

Environment & Climate Change Partnership Update

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

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

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 agreed a new ECCP Plan 2022-25, which includes a new fourth priority for the partnership:
 - (a) Increase cross thematic partnership collaboration with the Economic Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB).
- 3 The ECCP have been heavily involved in promoting the ECCP Climate Emergency agenda over the past year, linking to the UK hosting Conference of the Parties (COP) 26 in November 2021. The partnership has also supported a wide variety of projects through the three workstreams, examples of which are detailed in the presentation.

Recommendations

- 4 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 2023/24.

Background

- 5 The new ECCP was established following a strategic governance review of the County Durham Partnership. The ECCP Executive Board was set up to manage the partnership, supported by three workstream strategic boards:
 - (a) Climate Emergency
 - (b) Ecological Emergency
 - (c) Place, Health and Community
- 6 The partnership agreed their strategic objectives for 2021/22:
 - (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.
- 7 The ESC OSC invited the Chair of the ECCP to discuss with members of the committee the priorities of the partnership, activity undertaken over the past year and what is planned for the future.

Current position

ECCP Executive Board

- 8 The ECCP Executive Board, as well as managing the workstreams, have been focusing on engagement activities through:
 - (a) County Durham Partnership Event: Environment and Climate Change – Our Local Response, 26th November 2021. Members of the ECCP provided knowledge and support for the event, including a key note speech from the ECCP Chair and delivering themed workshops.
 - (b) Durham Conference of the Parties (COP) 2021 – partners from the ECCP Climate Emergency workstream organised and delivered the event where over 70 delegates, including representatives from Durham County Council, Durham

University, businesses, and the NHS, gathered at Beamish Hall on Monday 1st November 2021 to sign a new climate change agreement.

- (c) Climate County Durham website – launched at the Durham COP; the website has information on what local residents, businesses, children and young people, and community groups can do to reduce their impact on the climate and the environment. It also providing individuals and Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with the opportunity to sign up to the new climate change pledge.
 - (d) 32nd County Durham Environment Awards – the 2021 Environment Awards received 48 entries submitted over 12 categories and the winning entries were announced via a live streamed online ceremony on Youtube at 7 p.m. on 13th May.
- 9 Following a review of the ECCP strategic objectives for 2022, at a meeting held on 8th March 2022, the Executive Board agreed the ECCP Plan 2022-25, which sets the strategic direction for the ECCP over the next three years. This includes the addition of a fourth strategic priority for the partnership:
- (a) Increase cross thematic partnership collaboration with the Economic Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB).

A workshop was held on 28th April 2022 where members of the ECCP and the Economic Partnership met to discuss working together to address linked environmental and economic issues, and how these can influence the new Economic Strategy currently being developed. Plans are also in place to develop stronger links to the HWB over the coming year.

ECCP Climate Emergency Workstream

- 10 As well as launching the new County Durham Climate Change Agreement at Durham COP, the Climate Emergency workstream's main function has been the development of the countywide Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP2). A detailed report on the plan is scheduled to come to future ESC OSC meeting. The workstream have also been supporting a number of projects, including:
- (a) Try before you buy – electric vehicle (EV) loan scheme to give businesses the opportunity to try an EV van before committing to the purchase of one. ECEP Chair and delivering themed workshops.

- (b) EV charging points – various schemes have enabled over 100 charge posts to be installed thus far, more schemes ongoing and further funding to be applied for.
- (c) Peatland restoration in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB) – Continue programmed peatland restoration work, estimated at 1,162 hectares.
- (d) External wall insulation schemes – which have improved household energy efficiency at schemes in six towns and villages across the county.
- (e) Solar carports – we are working to develop an investment case to energise and bio-diversify large public car parks with solar PV carports and Green Infrastructure. This project is EUCF funded, and the feasibility study will be completed by September 2022.
- (f) Horden minewater project – partners have been working with representatives of the local community in Horden, the East Durham Trust and East Durham Business Services supported a scoping study into the minewater heat at Horden, that is currently being pumped to the surface and into the sea, to see if it could be used as a renewable heat source.
- (g) Climate County Durham website and the new Climate County Durham branding – support the development of the website mentioned above and the new branding used to promote the climate emergency message. Members of ESC OSC can visit the website at ClimateCountyDurham.org.uk

11 Future projects that will be supported by the Climate Emergency workstream include:

- (a) Homeowners retrofit loan pilot – a loan scheme to help residents with the cost of energy efficiency measures.
- (b) County Durham Summer COP events – following on from the successful Durham CoP event in November a new programme of events is being arranged for July 2022.
- (c) Business Energy Efficiency Project 3 (BEEP) – following on from the Nationally recognized BEEP project, the partnership is looking at ways to extend the project when European Regional Development Fund funding finishes in March 2023.
- (d) Explore ways to enable on street charging – working alongside Oxford County Council to extend a trial they are undertaking to Durham County.

- (e) Local Area Energy Plan – a long term project to inform, shape and enable key aspects of the transition to a net zero carbon energy system.

ECCP Ecological Emergency Workstream

- 12 The Ecological Emergency (EE) Workstream Strategic Board has set up two subgroups, whose role is to further the development of the two components of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): the statement of biodiversity priorities, and the mapping of our biological resource and the opportunities for creating or improving habitat for nature.
- 13 The first of these sub-groups is the Statement of Priorities Subgroup which met in December 2021. The group discussed the broad outline of the statement of priorities document and agreed the use of Natural Character Areas as a starting point to describe the region. The EE Strategic Board agreed that their aim will be to co-ordinate strategic action to reverse the decline in biodiversity across County Durham.
- 14 The Mapping Subgroup met in January 2022 and updated the sources of local data that we would need to deliver the mapping, this included gaining permissions to use specific datasets and providing datasets to the Environmental Records Centre North East England (ERIC).
- 15 Progress within the Subgroups is constrained by the lack of guidance from DEFRA on the final shape and form of a LNRS. The Subgroups and the wider EE Strategic Board continue to develop ideas, collate data and share learning where possible while waiting from DEFRA.
- 16 The EE Strategic Board have previously agreed that their aim will be to co-ordinate strategic action to reverse the decline in biodiversity across County Durham and that the priority areas of work for the workstream are:
 - (a) Raise of the local profile of the ecological emergency and to promote collaborative action to reverse the decline in habitats and species. This aim continues to be promoted with members of the EE Strategic Board presenting to Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Information on the ecological declines in County Durham and the work been done to reverse the declines was presented to Councillors on the 13th December 2021. Members of the EE Strategic Board also presented at the County Durham Partnership event on Environment and Climate Change held on the 26th November 2021.

- (b) Develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for County Durham and begin the process of identifying our biodiversity priorities and associated actions. Two subgroups have been established and have met to discuss the statement of priorities and mapping for the LNRS. The wider EE Strategic Board continues to meet to discuss the LNRS process and support the subgroups.
- (c) Help drive more coordinated, practical, focussed action and investment to help nature and people flourish together, whilst delivering wider nature-based environmental benefits. Durham County Council has agreed to fund a Local Nature Recovery Officer whose role will be to co-ordinate the delivery of the LNRS and help drive focussed action across the County.

ECCP Place, Health and Community Workstream

- 17 The Place, Health and Community (PHC) workstream continues to engage a wide cross section of place and community based partners in quarterly sessions to pursue its goals as agreed 12 months previously. Projects supported include:
- (a) The Glasgow Food declaration – the partnership has promoted the Glasgow Food Declaration with the aim of persuading DCC to sign and commit to developing and implementing integrated food policies and strategies, reducing greenhouse gases from urban and regional food systems. Calling on national governments to establish enabling policy frameworks and multi-level governance mechanisms.
 - (b) Local Heritage Listing – the development of a countywide list of non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) that the council is piloting for a national register for Historic England with a view to these being afforded greater statutory protection. To date, an initial trawl of 167 buildings/site reviews have been undertaken for a total number of 1534 DCC assets. The group agreed these were important community assets that could be promoted and supported through its membership network and has committed to participating in the next stages including participation in a community forum, identifying nominations from the community as a legacy of the pilot phase. The Information is currently being finalised and updated with report to DCMS in September and publication of local lists for the pilot areas.
 - (c) A Tree Per Child – a tree planting project with schools, which aims to see 20,000 of the county’s children plant at least one tree in the next 4 years. To date 1500 children from over a dozen schools have had the experience of either planting trees

in their own school grounds or at one of the council's new woodland sites.

- (d) County Durham Environment Awards – took a lead on the 32nd Environment Awards mentioned above.
 - (e) Brightwater – made possible by £2.6M of National Lottery funds, Brightwater is a £3.2 million project to preserve and enhance riverside habitats and historic sites across the catchment of the River Skerne over a four year timeframe. Managed by the Bright Water Landscape Partnership, the area extends over 200 square km of lowland in County Durham and Darlington, focusing on the River Skerne from Hurworth Burn reservoir in East Durham to South Park in Darlington.
 - (f) Community Food – the Food Durham partnership, part of the Sustainable Food Places Network, has achieved Bronze Food Places status and is working to achieve silver by August 2023. Focused on growing and procurement they are also involved in promoting the Veg Cities, Sugar Smart and Fish City campaigns. The partnership has been involved in a food resilience project targeting those accessing emergency food provision and advising on the potential of growing food using mine water heat in Horden.
- 18 Future work for the PHC workstream will be leading on the work to develop links with the other thematic partnerships e.g., working with the Economic Partnership to consider the potential for helping achieve wider objectives for community-based outcomes for the draft economic strategy and those in the towns and villages regeneration plans and the city of culture bid. There is work commencing on understanding how partner assets can help influence and contribute to these through a short survey. It asks where our reach would best be felt and what assets could we bring to the agenda.

Conclusions

- 19 The ECCP have had a busy first year, particularly given it coincided with the UK hosting COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021. The partnership has been heavily involved in raising the profile of the Climate Emergency and embedding this message within communities across the county will be a challenge moving forward, and the successful delivery of CERP2 will be vital to this. There will also be the challenge of developing the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy over the coming years, and the ECCP will have an important role to play not only in its development but also in the strategy delivery long term. To support the CERP2 and the LNRS the ECCP will need to ensure these

agendas are integrated into the work of the Economic Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the adoption of a new strategic priority linked to improving thematic partnership collaboration will support this aim.

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.