

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 collaborative and promotional activities 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.

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 2023/24.

Background

- 4 The new ECCP was established following a strategic governance review of the County Durham Partnership. The ECCP is supported by three workstream strategic boards:
 - (a) Climate Emergency

- (b) Ecological Emergency
 - (c) Place, Health and Community
- 5 The partnership agreed the ECCP Plan 2022-25:
- (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.
 - (d) Increase cross thematic partnership collaboration with the Economic Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 6 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.

Current position

ECCP collaboration

- 7 The ECCP have been involved in the following collaboration activities:
- (a) Durham University knowledge sharing - two formal knowledge sharing events have been held in the last 6 months, with the University estates team to compare ways of working on all things net zero, share best practise and develop joint working opportunities such as funding bids. This work has focused on transport, estate decarbonisation, energy management, procurement, communications & engagement, the ecological emergency, and waste. Subsequent meetings and action plans are in development.
 - (b) We are working in collaboration with Business Durham to monitor the delivery of Climate Emergency Response Plan version 2 (CERP2) actions and promote net zero business support. Officers have been attending business engagement events and present on key issues such as energy efficient to reduce energy bills and solar photovoltaic.
 - (c) Meetings have been held between the regional Local Authority Ecologists, the Wildlife Trusts, and Tees Valley Local Nature Partnerships to discuss the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

(LNRS) across the region and how best to ensure cross boundary co-ordination of the LNRS. It is likely that this grouping will form the basis of a cross boundary group tasked with ensuring that each LNRS is cognisant of each other, and linkages are made between the mapping and biodiversity priorities.

- (d) Partners have engaged in the consultation to inform the development of the County Durham Physical Activity strategy and associated well-being action plan. Focal points for input have centred on improving population health by engaging more with our natural environment and the use of natural assets to promote increased physical activity and mental health for both residents and those visiting the county. Amongst our recommendations were promoting the use of Bishop Auckland Heritage trail and introducing a 'once a year bike day' for learning how to maintain them etc, as an element of local walking/cycling routes that are to be included in new housing estate provisions. There was also a wish to see clearer links to the food agenda – i.e., community growing and allotments, as well as exploring links to cultural and heritage promotion.
- (e) The ECCP board Held a workshop on 13 September 2022 with economic strategy leads to help shape the new Inclusive Economic Strategy, including achieving a more broadly defined economic ambition in its vision and priorities and the promotion of the green economy.
- (f) In April 2023 the ECCP worked with Durham County Council (DCC) partners providing comments and suggestion on the proposals detailed in the County Durham Community Engagement consultation. Focusing on the areas of the consultation that will have a direct impact on the priorities of the ECCP.

ECCP promotion

8 The ECCP have been involve d in the following promotional activities:

- (a) The annual County Durham Environment Awards 2022 ceremony, organised by the ECCP, was held in person for the first time since before the Covid-19 pandemic on 28 February 2023, at Hardwick Hall Hotel. Now in its 33rd year, the event celebrated the county's community groups, individuals, businesses and other organisations that demonstrated great design, environmental guardianship, and community spirit across the county. There were 56 nominations received, with a

panel of expert judges whittling down the applications of individuals, businesses, and organisations across the county to identify the category winners, who were presented with their awards on the day.

- (b) The Climate County Durham resident engagement website <https://climatecountydurham.org.uk/> has been successful in engaging with residents, SMEs, and young people. It is updated on a weekly basis with articles focussing on local climate action. This website also includes a climate pledge for residents and business alike which has 53 signatories.
- (c) The SMART cost of living campaign was launched to engage with residents and DCC officers and inform them about energy efficiency measures to reduce their bills during the energy crisis. This campaign is ongoing, delivered in partnership with the Northern Echo.
- (d) DCC developed a Food for the Planet campaign to promote the adoption of low carbon diets. This campaign has involved a 'carbon costed' restaurant night, a low carbon pumpkin patch event and a £1 vegetarian discount across the council's three canteens for up to 1,800 meals. This work was completed with partners from Sustain, the Soil Association, REfUSE café and Little Chefs Big Chefs CIC.
- (e) Partners including DCC, Durham University, Raby Estates, the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Federation of Small Businesses have held over 25 events to engage with residents, small and medium enterprises (SME), Town and Parish Councils, Area Action Partnerships and local community groups. Events include the Regional Electric Vehicle Unified Plan electric vehicle (REVUP EV) showcase, Together Towards Net Zero Business showcase and accompanying masterclasses, a Citizen's Forum, and a carbon costed restaurant night.

Climate Emergency work

- 9 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) Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP2) is now completed with over 500 SMEs assisted with energy advice and support since 2019. BEEP3 is due to be launched in the coming months, with a similar purpose but with support extended wider than just

SME's. There are a significant number of interested parties currently on waiting list for BEEP3 to start.

- (b) Horden minewater project- a technical feasibility study is underway to assess ways in which heat from abandoned mines in Horden can be used for community benefit, options include community and commercial horticulture. The study and community engagement has been made possible by DCC's successful funding application for £110,000 from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the Net Zero Hub and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
- (c) A consultant, appointed using funds from a successful European City Facility (EUCF) bid, delivered a report on the feasibility of rollout of solar car ports and green infrastructure across the county on DCC and partner land. Partners include a property developer, the acute NHS Trust, Durham University and Northumbrian Water Ltd. Work is now underway to begin the physical rollout starting with 16 DCC sites.
- (d) A study was undertaken to assess the feasibility of a hydro-power turbine installation in the Twizel Burn, Grange Villa. The study found that the site would provide a viable location for the installation of a 25kW hydro-electric scheme offering a net return on a £328,000 investment within 18 years or 15 years if forecast inflation rates are fulfilled. An internal rate of return of 5.6% over a 25-year period, and an average annual carbon saving of around 26 tons or 40 average UK domestic properties. Officers are now working to assess the options put forward in the report including funding and possible community ownership.
- (e) The Try Before You Buy scheme for businesses to try out EV vans for free over a 3-week period, before deciding to purchase. The scheme has been very successful with the 4 vans available out on the road with SME's a significant proportion of time.

Place, Health and Communities work

- 10 The Place, Health and Community (PHC) workstream continues to engage a wide cross section of place and community-based partners. A new chair, Kate Burrows, Executive Director of Durham Community Action has taken the chairmanship of the group. Projects supported include:
 - (a) Partners have been engaging with stakeholders and promoting walking and cycling along the route of the Stockton and

Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone, with the Durham section to be delivered by end of March 2024. There will be several significant investment opportunities for Locomotion and Stockton riverside and Preston Park in Darlington such as digital interpretation and a wayfinding app.

- (b) PHC partners took a lead on developing, managing and running the 33rd Environment Awards mentioned in section 8(a) above.
- (c) Local Heritage Listing – partners have been involved in the development of a countywide list of non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs), piloted across 8 settlements, to achieve greater statutory protection of local heritage structures through the creation of a national register to be managed by Historic England. The local process was led by DCC's conservation team who has engaged with over 120 groups and individuals in preparing the list: 42 councillors in 20 wards in pilot areas, 10 Town and Parish Councils, 6 MP's and 5 AAP's. e.g., City of Durham Trust, Bishop Auckland and relevant Town and Parish Councils. Within the 8 settlements there were 410 assets identified, with 111 of those within the Stockton and Durham Railway/Shildon area, 72 in Bishop Auckland, 67 in Durham City, 17 in Sacriston, 47 in Seaham, 30 in Sedgfield, 36 in Shotley Bridge and 30 in Staindrop.

Ecological Emergency work

- 11 The Ecological Emergency Workstream (EEW) has been waiting on guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) before undertaking any significant work on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), although work in the background has continued. The DEFRA guidance was released on the 23 March 2023 and both Natural England and DEFRA are holding meetings with the Responsible Authorities producing the LNRS over the coming months to run through the guidance. A meeting of the EEW took place on 18 April to discuss the guidance and determine the next steps. As mentioned, work in the background has continued including:
 - (a) DCC have been working with Natural England to identify the best locations for habitat creation and restoration to enhance existing habitat networks and increase connectivity across landscapes. DCC proposed using magnesium limestone grassland as the trial habitat and Natural England are now liaising with Environmental Records Information Centre (ERIC) for data on magnesium limestone grassland distribution and Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves with a

magnesium limestone interest. This trail will feed into the mapping process for the LNRS.

- (b) ERIC and DCC Ecologists continue to work on the mapping, collating baseline data and identifying any gaps. ERIC are involved with two Natural England projects to inform the LNRS mapping. The first of these is an Urban Modelling Project, based on Greater Manchester model, which aims to develop a way to model the urban environment. The second project is around mapping using species data and how this will link to broader habitat mapping. ERIC has produced a model to increase its capacity to deliver the LNRS mapping. ERIC is proposing two new members of staff over two years to deliver across all 4 LNRS within their area. It is hoped that the costs of the new staff can be covered by extra burdens grants from DEFRA, although details of any further funding are still to be provided by Government.
- (c) DCC are interviewing for a new Senior Ecology post to create the capacity within the Ecology Team to progress the LNRS.

ECCP future work

- 12 Future work of the ECCP that will support the delivery of the ECCP Plan 2022-25 includes:
 - (a) 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.
 - (b) Project Greenscape - DCC, in partnership with Northumbrian Water Ltd has applied to the Water Services Regulation Authority innovation fund for Project Greenscape which will see the development of a programme of support, including financial incentivisation, for farmers in County Durham to switch to regenerative practises to improve river water quality, soil health, carbon sequestration and lower the carbon emission of agriculture. If successful, this scheme will act as a national demonstrator.
 - (c) Partners including DCC, Durham Uni, NHS Foundation Trust and Northumbrian Water have jointly applied to the Innovate UK Fast Followers competition, which, if successful, will fund a Net Zero officer across all 4 organisations to develop standard practice to tackle scope 3 emissions.

- (d) Gull-e Trial - DCC are working in partnership with Oxford County Council to develop a Gull-e scheme to enable residents without off street parking to charge electric vehicles. A trial will begin of a gully and a cable sheath in 2023.
- (e) Partners will be looking to forge greater links with the Town and Villages Regeneration Programme in terms of dialogue on how the community needs can be met from sustainable-based investment, such as ensuring services and facilities can be accessed from housing on foot within a 20-minute timeframe. Other areas that are being looked at of interest of partners are greening homes and fuel efficiency.
- (f) Partners will be looking to engage in the roll out of the County Durham Poverty Strategy and build a dialogue with the Horden Together project, exploring opportunities for sustainable and local food growing with the East Durham Trust and their interest in heat recovery from minewater.
- (g) A Local Heritage Listing community panel was launched in April to review borderline cases and agree content of the list. This will inform management reports within DCC endorsing and adopting local lists leading to their protection by means of a supplementary planning document (SPD) later this summer. Partners from the ECCP have agreed that these kinds of community assets could be promoted and supported by its membership and has committed a member to participating in the panel and its next stages.
- (h) The produce the LNRS - this is a huge undertaking, comprising of a written Statement of Priorities which details what we want to achieve and identifies clear targets, and a mapping element that identifies our current biological resource and where the priorities are for habitat creation and restoration. In addition, there is the need for consultation with stakeholders and the wider public and regular reviews and updates in the years following the production of the LNRS.

Requests for support

- 13 Scrutiny members are asked to encourage their constituents to support the creation of the Local Heritage List by engaging in the public consultation process once the draft SPD has been agreed by cabinet, prior to its formal adoption in planning policy.
- 14 Additional resources are likely to be required to enable the delivery of the LNRS and its monitoring; although additional funding from DEFRA

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.