

WENP Board Meeting

Teleconference // 21 September 2021 // 14:00 – 17:00

Items

IB welcomed attendees to the meeting. The minutes from the previous Board meeting were approved and are 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.

1. WENP Strategy

IB provided a summary of the outcome of 1-to-1 discussions that were held with Board members regarding the Strategy:

- Agreement that nature's recovery should be the main focus of the Strategy, and on facilitating big, impactful projects to achieve this.
- WENP's work in connecting people, joining things up, and creating conversation is valued across the Board. Additionally, the role of WENP as a 'critical friend', honest broker and champion for the natural environment was valued.
- Interpreting data and evidence related to the natural environment to inform strategic prioritisation of funding and resources also came out as an important piece of work.
- The statutory functions of Unitary Authorities (UAs) and WECA are not always easy to untangle for those not closely involved; this is very important, but we need to do a better job explaining it to partners.
- Potential overlaps with the remit of the Green Infrastructure WG and the EOSG need to be addressed.
- Additional support is needed for the WENP Manager role.

SG provided an overview of the proposals for the content of the WENP Strategy, as outlined in the paper sent pre-meeting. The Board was broadly in agreement with the content proposed, with the following comments made:

- The language of the 'Mission' (especially 'focal point') should be adjusted to more clearly communicate the purpose of WENP.
- The language 'engage with organisations' on the first enabling priority should be adjusted. The first and third enabling priorities could also be joined together.
- The targets should be revisited, both to check whether they remain viable and relevant, and to bring them in line with the 10-year timeline of the Strategy. They should also be renamed as 'aspirations', and have clear definitions and baselines.



- The references to the 'Nature Recovery Network' or 'Nature Recovery' should be made consistent and clear.
- AC noted that 2050 targets are still useful as a frame of reference for our ambition, and RC suggested setting the long-term target as what we would be satisfied with forever.

SG suggested having both 2030 and 2050 ambitions, to capture the long-term context as well as providing the urgency of a 2030 ambition, and making clear how the two relate.

[ActionSep21/01: IB and SG to update the proposed content for the WENP Strategy and recirculate to the Board.](#)

[ActionSep21/02: SG to convene a Task and Finish Group to work on updating the targets/ambitions for the West of England.](#)

2. NRN Prospectus Update

IB explained that from the 1-to-1 discussions, the question arose as to whether the NRN Prospectus needed more focus. SG provided an overview of the updates to the Prospectus sent pre-meeting, and attendees were invited to provide their thoughts on the scope and use of the Prospectus:

- It was agreed that the Prospectus was a very useful document to have, giving legitimacy to projects and for seeking funding as a region.
- The status of the projects and programmes should be made clear in a single 'progress diagram'.
- It would be useful to provide an overview of the mechanisms available to deliver these projects (such as Biodiversity Net Gain or the Bristol Avon Catchment Market) in a separate document (or referred to somewhere separate in the Prospectus), as the place-based approach to this document is valuable.
- The role of the Prospectus related to the JGIS pipeline needs to be made clear. It should be made clear which of the JGIS Pipeline, Forest of Avon Plan, and BACP Catchment Plan each project is in.
- If this is to be more proactively communicated externally, the design may need updating to make its context clearer.

IB summarised that we may need to unpick whether each of these is the right project and explain better why these projects are the right ones for the Prospectus. Additionally, we need to think about how we progress the projects in the Prospectus towards being 'shovel-ready' and feed into investment.

[ActionSep21/03: IB and SG to update Prospectus based on feedback received at the Board meeting and consider how to further communicate the Prospectus externally.](#)

3. Potential sources of funding

West of England Green Recovery Fund

SG explained that the papers for the West of England Joint Committee proposed the creation of a £20 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund, which will include habitat creation and increasing biodiversity within its scope.



LA underlined that this was only a suggestion at this stage and that it was unclear how much would be dedicated to the natural environment. It was therefore agreed to keep a watching brief on the fund.

LA added that we need to further develop nature-based projects, as per the previous discussion, and explained that WECA was looking to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan, that would be jointly owned by partnership across the West of England.

Landscape Recovery Fund

SG provided an overview of DEFRA's Landscape Recovery Scheme, which sits within ELMs and aims to fund long-term, large-scale, landscape and ecosystem recovery projects. More information is included within the paper sent to Board Members pre-meeting.

It was agreed that the West of England Agriculture Working Group should explore opportunities to submit funding to this scheme, and feed back any opportunities to the WENP Board.

Post-meeting note: the West of England Agriculture Working Group met on 22nd September 2021 and identified potential opportunities for bids to the Landscape Recovery Fund within the West of England, which will be further explored by relevant partners.

Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Fund

SG explained that it was intended to make a West of England bid to the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Fund, bringing together the four UAs and the Forest of Avon Trust under the umbrella of the Forest of Avon Plan. This would also be discussed through the West of England Tree and Woodland Strategy Group, so that partners can contribute towards the bid.

It was agreed that the draft bid would be submitted to the WENP Board for its support.

Other funding sources

RC noted that there Somerset Wildlife Trust was leading on a bid to the EA Coastal Connectedness Fund, which would look to on the vision for the Severn Estuary originally created by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. BACP has signalled its support, and it may be useful for WENP to do so as well.

Post-meeting note: a WENP Letter of Support was provided to Somerset Wildlife Trust for their bid to the EA Coastal Connectedness Fund

AC added that a joint bid covering Somerset and North Somerset was being made for the discovery element of the [Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme](#), which would include Gordano Valley.

ActionSep21/04: West of England Agriculture Working Group to explore opportunities to submit funding to the Landscape Recovery Scheme and feed back any opportunities to the WENP Board.

ActionSep21/05: SG to bring bid to the Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Fund to the WENP Board for approval.



4. Funding Mechanisms

Bristol Avon Catchment Market

AC presented on the Bristol Avon Catchment Market, was recently granted £1.78 million of funding through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The slides have been sent to members alongside the minutes.

MM asked if there was a narrative as to how the target areas were selected. AC responded that there is, and it would be outlined in the FAQs. In summary, it brings together factors including WENP NRN mapping, ecosystem service modelling, economic appraisal regarding quality of agricultural land, and expected interest in NBS to model the target areas.

IB added that the Catchment Market provide a potential mechanism for LAs and others to secure and sell credits for environmental services such as carbon sequestration and a potential way to deliver BNG.

Agriculture Working Group update

AC provided an update on the work of the West of England Agriculture working group, which is co-hosted by WENP and BACP. Its purpose was explained as linking up policy/strategy in the region with action on the ground; we need landowners and farmers to deliver our vision for natural environment, and therefore it is beneficial to engage them (and their advisors on the ground) early and increase buy-in. The group is also trying to coordinate funding, avoiding delivering the same thing in the same thing area.

Among other topics, the group has discussed:

- Approaches to natural capital, both strategic (e.g. mapping the West of England's natural capital) and 'on-the-ground' (e.g. mapping a farm's natural capital).
- A regional approach to ELMs, and what our regional priorities are for ELMs funding.
- Keeping up to date with other projects that may provide funding to landowners/farmers, such as the Catchment Market and Trees for Climate.

IB clarified that we are not looking for WENP to talk to individual farmers, but that the Agriculture WG shows the benefit of bringing people together to focus on a specific area.

MM requested that the minutes of the Agriculture WG meetings were shared with the Board and raised the possibility of the WG discussing the wider context around land-use decisions.

Post-meeting note: the minutes of the Agriculture WG have been made available on the [WENP Board Channel](#) on the WENP Teams space.

5. Partner Updates

The following updates were provided by partners:

- **South Gloucestershire Council's** dedicated tree-planting officer is paying dividends. Through the Council's Climate Action Programme, they are trying to turn one of the NRN Prospectus conceptual ideas on 'addressing transport severance' into a project. The GI Strategy (Greener Places) is close to completion. The ASEA flood defence works have created new wetland reserves at Hallen Marsh and Northwick.



- **WECA** is receiving good investment on the £300k feasibility funding for strategic GI Projects. WECA will submit a LNRS consultation response, which will be coordinated with WENP's.
- For **B&NES Council**, progress on developing the Somer Valley Rediscovered GI Programme is well underway. Natural England is providing investment to accelerate it; a funding bid will be made in the early part of next year. Bath Riverline is making good progress, with land negotiations underway (Batheaston to Newbridge). The Chew Valley GI Project is also progressing. The Bathscape mid-term review has been completed.
- **Bristol Water** is making progress on its Strategic Natural Action Plan, which will build on partnership pieces of work to identify areas where Bristol Water can invest in natural assets. This will act as justification for investment on estate primarily but could also expand to justify investment elsewhere.
- **Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership** (BACP) noted the River Frome Innovation Programme, which has received £6m of DEFRA funding over the next 6 years. The work will involve natural flood management and sustainable drainage. BACP is currently focusing on fish populations, with a Working Group formed to look at this
- The **Woodland Trust** is expanding its advisory services, in coordination with the Forestry Commission.
- **Wessex Water** is performing investigations on water quality and pollution that will be ready in a year or so and may provide useful evidence re our baseline. They have been working with the NatCap Research group in Oxford to look at multiple benefits of nature-based solutions over hard assets. This work has ascertained that NBS can achieve the same outcomes as hard assets, with significant cost and carbon reductions in doing so. They are also looking at urban solutions to e.g. flooding and water quality.
- **Natural England** explained that DEFRA is writing to higher-tier authorities regarding responsible authorities for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Guidance for the LNRS will not be released until the Environment Bill is enacted.
- **Avon Wildlife Trust's** main focus is the Bristol Avon Catchment Market. They are also looking to develop a super National Nature Reserve on Mendip Hills, in association with the AONB unit and other partners. The Avon Wildlife Trust Strategy will be launched this Autumn.

6. Any Other Business

SG and IB suggested organising an outdoor walk to provide Board members with the opportunity to reconnect in person.

Post-meeting note: an outdoor walk has been organised for the afternoon of 11th October, as per the calendar invite sent.

Attendance

Attendees

Ian Barrett (Chair) – IB	West of England Nature Partnership
Amy Coulthard – AC	Avon Wildlife Trust
Mark Minkley – MM	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Richard Cresswell – RC	Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership
Richard Ennion – RE	Bristol City Council
Natasha Clarke – NC	Bristol Water
Samantha Dawe – SD	Environment Agency
Alex Stone – AS	Forest of Avon Trust
Tom Boden – TB	National Trust
Simon Stonehouse – SS	Natural England
Savita Wilmott – SW	Natural History Consortium
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
Ross Kennerley – RK	Woodland Trust
Stuart Gardner – SG	West of England Nature Partnership

Apologies

Sally Hogg	Bristol City Council (representing Directors of Public Health)
Nigel Riglar	Environment Officer Steering Group
Marion Steiner	GP
Paul Cottington	National Farmers Union
Alex Raeder	National Trust
Rachel Williams	Natural England
John Flannigan	North Somerset Council

Actions

Action	Description	Lead(s)	Status
Action Sep21/01	IB and SG to update the proposed content for the WENP Strategy and recirculate to the Board.	IB/SG	Open
Action Sep21/02	SG to convene a Task and Finish Group to work on updating the targets/ambitions for the West of England	SG	Open
Action Sep21/03	IB and SG to update Prospectus based on feedback received at the Board meeting and consider how to further communicate the Prospectus externally.	IB/SG	Open
Action Sep21/04	West of England Agriculture Working Group to explore opportunities to submit funding to the Landscape Recovery Scheme and feed back any opportunities to the WENP Board.	AC	Open
Action Sep21/05	SG to bring bid to the Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Fund to the WENP Board for approval.	SG	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
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