for nature-based solutions in increasing climate resilience. We also recognise that our constituent local authorities are working with locally derived targets that may differ from some of those expressed here.



### 3.0 Priority actions

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The plan covers a broad range of natural environment projects focusing on tree and hedgerow planting, improving access to green space for all communities across the West Midlands and developing our wildlife corridors. The aim is to improve these environments in their own right, promoting biodiversity net gain, as well as for all the region's communities to enjoy. It also covers a number of enabling actions that will need to be put into place in order to ensure these actions are achieved (for example, securing financing and behaviour change initiatives).

The actions that we propose taking fall under the following themes:

- Widening **access to green and blue spaces** for all communities across the West Midlands, initially focusing on places where there is a deficit of access.
- Increasing **tree and hedgerow planting**, but with an emphasis on 'right tree, right place', to support climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Promoting **wildlife corridors** and working with natural corridors (both green and blue) as well as those linked to infrastructure projects, e.g. along cycle ways.
- Recognising the importance of the **enablers of change** and supporting activity around financing and behaviour change that will enable the roll out, impact and scalability of the initiatives in this plan.

These themes, and how we will deliver them, are covered in more detail in the following sections of the document. Each theme proposes a flagship project that the West Midlands Combined Authority will lead, as well as other projects where we will work alongside regional partners. A more detailed breakdown of the actions can be found in Appendix 1.

### 3.1 Access to green and blue spaces

We know that there are considerable benefits from the natural environment for physical and mental health, as well as for reducing carbon and adapting to increasingly extreme weather events caused by climate change.

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA)<sup>14</sup>, funded by NERC, estimates the health benefits of living with a view of a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year, and that increasing green spaces could reduce run-off and urban flooding which costs around £270 million a year in England and Wales. Further, recent research by the RSPB<sup>15</sup> shows that 'people in the UK with an annual household income under £10,000 are 3.6 times more likely to have no outdoor space where they live, and about 40% less likely to live within a 10-minute walk of any publicly accessible natural greenspace than people with a household income of £60,000 or more'.

Research by Fields in Trust, using the 2020 Green Space Index<sup>16</sup>, finds there is the equivalent of 32.94 square metres (sqm) of publicly accessible park and green space provision per person in Great Britain. But as population increases, by 2040 this figure will reduce by 7.57% to 30.44 sqm per person. In the West Midlands, this same data shows significant variation across the Combined Authority area and, by 2040, the data is showing that the West Midlands will fall below the minimum standard of provision. We are determined to reverse this trajectory by taking action to improve availability of high-quality green and blue space to all people across the West Midlands through the actions described below.

We will also work with emerging standards being developed by other organisations, e.g. Natural England's Access to Natural Greenspace Standard and the Woodland Trust's Access to Woodland Standard.

#### WMCA-led flagship programme

##### Community Green Grants

Using data that WMCA and other regional partners have available, we know that access to green space is not equitable, a situation that has been brought into sharp relief during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The data shows the neighbourhoods where there is currently deficit of access to green space and we are seeking to work with delivery partners across the West Midlands to provide community green grants to roll out projects to create, enhance and improve access.

In response to the evidence base provided by the Five Year Plan, the WMCA Board committed £725,000 to support regional organisations and communities in delivering projects associated with widening access to nature and green space. It is anticipated the grant will launch in autumn 2021 for an initial two years, although the intention is to find ways to extend the grants to continue to support this important area of work.



## Priority actions

- Continue to work with the West Midlands National Park to transform their vision into practical action, encouraging new projects with an awards programme
- Create a new national trail in the West Midlands, working with local authorities, national organisations (like the National Trust, Canal and River Trust and Natural England) and walking groups.
- Develop a plan for including green infrastructure as part of the transport network at project development stage e.g. green roofs on shelters, semi-natural habitat into verges or leftover land.
- Creation and enhancement of urban meadows to increase biodiversity and amenity value of under-used open spaces whilst reducing maintenance costs.

We will also work to support regional projects that improve access to green space, where these align with our vision for the region's natural environment ambitions, for example:

- The opportunity to open the Duddeston Viaduct in Digbeth as a public green walkway.
- The Black Country programme of nature and visitor improvements to go alongside the new UNESCO Global Geopark status.





# Case studies

## Tame Valley Wetlands

Tame Valley Wetlands (TVW) is a strategic partnership established by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust in 2005, which oversees the delivery of environmental enhancements across the Tame Valley Wetlands Nature Improvement Area (NIA). The NIA includes the most extensive area of interconnected wetlands in the West Midlands straddling Tamworth, North Warwickshire, Solihull and Birmingham. The area is exceptionally important for both wildlife and people and it includes some of the key green spaces adjoining the conurbation such as Kingsbury Water Park, Middleton Lakes and Kingfisher Country Park. The vision is:

By 2030, the Tame Valley Wetlands will be a high quality, well-known and valued landscape, rich in wildlife, beauty and culture for all to enjoy.

### The four key aims are to:

- 1 Landscape scale habitat creation and management
- 2 Maximising opportunities from strategic planning
- 3 Community engagement and ownership
- 4 Training and skills

In 2014 the partnership was awarded £2.5 million funding through Heritage Lottery Fund (now NLHF) to deliver a range of environmental enhancements across the area including:



Over **600m** of river restoration



**16 ha** wetland restoration



**1,196m** of hedgerows



Offering educational sessions to **3190 children**



**5362 people** participating in events and training







Further funding through schemes such as ERDF's Water Environment Grant and GBSLEP Small Habitats Grant has allowed further enhancement works to be carried out on the wider Tame catchment on the rivers Cole and Blythe, both key tributaries of the River Tame. This has included sustainable urban drainage schemes and invasive species control at Brueton Park, Earlswood and Meriden Park in Solihull.

At a more strategic level the partnership has been involved in the West Midlands National Park and Birmingham City University's Project Saturn. The partnership co-commissioned with the Environment Agency a strategic vision for the River Cole and secured £707,000 from Defra's Green Recovery Challenge Fund for the Love Your River Cole Project (LYRiC). TVW are working closely with Birmingham and Solihull Councils and The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country and other partners to deliver a range of enhancements along 17km of the River Cole. A major element of the project has been working with the Princes Trust to develop and deliver a range of learning opportunities for 144 18-24 year olds and provide them with skills to pursue a career in the green economy. The partners are also hosting 6 trainees from across the West Midlands.

TVW continues to offer a wide variety of education and outreach programmes based at the at Hams Hall Environmental Centre including schools from across Birmingham and the Black Country and bush craft to variety of groups. The partnership also has its own volunteer group, Tameforce, working actively across the area. Further information: <http://www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk/>



## Future Parks Accelerator (FPA)



The FPA programme is funded by National Heritage Lottery Fund, National Trust and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This was formed to respond to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Future of Public Parks 2016-17; which uncovered an out-dated approach to urban green space right across the UK.



National  
Trust

Birmingham has come forward with a 25 year City of Nature Vision as a new city theme to run through all its policies, thinking and decision-making; reflecting the city's declared climate emergency. The Vision will be a people's vision, challenging the old Victorian top-down system; putting people first and their engagement with nature and their natural environment, where they live. To illustrate this, over 150 Earth Stories have been submitted by (mainly) younger Birmingham citizens capturing their enthusiasm and passion for living with nature.

Birmingham City Council has looked right across its organisation and partners to come forward with a new way of doing things. They have tested proposals within Children's, Housing, Employment, Health and Wellbeing and Planning to help the city better see the value of nature and our green spaces. The programme has created a space for an "ecosystem" of organisations and individuals to come together and treat issues relating to nature together; across 5 themes:-

- A Green City
- A Healthy City
- A Fair City
- A Valued City
- An Engaged City

A further innovation has been the development of an Environmental Justice Map for Birmingham that responds to the global issue highlighted through the COVID-19 lockdowns of unequal access to public green space. This map also captures climate change pressures through heat stress and flood risk; and peoples life expectancy affected by their postcode rather than their genetic code. This map highlights the need for urgency and action and a total rethink over the role of the natural environment in cities; and emphasises how this is everybody's agenda.



## What will the 25 Year City of Nature Vision Deliver?

- Restore Birmingham's Nature Recovery Network
- Support the delivery of the West Midlands National Park
- Increase the city's tree canopy to 25%
- Introduce a Birmingham Fair Parks Standard
- Introduce a Sustainable Finance Framework
- Establish a City of Nature Community Alliance
- Mainstream healthy activities outdoors
- Establish Green Champions and widespread community engagement







Richard Faulks/WTML

### 3.2 Tree and hedgerow planting

Trees and hedgerows play an important part in the natural environment, as long as the ‘right tree, right place’ principle is followed. They offer a range of benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity net gain. They bring multiple co-benefits for people’s physical and mental health, especially in urban areas. There is already significant work happening in all sectors across the West Midlands with local authorities, environmental NGOs and regional businesses making commitments and planting trees.

Currently, forest cover in the WMCA is about 1.5% of the area; agriculture 20% and urban/built up areas 70%, of which 57% comprises less built up areas, technically referred to as ‘discontinuous urban fabric’. The best opportunity for tree planting is on agricultural land of poorer quality and which will be repurposed with an associated shift in payments through the Environmental Land Management Scheme. The commitment made, through the Five Year Plan, is for 5.7 million additional trees by 2026 and 19 million by 2041 to support the regional net zero goals.

Ensuring that tree and hedgerow planting is well conceived, carried out and maintained is an important part of ensuring that carbon sequestration and other benefits can be realised – this therefore presents an opportunity to create jobs and encourage community ownership and stewardship.

We also recognise the importance of targeting tree planting, the benefits (ecosystem services) that can be maximised through this approach and the potential damaging impacts tree planting can have for both amenity and biodiversity if evidence is not followed. Any planting carried out, or sponsored by WMCA, will use native trees and trees which are UK and Ireland sourced and grown, wherever possible, to try to avoid introduction of new tree diseases from abroad.

In addition to planting new woodland, this plan also recognises the importance of protection for any areas of ancient woodland and any ancient, veteran or notable trees, as well as restoration of any ancient woodland that has been degraded through clearance and replanting with conifers. Protection and care of mature trees across the region is important for retaining biodiversity value, canopy cover and landscape quality, as well as to enhance air quality.

## WMCA-led flagship programme

### Virtual Forest: encouraging tree-planting

The West Midlands Virtual Forest website was launched in January 2020 as a tool for recording and promoting tree planting in alignment with the WM2041 ambitions to plant 19 million trees by 2041. The project works on a philosophy of ‘crowd planting’ and we will work in collaboration with a number of partner organisations such as local tree planting groups, local authorities, national charities (such as The Woodland Trust and Trees for Cities) and other groups with large scale tree planting initiatives. The site will also seek to link up trees, land and people able to assist with planting, as well as providing support on how to plant trees and how to get further involved with the initiative.

We are keen to continue to work with partner organisations to publicise activity, and the importance of tree planting, to enable people from across the West Midlands to get involved in some way this year. We are also seeking collaboration with stakeholders who are already planning on planting trees on private land to engage with the platform to help us reach our target. As part of this initiative, we would like to:

- Develop an annual plan/ targets for tree and hedgerow planting, to be delivered with partners through the Virtual Forest.
- Through the expansion of the Virtual Forest platform, explore ways we can replant historical forests like Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden
- Bring major regional landowners together in a ‘tree planting summit’ to promote collaboration and bring forward land for trees and other biodiversity projects.

## Priority actions

- Support the Urban Forest Masterplan initiated in Birmingham and explore the potential to create a regional urban forest strategy.
- Support initiatives from partners that align with our outcomes, for example the Commonwealth Games Legacy Forest by Severn Trent Water
- Run a ‘right tree, right place’ campaign, for example, where trees work well as part of the climate adaptation solution to urban heat.
- Work with the Woodland Trust and other tree-planting groups to explore setting up a West Midlands Tree Nursery of British native species where residents with gardens or land where they wish to plant a tree can collect or purchase discounted saplings, potentially working with garden centres in the region.
- Explore incorporating tree-lined streets into the finished design for every West Midlands transport scheme which involves redesigning streets and is funded by the Combined Authority.



## Case studies

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### The Severn Trent Commonwealth Games Forests

The aim is to create a forest or a number of forests (using only native trees, UK sourced and grown, in keeping with the local landscape), to celebrate the year of the Games and leave a lasting legacy for both our communities and the environment in the West Midlands. There will be a 2022 acre forest as well as 72 tiny forests, aimed at improving and enhancing the biodiversity of the region, with the potential to incorporate some existing forest/woodland areas that can be adopted into the wider landscape and brought into a coherent management strategy. They will follow watercourses and provide nature corridors across and through the area, wrapping around existing urban areas, providing a “green hug” and providing air quality improvements.

As well as the environmental benefits, the Commonwealth Games Forest will leave a lasting legacy for communities across the West Midlands by bringing a place for people to experience nature and be together without everyday life distractions. The project will embrace ‘social prescribing’, such as a forest workshop that could support community mental health and well-being. There is also the potential to provide jobs and skills through the creation and maintenance of the forest with others, as well as through the visitor-related activity.

The 72 tiny forests will each be linked to one of the nations competing in the Commonwealth Games. Severn Trent Water are working with Earthwatch to deliver this programme, which will link to communities through schools’ programmes and other community outreach initiatives.

SEVERN  
TRENT  
WATER







## The Arden Free Tree Scheme (Solihull MBC)

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's Arden Free Tree Scheme is being run in partnership with Birmingham Airport to plant traditional native tree species as part of their carbon management plan. The aim is to enhance and protect the Arden landscape character of the borough, creating a strong sense of place and local distinctiveness. During the 20/21 winter this scheme supported 30 individual tree planting projects across Solihull and the wider Arden landscape with a total of 6,431 native trees and shrubs planted to create hedgerows and small woodlands. This initiative will have the added benefit of being planned to protect and enhance Solihull's strong rural character and those features characteristic of the wider Warwickshire Arden landscape.



**30** individual tree planting projects



**6,431** native trees and shrubs planted



### 3.3 Wildlife corridors

Increased development of land, through housing, road building, or even agricultural activity, can be prohibitive to the mobility of wildlife. Areas become isolated, which can have detrimental effects on biodiversity. In order to prevent this, there needs to be more active creation of wildlife corridors, which can include river corridors, canals and contiguous corridors of high quality semi-natural habitat including woodlands, heathland and grasslands, but can also be constructed, for example, green bridges over new infrastructure. The National Trust describes wildlife corridors ‘as a link from one environment to another allowing wildlife to move freely and safely between them, without threat from predators or traffic’<sup>17</sup>.

Climate change, and its effects, mean that wildlife corridors could become increasingly important as species migrate to compensate for the change in temperature and natural environment. The West Midlands is significant geographically in this context as it will be an important part of the pathway for species moving north or south due to climate change. In addition, the role of the WMCA facilitates the ability to work across boundaries in the creation of new wildlife corridors.

We also need to ensure there are high quality areas of wildlife and biodiversity for the corridors to link together. Achieving nature recovery will need large areas and blocks of land in environmentally sensitive management, and considerable creation of habitat, in addition to having ecologically functioning corridors. We will work with partners to create, protect and enhance wetlands, grasslands and heathlands. Alongside tree and hedgerow planting, these environments also create important carbon sinks.

#### WMCA-led flagship programme

##### Wildlife Corridors Commission

The WMCA will establish a Wildlife Corridors Commission to understand how the region could maximise the connectivity, for both people and wildlife, through green and blue corridors – a ‘doorstep to landscape’ vision for the region. The Commission will also explore the ways that we can address barriers and blockages for wildlife due to transport and infrastructure. The overall aim of this work will be to support biodiversity net gain for the region; being able to take a pan-regional view across constituent, and into non-constituent, authorities maximises the spatial reach of impact.

The Commission will work with the evidence coming through mapping to identify priority areas of focus. This could be in terms of protecting and enhancing existing strategic wildlife corridors as well as creating new ones. The mapping will use the work undertaken by the Wildlife Trusts in anticipation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The initial six corridors of focus include those along the Rivers Cole, Rea, Stour, Sherbourne and Blythe as well as that being created by HS2. We will also support work on the region's canals as important wildlife corridors. Regional partners are already engaged in work in these corridors and the WMCA would use the work of the Commission to support this. The Commission will also work closely with existing stakeholders and partnerships operating in this space, for example the Local Nature Partnerships.



## Priority actions

- Explore creating a regional 'Wildlife Ways' programme, building on the work in Solihull. Projects would include: tree, hedgerow and wildflower planting, small habitat grants for local conservation projects and improved cycling and walking access.
- Use our wildlife corridors to boost species recovery. The work towards a Local Nature Recovery Strategy will identify focus species (for example, those included in the draft Black Country LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Opportunities).

In addition to these actions, the WMCA will support partners in delivering projects that are regionally significant in enhancing wildlife corridors. These include:

- Support for the regional region's world-famous canal network, which provides important nature recovery networks, linking otherwise fragmented habitats. We will work with the **Canal and River Trust** on the natural environment on and around the canals; on improving towpaths, access and signage; and exploring opportunities for community engagement with nature and through their Explorers schools programme.
- Work with the **Environment Agency** to use nature-based solutions for flood alleviation and corridors, where appropriate. This will be included as part of a Regional Adaptation Plan.
- Work with **farmers and landowners** to enhance the rural and urban fringe agricultural land for biodiversity e.g. the Arden Farm Network across Arden Character area, led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.
- Work with **Natural England** and partners on projects to deliver the Nature Recovery Network including restoration of heathlands and exploration of peatland restoration as a nature-based solution.





# Case studies

## Wildlife Ways

Wildlife Ways is a £16.8 million programme (run by Solihull MBC) and part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and WMCA. It opens up and improves existing routes, allowing wildlife to flourish and helping people to walk and cycle across the borough. In total, over 73 hectares of improved wildlife habitat has been created of benefit to the environment – through such things as local climate amelioration, surface water control and air quality improvements. These contribute to the health and well-being of the borough’s residents and visitors, education and regional economic investment and productivity.

The aims have been to improve the wildlife value and biodiversity of open spaces and highway verges and connect these areas together by improving 24 hectares of wildlife habitats along 69km of existing cycle ways and 23km of new shared surfaces. The highway verges act as green corridors for some fauna and flora to move and spread; without these, large open spaces can become isolated. These open spaces and parks support a variety of different habitats including woodlands (of which 11 have had works carried out through Wildlife Ways), 9 grassland sites (with over 25 hectares enriched with wildflower seed) and 1 watercourse, re-profiled with gravel riffles, changes in depth and new marginal vegetation. Habitat enhancements to a stretch of the Kingshurst Brook enable an increase in natural river processes, reconnect the brook to its floodplain, diversify the morphology of the brook and reduce flood risk downstream. The work also included planting over 300 native riverside trees along the brook including black poplar, alder and willow to provide habitat diversification and shading to sections of the watercourse to mitigate future increases in water temperatures due to climate change

Alongside the main Wildlife Ways programme, lots of smaller programmes have been developed as part of the Wildlife Ways / Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership’s Small Habitats Grants Programme (part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund).



£16.8 million programme



73 ha of improved wildlife habitat



23km of new shared surfaces



300 native riverside trees



## Natural Rivers and Green Corridors



In partnership with Birmingham City Council, Environment Agency, The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country and part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Natural Rivers and Green Corridors aims to improve Birmingham's natural wildlife habitats and green spaces. In doing so, the project will benefit communities by making local green spaces more attractive and deliver wider environmental benefits including mitigating the impacts of climate change, air pollution and flood risk.



The programme includes restoration of the Bourn Brook through removal of weirs and deculverting of a watercourse in Senneleys Park to improve public safety, reduce flood risk and restore natural processes to allow wildlife to thrive. Invasive species alongside water courses in the upper Rea catchment are being managed to reduce flood risk and restore native biodiversity and public woodlands are being restored through thinning and planting of native ground flora.



Birmingham & Black Country

This £1.25m investment supports the delivery of strategic green and blue infrastructure objectives set out in Birmingham's Green Living Spaces Plan, the Environment Agency's Humber River Basin Management Plan and Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017-2022. The project will result in 125ha of improved wildlife habitat.





## Love Your River Stour



Love Your River Stour is a project working to improve the River Stour catchment for wildlife and people which has recently secured substantial funding (> £600k) including from the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The Stour and tributary, the Smestow Brook, are key ecological corridors identified as priorities for restoration in the draft Black Country Local Nature Recovery Opportunity Map (April 2021), however, the wildlife of the river suffers from problems including poor habitat and water quality (diffuse pollution), artificially modified banks, artificially created barriers to fish movement (e.g. disused weirs), litter and invasive species.



**Birmingham &  
Black Country**

The project takes an ecosystem services approach, investing in green and blue infrastructure to provide high quality open space for deprived urban communities, restore aquatic and terrestrial habitats for ecosystem-critical species such as salmon and otter, and addressing environmental issues including flood risk and pollution through nature-based solutions.

Love Your River Stour is a partnership of The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Severn Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency.





### 3.4 Enablers of change

This plan has highlighted some ambitious nature-based solutions for the West Midlands to implement in its mission to address the ecological emergency. Their success will require us to also create the right conditions amongst all stakeholders, from communities to NGOs businesses to play their part. We also need to understand how to take account of nature more effectively in decision-making, understanding how we value it, and enable a consistent approach to mapping and data so that we have a clear idea on the state of the region's nature.

The actions described in this section start to bring together opportunities and communities of action to implement the different projects and programmes that will be necessary. These range in scale and size, from citizen science programmes that can be run in an adhoc way, through to apprenticeship and trainee schemes to ensure that we are able to provide opportunities in jobs related to nature. In particular, we will work to ensure that these opportunities represent the West Midlands population and that all opportunities focus on inclusion and improving access for everybody.

#### WMCA-led flagship programme

##### Spatially defining the region's natural environment through maps

Understanding how and where we should protect, restore and enhance nature needs to be driven by data and an understanding of the different needs, requirements and opportunities across the region. Central to our work on the natural environment needs to be an understanding of the right kinds of interventions in the right places, including where priority action should be focused. Without this understanding, we risk implementing projects that could be detrimental to the region's biodiversity. As a result, we are aiming to complete full habitat mapping across the WMCA area before the end of 2022; this will build on existing work undertaken by the **Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country**.

In addition to this more technical mapping, we also aim to create and share an interactive map to provide up-to-date information on nature across the WMCA area. This will enable additional layers to be added to build up a comprehensive overview of the natural environment and its potential contribution to climate adaptation and resilience and air quality improvements, for example. It will also allow understanding of where areas could be targeted for investment into nature, building in the work around access to green space, and existing/ developing programmes of activity, e.g. West Midlands National Park awarded programmes or the new West Midlands trail as it progresses.

Having a clearly mapped evidence base will also support the understanding of potential impact of the different projects and programmes contained within this plan, which will be important for all regional stakeholders in terms of targeting investment and action in a coordinated way to support biodiversity net gain outcomes. The WMCA will work with existing extensive data held by Eco Record and Habitat Biodiversity Audit, to avoid duplication of data gathering and to draw in extensive local knowledge and expertise.

## Priority actions

- Build natural environment into the WM Net Zero Business Pledge so businesses understand how they can support nature.
- Implement effective data collection and monitoring of the region's natural environment as a foundation for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan and explore new finance mechanisms, e.g. leveraging of private sector finance.
- Work with the proposed Net Zero Citizen's Panel (to be set up in response to the work developed for the Five Year Plan) to support natural environment initiatives.
- Run a programme of citizen science activity to support engagement in natural environment activities.
- Trial a natural capital apprenticeships scheme as part of the Green Skills Strategy (to be delivered as part of the FYP), working alongside existing programmes of activity such as the successful Level 2 traineeships offered by the Wildlife Trusts.
- Include natural environment projects as part of the region's Net Zero Neighbourhood demonstrator.
- Implement behaviour change initiatives to support the natural environment vision and outcomes, e.g. provide information on planting climate resilient species on the WMCA website; support initiatives on water efficiency to conserve resources; provide guidance for planting for climate resilience, e.g. rain gardens and other SUDs initiatives; or using trees to provide shade and mitigate urban heat.





# Case study

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## The West Midlands National Park

The West Midlands National Park (WMNP) is a concept, developed and led by Birmingham City University, that unites the people of the West Midlands with their landscape, culture and heritage. Its purpose is to create a better quality of life, opportunities and environment for the future with thriving, healthy and resilient communities. Recognised in the UK Government's Landscape Review, it is backed by many local stakeholders. It resonates with the aims and projects in this Plan, as well as the region's climate emergency response, WM2041, and our 'brownfield first' approach to development.

### Potential WMNP projects include:

- Sequences of parks and squares connecting communities across and through the West Midlands to create a walkable region.
- Publicly accessible clean rivers, canals, streams and working floodplains to walk and cycle along, and the start of long-distance journeys to the UK coast.
- The sight and sound of nature all around, clean air, limited traffic, extensive garden and street planting, forests and woodlands to define the region.
- Housing/development designed to exploit views, horizons, skylines and inherent beauty of the region.
- Celebration of regional food, through allotments and urban agriculture networks, local food markets.
- Networks of local supplies, shops, working places and circular economies.
- Projects demonstrating carbon capture, the storage, cleansing and purification of flood and storm water.

The WMNP Lab at Birmingham City University has identified a range of initial projects and they are considering the following as priorities for a WMNP award:

- A plan for using parks and the public realm as part of the regional recovery from Covid-19. This has four elements to it:
  - 1 Creating alternative futures for Birmingham City Centre. This would be a collaborative study to inform the radical rethink of the purpose, scope and economic viability of dense city centres in a post-Covid economy, climate emergency and the urgent need to kick start a green recovery.
  - 2 The Knowledge District, including The Birmingham Central Park. Developing a spatial strategy for a Birmingham Central Park, the creation of the Knowledge District and the relationship of HS2 Curzon Street with its environment, all in the context of its canal and river network.
  - 3 Birmingham National Ring Parks. This project will develop the economic case and the spatial strategy for the Birmingham National Ring Park; a green, healthy alternative to the notorious ring roads that encircle our cities, starting with Birmingham.
  - 4 The WM City Centre Parks. Building on the success of the Black Country Urban Park and the Black Country Garden City, the WM Central Parks project will create a strategy for a series of central parks in each major city of the West Midlands.

- A vision for the region's waterways. Development of a vision for canal and river navigations, including the green energy and social agendas etc.
- A spatial strategy for the Tame Valley and HS2. A strategy to improve Multiple Deprivation Indices, encouraging integrated working and holistic solutions, bringing different disciplines, external investment and expertise together to achieve more whilst lifting aspirations and design quality.

This work will bring together the many partners already active in this space across the region, acknowledging the significant visioning and delivery work that is already taking place.





## 4.0 Delivery

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## 4.1 Funding and financing

The scale of this challenge will require significant levels of new investment in natural capital. Public sector funding sources will continue to play an important role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment. However, for us to achieve our goals it is critical that more private sector investment is also leveraged. Over the next 12 -18 months, the WMCA will work with all regional stakeholders, and national government, to identify ways to re-wire the financing of actions that help enhance our natural environment. We will also work to identify new sources of investment, some of which are described in this section.

The green finance landscape is changing, we need to engage with this to convert challenges into opportunities. Issues around nature need to be part of a 'whole place' approach to development and bringing smaller funding pots together where appropriate to do so. The funding and financing for natural environment schemes will be developed on a project-by-project basis. Some of the delivery could be funded through traditional **grant-based approaches**. Each of these schemes has different scale and criteria, some of which would be more appropriate for delivery partners to apply for. The main ones that are currently available include:

- Potential to apply for Environmental Land Management Scheme<sup>18</sup>, particularly in relation to local nature recovery and landscape recovery.
- National Lottery Heritage Fund for wider landscape schemes

- Health and wellbeing funding routes, e.g. social prescribing
- Potential funding options through DEFRA e.g. NEIRF (Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund<sup>19</sup>), Nature for Climate Fund.

In addition to support for natural environment programmes in the constituent local authorities, there is also the potential to work with non-constituent Combined Authority councils to encourage West Midlands farmers and landowners outside the main urban areas to improve nature on their land, by taking advantage of the new post-Brexit agricultural subsidy regime

There is also the potential to consider **new financial solutions** for nature that take us beyond a grant-based approach. These sources could include:

- Crowdfunding models
- Private finance models e.g. through river catchment partnerships
- Both commercial and non-commercial tree planting funds
- Locally developed initiatives e.g. co-operatives, community interest companies
- Including the natural environment as part of a wider systems approach to net zero, e.g. in 'zero carbon neighbourhoods as a service' approaches.

Finally, as mentioned in Section 3.1, WMCA will be rolling out a programme of **Community Green Grants** to boost nature, and promote biodiversity net gain across the region, as well as addressing the inequality of access to green space that the New Economics Foundation work identified. The grants scheme will support work with delivery partners across the West Midlands to provide community grants to roll out projects to create, enhance and improve access to green space. We would work with local authorities and environmental NGOs whose expertise would ensure that the right schemes are delivered in the right places.



## 4.2 Structure for delivery

To support delivery of the Natural Environment Plan the WMCA will convene a Natural Capital Board for the region, to bring together stakeholders to co-ordinate action. This will include a wide range of issues, including: tree planting, taking a leading role on nature recovery and work to support funding and roll out of Community Green Grants. Delivery will happen in conjunction with local partners and working with large scale projects like the Commonwealth Games and HS2.

The Natural Capital Board will sit alongside other significant WMCA boards, recognising the importance of this area of activity in enhancing the future prosperity of the region. The Natural Capital Board and the Net Zero Infrastructure Delivery Board will report directly to the Environment and Energy Board, and will have direct accountability to this Board.

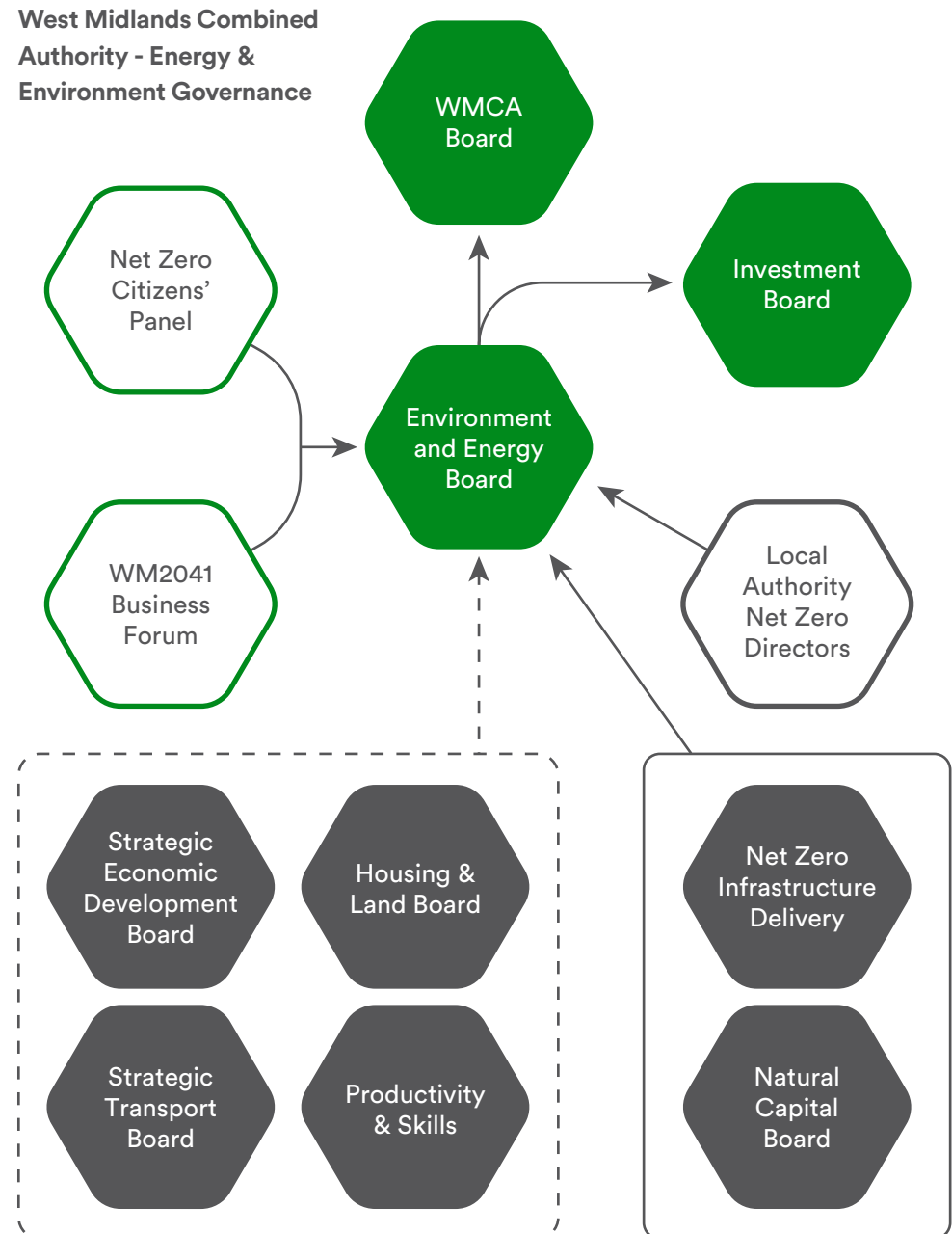
For the other WMCA thematic boards, there is not a formal reporting route into the Environment and Energy Board, but a clear reflection that they have an input to make into the environment and energy agenda and to the successful delivery of the WM2041 ambitions. In the same way, we would expect the work programme of the Natural Capital Board to be of interest to other thematic boards on an issue-by-issue basis.

The diagram shown here is a representation of how the governance will operate, recognising that there is no way of perfectly representing the reality in action. The Natural Capital Board will follow the governance arrangements of other WMCA boards. All board reports will be publicly available.

## 4.3 Get Involved

For further information, please go to:  
<https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment/>

Please also contact: [wm2041@wmca.org.uk](mailto:wm2041@wmca.org.uk)



# Appendix 1: Delivery plan

## Theme 1: Access to green and blue spaces

Action	Aim	Y1 focus (2021-2022)	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>Community Green Grants programme</b>	To support delivery of new projects to improve access to green space (e.g. creation of community pocket parks) or other projects supporting biodiversity in communities (e.g. food growing projects).	To establish the grant scheme and roll out the first Community Green Grants, working with regional stakeholders.	A network of WMCA green spaces, owned by community groups. Additional funding secured for the continuation of the programme.	Lead	Business community. Third sector organisations. Community groups. Local authorities. Landowners.	An initial £725k committed by WMCA with the intention to find additional resource and align with complementary activity, for example, Woodland Trust's community tree packs.
<b>West Midlands National Park</b>	We will continue to work with Birmingham City University on the West Midlands National Park to transform the vision into practical action through the implementation of their awards programme.	Finalisation of the awards programme and initial projects identified.  The WMNP website developed for mapping projects and programmes.	To have a network of projects awarded by the West Midlands National Park showcased on the dedicated website.	Enable	Birmingham City University. WMNP Foundation Board. Local authorities. Other stakeholders engaged through BCU governance.	An ongoing programme requiring investment. An initial £25k of support has been provided to the WMNP.
<b>National walking trail</b>	Work with partners to create a new national trail in the West Midlands.	To identify the process for establishing a new national trail and convening the relevant stakeholder group	Have identified a potential route, bearing in mind rights of access and landowner permissions. Initial sections mapped.	Convene	Local authorities. national organisations (including the National Trust, The Ramblers Association, the Canal and River Trust and Natural England) and local walking groups.	TBC – investment sought for implementation once initial scoping completed.



Action	Aim	Y1 focus (2021-2022)	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>Greening transport infrastructure</b>	We will work with Transport for West Midlands at the early stages of programme/ project development to include green infrastructure as part of the transport network, e.g. green roofs on shelters, semi-natural habitat into verges /leftover land.	TfWM and WMCA will work together to develop a pipeline of projects that we can influence immediately. In addition, we need to understand what we can influence through the Local Transport Plan.	We will work through the Local Transport Plan and with existing governance structures, including Strategic Transport Officers Group, to understand potential and deliver projects across the region.	Enable	TfWM. Local authorities. Private sector.	Understand how we might leverage additional investment from existing schemes to support this initiative in the first instance.

## Theme 2: Tree and hedgerow planting

Action	Aim	Y1 focus (2021-2022)	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>Virtual Forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an annual plan/ targets for tree and hedgerow planting, to be delivered with partners through the Virtual Forest.</li> <li>Through the expansion of the Virtual Forest platform, explore ways we can replant historic forests like Shakespeare's Forest of Arden</li> <li>Bring major regional landowners together in a 'tree planting summit' to promote collaboration.</li> </ul>	We will bring together regular meetings of the Virtual Forest stakeholders to discuss tree planting targets and events and opportunities for the coming year. We will produce a tree planting pipeline and ensure trees are registered on the website. We will also organise a tree planting summit and start to build a potential land bank for natural environment projects, with a focus on tree planting	The Five Year Plan has a target to plant 5.7m trees by 2026.	Lead	Local authorities. Local tree planting groups. Environmental NGOs. Landowners. Other private sector investors. Woodland Trust.	Funding available through the WMCA environment budget for convening. Tree planting will require additional budget.
<b>Supporting other tree-planting strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the urban forest masterplan initiated in Birmingham and explore the potential to create a regional urban forest strategy</li> <li>Support initiatives from partners that align with our outcomes, for example the Commonwealth Games Legacy Forest by Severn Trent Water</li> </ul>	Showcase and support regional projects to provide profile and support delivery where these align with WMCA priorities.	Work with other partners across the region to support the delivery of the five year tree planting target.	Enable	Local authorities. Regional business. Tree planting groups.	Support will be through communications and strategic support where appropriate.
<b>Awareness raising around tree planting</b>	Run a 'right tree, right place' campaign.	The campaign will be run as part of the wider WM2041 communication activity in the 2021/22 tree planting season.	Updates will be made to the communications each year via the Virtual Forest website.	Lead	Woodland Trust. Wildlife Trusts. Forestry Commission.	N/A. This will form part of the new WMCA website Environment pages and the Virtual Forest platform



Action	Aim	Y1 focus (2021-2022)	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>Ensuring supply of native species of tree</b>	Work with the Woodland Trust and other tree-planting groups to explore setting up West Midlands Tree Nursery locations of British native species where residents with gardens or land where they wish to plant a tree can collect or purchase discounted saplings, potentially working with garden centres in the region.	Scope out the potential for the WM Tree Nursery, including sites and developing the business case	Depending on interest from regional stakeholders, including local businesses, roll out initial locations ahead of 2022/2023 tree planting season.	Enable	Woodland Trust. Virtual Forest stakeholders. Local authorities. Garden centres.	TBC – this will require a full business case to be developed.
<b>Street trees</b>	Explore incorporating tree-lined streets into the finished design for every West Midlands transport scheme which involves redesigning streets and is funded by the Combined Authority.	TfWM and WMCA will work together to develop a pipeline of projects that we can influence immediately. In addition, we need to understand what we can influence through the Local Transport Plan.	We will work through the Local Transport Plan and with existing governance structures, including Strategic Transport Officers Group, to understand potential and deliver projects across the region.	Enable	TfWM. Local authorities. Private sector.	Understand how we might leverage additional investment from existing schemes to support this initiative in the first instance.

## Theme 3: Wildlife corridors

Action	Aim	Y1 focus	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>Wildlife Corridors Commission</b>	Establish a Wildlife Corridors Commission to maximise the connectivity, for both people and wildlife, between green spaces and along blue corridors.	Build Commission Advisory Group and launch tender for work. Establish priority corridors for investment through mapping.	To have a Local Nature Recovery Strategy in place delivering biodiversity net gain through improved wildlife corridors. Activity taking place on the 5 priority corridors identified in the plan.	Lead	Local authorities. Environmental NGOs. TfWM. Private sector partners.	The Commission will be run within the budget of the WMCA natural capital programme. Additional resource will need to be identified for projects.
<b>A regional 'Wildlife Ways' programme</b>	Roll out regional good practice, for example explore potential of a regional Wildlife Ways programme, building on the work in Solihull. Projects would include: tree, hedgerow and wildflower planting, small habitat grants for local conservation projects and improved cycling and walking access.	Explore the potential with partners across the region and develop a business case.	Support delivery if funding secured.	Enable	Local authorities. TfWM. Private sector partners. Environmental and conservation NGOs.	This will require identification of external funding in order to invest in a region-wide programme. We will explore all opportunities identified in Section 4.1 of this plan.
<b>Species recovery</b>	Identify links to specific species recovery as part of work for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with stakeholders to identify priority species for recovery</li> <li>Include in habitat mapping</li> </ul>	Evidence of further species recovery through natural capital interventions as part of the annual State of the Region's Nature report.	Enable	RSPB. Natural England. Wildlife Trusts. Local authorities.	This will require significant additional funding, to be included as part of other funded work. The action will mainly be to partner with other organisations.
<b>Spatially defining the region's natural capital through maps</b>	Complete a habitat map, building on the work already being undertaken by regional stakeholders, to indicate priority areas for nature recovery.  Build this into a more comprehensive interactive map to provide up-to-date information on the natural environment across the WMCA area.	Scope out the requirements needed for the mapping and identify where there are gaps in data/ data requirements. We will work with regional stakeholders to identify what these are.	Up-to-date and relevant maps that guide the region's investment into natural capital. Additional layers will also enable an understanding of potential links with nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and air quality improvements, for example.	Lead	Local authorities. Wildlife Trusts. Other environmental NGOs. Defra.	Investment to be secured.

## Theme 4: Enablers of change

Action	Aim	Y1 focus	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>WM Net Zero Business Pledge</b>	Build natural environment indicators into the WM Net Zero Business Pledge so businesses understand how they can support natural capital.	Work with businesses and business organisations to support natural environment investment.	Develop a 'natural environment exchange' platform where project ideas, land, investment and skills can be shared to support acceleration of project delivery.	Lead	Sustainability West Midlands. LEPs. Business in the Community. Individual organisations (of all sectors and sizes).	Investment secured for business pledge start-up. Identifying sponsorship to expand the programme.
<b>Data and monitoring</b>	Implement effective data collection and monitoring of the region's natural environment as a foundation for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	Have a clear baseline for the state of the region's nature. This will form part of the work of the Centre for Climate Data approved as part of the WM2041 Five Year Plan.	Produce an annual 'State of the Region's Nature' report, to be presented at the Environment and Energy Board.	Lead	Local authorities. Wildlife Trusts. Other environmental NGOs. Defra. Local Nature Partnerships	Some funding has been secured for the Centre for Climate Data as part of the Five Year Plan.
<b>Natural capital financing</b>	Develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan and explore new finance mechanisms, e.g. leveraging of private sector finance, taking on board the Dasgupta Review recommendations.	Scope Natural Capital Investment Plan to cover investment in green and blue space across the region supporting biodiversity net gain but also nature-based solutions for climate resilience.	Continue to build and diversify the Natural Capital Investment Plan. Secure investment for natural capital programmes.	Lead	Local authorities Defra Financial institutions Private sector Environmental NGOs	Funding to be secured. Work with WMCA Green Finance Lead to develop proposition.
<b>Citizen engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the proposed WM2041 Citizen's Panel to support new natural environment initiatives.</li> <li>Run a programme of citizen science activity to support engagement in natural environment initiatives.</li> </ul>	The citizen's panel will have been established and it will be clear how all parts of the environment/ net zero work will be part of the conversation.	Natural environment and access to green space for West Midlands communities will form an ongoing part of the Citizen's Panel work programme	Lead	Local authorities. Universities. Wildlife Trusts. NGOs. Community groups. Commonwealth Games.	The WMCA has committed £150k to establish and run a Citizen's Panel to work on regional net zero and environment priorities.



Action	Aim	Y1 focus	Success by 2026	WMCA role (lead/ enable/ convene)	Stakeholders include	Investment secured
<b>Natural capital apprenticeships</b>	Trial a natural capital apprenticeships scheme as part of the Green Skills Strategy (to be delivered as part of the FYP).	Build on work that is being trialled elsewhere (including as part of Birmingham City Council's Future Parks Accelerator) to explore opportunities and career pathways.	Trials undertaken to test natural capital apprenticeships and uptake.	Enable	Colleges and FE providers. Potential employers. Local authorities. Wildlife Trusts.	To be secured as part of the WMCA's work on green skills.
<b>Net Zero Neighbourhood Demonstrator</b>	Include natural environment projects as part of the region's Net Zero Neighbourhood Demonstrator.	Work with the selected neighbourhood(s) to identify priority areas for the natural environment as part of the system change.	Natural capital and biodiversity net gain will feature in the delivery of the selected neighbourhood, along with other elements of the net zero 'system' (energy, mobility and built environment)	Lead	Energy Capital. Local authorities. Communities in selected neighbourhood(s).	The WMCA has committed £2m to the Net Zero Neighbourhood demonstrator programme. Further funding will be leveraged for this programme.
<b>Behaviour change</b>	Implement behaviour change initiatives to support the natural environment vision and outcomes, e.g. provide information on climate resilient species to plant on the WMCA website.	Have a clear programme for behaviour change, as well as the methods, to begin running campaigns. The first campaign will be linked to tree planting.	Develop other initiatives that can be supported through behaviour change, e.g. water efficiency; planting to support climate resilience.	Lead	Local authorities. Commonwealth Games. Private sector. Environmental NGOs.	Have some budget to run behaviour change work. Have also secured some funding linked to the Commonwealth Games from DCMS. Further funding will be secured on a programme-by-programme basis.

# Endnotes

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- 1 <https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/reports/>
- 2 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)
- 3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-recovery-network/nature-recovery-network>
- 4 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf)
- 5 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/962785/The\\_Economics\\_of\\_Biodiversity\\_The\\_Dasgupta\\_Review\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962785/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf)
- 6 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- 7 <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/post-2020-global-biodiversity-framework>
- 8 <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4008/wm2041-final-003.pdf>
- 9 <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4009/wm2041-a-programme-for-implementing-an-environmental-recovery-june-2020.pdf>
- 10 Available here: <https://maps.tfwm.org.uk/portal/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/3e4d8d9006c64e74a575b00a08c89c6c>
- 11 <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4009/wm2041-a-programme-for-implementing-an-environmental-recovery-june-2020.pdf>
- 12 <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4870/wm-net-zero-fyp-tech-report.pdf>
- 13 This has come from modelling undertaken as part of the work on the region's first Five Year Plan for achieving net zero: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4870/wm-net-zero-fyp-tech-report.pdf>
- 14 <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>
- 15 [https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report\\_nature-and-green-recovery\\_rspbyougov\\_june-2020.pdf](https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf)
- 16 <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/83b164ac89d14890a7004772da10ada4>

17 <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lodge-park-and-sherborne-estate/features/keeping-wildlife-connected->

18 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-land-management-schemes-overview>

19 <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/02/10/new-10-million-fund-to-boost-investment-in-nature-projects/>





**West Midlands**  
Combined Authority