

WENP Board Meeting

Teleconference // 17 March 2021 // 14:00 – 16:30

Items

RC, acting as Chair, welcomed attendees to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves. It was explained that Selena Gray had stepped down as WENP Chair due to personal circumstances, and that a decision regarding a new Chair would be made shortly by the WENP Executive Group. The Board's best wishes and gratitude were expressed for Selena.

The minutes from the previous Board meeting and the WENP Work Programme 2021 were approved and are both available on the [WENP website](#).

SGa provided an overview of the actions from the previous meeting – a list of open actions can be found at the end of this document.

[ActionMar21/01: SGa to set up meeting of the WENP Executive Group to discuss nomination of a new WENP Chair.](#)

1. Nature and Health Update and Discussion

SGa provided an update on the Green Social Prescribing (GSP) Project taking place within Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG), which is being led by the BNSSG Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) 'Healthier Together'. The project's aim is to develop a systematic approach for community and environmental partners to provide support at scale, embedding green social prescribing into health services. The GSP Project Board and a Project Coordinator will be appointed soon. Further detail on the project can be found in the meeting slides sent round to Board members.

Natural England also has funding for half a post to support the pilot, which ideally will also help WENP and the connection of health and nature.

MS added that a crucial element of this project was weaving nature-based services within the health and care system. The Royal College of GPs has a Green Social Prescribing sub-group, which has noted the importance of bringing nature-based practices into their conversations with patients; this could be achieved through education and upskilling. MS also noted the enthusiasm among partners for this work.

SGa provided an update on other Nature and Health work within WENP:

- The WENP Nature and Health Strategy Group continues to work towards the goal of mainstreaming capacity in nature and health into NHS and local services, as per the WENP [Nature and Health Plan](#). As such, the Group has been focussed on supporting the GSP bid. A new Chair for the Group will need to be appointed to replace Selena.
- WENP is providing support to the production of a Social Prescribing Directory, which is being led by Active Ageing Bristol. The Directory will include a section on the natural environment, with the aim of increasing awareness of existing services in the region.



- The [Nature and Health Practitioners Network](#) is continuing to meet and is now providing its own administrative support, rather than WENP helping to organise its meetings. Sub-groups have also been set up through the Network, including one on diversity.

RB asked what role WENP could play in ensuring learning is coordinated across BNSSG and B&NES, including the Somer Valley Rediscovered project. MM echoed this comment, noting the support from Natural England for the Somer Valley Rediscovered Project and the potential for synergy between this and the GSP project. SGa offered to raise this at the GSP Board and suggested a workshop could be set up to share learnings between the two projects.

NR observed that evaluation criteria will need to provide a broader take on the contribution of the various projects across the West of England in order to create a coherent story for future funding, and where we want to be at the end of this work.

MM also noted the need to look beyond political boundaries to ensure we think about people's access to nature, and about the role of nature-based solutions in health and vice-versa. RB suggested that the WENP Nature and Health Strategy Group might benefit from additional representation to increase links between nature and health and other work on the natural environment.

[ActionMar21/02: SGa to set up a meeting of Nature and Health Strategy Group to discuss way forward and nominate new Chair.](#)

[ActionMar21/03: SGa to explore additional representation on the Nature and Health Strategy Group to improve links with other workstreams, and send email requesting volunteers.](#)

2. Trees and Woodland

2.1 Forest of Avon Plan: A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England

MM and SGa provided an update on the Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England. The document's content is now finalised (save for any proof-reading) and the design is ongoing. The plan is to have the document approved by the West of England Planning and Housing Board, before being ratified by the June Joint Committee. However, in the meantime, the document can be used internally by WENP Partners and the Forest of Avon Trust (FoAT) for strategic and planning purposes.

SGa added that the FoAT and Woodland Trust were leading work to produce a shorter version of the document for engagement with landowners. HE added that a communications plan was important to inspire people and ensure that the Strategy is incorporated into organisations' plans etc.

Post-meeting note: The March Planning and Housing Board was cancelled. The next meeting will now be in May, to which the Tree and Woodland Strategy will be brought for approval.

2.2 Trees for Climate Fund

JC provided an update on the Trees for Climate Fund in the West of England:

- Trees for Climate Funding has been confirmed for Years 1 (15.5 ha in urban areas) and 2. Confirmation regarding funding for the following three years (2023 to 2025) will be received shortly, and if this were confirmed it would be a substantial fund for the region, enabling around 350ha of trees and woodland to be established through grants provided to organisations and landowners. The whole of the West of England will be eligible for grants.



- The funding is very flexible, including orchards, hedgerows, low density planting, strategic planting on farmland, open space within woodland etc. Grants will be offered on a bid basis rather than at a fixed rate.
- The FoAT has increased capacity by appointing two Tree and Woodland Officers. These are full time posts, providing capacity to work with partners to bring schemes forwards under the Trees for Climate funding. The Trust can also help landowners and organisations to access other grant schemes.
- The extra capacity will enable the FoAT to start knitting everything together, building on the T&W Strategy document.

RC noted that existing pathways should be used to connect with the agricultural sector, rather than creating any additional pathways that would confuse things. IB added that the West of England Agriculture Group was an important resource for connecting with landowners.

JF observed that there was an opportunity to connect with town and parish councils. Ideally, any schemes should provide feedback to demonstrate what has been achieved in terms of the T&W Strategy and other strategic documents.

MM asked whether, given the importance of coordination with landowners, funding should be put into the FoAT to provide a coordination function. RE agreed that a coordination function is important, as all partners are doing tree planting but the scale and benefits of this are not always reflected, and that a comprehensive map of what is being delivered in the region is needed.

RC observed that there was consensus that WENP would welcome coordination from FoAT and suggested that MM explored funding options for a Forest of Avon Trust coordination role. SGa also noted the need to coordinate Trees for Climate Funding with other sources of funding (e.g. a catchment market, WECA investment fund, ELMs).

HE explained that the Woodland Trust was offering an emergency tree fund, providing Local Authorities with additional funding to get trees in the ground. The Woodland Trust will be approaching areas ready to go forward, and the West of England is in a good position to receive such funding given the work already done and underway.

[ActionMar21/04: SGa to organise a meeting of the West of England Tree and Woodland Strategy Group to discuss use of Tree and Woodland Strategy.](#)

[ActionMar21/05: MM to explore funding options for a Forest of Avon Trust coordination role for trees and woodland in the West of England.](#)

3. NRN Prospectus and funding for Nature Recovery

3.1 NBS discussions and upcoming funding bids

IB provided an update on progress on developing platforms to deliver the NRN across the West of England and upcoming funding bids in the West of England:

- There was a discussion at the recent Environment Officer Steering Group (EOSG), recognising that a lot is happening within LAs and the charity sector on developing such platforms and that there is a need to make the most of market-based opportunities to deliver these.



- There will be a workshop for EOSG to look at how we bring different platforms together, understand how these platforms might work and what the roles of different organisations in them might be. WECA will be in touch with people regarding this and hope to organise it quite soon.
- Feedback from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund noted that there were a lot of disparate bids from the WoE; there is, therefore, some work to draw everything together.
- South Gloucestershire Council is putting a bid together for the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund to pilot a local NBS platform, which would then be extended out across the WoE. There is a need to get together and look for our overall story and plan for this bid.
- There is also a need for a clear narrative at the West of England level on how we deliver multiple ecosystem services including Biodiversity Net Gain, carbon sequestration, pollution reduction, etc.
- Avon Wildlife Trust is looking at putting in a second bid for the Bristol Avon Catchment Market to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Natural England noted before the meeting that the catchment market does not have to be designed from scratch, as there has been lots of learning from the Somerset catchment market. In particular, the market rules should be robust enough to be transferable; however, the governance of course can be designed very differently, and we have the opportunity to be much more inclusive.

LA explained that there is a desire to explore the different roles for different organisations. There will inevitably be some 'messiness', which is acceptable as long as there is a coherent approach in terms of outcomes that we are working towards.

HE flagged that Local Nature Recovery Strategies are coming along, and it is likely that work will be needed to start in April next year. DEFRA is relying on natural capital investment models to deliver these, and the Devon Biosphere is looking to develop a model that shows what investment can be used where. LA replied that it was not yet clear who will have statutory responsibility for the LNRS, but that cooperative working will be important.

3.2 WECA Investment Fund update

LA provided an update on the WECA Investment Fund, through which £300k has been made available to develop strategic business cases for GI Work. Seven priority programmes have been identified, through which a pipeline of projects will be developed. Three of these projects are being looked at currently: Commons Connection, Chew Valley Lake Recreational Trail and Somerdale Bridge. The plan is to produce business cases within a year and a project manager has been appointed to take these forwards. RC noted the need to ensure that these three projects have balanced outcomes across access to green space and work we want to see on nature recovery, climate emergency etc.

3.3 NRN Prospectus

SG and IB proposed that the Nature Recovery Network Prospectus was uploaded to the WENP website, with text explaining that it is a working document and published in the interest of transparency. The Board agreed to this proposal.

Post-meeting note: the NRN Prospectus has been uploaded to the WENP website. The page can be viewed [here](#).



4. Partner Updates

4.1 Spatial Development Strategy

WECA's Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) Engagement Plan was included in the pre-meeting pack. The SDS is essentially WECA's mayoral plan, together with B&NES Council, BCC and SGC. It acts as a spatial strategy for how the region will grow and positions the region for a green recovery. As it is a statutory planning process, there will be an independent examination. There will be only one formal stage of consultation, lasting three months, with engagement acting as a precursor to formal consultation; the formal consultation is planned for the end of 2021 or early 2022.

The key findings from engagement were that space for wildlife and nature, and access to nature and green space were rated very highly. The next steps for the SDS involve working with stakeholders to develop a plan.

4.2 Biodiversity Net Gain

The paper provided in the pre-meeting back informed recent discussions with HoPP and EOSG, and it was agreed that there was a need to understand where it would make most sense for WoE authorities to work jointly on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), and the BNG group is setting those options out for HoPP later this month.

While Royal Assent of Env Bill is delayed until Autumn and there are upcoming consultations on the Defra metric 3.0 and other aspects of BNG, which leave a degree of uncertainty around some of the specific requirements, it is still advisable to form a clear view among the authorities and partners as to how BNG will be implemented. This will assist in SDS/Plan development as well as being relevant to consideration of possible shared resources/approaches such as mechanisms and tools for delivering, managing, recording BNG and other environmental projects and obligations.

There is not currently an SPD for BNG; it is being studied how the metric could be used to inform planning, but it has not been determined whether it will be an SPD as of yet. South Gloucestershire council have a draft SPD for BNG and will be sharing that to inform consistent approach.

4.3 Environmental data systems review

One of the first pieces of work through the EOSG is to look at environmental data, using the environment bill as a spur to prepare us for upcoming environmental data requirements. This work will look at individual and joint needs for environmental data across the region. The Task Group is seeking to engage with stakeholders quite widely on data requirements and how data might need to be shared/held individually. A series of qualitative interviews will be held to this end, with WENP Board members invited to participate.

The work is going to be fairly targeted around the Environment Bill requirements including BNG. It will analyse outputs required through the Environment Bill compared to data that is already being collected and produce a gap analysis.

4.4 Other partner updates

The following updates were provided by partners:

- **South Gloucestershire Council's** GI Strategy is being prepared for consultation in May. SPDs are being finalised for Green Infrastructure, Trees, and SuDS. The first draft of the outline business case (OBC) has been completed for the Commons Connections project.
- MM had a call with the CEO of Visit Bath and Cabinet Member to reframe the offer of **B&NES Council** for visitors. The aim is to increase the length of time visitors stay in and around Bath to explore the



area - walking, cycling and immersing themselves in the natural environment. Bathampton Meadows is being transferred across to National Trust. Bathriverline.co.uk has been set up as an engagement website for Bath Riverline, with the aim to improve it as a community corridor, as well as for biodiversity.

- As explained above, the **National Trust** is taking on Bathampton Meadows, and will be working with B&NES Council and AWT on the site. The Trust is still going through a transition period to adjust to the effects of Covid-19.
- The **North Somerset Council** GI Strategy is [out for consultation](#). A 'Rewilding Champions' project has been put in place in coordination with AWT – the project will measure whether the rewilding project is making a difference to biodiversity. Another 20k trees have been planted this winter.
- **Avon Wildlife Trust's** [Entry Hill bid was unsuccessful](#), and [new plans have been developed for an engagement hub at Grow Wilder](#).

ActionMar21/06: LA and SGa to discuss engagement with Western Gateway initiative

5. Any Other Business

SGa explained that a WENP Away Day would be organised once Covid restrictions have been lifted and a new Chair nominated.

ActionMar21/07: SGa to look into WENP Away Day once Covid restrictions are lifted and a new Chair nominated

Attendance

Attendees

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Richard Cresswell (Chair) – RC | Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership |
| Ian Barrett – IB | Avon Wildlife Trust |
| Mark Minkley – MM | Bath & North East Somerset Council |
| Charlotte Rivers - CH | Bristol City Council Public Health |
| David Hudgell – DH | Bristol City Council Public Health |
| Richard Ennion – RE | Bristol City Council |
| Natasha Clarke – NC | Bristol Water |
| Rebecca Kirk – RK | Environment Agency |
| Nigel Riglar – NR | Environment Officer Steering Group |
| Marion Steiner- MS | GP |
| Alex Raeder – AR | National Trust |
| Tom Boden – TB | National Trust |
| Savita Wilmott – SW | Natural History Consortium |
| John Flannigan – JF | North Somerset Council |
| Brian Glasson – BG | South Gloucestershire Council (representing Heads of Planning) |
| Matthew Lipton – ML | South Gloucestershire Council |
| Ruth Barden - RB | Wessex Water |
| Laura Ambler – LA | West of England Combined Authority / LEP |
| Heather Elgar – HE | Woodland Trust |
| Stuart Gardner – SGa | West of England Nature Partnership |

Observers

| | |
|-----------|----------------------|
| Jon Clark | Forest of Avon Trust |
|-----------|----------------------|

Apologies

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Selena Gray – SGr | West of England Nature Partnership Chair |
| Sally Hogg | Bristol City Council (representing Directors of Public Health) |
| Paul Cottington | National Farmers Union |
| Rachel Williams | Natural England |
| Simon Stonehouse | Natural England |
| Ross Kennerley | Woodland Trust |

Actions

| Action | Description | Lead(s) | Status |
|----------------|--|---------|---------|
| ActionMar21/01 | SGa to set up meeting of the WENP Executive Group to discuss nomination of a new WENP Chair | SGa | Open |
| ActionMar21/02 | SGa to set up a meeting of Nature and Health Strategy Group to discuss way forward and nominate new Chair | SGa | Open |
| ActionMar21/03 | SGa to explore additional representation on the Nature and Health Strategy Group to improve links with other workstreams, and send email requesting volunteers | SGa | Open |
| ActionMar21/04 | SGa to organise a meeting of the West of England Tree and Woodland Strategy Group to discuss use of Tree and Woodland Strategy | SGa | Open |
| ActionMar21/05 | MM to explore funding options for Forest of Avon Trust coordination role for trees and woodland in the West of England | MM | Open |
| ActionMar21/06 | LA and SGa to discuss engagement with Western Gateway initiative | LA/SGa | Open |
| ActionMar21/07 | SGa to look into WENP Away Day once Covid restrictions are lifted and a new Chair nominated | SGa | Open |
| ActionDec20/03 | SGa and HE to explore creating a shorter version of the West of England Tree and Woodland Strategy for landowners | SGa/HE | Ongoing |
| ActionSep20/05 | SGa to write a formal note of thanks to the Forest of Avon Trust for their work on the Tree and Woodland Strategy | SGa | Open |
| ActionSep20/07 | SGa to share the information on Bathscape with the WENP Board | SGa | Open |
| ActionSep20/09 | SGa to explore who the best representative would be on the WENP Board for the Severn Estuary | SGa | Open |
| ActionMar20/02 | PC to send SGa list of ELMs trials so that it can be circulated to Board Members | PC | Open |