

Fit for the Future?

Lead Organisation:

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Manager: Alan Carr (Sustainability Adviser)

Partners:



Customers:

Members of LEP Boards, low carbon/sustainability LEP sub-boards, those in local authorities who work with the LEP who focus on climate change issues and national bodies that support LEPs with their work on climate change.

Project Duration:

September 2015 – June 2016

The Project

Are LEPs Fit for the Future?

This project consisted of two distinct parts: (1) the production of a report called 'Fit for the Future?' and (2) an event to stimulate learning following publication of the report. The work aimed to assess the commitments of all 39 LEPs in England to reducing carbon emissions, stimulating a low carbon economy and adapting to climate change. The report provided a benchmark of each LEP against each of these three metrics and discussed geographical progression patterns. We did this by analysing the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) strategy, Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and Annual Report of each LEP and seeking out where reference had been made to the low carbon economy and tackling climate change.

Crucially, based on our findings, the report contained recommendations for both LEP representatives themselves and those national and regional bodies that support LEPs in terms of what they can do to improve their benchmark. We then convened an event that brought together representatives from LEPs and national bodies who have influence over these, to allow for an opportunity to network with peers and learn from national expertise.

Ultimately, SWM and our partners wanted to analyse the extent to which low carbon investment is being considered across the country and whether this investment is resilient and Fit for the Future.

Aims

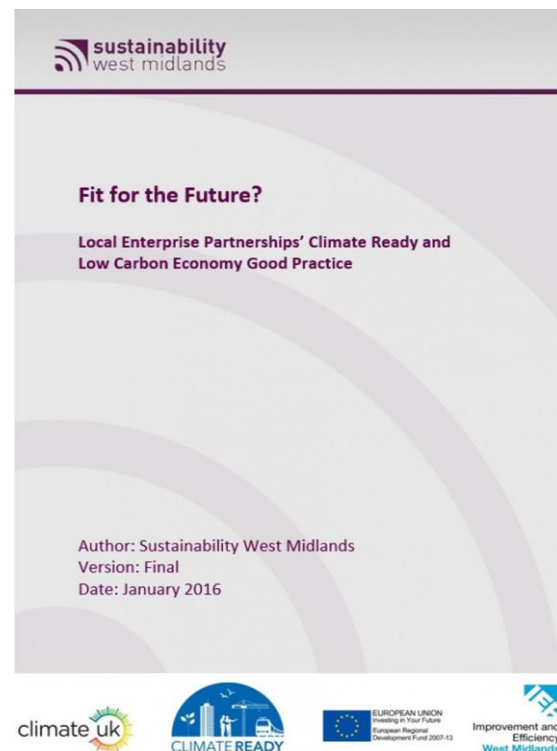
The primary aims of the report and the event were as follows:

- To promote existing good practice in climate adaptation, mitigation and promoting the low carbon economy through the identification of case studies.
- To identify where each LEP requires improvement either through communicating existing good practice through published documents or by addressing gaps in activities on the ground.
- To provide a methodology and benchmark that can be repeated annually to help identify further good practice and progress and provide a clearer national set of criteria for LEPs to work towards on this agenda.
- To provide recommendations on how government can further improve the support for LEPs in the delivery of this agenda.
- To help environmental and sustainability champions within LEP Boards, Advisory Committees and ESIF committees to make connections and therefore develop potential future joint projects.
- Provide a forum for national environmental bodies to present their existing offers of help and understand future support needs in this area.

Challenges

Challenges faced in the development of this project included the following.

- **Methodology:** We were expecting to see commitments related to climate change in ESIF strategies, SEPs, or annual reports if LEPs were considering investment in these areas. However, it became apparent that many LEPs had not fully disclosed all of the work they were doing related to climate change in these key documents. As such, we had to field questions from some LEPs asking why we hadn't included certain aspects of their work in our analysis and explain to them the methodology used. We also suggested that these LEPs disclose their work in future iterations of their key documents.
- **Sensitivity:** One of the key aspects of the report was ranking each LEP out of 39 in terms of their commitments to climate resilience, mitigation and stimulating a low carbon economy, plus an overall ranking of the averages of these three metrics. There was much debate between ourselves and partners around whether we should do this as some LEPs lower down the list may not appreciate being, on the face of it, named and



shamed. However, we were pleased to keep these league tables in, because it transpired that it was this that initially made the audience stand up and take notice of the report.

- **Mapping:** The maps included within the report required the use of GIS. Thankfully we obtained the support of a trusted partner, Staffordshire University, who provided us with access to their GIS software. It meant that this aspect of the work was logistically challenging, however.
- **Event:** Intervention into LEPs outside the West Midlands was new for us, so we had plenty of work to do, not only to find the right contacts from the various authorities, but to also gain the trust of these contacts. We employed the services of a student researcher to help with the former, and worked with our partners to help instil the latter. Evidence shows that this worked, given the good attendance at the event but also since, where we have been invited to speak at workshops convened by Greater Manchester and Sheffield City Region LEPs.
- **Does the research match reality?** We understand that what is projected in an ESIF strategy or a SEP may not transpire into actual action on the ground. Clearly to move this project forward, the next stage is to test the benchmark we have devised against each LEP to see if they have fulfilled their commitments.

The Outcome

Results

Benefits to the partners

Accessing European funding is complex but provides a huge opportunity, so it is important that the partners know where the most help is needed and what support is required. Partners include the Environment Agency, who funded both the report and event, DCLG, Natural England, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and our umbrella body Climate UK. This report and feedback from the event provides a benchmark and a means by which to target intervention, something that lacked previously.

Benefits to the customers

This work prompted some LEPs into action, helped make the connections for others and allowed the best performing ones to share their expertise. New connections have also been made to heighten the potential for joint working. Ultimately, our main aim was to provide a mechanism for LEPs to ensure that our economy is resilient and as de-carbonised as possible; this work has provided the first step towards achieving this.

Benefits to Sustainability West Midlands



SWM can provide support to LEPs and now we have the evidence showing what sort of support is required. It gives us the confidence to intervene and engage in the right way and with knowledge. The work we have done will also begin to contribute to some of our more local economic-based targets in line with our 2020 vision, such as:

- *“The West Midlands is a hub for low-carbon technology innovation and an international supplier, increasing productivity by 30%.*
- *There has been growth in the building refurbishment industry and the manufacture of wind turbines, fuel cells and fittings.*
- *Investment in the motor industry has taken advantage of the ‘green motoring’ market.*
- *Up-skilling programmes have equipped the local workforce with skills to enter new job markets.*
- *Many communities and businesses own micro-generation facilities to produce their own energy.”*

In the Future

SWM is looking to produce version two of the report and run a second event in 2016-17. The former would build on the benchmark by looking at the reality in each LEP area, asking questions like “What has been funded and which commitments have gone ahead? What extra work may have been done?” The latter would once again bring together these findings and maintain the connections already made.

We are also seeking to support national organisations such as those mentioned previously by running a national network for LEPs to ensure that engagement is consistent and to provide a first port of call for both LEPs and supporting bodies to ask questions or make connections. SWM has the tools and expertise to make this happen, but at this stage needs the commitment from national bodies to provide the required resource.

The Extra’s

Accolades

Two delegates from the event quoted:

“Very, very useful. Gave me lots of ideas on how to progress with our LEP and their knowledge of low carbon / climate change adaptation.”

“Case studies provided excellent inspiration to demonstrate what can be achieved. Sharing documents and models will continue to be invaluable.”

Links and Downloads

[Fit for the Future? report](#)

[Fit for the Future? event outputs](#)

Contact Details

For further information on our work with the LEPs or to work with us in one of a variety of ways, please contact the SWM team on 0121 237 5890 or enquiries@swm.org.uk.