

WENP Board Meeting

Teleconference // 15 December 2021 // 14:00 – 17:00

Items

IB welcomed attendees to the meeting. It was explained that Simon Hunter had joined the WENP Board, representing Bristol Avon Rivers Trust.

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 Chair

Note: IB stepped out of the discussion regarding the appointment of the WENP Chair.

Attendees were reminded that, following on from Selena Gray stepping down as WENP Chair in March 2021, Ian Barrett had been acting as Interim Chair.

On behalf of the WENP Executive Group, BG proposed that Ian be appointed as WENP Chair for three years (i.e. until the end of 2024), as per the usual term set out in the WENP Terms of Reference. The Board agreed with this proposal.

BG also suggested that a Vice-Chair could be appointed in a year's time, who could act as an understudy to the Chair with a view of stepping up to the role at the end of the Chair's three-year appointment. RC replied that another option would be to have 2 or 3 people from different backgrounds acting as vice-Chair, which would allow an assessment of the most suitable for the Chair position.

It was agreed that the possibility of appointing Vice-Chair(s) would be explored in more depth by the WENP Executive Group over the next year.

[ActionDec21/01: SG to update WENP Terms of Reference and send to Board for approval](#)

2. WENP Strategy

SG presented the final version of the WENP Strategy 2021-2030, for Board approval. It was agreed that the Strategy would be published with an additional piece of text relating the Nature Recovery Ambitions to climate change.

Post-meeting note: The WENP Strategy has been published and is available to view on the WENP website: [WENP Strategy 2021-2030 - WENP](#).

LA suggested it would be useful to brief those involved in Unitary Authority / WECA governance (e.g. relevant Councillors and Directors) on the Strategy, and perhaps enable them to endorse the Strategy. It was agreed that a letter would be sent from the Chair to this effect, which could also be sent to contacts in other partner organisations if desired. Additionally, UAs agreed to explore taking the Strategy to their governance structures for endorsement.



ActionDec21/02: SG and IB to write a brief letter from the Chair communicating the publication the Strategy, aimed at organisations' governance structures.

ActionDec21/03: All Board Members to let SG know contacts within their organisation for the above letter, if desired.

ActionDec21/04: Unitary Authority representatives to discuss offline taking WENP Strategy to governance structures for approval.

3. NRN Prospectus Update

SG explained that a draft update to the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) Prospectus had been produced, with the aim of providing a more strategic focus to projects. Six 'Strategic Nature Recovery Network Project Areas' had been chosen as areas in which, either because of their existing value to nature, strategic location, or land use provide even greater opportunities to focus on nature's recovery.

It was agreed to published the updated version on the basis that it will continue to be updated as a live document, with the following additions:

- The relationship to the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy should be made clear. It should be explained that these are partnership opinions of status on nature's priorities, with other priorities also recognised, and that these will feed in to the LNRS
- The relationship with the Forest of Avon Plan should also be set out.
- It should be made explicit in the Prospectus that it is a live document that will be updated as projects progress and new information/evidence becomes available.

Post-meeting note: The updated version of the Prospectus has been published and is available on the WENP website: [Nature Recovery Network Prospectus - WENP](#).

4. WENP Activity Mapping

Attendees were requested to go into breakout rooms to discuss the draft WENP Activity Mapping document that was sent to Board members before the meeting. The Activity Mapping is intended to encourage active partnership working, and to provide increased accountability for actions between Board meetings.

Based on feedback from the breakout rooms and discussion in plenary, the following priority actions for the next Board meeting were identified:

- **Cotswolds – Mendip Hills AONB Link**
 - To report back at next Board meeting on work in Cam Valley, and to clearly set out who is doing what in the area.
 - Suggested owner(s): Amy Coulthard, Simon Hunter, Rachel Williams
- **Catchment Market Pilot**
 - AC to report back on launch and progress at the next Board meeting
- **Biodiversity Net Gain**
 - Simon Stonehouse to report back on progress, followed by longer discussion on how we link this up with other work/mechanisms including the Catchment Market, at the next Board meeting.



- **Water Company Investment**

- Ruth and Natasha to report back at next Board meeting based on the workshop planned for February 15th.

Additionally, the following priorities were identified for 2022 that would not require immediate action ahead of the March Board meeting

- **Trees and Woodland:** additional clarity is needed regarding what the tasks for the WENP Board would be that were not already covered by the Tree and Woodland Strategy Group.
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** a priority for the coming year, but it will become clearer what WENP needs to be doing once the process is underway in the Spring.

Board members have been requested to provide feedback on the above priorities following the Board meeting.

[ActionDec21/05: SG to update WENP Activity Mapping table based on discussions at the Board meeting and any feedback post-Board.](#)

5. CPRE Presentation

Sophie Spencer, Director of [CPRE Avon and Bristol](#), presented on CPRE's new Strategy, their Starry Skies campaign, and their priorities for 2022/23. The slides from the presentation have been sent to Board members with these minutes.

AC noted that we do not usually think about light and noise pollution, although they can be important in terms of ecological severance, and that it could be useful to overlay the light pollution mapping on the West of England NRN. SS added that the colour of light can also impact on wildlife (with blue being worse) and that there are relatively simple actions that could be taken to reduce the impact of light pollution on wildlife and people. The mapping done by CPRE is quite detailed and could allow local light pollution hotspots to be identified.

6. Quick updates

West of England Green Recovery Fund:

- A West of England Green Recovery Fund for the WECA region (i.e. not including North Somerset) was approved on 9 December 2021.
- At least £10m of the fund is to be dedicated to 'Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity', although it is unclear how this will be structured.
- It is understood proposals for the fund will be worked through existing UA/WECA structures, including the GI Working Group and the Environment Officer Steering Group, on which WENP sits.



Forest of Avon Plan Emergency Tree Fund bid

- The West of England bid for the Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Fund has been submitted by the Forest of Avon Trust on behalf of the four UAs in the region. The result of the bid is expected in late January 2022.
- If successful, the bid would provide funding for a full-time coordinator post, a part-time communications post, funding for an engagement and comms package, and funding for an improved evidence base for trees and woodland, among other items.

Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund

- A second round of the natural environment investment readiness fund is open until February 2022, providing funding for innovative nature projects in England that can attract private financial investment.
- BART is looking at a potential bid with the wider Rivers Trust, which would look at creating a mechanism for funding solutions to water-based problems such as weir removals and urban SuDS.
- South Gloucestershire Council is planning to send in application based on their unsuccessful first round bid for a carbon fund.

Severn Estuary Vision project

- Somerset Wildlife Trust is leading a project on the Severn Estuary Vision, funded through the Environment Agency's Coastal Coordination Fund. The focus of the project is on creating a framework for action on the [Severn Estuary Vision](#), including identification of areas for nature restoration.
- WENP is represented by SG on the project steering group, who will report back to the Board as required.

7. Partner Updates

The following updates were provided by partners:

- **Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership** (BACP) is working on an updated Catchment Plan for publication in the New Year, while BART is leading on developing a Fish Recovery Strategy.
- The **National Trust** has a new Chair - René Olivieri – who is the former Chair of the Wildlife Trusts. The organisation plans to plant 20 million trees by 2030, including 4 million in the South West. They are looking at how this can be delivered. The land at Bathampton Meadows, which forms part of Bathscape, will soon be transferred to the National Trust.
- **Avon Wildlife Trust** will be formally launching the [Bristol Avon Catchment Market](#) in the New Year and is hoping to run workshops with farmers and landowners to engage them. An ELMs Test and Trial is running in the Cotswolds Downs (St Catherine's Valley), looking at private investment at a landscape scale. The results from this T&T will be available in March.
- **The Forest of Avon Trust** is in the process of completing Trees for Climate agreements for 75ha of tree planting. New Board members are also being appointed, and the Trust is recruiting a part-time woodland management officer (with a Bathscape focus) and increasing the capacity of their health and wellbeing work.



- **Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART)** is in the process of delivering an 18-month programme in the Chew Valley sub-catchment funded through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. This includes putting in demonstration sites for 3D buffer strips (scrapes, wetland features etc) along 1-1.5 miles of river, and delivering nature-based solutions. BART is also working on the Cam Brook and Wellow, including with landowners in Cam brook who have provided funding for identification of opportunities (this has also been identified as a potential wildlife corridor for the Cotswolds-Mendip Hills AONB link. Additionally, there is work ongoing on the Little Avon and Upper Avon in South Gloucestershire, which have opportunities for nature-based solutions, and in the North Somerset Levels and Moors there is a focus on the Land Yeo.
- **South Gloucestershire Council** has produced a timescale for their GI Strategy Action Plan. Internal webinars on building with nature have been held to build their internal knowledge base, which have been well attended. Ten town and parish councils are drafting Local Nature Action Plans. The Commons Connection Full Business Case has is being submitted to WECA, which will include a Natural Capital assessment.
- **WECA** is producing a paper looking at the response to the Environment Bill and the resource requirements created by it (e.g. through Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy) as one of the Combined Authorities outside of London with strategic planning powers. WECA has commissioned 'Area Profiles' for the GI Areas defined in the [Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy](#), which will contribute towards the Spatial Development Strategy. The business cases for the GI Programmes are progressing.
- The **Environment Agency's** [Avon Severnside Flood Risk scheme](#) is underway. A lot of the EA's focus is being taken up by water quality regulation, specifically its regulatory role. The price review for water company investment is starting now. Another focus is 'nutrient-neutral growth' in protected areas damaged by eutrophication, through offsetting nutrients that would be added to the environment through additional building. The [Somerset Catchment Market](#) for nutrients is being developed.

8. Any Other Business

It was agreed that a WENP Conference in early Summer 2022 would be useful, and that holding it in-person would be best if Covid restrictions at the time allowed.

Post-meeting note: The WENP Annual Review 2021 has been published on the WENP website: [WENP-Annual-Review-2021.pdf](#).

ActionDec21/06: SG to explore holding a WENP Conference in early Summer 2022.

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
Simon Hunter – SH	Bristol Avon Rivers Trust
Samantha Dawe – SD	Environment Agency
Jon Clark – JC	Forest of Avon Trust
Paul Cottington – PC	National Farmers Union
Tom Boden – TB	National Trust
Jo Lewis – JL	Natural England
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
Rosie Walker – RW	Woodland Trust
Stuart Gardner – SG	West of England Nature Partnership
Sophie Spencer – SS	CPRE Avon and Bristol (Observer)

Apologies

Richard Ennion	Bristol City Council
Natasha Clarke	Bristol Water
Nigel Riglar	Environment Officer Steering Group
Marion Steiner	Chair of WENP Nature and Health Strategy Group
Rachel Williams	Natural England
Savita Wilmott	Natural History Consortium
John Flannigan	North Somerset Council
Ross Kennerley	Woodland Trust

Actions

Action	Description	Lead(s)	Status
Action Dec21/01	SG to update WENP Terms of Reference and send to Board for approval	SG	Open
Action Dec21/02	SG and IB to write a brief letter from the Chair communicating the publication the Strategy, aimed at organisations' governance structures	IB/SG	Open
Action Dec21/03	All Board Members to let SG know contacts within their organisation for the above letter, if desired.	All	Open
Action Dec21/04	Unitary Authority representatives to discuss offline taking WENP Strategy to governance structures for approval	BG, MM, JF, LA, RE	Open
Action Dec21/05	SG to update WENP Activity Mapping table based on discussions at the Board meeting and any feedback post-Board	SG	Open
Action Dec21/06	SG to explore holding a WENP Conference in early Summer 2022	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
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