

A Naturally Healthy Economy- through integrating the Environment



The West Midlands has a hidden asset- its natural green environment. To be 'Best-in-Class' the WMCA will have to integrate this environment into all its decision-making; leading to better housing, better transport, better health and well-being, better workforce performance and better quality of life- attracting better investment.

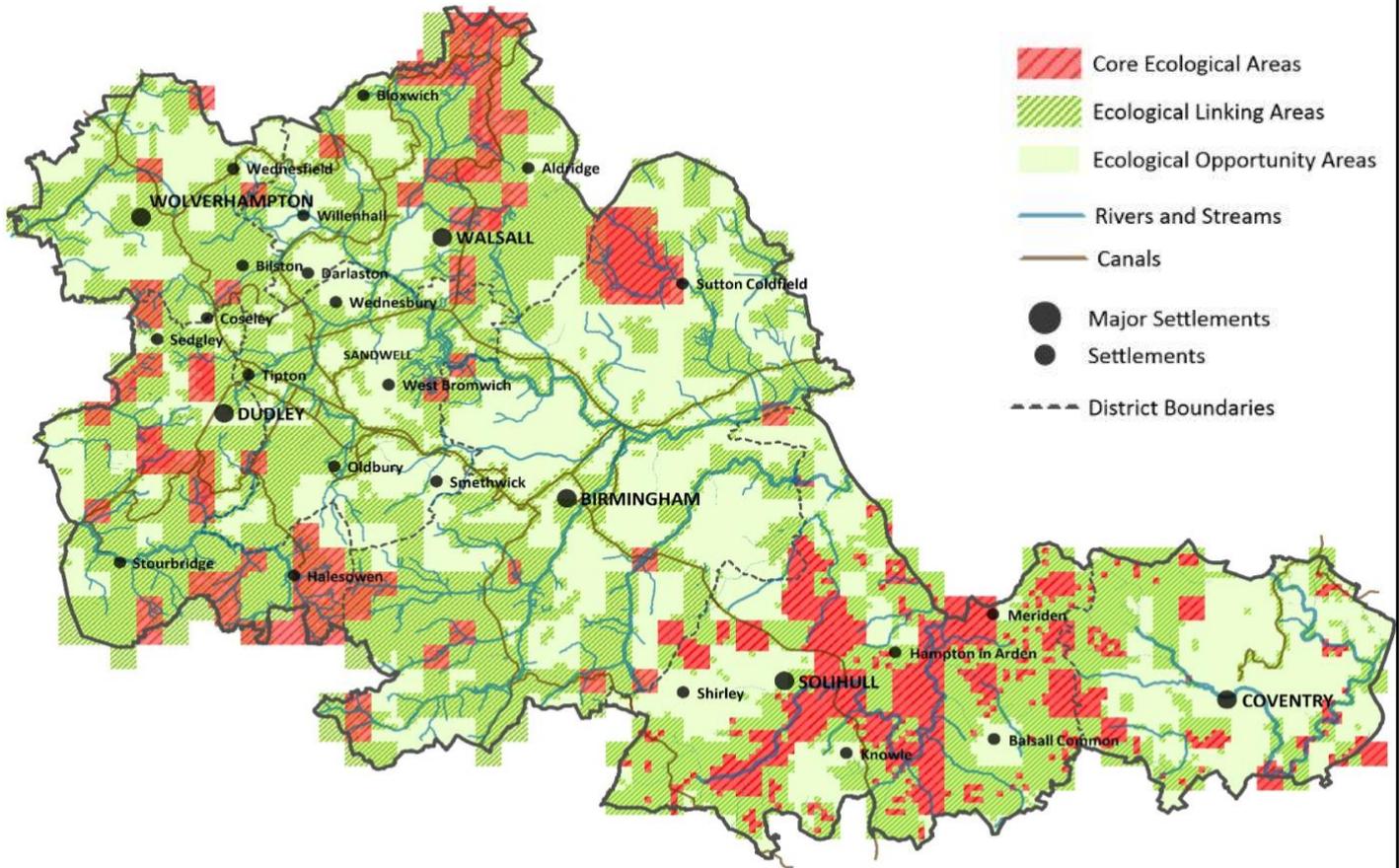
Overview:

- The environment groups representing the West Midlands have all come together to support the formation of a **WMCA Environment Board** to drive this integration;
- The environment groups offer the **Natural Capital Roundtable** as an expert advisory group in support;
- Through HS2 a single set of environmental metrics is being devised;
- The **Natural Capital Roundtable** would help establish a natural capital module to work across the **Direct Economic Impact Model (DEIM)**; as an integrated part of the **WMCA Assurance Framework**.

OUR KEY PRINCIPLES:

For the West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver this spatial vision, the following natural capital principles need to be owned and supported by all sectors and stakeholders within the WMCA:-

- Natural Capital is an asset and a net contributor to economic growth. Investing in it creates jobs and services which contribute to the regions GVA;
- For new housing and developments to incorporate natural capital, such as green roofs, walls and SUDS, leading to sustainable communities;
- Natural capital can be used to improve air quality, helping Birmingham and the West Midlands deliver a Clean Air Zone;
- Develop green spaces and green corridors linked with sustainable transport to reduce traffic congestion and improve health and economic productivity;
- Recognition for the significant contribution from the existing green workforce to the local economy; and the acknowledgement of its potential growth as a sector in its own right;
- Embed the principles for natural capital into the **WMCA Assurance Framework**.



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The existing ecological networks of the West Midlands The ecological network has been developed for the WMCA constituent members (see map above) using robust scientific analysis that allocates all parts of the landscape into three broad categories:-

Background:

All the environmental groups and their Local Authority partners have come together as a *single voice with a single agenda*- to support the integration of the natural environment across all activities of the WMCA. They all support the WMCA becoming the first region in the country to develop its own 25 year Environment Plan-delivered through an integrated approach-rather than traditional stand-alone mechanisms.

The WMCA benefits from a rich ecological network, which lies within and links to, the region’s towns and cities. The ecological network supports a wide variety of wildlife including plants, small mammals, pollinators, other insects and birds and provides a vital space for physical activity, improved air quality and flood alleviation.

The Ecological Richness of West Midlands:

- **Core Ecological Areas**- are existing areas of high natural value – offering extensive public benefit;
- **Ecological Linking Areas** – these areas of medium to high natural value- that crucially connect both people & wildlife e.g. canals;
- **Ecological Opportunity Areas**- most densely developed areas-offering great potential through urban parks, road verges & corner sites.

A West Midlands Natural Capital Plan can be used to capture the multiple benefits derived from this ecological framework *to put natural capital at the centre of the place making agenda* within the WMCA.

A Natural Capital Definition: elements of the natural environment which provide valuable goods and services to people, such as clean air, clean water and recreation.

National Vision - "to be the first Government ever to return the environment in a better condition that it inherited it, over the course of a generation" (Natural Environment White Paper, 2011).

The Power of Place:

The power of place to affect people's mental and physical health, and hence their overall well-being, has been recognised for many years, and is the central tenet of the NHS England's Healthy New Towns programme. Recent health and well-being indicators and reports such as the House of Lords Select Committee Review (2016) 'Building Better Places', have also illustrated the effects place design and quality can have on people's health and well-being.

Global Vision – "fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies. To this, it must catalyse investment and innovation which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new economic opportunities." (OECD, 2011)

The environmental economy contributed **£1.2bn GVA** to the WMCA economy in 2014

Direct Health Effects:

Research into the direct public health benefits of urban green spaces has focussed on three main areas- physical activity, mental health and specific treatments:

- A national survey in England of people who had moved from areas of more green to areas with less, or vice versa, identified direct changes in their reported well-being;
- A national cross-sectional study in the UK found a correlation with people who lived within 500 meters of accessible green space were 24% more likely to meet 30 minutes of physical activity;
- Low income areas are associated with lower quality housing and education, poor diet, and less access to good quality green space. Such deprivation is closely linked to poor health. Life expectancy is on average 7 years shorter and they will live more of their lives with disabilities. Health inequalities are halved in greener areas.
- DEFRA- has estimated that if everyone had access to sufficient green space the benefits associated with increased physical activity could save the health system £2.1bn per year.

Indirect Health Effects:

Urbanisation damages the environment and has a range of implications for human health.

Increasing urban vegetation could help reduce:-

- Flooding-10,000 trees can retain approx. 35 million litres of water per year;
- Noise pollution- a border of trees and shrubs 30 metres wide can reduce noise levels by 5-10 decibels;
- Air pollution- a doubling of tree cover across the west Midlands could reduce the concentration of fine particulate matter by 25%;
- Urban Heat Island- vegetation creates shade which reduces the risk of heat stroke and exhaustion.

Good access to quality greenspace could **save the NHS in WMCA £105m per year**

Public Service Reforms:

The majority of funding for green spaces in the UK comes from the public sector; 70% local authorities and 15% Central Government and the EU. **Reduction in central government grants to local authorities has led to a year on year decrease in spending on green spaces- since 2010/11- up to 10.5%- in a year.** Local parks are not a statutory service- so not protected by law.

Local businesses and property developers benefit from additional green space through job creation, visitor spending, work force retention and house prices- up to 5% uplift in value.

As part of the planned public service reforms the Natural Capital Roundtable can offer- a new approach to governing, financing and planning for urban green space:- a **'Star Framework'** linking top-down strategic beneficiaries with bottom-up service **recipients so integrating the environment with the growth and social agendas.**

Resilient Networks and Environments:

The WMCA aims to connect people with jobs. Green and blue infrastructure already provide **essential corridors** for people and wildlife to travel across the WMCA, **e.g. canal network;**

Inward investment - attractive areas encourage the movement of employers to an area, and increase the value of local property. The Glasgow Green Renewal Project led to a 47% increase in council tax receipts;

63% of journeys in the West Midlands are by car and, at peak times, 81% of cars have just one person in them- **achieving a modal shift**- is a high priority;

Urban transport infrastructure often results in the funnelling of pedestrians along major roads, where the **concentration of air pollution** is highest. Green corridors across cities can reduce pedestrian exposure to pollution by providing alternative routes. Resilient networks are essential for the WMCA ambitions; resilient neighbourhoods must reflect **best practice in 'Place-Making'**;

Land and Housing:

All land is natural capital. Having sensible, informed strategic plan for land use allowing for biodiversity and ecosystem services as underpinning aims of this will result in maximum benefits for all. Developments should be viewed as in and part of nature requiring developers to think differently and more creatively about design. All land must be valued for biodiversity quality and potential, and contribution to ecological network as well as potential for housing and development. Brownfield can offer high biodiversity value.

The Natural Capital Roundtable can offer the support of two newly devised Tools:-

- **Natural Capital Planning Tool**- currently subject to a national trial- with UK business support (UKBCSD) and RTPI & RICS; on WMCA sites at:-
- UK Central;
-Birmingham Smithfield
- **The Healthy Development Toolkit**- based around the NHS's Sustainable Development Unit checklist;

A Green Workforce:

In 2001 environmental economy of WM comprised 91,000 jobs generating £1,425 million GDP (5% of regional employment and GDP).

- **Ignite**-training the new WMCA Green Workforce;
- **Accelerate**-mapping the existing green jobs;
- **Re-Tune**-wider professions & Public Sector Reforms; Post 16 entry level training programme for WMCA **Green Apprentices;**
- **UNESCO Geo Park** proposal: Applying income and employment multiplier coefficients, it is argued that geodiversity generates between £2.6 million and £4.9 million in local income and supports between 324 and 441 full time equivalent local jobs.

Natural Capital can be defined as the world's stocks of **natural** assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things. It is from this **Natural Capital** that humans derive a wide range of services, often called ecosystem services, which make human life possible.

(Natural Capital Committee Third Report 2015)

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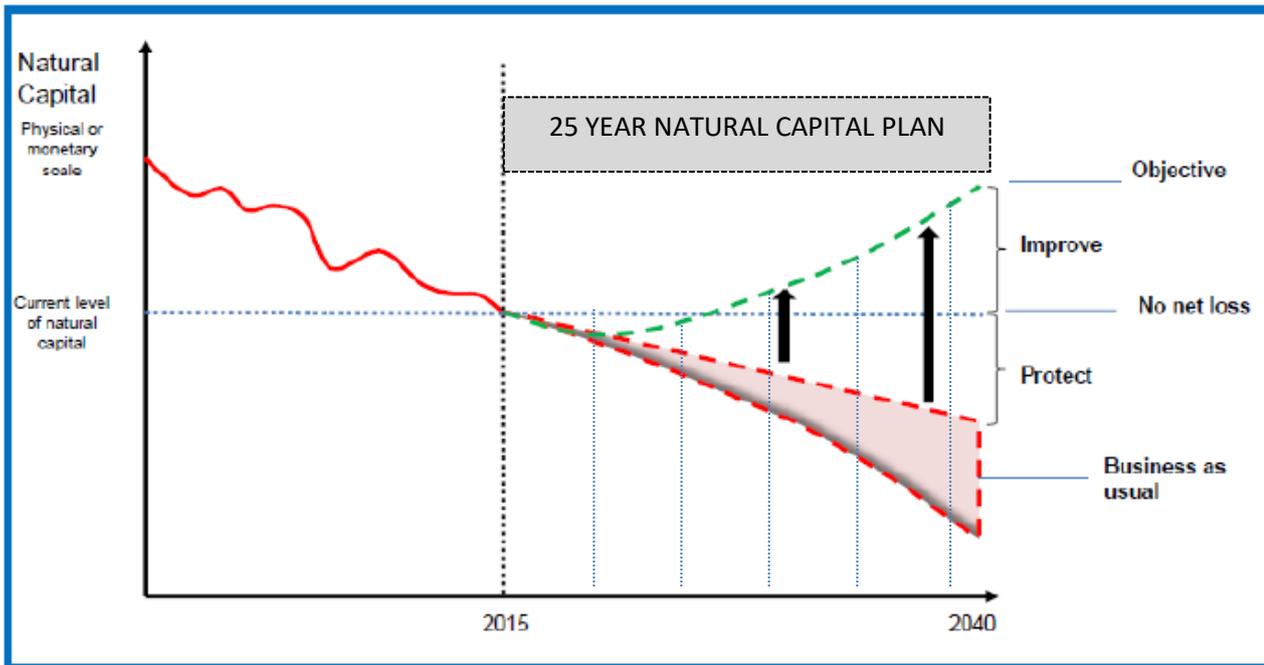


Figure 1: Protecting and improving natural capital over a generation – a stylised interpretation

The WMCA can become the first region in the UK to develop a 25 year Natural Capital/ Environment Plan – with all the multiple benefits that would bring.

The 25 year plan would be broken down into 5 year delivery plans; shared right across the Growth Agenda and regional stakeholders; co-ordinated by the Environment Board with the WMCA PMO office.

Creation of a WMCA Environment Board- A Case for Support:

- The WMCA Environment Board would oversee the integration of the 25 Year Environment Plan- across the Growth Agenda;
- Natural Capital would become an essential element in the WMCA Assurance Framework;
- A Natural Capital module would be devised to work right across the 8 WMCA SEP priorities- providing additional resilience to the Direct Economic Impact Model;
- We would work with the Growth Company to embed natural capital through value-capture.

- Natural Capital would form part of the Benefits and Realisation & Evaluation Strategy;
- The Environment Board would work with and through the WMCA centralised PMO function- to ensure cross-linkage with the 3 Commissions;
- The Environment Board would be supported by the Natural Capital Roundtable offering direct support:-
 - The Star Framework to work with Public Sector Reform;
 - The Natural Capital Planning Tool & Healthy Development Toolkit- for all Place Making