

# **25 Year Environmental Plan**

## **Opportunities for the West Midlands**

**Author: Sustainability West Midlands**

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**Project Manager:** Dr Simon Slater, SWM

**Project Contributors:** Gareth Evans, SWM team and members

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Registered company No.04390508

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## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to identify the key sustainability opportunities for the West Midlands from the 25 Year Environment Plan. This will help SWM, the West Midlands Combined Authority, Local Enterprise Partnerships and our networks of members and partners to understand where we can work together to help deliver the UK Government agenda and our own regional and local priorities.

### Summary of opportunities

- SWM already provides independent annual sustainability monitoring for the West Midlands region and WMCA, and could expand this with partners to include a measure of natural capital.
- Aligning investment in the natural environment with the emerging workstreams we are supporting with partners and the WMCA around natural environment and green infrastructure, and the work of our members such as National Grid.
- Drive for higher environmental standards for housing will help our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and our members such as the Sustainable Housing Action Partnership (SHAP) to improve local sustainability construction standards, location and planning.
- The region has a high concentration of waste recycling companies due to our manufacturing base and location as a national logistics hub. Therefore West Midlands companies and business networks will benefit from the proposed actions on improved innovation on product design, reuse, and recycling. This also supports one of the WMCA work streams.
- Potential to explore a regional waste and resource efficiency strategy to support the new national strategy in 2018.
- The improved water efficiency and planning agenda will support the SWM Green Business Clubs network activities and our work with Severn Trent

## 2 Our Approach

### 2.1 Our policy experience

We are the sustainability adviser for the leaders of the West Midlands. We are also the regional sustainability champion body for the West Midlands, designated by government. We are a not-for-profit company that works with our members in the business, public and

voluntary sectors. Our Board is private sector led and has cross-sector representation; they are supported by our team of staff and associates.

We have drawn on our following policy experience to respond to this strategy:

- Government independent regional sustainability champion for the West Midlands since 2002, now the only outside London.
- Running a range of annual good practice networks and events sharing solutions and reaching over 10,000 individuals within the business, public and voluntary sector.
- Futures and sustainability reviews for Government, business and public sector, and producing the UK's only annual independent regional sustainability roadmap progress report.
- Developed the UK's first low carbon regional economic development strategy with Advantage West Midlands in 2007.
- Produced the UK's first joint Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) low carbon investment prospectus, and national benchmark of LEP sustainability good practice.
- Supported by the UK Government to promote UK expertise in low carbon economic policy and business opportunities in Europe, China, and Japan.
- Sustainability advisor and delivery partner for the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- Our review and response to the draft UK industrial strategy, and final clean growth and industrial strategy.

## **2.2 Why is the 25 Year Environment Plan important?**

Our natural environment is our most precious inheritance. The United Kingdom is blessed with a wonderful variety of natural landscapes and habitats and the 25 Year Environment Plan sets out comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing them in England for the next generation. Its goals are simple: cleaner air and water; plants and animals which are thriving; and a cleaner, greener country for us all.

By using land more sustainably and creating new habitats for wildlife, including planting more trees, the decline in native species and improved biodiversity can be achieved. By tackling the scourge of waste plastic our oceans can become cleaner and healthier.

Connecting more people with the environment will promote greater well-being and by making the most of emerging technologies, a cleaner, greener country can be achieved whilst reaping the economic rewards of the clean growth revolution.

## **2.3 SWM Approach**

When reading through the 25 year environment plan we picked out 4 of the 6 chapters that the government has wrote about due to these four having a strong affiliation with our work and the priorities and targets that we have set for the West Midlands. We also included a chapter on how the government would put the plan into practice as this is

essential for any progression to be made. You can see our views on how each of the chapters meet our priorities in Annex A where there is a scoring system and a comment made for each chapter.

### **3 Key opportunities for the West Midlands:**

#### **Using and managing land sustainably**

##### **Headlines**

Higher environmental standards for all new builds. As new homes will be built in a way that reduces demands for water, energy and material resources, improves flood resilience, minimises overheating and encourages walking and cycling. Resilient buildings and infrastructure will readily adapt to a changing climate. This will be done through the imbedding of an environmental net gain principle for developments including housing and infrastructure.

Defra will invest at least £200,000 to help develop soil health metrics and test them on farms across the country. These soil metrics will give the whole industry a comparable way of measuring soil health leading to improved soil health and restoration and protect peatlands through ending the use of peat in horticulture.

Expand woodland cover and make sure that existing woodlands are better managed to maximise the range of benefits they provide – this will include an appointment of a national Tree Champion to support the approach to promote the unique blend of social, economic and environmental benefits offered by trees and forests. This will also involve the designing of a new woodland creation grant scheme, involving landowners, farmers and key forestry stakeholders with the hope that new grant scheme could specifically incentivise larger scale afforestation to meet carbon goals and wider environmental benefits at a landscape scale.

##### **Strategic Fit - Support for Roadmap 2020 priority?**

The higher environmental standards for new builds will help improve energy efficiency through the reduced demand of water, energy and improved material resources leading to an overall reduction of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere during both the build but also during the lifespan afterwards.

The encouragement of walking and cycling with new builds will not only have a decreased effect on carbon through reduced use of other forms of transport but also an improved health benefit contribution to our aim of a decreased health inequality gap.

Improving our environment through increased soil health, decreased use of peat and increased afforestation will have large environmental benefits but will also create a larger carbon sink, taking in more CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.

### **Issues with this Chapter**

This chapter has a large emphasis on policy with: Designing and delivering a new environmental land management system, introducing new farming rules for water, appointing a national Tree Champion and Strengthening biodiversity national planning policy all mentioned, however these are not explained in much more detail with little information on what each if these policies will entail and who and where they will take place.

There was a major opportunity within this section to look at the impact transport has on the environment through managing land sustainably, but there is no mention about this. There is talk within building new homes about encouraging walking and cycling but there is no mention about public transport or routes for these new builds to access everyday amenities.

### **Summary of Opportunity for West Midlands**

- Drive for higher environmental standards for housing will help our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and our members such as the Sustainable Housing Action Partnership (SHAP) to improve local sustainability construction standards, location and planning.
- Aligning investment in trees and natural environment with the emerging workstreams we are supporting with partners and the WMCA around natural environment and green infrastructure.

## **Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes**

### **Headlines**

The development of a Nature Recovery Network providing 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife habitat, more effectively linking existing protected sites and landscapes, as well as urban green and blue infrastructure. Providing opportunities to re-introduce species that have been lost from the countryside. To achieve this the development of a code and best practice guidance for assessing the merits and risks of species reintroduction projects, taking account of their contribution to global and domestic conservation priorities, community engagement and wider social and economic impacts would need to be produced.

Commissioning a 21st Century ‘Hobhouse’ Review of National Parks and AONBs. Working with National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards to deliver environmental enhancement, including demonstrator projects, and engaging with communities through their statutory management plans.

Work with the water industry and its five-year business planning cycles to make sure it puts in place long-term strategies to increase resilience and manage supply and demand. This includes all significant abstractions that have been historically exempt to make sure that they also play a part in protecting the water environment by 2022.

### **Strategic Fit - Support for Roadmap 2020 priority?**

Through providing an additional 500,000 hectares of wildlife habitat and the addition of previous species back into the countryside alongside the review of national parks this will go towards our environment priority through enhancement of green spaces and environment infrastructure.

### **Issues with this Chapter**

This chapter references how the government will work with companies within the sectors on policy. It is not clear how any potential conflicts of interest will be managed.

### **Summary of Opportunity for West Midlands**

- Aligning investment in the natural environment with the emerging workstreams we are supporting with partners and the WMCA around natural environment and green infrastructure
- The improved water efficiency and planning agenda will support the SWM Green Business Clubs network activities and our work with Severn Trent

## **Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing**

### **Headlines**

Utilising the environment through helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces including through mental health services and encouraging children to be close to nature in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas.

The government plans to support the Parks Action Group in its work to help England's public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future. However, there is no description on what this support will be.

Working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to see how commitments on green infrastructure can be incorporated into national planning guidance and policy.

Government wish to continue to work with stakeholders to develop and implement a programme to plant one million trees in England's towns and cities by 2022, improving larger cities green infrastructure and having a crucial role in reducing air pollution in these areas.

### **Strategic Fit - Support for Roadmap 2020 priority?**

This chapter has strong emphasis on what the environment can do for us, which stresses the reasons why we must look after the environment. By promoting green infrastructure both in cities and further out it meets our environment priority. Whilst green infrastructure is being used to improve health and wellbeing through linking up with mental health services, schools and children especially in disadvantaged areas as well as generally meeting the needs of the communities it will contribute towards our target of reducing health inequality by 30%.

### **Issues with this Chapter**

With emphasis on how the environment can have a positive impact on communities there appears to be a lot of positive opportunities. However unlike other policy areas no money has been pledged towards these plans and ideas.

### **Summary of Opportunity for West Midlands**

- Aligning investment in the natural environment with the emerging workstreams we are supporting with partners and the WMCA around natural environment and green infrastructure

## **Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste**

### **Headlines**

This area including plastic in the oceans got the majority of media attention from the 25 year plan with initiatives such as, working towards eliminating all avoidable waste by 2050



and all avoidable plastic waste by end of 2042. Reduce pollution by tackling air pollution in our Clean Air Strategy and reduce the impact of chemicals.

The chapter also included other activity including: Publishing a new Resources and Waste strategy in 2018 aimed at making the UK a world leader in resource efficiency. It will set out an approach to reducing waste, promoting markets for secondary materials, incentivising producers to design better products and how materials can be better managed at the end of their life by targeting environmental impacts.

Encourage producers to take more responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products and rationalise the number of different types of plastic in use. Whilst working with the industries to make sure that more plastics can be easily recycled and the quality of collected recycled plastics is improved.

Supporting water companies, high street retailers, coffee shops and transport hubs to offer new refill points for people to top-up water bottles for free in every major city and town in England.

Working with the waste management industry and re-processors to significantly increase the proportion of plastic packaging that is collected and recycled. To do this there needs to be clarity and standardised items that can be recycled within households nationwide as there is still too much confusion regarding what products can be recycled in which areas.

### **Strategic Fit - Support for Roadmap 2020 priority?**

Large focus around the issue of waste and how we can alter especially plastics use, not only increased recycling of plastics but also the reduction of use in the initial stages of the products. This is a key step as currently the infrastructure is not set up nationwide to cope with the added amount which the government wishes to recycle. Diverting waste from landfill is one of our priority actions, whilst decreasing the production of these plastics would be the ideal outcome with increased recycling of the rest.

Over the past seven years the government has invested around £54million into plastic innovation however the government recognises that there is a need to accelerate the pace of research to ensure a higher proportion of plastic is re-usable, recyclable and recycled and that British companies are at the forefront in developing this technology. This fits into the procurement priority of ours as the government is stimulating innovation although they have not pledged any more money to accelerate the pace of the research.

Overall this will have a largely positive impact on the UK's environment as a reduction in the use of plastics and the increased amount being either reused at new refill points in major cities or the amount that gets recycled will halt the amount of plastics used reducing the

amount of crude oil used having ongoing environmental benefits. Whilst less plastics will go to landfill and in the oceans clearing up the UK's natural environments and habitats.

### **Issues with this Chapter**

The main issue is that local authorities do not have standardised materials they can recycle as not all have the facilities to recycle these plastics, so there is a lot of confusion with individuals regarding what they should put in their recycling bins and not in their domestic bins. This issue needs to be corrected to enhance the large positive outcomes the government wishes to see around recycling.

### **Summary of Opportunity for West Midlands**

- The region has a high concentration of waste recycling companies due to our manufacturing base and location as a national logistics hub. Therefore West Midlands companies and business networks will benefit from the proposed actions on improved innovation on product design, reuse, and recycling. This also supports one of the WMCA work streams.
- Potential to explore a regional waste and resource efficiency strategy to support the new national strategy in 2018.

### **Putting the plan into practice**

#### **Headlines**

Consulting on setting up a new independent body to hold government to account and a new set of environmental principles to underpin policy-making.

Develop a set of metrics to assess progress towards our 25 year goals and undertake a second 'National Ecosystem Assessment' type initiative beginning in 2022. Refreshing the 25 Year Environment Plan regularly to ensure that collectively there is focus on the right priorities, using the latest evidence, and delivering better value for money.

Continue work with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to develop a full set of natural capital accounts for the UK. Whilst improving understanding and valuation of the benefits of natural capital through government research and working with the research community.

The government propose to report annually on the plan itself. Reports will cover the progress against performance measures and an analysis of recent outcome indicator monitoring. Alongside partners within government, such as the Office for National Statistics, and interested parties outside, including environmental organisations, there will be

continued published official and national statistics, giving everyone information on how the environment is changing.

### **Strategic Fit - Support for Roadmap 2020 priority?**

With this section focusing on how the government will make sure that what they have promised is achieved they are contributing towards our leadership priority. With the government focusing on monitoring this will give a good indication if they are on track or there needs to be improvement which will all have an effect on our environment priority.

### **Issues with this Chapter**

There is little detail about the role of an independent body to hold the government to account or the consequences if plans are not followed through on.

### **Summary of Opportunity for West Midlands**

- SWM already provides independent annual sustainability monitoring for the West Midlands region and WMCA, and could expand this with partners to include a measure of natural capital.
- Aligning investment in the reporting of progress natural environment with the emerging workstreams we are supporting with partners and the WMCA around natural environment and green infrastructure, and the work of our members such as National Grid.

END

## Annex A

<b>25 Year Environment Plan</b>	<b>West Midlands Roadmap to a sustainable future in 2020- Sustainability Priorities</b> Sub-regional, cross-sector and boundary activity that will deliver the most effective contribution to productivity, carbon reduction, and health inequality outcomes. +, ++, +++ = Indicative positive contributions of the powers and activities of the 25 year environment plan to the WM Sustainability Priorities.							Overall comment on potential contribution of the powers and activities of the 25 year environmental plan to the WM Sustainable Priorities
	Jobs- Development and coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs and skills	Procurement- Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation and save costs	Waste- Infrastructure for diverting commercial and industrial waste from landfill	Buildings- Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency	Transport- Improved low carbon transport choices – flexible working, cycling, walking	Energy- Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas	Environment- Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defenses and green spaces	
<b>Chapter 1 – Using and managing land sustainably</b>			<b>+</b>			<b>+++</b>		The Majority of this chapter focuses on policy to alter the environment, however many statements mention that a policy will be put in place or an existing policy will be change but now what these changes will be and what restrictions will be put in place. The chapter covers using and managing land sustainably however there is little to no mention around land use for transport which should be expected, especially regards to buildings and accessing public transport regarding their locations.

<b>25 Year Environment Plan</b>	<b>West Midlands Roadmap to a sustainable future in 2020- Sustainability Priorities</b> Sub-regional, cross-sector and boundary activity that will deliver the most effective contribution to productivity, carbon reduction, and health inequality outcomes. +, ++, +++= Indicative positive contributions of the powers and activities of the 25 year environment plan to the WM Sustainability Priorities.							Overall comment on potential contribution of the powers and activities of the 25 year environmental plan to the WM Sustainable Priorities
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<b>Chapter 2 – Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes</b>						++		Promising plans including the Tree Health Resilience Plan suggested to be released during 2018 and useful information around a Nature Recovery Network. Large emphasis on working with companies and businesses within each sector to make improvements, however no indication that these companies are free and willing to do as much work as being promised.

25 Year Environment Plan	<b>West Midlands Roadmap to a sustainable future in 2020- Sustainability Priorities</b> Sub-regional, cross-sector and boundary activity that will deliver the most effective contribution to productivity, carbon reduction, and health inequality outcomes. +, ++, +++ = Indicative positive contributions of the powers and activities of the 25 year environment plan to the WM Sustainability Priorities.								Overall comment on potential contribution of the powers and activities of the 25 year environmental plan to the WM Sustainable Priorities
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Chapter 3 – Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing							+++	+	Detailed information especially around disadvantaged areas and the work that can be done to get children more involved. The promise of continuing to work with Exeter University with ORVal shows promise that commitments are being made. Promise to plant one million trees by 2022 will be a green boost for cities areas.

<b>25 Year Environment Plan</b>	<b>West Midlands Roadmap to a sustainable future in 2020- Sustainability Priorities</b> Sub-regional, cross-sector and boundary activity that will deliver the most effective contribution to productivity, carbon reduction, and health inequality outcomes. +, ++, +++= Indicative positive contributions of the powers and activities of the 25 year environment plan to the WM Sustainability Priorities.							Overall comment on potential contribution of the powers and activities of the 25 year environmental plan to the WM Sustainable Priorities
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<b>Chapter 4 – Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste</b>		++	+++				++	Large focus surrounding waste and promoting recycling especially with plastics through various methods and stages. Innovation of plastics was discussed with £54million already funded but organisations are identified which can help the government make the most of this funding. Air pollution and water quality are also mentioned with strategies and lots of working with businesses and industries planned to take place.

<b>25 Year Environment Plan</b>	<b>West Midlands Roadmap to a sustainable future in 2020- Sustainability Priorities</b> Sub-regional, cross-sector and boundary activity that will deliver the most effective contribution to productivity, carbon reduction, and health inequality outcomes. +, ++, +++ = Indicative positive contributions of the powers and activities of the 25 year environment plan to the WM Sustainability Priorities.							Overall comment on potential contribution of the powers and activities of the 25 year environmental plan to the WM Sustainable Priorities	
<b>Putting the plan into practice</b>	Jobs- Development and coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs and skills	Procurement- Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation and save costs <b>++</b>	Waste- Infrastructure for diverting commercial and industrial waste from landfill	Buildings- Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency	Transport- Improved low carbon transport choices – flexible working, cycling, walking	Energy- Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas	Environment- Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defenses and green spaces <b>++</b>	Leadership and perception change- civic and corporate leaders showing that work and lifestyle changes are desirable and realistic <b>++</b>	This section gives a good indication on how the government are going to make sure this plan is implemented and updated throughout so that it doesn't become outdated and irrelevant towards the end of the 25 years. The government has split the work up between in house and getting other companies to make sure that they reach their target, however although there is mention about an independent body to hold the government to account it does not specify if there are consequences if plans are not followed through on.