

**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 with background information in advance of a presentation from Executive Board members of the County Durham Environment & Climate Change Partnership (ECCP). The presentation will focus on background and structure of the partnership, vision and partnership priorities, plans and challenges.

**Executive summary**

- 2 Following the Vision 2035 agreement in September 2019 and the restructure of the County Durham Partnership (CDP) governance structure in September 2020, a new Environment & Climate Change Partnership was developed and introduced.
- 3 The ECCP role will be focused on delivering the environment and climate change objectives detailed in the Vision 2035. The ECCP Workstreams will focus on the development of the new countywide Climate Emergency Response Plan 2022-24 to achieve County Durham's carbon reduction targets; and a Local Nature Recovery Strategy to improve the natural environment and biodiversity as highlighted in the Environment Bill 2021. Once established, this work will be reflected in a new all-encompassing ECCP Strategy.
- 4 Members of the ECCP Executive Board will provide the committee with a presentation which will focus on:
  - The structure and vision of the ECCP Executive Board.
  - The ECCP's workstreams, their structure, priorities, and plans.
  - The challenges the ECCP face if it is to be successful.

A copy of the presentation is attached as appendix 2.

**Recommendation**

- 5 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) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes a further update from the Environment and Climate Change Partnership in its work programme for 2022/23

## **Background**

- 6 In November 2019 the County Durham Partnership (CDP) began to undertake a strategic governance review of its framework of five thematic partnerships and supporting sub-groups. The aim of the review was to ensure the CDP structure was fit to deliver the County Durham Vision 2035 efficiently and effectively.
- 7 Following consultation with partners, and an unexpected delay due to Covid-19, a final proposal for a new CDP governance structure was discussed and agreed at a CDP Board meeting on 25 September 2020.
- 8 It was agreed by the CDP Board that the previous Environment Partnership structure was not the best fit to deliver the new arrangements, and it was decided that an entirely new thematic partnership, the Environment & Climate Change Partnership, would be developed and introduced within the new CDP governance structure.
- 9 A workshop to consider a potential role, structure and priority areas for the new Environment & Climate Change Partnership took place on 10 November 2020. Experts were drawn from across other thematic partnerships as well as stakeholders from Durham County Council, Durham University, external agencies, the voluntary sector and business partners.
- 10 It was agreed that the ECCP will lead on the following County Durham Vision 2035 objectives:
  - (a) Green technologies
  - (b) Core heritage
  - (c) Natural assets and bio-diversity
  - (d) Clean air to support physical activity
  - (e) Carbon emissions and climate change

- (f) Sustainable transport including air quality
  - (g) Energy efficient homes and wider environmental impact
  - (h) Sympathetic building design and development
  - (i) Protecting our natural environment
- 11 To deliver the objectives of the Vision 2035 it was agreed that three workstreams would be set up to support an ECCP Executive Board. These workstreams are:
- (a) Climate Emergency
  - (b) Ecological Emergency
  - (c) Place, Health and Community
- 12 Workstream leads were agreed, key stakeholders for each workstream were identified and meetings to establish the workstream priorities were organised for early 2021.

## **Current position**

### *ECCP Executive Board*

- 13 Following the establishment of the workstreams the ECCP Executive Board met for the first time on 24 March 2021, where they discussed Terms of Reference and a vision statement for the ECCP. The Executive Board is chaired by Jim Cokill, Director of Durham Wildlife Trust, supported by Durham County Council's (DCC) Partnership team.
- 14 It was agreed that the vision would be – 'A better County Durham: sustainable communities, resilient to climate change, richer in nature.' To achieve the vision the ECCP would bring together public, private, voluntary and community sector partners to use their shared knowledge and skills to find innovative solutions to environmental issues which affect County Durham, working together to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure resources are used efficiently and effectively.
- 15 It was also agreed that the ECCP would have three strategic objectives:
- (a) Address the climate emergency challenges as they apply to County Durham.
  - (b) Address the ecological emergency challenges as they apply to County Durham.

- (c) Promote engagement and activity to improve environmental outcomes in communities across County Durham and promote sustainability, health and wellbeing across each workstream area.

The three workstreams each have a responsibility for one strategic objective.

### *ECCP Climate Emergency Workstream*

- 16 The first meeting of the Climate Emergency (CE) Workstream Strategic Board took place on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The workstream is chaired by Professor Jon Gluyas, from Durham University and the Durham Energy Institute, supported by DCC's Low Carbon Economy team.
- 17 The CE Strategic Board has representation from a number of key organisations linked to the Climate Emergency. These include:
  - (a) Durham Energy Institute
  - (b) Coal Authority
  - (c) Environment Agency North East
  - (d) Lanchester Wines
  - (e) Northumbrian Water
  - (f) Northern Powergrid
  - (g) Keele University
  - (h) County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
  - (i) Durham Community Action
  - (j) North East and Tees Valley Federation of Small Businesses
  - (k) County Durham Economic Partnership
  - (l) Northern Gas Networks
  - (m) Durham County Council
- 18 The CE Strategic Board agreed that their aim will be to support the reduction of carbon emissions from all sectors across County Durham to tackle the climate emergency and hit our target of being net zero for the whole county by 2050 at the latest.
- 19 The priority areas of work for the workstream over the next year will be to:
  - (a) Explore the potential to develop a replicable model for energy generation from solar carports, potentially incorporating green infrastructure, battery storage, electric vehicle charge points etc. in underutilised carparks across the county.

- (b) Develop a Local Area Energy Plan for County Durham which will identify energy assets and challenges across the County, then develop a programme of interventions to support future investment and growth opportunities.
- (c) Develop a countywide action plan to tackle the Climate Emergency, which will form part of the new Climate Emergency Response Plan that will be published in February 2022.

### *ECCP Ecological Emergency Workstream*

- 20 The first meeting of the Ecological Emergency (EE) Workstream Strategic Board took place on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021. The workstream is chaired by Chris Woodley-Stewart, Director at North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership (AONB), supported by DCC's Ecology team.
- 21 The EE Strategic Board has representation from a number of key organisations linked to the Ecological Emergency. These include:
  - (a) North Pennines AONB
  - (b) Durham Wildlife Trust
  - (c) Natural England
  - (d) Environment Agency
  - (e) Woodland Trust
  - (f) Durham County Council
- 22 The EE Strategic Board agreed that their aim will be to co-ordinate strategic action to reverse the decline in biodiversity across County Durham.
- 23 The priority areas of work for the workstream over the next year will be to:
  - (a) Raise of the local profile of the ecological emergency and to promote collaborative action to reverse the decline in habitats and species.
  - (b) Develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for County Durham and begin the process of identifying our biodiversity priorities and associated actions.
  - (c) Help drive more coordinated, practical, focussed action and investment to help nature and people flourish together, whilst delivering wider nature-based environmental benefits.

### *ECCP Place, Health and Community Workstream*

- 24 The first meeting of the Place, Health and Community (PHC) Workstream Strategic Board took place on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The workstream is chaired by Peter Samsom, Food Partnership Co-ordinator at Durham Community Action, supported by DCC's Environment and Design team.
- 25 The PHC Strategic Board has representation from a number of key organisations linked to the environment and communities across the county. These include:
- (a) OASES (Outdoor and Sustainability Education Specialists) North East
  - (b) Durham Wildlife Trust
  - (c) Historic England
  - (d) Environment Agency
  - (e) Groundwork North East and Cumbria
  - (f) DCC Area Action Partnerships (AAPs)
  - (g) North East Rivers Trusts
  - (h) DCC Public Health
  - (i) Durham Community Action
  - (j) DCC Planning Strategy
  - (k) Historic England
- 26 The PHC Strategic Board agreed that their aim will be to promote engagement and activity to improve environmental outcomes in communities across County Durham and promote sustainability, health and wellbeing across each workstream area of the Environment & Climate Change Partnership.
- 27 The priority areas of work for the workstream over the next year will be to:
- (a) Engage with the Sustainable Food Network to encourage community food production and its recognition within DCC priorities and policy.
  - (b) Seek input into DCC Towns and Villages investment plans.
  - (c) Provide advice and support on the new countywide local heritage listing project.
  - (d) Provide advice and support for AAPs in delivering a new Tree Per Child initiative - identifying community, wildlife and climate benefits.

- (e) Create sustainable healthy communities' toolkit – in an ideal world what would a sustainable community look like (wind turbine, walking groups, litter pick groups, flooding preparation etc).
- (f) Promote nature-based solutions to the climate emergency, flood risk management and the Green Recovery process by aligning communications with community networks e.g. compiling a gazetteer of environmental groups across the county and how they can feed into and help deliver joint priorities.

## **Challenges for the ECCP**

28 The new Environment & Climate Change Partnership is at the beginning of a journey and partners recognise that, if the partnership is to achieve sustainable outcomes, there are challenges which will require collaborative work to overcome. These include:

- (a) Working closer with the other thematic partnerships, particularly the Economic Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board, to address shared agendas. This will involve building on existing collaborative work currently underway e.g. green recovery project.
- (b) Ensuring that strategic objectives relate to what is delivered at national, regional and local levels. This will be dependent on identifying a golden thread from the Vision 2035 through the partnership's strategies and workstreams, underpinned by a robust joint performance framework.
- (c) The size and complexity of the agenda. Effective partnership working will be essential to success and it's recognised that this is a long game which requires patience - short term gains must be linked to longer term objectives.
- (d) Accessing finance and resources to support the ECCP agenda. This requires opportunities for joint commissioning, aligned/pooled budgets, and attracting external funding to be identified.
- (e) Raising awareness of environmental and climate change issues and the work the ECCP is doing/planning to address these issues. This will require improved working with the voluntary and community sector, the private sector, and more effective engagement with, and empowerment of, all sections of our communities across Durham County.

## **Conclusions**

- 29 The ECCP's vision and how the partnership is structured to respond to it, including its priority action areas and the challenges the partnership faces if it is to be successful will be imperative in delivering this high profile agenda.

### **Background papers**

- [County Durham Vision 2035](#)

### **Other useful documents**

- [Climate Change Emergency Response Plan](#)

### **Authors**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Not applicable

### **Finance**

Not applicable

### **Consultation**

A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken when developing the new governance structure for the County Durham partnership.

### **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

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## **Appendix 2: Environment & Climate Change Partnership Presentation**

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**See separate PowerPoint document.**