

Environment & Climate Change Partnership Update

**Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods
and Climate Change**

Purpose of the report

- 1 To provide Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESC OSC) with background information in advance of a presentation from Jim Cokill, Director of Durham Wildlife Trust, and Chair of the County Durham Environment & Climate Change Partnership (ECCP). The presentation will focus on the activity of the partnership over the past year and future plans.

A copy of the presentation is attached as appendix 2.

Executive summary

- 2 The ECCP have been involved a variety of projects over the past year linked to the priorities identified in the ECCP Plan 2022-25. The partnership has also supported a wide variety of projects through the three workstreams, examples of which are detailed in the presentation. The Executive Board reviewed the partnership in September 2023 and ran an Emergency Summit April 2024, where they identified new areas of work for the partnership to consider. These will be discussed at the next ECCP Executive Board meeting in June.

Recommendations

- 3 Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:
 - a) note and comment upon the information provided within the report and presentation.
 - b) include a further update from the Environment and Climate Change Partnership in its work programme for 2024/25.

Background

- 4 The ECCP's vision is for 'a better County Durham: sustainable communities, resilient to climate change, richer in nature'. The overarching responsibility to deliver the vision sits with the Executive

Board. The Executive Board is supported by three workstreams, each of which have Strategic Boards chaired by senior officers from partner organisations, independent from Durham County Council:

- (a) Climate Emergency – chaired by Professor Simone Abram from Durham University and the Durham Energy Institute
 - (b) Ecological Emergency – chaired by Chris Woodley-Stewart from North Pennines National Landscape
 - (c) Place, Health and Community – chaired by Kate Burrows from Durham Community Action
- 5 The ESC OSC invited the Chair of the ECCP to discuss with members of the committee activity undertaken over the past year and what is planned.

Current position

Climate Emergency work

- 6 The Climate Emergency workstream's main function has been the continuing delivery of the countywide CERP2. The workstream has been supporting several projects, including:
- (a) Supporting the Food for the Planet project. This included organising a carbon costed restaurant night with REfUSE Cafe, holding a Low carbon Pumpkin Patch event in association with Big Chefs Little Chefs, launching a National Vegetarian Week in County Durham and funding a low carbon food discount for 1,800 vegetarian meals across Durham County Council's sites. Also working with further partners to launch carbon ratings across several sites in the County; this includes working with the acute NHS Trust and Durham University. The project won a County Durham Environment award in the " Responding to Climate Change" category for its impact.
 - (b) Horden minewater – a further £159,000 was awarded to Durham County Council (DCC) from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero via the Heat Networks Delivery Unit, to appoint a consultant to carry out detailed project development work. This work, due to complete in July will see the development of an outline business case for a community focussed minewater scheme. Though at present the council are leading on this scheme, partners such as the East Durham Trust, Horden Together, and the Coal Authority have been vital in the project's progress. Match funding was reduced from approximately

£50,000 to £25,000 as further funding was awarded to this scheme via the Energy Accelerator fund.

- (c) Scope 3 – the Low Carbon Economy team has been engaging with local authorities through the Net Zero North East Board and partners such as Durham University and the acute NHS Trust to develop collective action on scope 3 emissions. This has led to a generally accepted methodology being adopted by many local authorities and partners.
- (d) Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure project (LEVI) – DCC has been successful in their bid for £4,375,000 and will be installing 250 EV charge points in Durham in collaboration with delivery partners. This work will begin imminently.
- (e) The next iteration of the Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP) has been launched. The Project will provide up to 100 fully funded energy audits for businesses across the county and so far, BEEP have received 51 referrals, of which 7 reports have been completed with 8 live currently.
- (f) The Green Economy study was presented to the board in April 2023. Produced by K Matrix and commissioned by Durham County Council, it provided a baseline analysis and growth potential of County Durham's Green Economy. The overriding aim of the study was to provide data in evidence for the Green Economy in County Durham through a snapshot of the market across a 3-year period. The market intelligence study provided quantification of the Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services sector for County Durham. The intention of the study was to be a tool to understand what is present in County Durham, from which to build further capacity.
- (g) Solar Car Ports - up to £75,000 has been awarded to the next stage of solar car ports project development and design through the Energy Accelerator fund. This project has so far undergone technical feasibility and design of 17 sites to Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) stage 2, and 5 of the best performing sites will subsequently be taken to RIBA stage 3 using this funding.
- (h) Climate County Durham website – in 2023, the home page was visited 2881 times by 929 individual users and the news pages were visited 454 times. We are currently developing the next phase of the website and restructuring other channels including the corporate content related to the work. The Climate County Durham Facebook page was launched in July last year. We now

have 208 followers with a common age range of 35-44. Though the following is somewhat small at present, they are increasing steadily at around 2% per month. As part of our overarching strategic comms and engagement strategy there will be a focus to grow the page interactivity and increase engagement.

Climate Emergency year ahead

- 7 The Climate Emergency workstream have also been supporting the development of the countywide elements of CERP3. They have been involved with the development of the strategy document, priority identification and description and consultation activity. The plan will set out actions for the council and partners to take from 2024-2027. The plan will be put before cabinet in early Summer 2024 and at time of writing, before adoption, has more than 230 actions. The Climate Emergency Strategic Board will act as a governance group for CERP3.
- 8 Climate Emergency partners will focus on co-ordinating the development of a Local Area Energy Plan for the county, which will aim to streamline project development by enabling intelligent investment in grid reinforcement, in anticipation of future developments.

Ecological Emergency work

- 9 The Ecological Emergency Workstream's (EEW) work is centred around the production of the Durham Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have a deadline of March 2025 for production of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which means that the EEW will need to produce a draft LNRS and consult on this by winter 2024.
- 10 To date most of the work has been around first stage consultation and engagement with the LNRS. They have also been setting up the structure of Sub-Groups for habitats and species, they will be tasked with producing the measures and actions for the county's priority species and habitats. Key tasks undertaken during 2023/24 include:
 - (a) Established the [LNRS website](#).
 - (b) Developed the first stage residents' consultation that informs the first draft of the LNRS. This included a mapping element that allowed residents to identify locations they believe could be important for nature recovery.
 - (c) Held meetings with the National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association to discuss engagement with farmers and land managers.

- (d) The residents' consultation ran for two months and finished on the 16 April.
 - (e) Directly emailed the consultation to over 350 companies and individuals ranging from developers, community groups, quarry companies, businesses, Parish and Town Councils. The email included supporting information and an offer to set up meetings to discuss the LNRS and consultation if required.
 - (f) Two LNRS workshops held with land agents.
 - (g) Schools' engagement was procured for delivery this coming year, 149 schools to be involved.
 - (h) Environmental Records Information Centre for the North East of England (ERIC) ran a LNRS 'Long List' Species Conference.
 - (i) Pro-forma for the introduction to the Statement of Priorities produced.
 - (j) Baseline Habitat Map produced.
 - (k) Produced indicative opportunity mapping based (solely on habitats) to help inform discussions with land agents and land managers.
 - (l) Established and agreed the structure of the Sub-Groups with the Ecological Emergency Board.
- 11 The Ecology team, who lead on the production of the LNRS, have attended the regional LNRS meetings and various webinars held by Natural England on specific elements of the LNRS. Meetings have been held with DEFRA to discuss progress and timescales for the LNRS. Regular meetings are held with ERIC, who are to be employed by the Council to develop the opportunities map, to refine the data used to inform the LNRS and discuss potential protocols around the mapping.

Ecological Emergency year ahead

- 12 Looking ahead, in the immediate future the work around the LNRS will concentrate on:
- (a) Starting the work of the Sub-Groups.
 - (b) Run a Durham Species Workshop to refine the species Long List developed at the ERIC Conference into a priority list for Durham.
 - (c) Run four workshops for land managers and farmers.

- (d) Write the Introduction to the Statement of Priorities.
 - (e) Collate the responses from the consultation and feed this information back to the Sub-Groups and ERIC.
- 13 The output from the Sub-Groups (the measures and actions required to deliver nature recovery and optimise the wider benefits arising from nature recovery) will form the basis of the LNRS and be linked to the opportunity mapping. The draft of the LNRS will be completed by winter 2024, this will allow us time to consult on the draft and produce the formal Durham LNRS by March 2025.

Place, Health and Community work

- 14 Place, Health and Community (PHC) workstream continues to engage a wide cross section of place and community-based partners. A new forward plan sets out ambitions for the group in engaging all sectors of the community in environmental priorities and issues by building effective working relationships with partners. The aim is to also add value to the priorities of the Environment and Climate Change Partnership. Projects supported over the previous year include:
- (a) Input to Climate Emergency Response Plan with the Low Carbon Team.
 - (b) Development of the County Durham 'Healthier by 2030' Healthy Weight Plan with Public Health.
 - (c) Influencing the Housing and Homeless Strategies with Planning.
 - (d) Reviewing the Sport England Funding & Moving Together Strategy with County Durham Sport.
 - (e) Looking to broaden community buy-in to the Horden Minewater project with East Durham Trust.
 - (f) Learning of a new approach to deliver a Place Partnership Strategy with Karbon Homes.
 - (g) Contributing to the Towns and Villages Initiative with DCC Economic Development.
 - (h) Inputting to the Local Heritage Listings Update with DCC Heritage and Conservation.
 - (i) Supporting the planning and delivery of the 34th County Durham Environment Awards which took place at Hardwick Hall hotel on 7 March 2024.

Place, Health and Community year ahead

- 15 Looking ahead, the PHC partners wish to work with delivery partners by building connections and providing support across both new and existing project and policy areas including:
 - (a) How to deliver Planning for Health and Twenty-minute Neighbourhoods Plans.
 - (b) Assisting place-based actions and responses to the new area focussed health strategies.
 - (c) Promoting action cards which contribute to the Adverse Weather and Health Plan.
 - (d) Tracking the progress of the Inclusive Economic Strategy.
 - (e) Promoting behavioural change across the Ecological Emergency and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
 - (f) Assisting the Climate Emergency Board in promotion of new CERP3 (2024-27) and development of Local Area Energy Plans, including measures to reduce the harmful environmental impacts of climate change on human health.
 - (g) Supporting the planning and running of the 2024 County Durham Environment Awards.

ECCP Executive Board Refresh and Emergency Summit

- 16 In September 2023 the Executive Board discussed refreshing their role with the aim of strengthening the focus of the board to improve the delivery of the ECCP's vision, focusing on workstream delivery, collaboration and decision making. They concluded that if they wanted to meet the challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies the Partnership needed to 'inform, influence and amplify' the importance of its work.
- 17 To achieve this, the board felt they needed to improve collaboration between the workstreams and the board. To facilitate this, they organised the ECCP Emergency Summit for 19 March this year, bringing together environmental and community leaders from across County Durham to help set the agenda for the Environment and Climate Change Partnership over the coming year(s). Discussions at the summit identified three key topic areas for the partnership Executive Board to act on:

- (a) Improve communication of information on the environmental and climate challenges facing County Durham, with emphasis on countering deliberate misinformation.
- (b) Increase the funding/finance available to invest in solutions to the climate and ecological emergencies and overcoming the negative impacts on people and communities.
- (c) Ensure that environmental issues are a significant part of the North East Mayoral Combined Authority's (NEMCA) agenda.

The detail on how we can achieve these will be discussed at June's Executive Board meeting.

ECCP challenges

- 18 The ECCP faces a number of challenges if it is to successfully achieve its ambitions including:
- (a) How do we get to Net Zero, together, and in time?
 - (b) Coordinating lots of different activities and future needs which link strategic workstreams and the wider thematic partnerships.
 - (c) Effective delivery countywide partnership elements of CERP3.
 - (d) Identifying new funding opportunities and ensure we are funding the right things.
 - (e) Producing the LNRS on time with limited resources and lack of baseline data.
 - (f) Promote and deliver the actions and ambitions held within the LNRS after its production.
 - (g) Ensuring partners are coordinated effectively and working towards common aims.
 - (h) Tracking progress over time to effectively demonstrate outcomes.
 - (i) How to achieve the priority areas identified at the Emergency Summit with limited resources.

Conclusions

- 19 The ECCP have continued to support the delivery of the countywide elements of the CERP2, as well as plan for the new CERP3. They have worked to promote important environmental messages through

wide ranging consultation and engagement activities. Following the green light from DEFRA partners are now working to develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy over the coming year. The Executive Board have identified new priorities areas for the partnership to consider, which will be explored over the coming months.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Climate Change

Climate change is a key area identified in this report.

Human Rights

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable

Disability Issues

Not applicable

Appendix 2: Environment & Climate Change Partnership Presentation

See separate PowerPoint document.