

Midlands Engine Environment Conversation



Developing our vision for green growth

Workshop Readout

Wednesday 18 November 2020



On November 18th 2020, Midlands Engine partners came together in a virtual workshop to share ambitions for how our region can lead the way in tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

Building upon previous Midlands Engine roundtables, which focused on clean energy and opportunities for growth, partners from business, local authorities, universities and non-government organisations were invited to take part in this high-level visioning session.

This workshop was an important step in working together in pan-regional and pan-sector partnership to agree a collective vision for the Midlands Engine. The message was clear: through partnership and innovation, we can lead the way in Green Growth.

Thank-you to our partners from National Trust, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and RSPB who co-designed and facilitated the workshop, and to our Workshop host and independent facilitator Pete Spriggs from www.clearerthinking.co.uk



Context and ambition

Opening the workshop, Sir John Peace, Midlands Engine Chairman, challenged participants to be bold with their ambitions for our region:

We find ourselves amid a Climate and Biodiversity crisis. In 2020, the World Economic Forum ranked climate change as the biggest risk to economy and society, and ranked Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse as one of the top five threats humanity will face in the next 10 years. Our world requires leaders to step up and transform how we do business through reducing greenhouse gases and taking action for nature's recovery.

2021 is set to be an important year for tackling the Climate and Biodiversity crises. This time next year, the UK Government will host COP26 in Glasgow, a Global summit of 200 world leaders meeting to agree a new global framework for climate action. In May 2021 the Convention on Biological Diversity COP15 will meet to agree new global targets for biodiversity.

The Midlands was the birthplace of the industrial revolution. Now, the health and wellbeing of our region's people, economy and environment require a new revolution – a green revolution.

We are at the beginning of a critical decade for getting the Midlands on track for net-zero emissions by 2050. However, we will need to set bold ambitions now and take big steps forward in the 2020s. There is not a moment to lose – but with ambition and partnership working we can achieve transformational green growth.

At the heart of green recovery should be the natural environment and the resources and services it provides. Our natural capital, such as clean air, water, carbon capture, landscapes, forestry and minerals, provides a major part the at the foundations of our social and economic wellbeing.



Workshop Summary

The workshop aimed to take a broad view of Green Growth and sustainability, and hosted break-out sessions to vision growth through three lenses: Environment, Social and Economic.

Four key strategic messages emerged:

- Green Growth for the Midland Engine will mean achieving economic growth and development whilst at the same time ensuring that the natural assets and services upon which our society and economy rely, can continue to provide prosperity for current and future generations.
- The Climate and biodiversity crises are both globally and locally important. Partners from across the Midlands have the collective ambition, expertise and experience to play a central role in driving Green Growth for the UK, innovating to play our role in tackling the twin emergencies.
- The benefits of investing in nature are multi-faceted. Restoring nature at scale through initiatives such as peatland restoration, tree planting and clean waterways, all have an impact upon human health in terms of climate, air quality, access to nature and wellbeing. The economic opportunities include direct employment as well as investor appeal and increased visitor economy potential.
- Lifestyle and infrastructure shifts will be needed at scale. This means moving to having homes that are energy efficient and fuelled from clean sources; transport systems that are energy efficiency and low carbon, and greater use of green infrastructure and sustainable modes of transport.

Key Themes identified in the workshop and breakout groups

Natural Assets: Clean water, soil & air quality are essential parts of Green Growth agenda, underpinning the health of people and the economy. Suggested target of 30% land in recovery and river catchment-based projects to improve water quality.

Carbon Capture: Maximising the ability of nature to capture carbon within the landscape is a key part of the net zero solutions mix. By setting targets to restore peatland and increase woodland cover throughout the region, we can contribute to net zero targets in a sustainable way.

World Class Landscapes: A Nature rich landscape is one that is good for local people, attracts visitors and is more attractive to potential investors in the region. By working to restore nature at a landscape scale, we can live in a more climate resilient region.

Urban Places & Greenspace: People's physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits from spending time outdoors in nature. Ensuring that high quality green space and blue space is accessible throughout the region contributes to health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Low carbon lifestyles: As a region, development of greener transport methods will be key to enabling people and goods to move in a more sustainable way. Low carbon homes, through mass retrofitting and innovative energy solutions for new homes.

Shifting the economic model: The region could lead the way in terms of efficiency and innovation in supply chains, moving towards a circular economy model that sees waste removed from resource use.

Breakout session overviews:

Participants envisioned what the Midlands could be like in 2030, having committed to driving Green Growth. Below are the group descriptions of Green Midlands 2030.

The Midlands is a **great place to live, work, invest and raise a family**. It is a thriving region where **poverty in its various forms has been eradicated**.

Everyone has **easy access to nature rich green space** and **warm, dry, affordable housing, heated and powered by sustainable energy sources**.

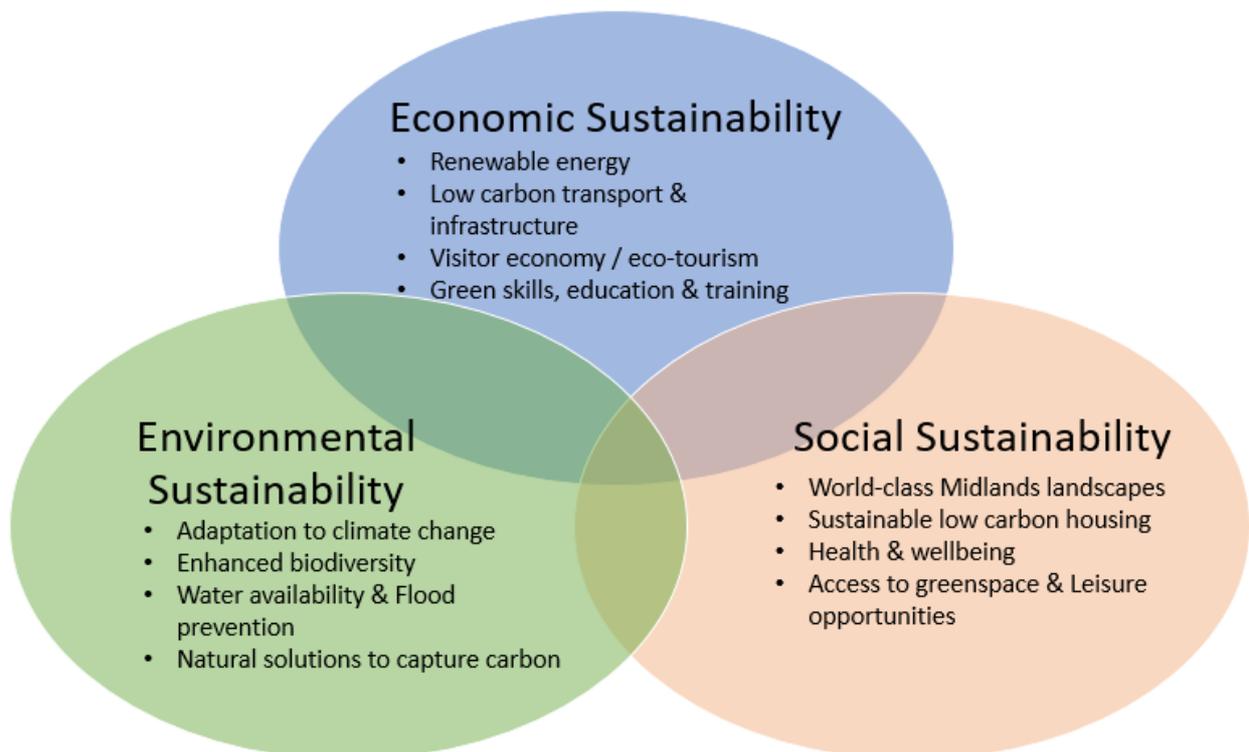
We are **innovative**, leading on **climate solutions**, our businesses are leading the **path to net zero**, whilst **30% of our land is in nature recovery**, and we are seeing the benefits of that investing in nature is a solution.

We are a **connected region**, with easy, affordable, **low carbon transport infrastructure** supporting business and social needs.

We are an **efficient region**, with **land and soils providing food sustainably**, our workplaces and homes are **energy efficient**, and our **circular economy** is maturing.

Green space is at the heart of our cities, with a healthy, skilled, motivated, informed workforce, with **leaders who are committed to working alongside nature** to make the region even more sustainable and nature rich in another decade.

We discussed potential areas for green growth, through the three lenses of economic, environmental and social impact. For many of the themes discussed, it was noted that they have multiple benefits across these three sustainability lenses.



Describing the changes needed

Looking to a 2030 horizon, group participants considered what it could look like socially, environmentally and economically to be the greenest region in the UK. Below is a read-out of the main points captured in the break-out sessions. Where participants referred to existing projects or relevant pieces of work, links have been provided.

Lens 1: Environmental Sustainability

In terms of **environmental sustainability**, the **change** that has taken place in 2030 would be:

Nature and Quality of Environment

- Our **air is as clean** as it can be – we are happy for our kids to breathe it, wherever they live.
- We are achieving a higher standard of **biodiversity net gain** than any other region in the UK.
- We will have ensured that **30% of land in the Midlands is high quality natural habitat** by 2030 and there is no squandering of land resource.
- We will have **healthy productive soils**
- Everyone **understands their impact** on the environment direct or indirect.
- We have started making inroads into **reversing the biodiversity crisis**.
- We have built upon Birmingham's lead in becoming a "biophilic city" and The Midlands has become the **first "biophilic region" where natural capital is valued** and an integrated approach to environmental and health problems is used <https://www.biophiliccities.org/birmingham-uk>
- The region's **natural capital resource will not reduce**, our best landscapes will be protected moving towards reaching their maximum potential.
- We will have **reversed the negative impacts of nitrogen deposition** on biodiversity.

Water

- All **rivers and streams across the Midlands have their function restored** (working and living floodplains).
- We are happy to let our **children swim in a river or drink local bottled water**.
- All **aquifers are protected** and in improving condition.
- By 2030 more (all?) activities which harm the environment will be either illegal or socially unacceptable.

Lifestyle & Place

- Everyone lives in a **net zero home**.
- There is widespread **access to nature near where people live**, contributing to health and wellbeing and quality of life.
- **Cycling and walking** across the region is the main form of transport.
- The region will be known as a **place which is a great place to live and work**.
- Our **green brand** (healthy environment and green lifestyles) is part of how people in the region see themselves

Nature Based Climate Solutions:

- We have created a regional **Wild Belt** where land being managed for recovery is afforded a designation <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wildbelt%20briefing%20September%202020.pdf>
- Our precious and **nationally significant resource of peatlands in the Midlands will be restored** (we have a significant amount of the regional resources).

- We have achieved **30% woodland cover in the National Forest by 2030**.
- We have achieved a **woodland cover target for the Midlands by 2030 (%tbc)**. **Should we set a target of creating a new national forest?**
- **We will see local tailoring of national schemes**, with local partnerships delivering some big bold initiatives to deal with biodiversity loss. We should be demonstrating through projects such as:
 - **The River Severn Partnership** is looking at bold environmental infrastructure across the area they cover. Integrated environmental management using long term catchment planning to drive resilience and sustainability.
https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/marches_lep_board_meetings/agendas/2020/09_september/River-Severn-Partnership-Presentation.pdf

Engaged Business Community

- Business success and recognition will be measured and valued by the contribution to a holistic view of quality of life. Functioning with **net positive impact on environment will be widely applauded**.
- Businesses will understand their dependencies on the landscapes and the functions they deliver and **coinvesting in enhancing multifunctional landscapes**. The four steps we need to help deliver this are engagement, build understanding of the environmental risks and opportunities, create a mechanism for action and have a clear baseline.

Evidence base:

- We need to understand basic principles and **what the scale of the challenge** is for the natural environment across the region. This in turn needs linking to a plan/strategy that sets a process for delivery at a local level.
- Overall, we need to link policy to a spatial framework. (Example referred to being the Blueprint for Local Environmental Delivery)
<https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/system/files/documents/Coalition%20Climate%20Asks%20Doc%20June%202020.pdf> .
- Need to understand what makes us distinctive as a region and make use of it. For us it's the cities and people, so we need to be thinking about challenges like connecting people with nature.

Finance

- We need to link government investment with local investment by organisations, businesses etc and develop new models for funding.
- Public sector investment decisions (e.g. pensions) will be held to account for investing in things that contribute towards restoring biodiversity and tackling net zero challenges.
- The ability to create new markets for looking after and restoring natural assets / natural capital should be developed a piloted. An example referred to was the MidLens Programme which is at concept development stage and would enable shared interest investment into multifunctional landscape solutions, a natural capital finance model using a river catchment approach [Landscape Enterprise Networks – A 3Keel initiative to support resilient landscapes](#).

Further Questions & challenges:

- **Collaboration is key**. Need to join up dots for shared asks (and vision) for the Midlands that deliver outcomes. Need to understand who is delivering what and look for synergies.
- **How do we have an adaptive plan?** Need to consider across the board, bring a collective investment programme. Need to show the wider benefits case.
- Natural flood solutions, adaptation, engineered flood solutions, carbon capture and storage are all outcomes we should consider. How do we **make best use of things we're already piloting** here, a specific example being biochar?
- We need to link in with **skills development**, and also help landowners to be more responsive by making it easier for them to engage.

- This needs to be viewed as **more than a race for locking up carbon**. It is about the health of the natural environment too. Carbon is the frame, but the regional environmental need and potential is way more than that.
- **Need to factor in the limiting factors** an example being that with things like tree planting land banks and lack of infrastructure are barriers.

Lens 2: Social Sustainability

In terms of **social sustainability** the **change** that has taken place in 2030 would be:

Health & Greenspace

- **Green space at heart of liveable cities and urban planning.** The starting point for planning, not a peripheral add on.
- **30% of Midlands protected for nature.** Better protected natural areas to provide nature rich, high quality habitats for wildlife. Improved biodiversity and abundance of wildlife, favourable SSSI condition. The state of nature directly impacts human health and wellbeing.
- We will be using **green prescribing** to prevent ill health.
- Measurable improvement in health e.g. **Obesity, linked to access to green space**
 - Increased air quality leads to reduction in respiratory issues.
- **Urban greenspace** which encourages climate change adaptation, access for people and wildlife.
- **Street trees planted in all new housing developments** and **legal protection** for existing street trees.
- **Everyone has access to nature rich greenspace within a safe 15min walk or cycle of their home.**
 - NE - should have greenspace within 300m of home.
- Midlands becomes a world **leader in well-being** as well as productivity.

Water and Land use

- Increased use of **Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)**.
- **Less people negatively impacted by flooding.** Water will be slowed down upstream, and the landscape will act as a natural sponge during wetter periods. Will beavers be playing a key role in this by 2030?
- Work with farmers to **reduce pesticide** use and drive more **sustainable farming**.

Identity and awareness

- **Midlands will be a great place, to live, work, invest, raise family. It will be known for being green,** and people will see this as a benefit of living and working here.
- The history and heritage of the Midlands will play a much bigger role in the regional brand (birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, UNESCO geopark in the Black Country, first National Park in the UK).
- Leading, innovating, driving policy change.
- **Environment embedded in school curriculum leading to green apprenticeships and an environmentally upskilled workforce**
 - Including a practical experience of delivering conservation.
- Improved **social awareness** of environmental issues.
- **Regional food** will form a big part of our identity.
- We will be **known as a beautiful region**, we will respect that in how we plan and design for green growth (new things should be beautiful and thoughtfully designed).

Homes and development

- **End of fuel poverty** – improved efficiency so all have access to warm, dry housing. Ref SDG 1.
- All new developments to be fitted with **micro-generation** of sustainable energy.

- **Public transport** to facilitate connections.
- Midlands will be an exemplar in **using creative planning and smarter use of housing density** to build a greener region.
- We will strike a **balance between respecting the heritage of old buildings and making them sustainable for the future** – we need to challenge planning regulations and listing assumptions in a sensitive and thoughtful way given the current crisis.

Circular Economy

- Our leaders and innovators will ensure Midlands is **central to the green industrial revolution** and we will trade locally, having a more circular economy.
- All businesses **aim for net zero by 2030**.

Lens 3: Economic Sustainability

In terms of **economic sustainability** the **change** that has taken place in 2030 would be:

Built Environment

- **Our buildings are Net zero carbon**, both new and retro-fitted. A new / reskilled workforce will be delivering retrofitting at scale.
- **Our buildings are climate resilient** and good for people – green indoors and out – good for wellbeing.
- **Integral renewable energy** – PV, electronic heating/cooling.

Low carbon transport & infrastructure

- **'Smart grid'** to support distribution of goods.
- **Community energy schemes** are operating – micro grids.
- The region will have **decarbonised heating systems** – hydrogen based + large battery storage?
- We will have been using **former coalfields** for mine water **heat recovery**.
- We will be using **sustainably produced hydrogen** as a fuel wherever we can.
- **Waste recovery and conversion** – precious metals.
- Massive increase in domestic charging points – **all new homes constructed with a charging point**.
- Incentives needed to drive installation of charging points.
- **Hydrogen powered vehicles** both commercially and for individual use.
- **Low carbon public transport** infrastructure.

Visitor Economy & Landscape

- **Landscape, nature and sustainable transport in green and blue infrastructure** are a key part of the **thriving visitor economy** draw to Midlands.
- Government **incentivised 'wilding' of landscape** to support future sustainable land management – regenerative agriculture – carbon sink. Rewilding large areas of land brings tourism and visitor economy benefits at a large scale (like the Knepp Estate, Sussex)

Green jobs

- **Our future leaders in 2030 will be leading in the greenest region** and will be delighted with the decisions we made today and the progress we have made on nature and carbon (we will be able to look them in the eye!)
- A **circular economy** across the region – cycling waste from one sector to be an asset for another.
- A range of **high-quality jobs from net zero transition** – reskilling planned and based on need e.g. **Natural Capital Apprenticeships** – no-one is left behind.
- Our **traditional skills and capabilities will have been repurposed** to meet the needs of the future working with our world leading academic institutions. We will once again **be an engine room of creativity** (note the Institute of Traditional Knowledge).

- We will have **farmers who are ensuring that our agricultural sector contributes to green growth** and does not cause pollution / negative impacts.

Policy

- Strategic planning – **linking through from local – regional – national.**
- The need to interact with **strategic planning from location**, carbon neutral approach, to site layout.
- **Public bodies procurement** – local, sustainable and net zero for all projects as a matter of course.
- Framework to ensure pan-regional impact for **green growth is part of the levelling up agenda.**

Making the case

The elements of the vision that each group felt would be the *most compelling to the wider business community* were shared as follows:

Environmental Sustainability

The most compelling elements of our vision for the wider business community would be:

- Business resiliency.
- The foundations of our economy rely upon our natural capital such as clean air, clean water, productive soils, pollination etc. Greening of our region's economy makes us more sustainable in the long terms and more resilient to the changes that come with the changing climate.
- Quality of life offer - lots of cities but best place to be to live, work, grow.
- Access to biodiversity and green space is high on people's priority list when looking for somewhere to live. In near future climate adapted living spaces will be a key consideration.
- We need to be bold, not just about staying where we are, we need to be kicking on. Our region has opportunities with skill trading, learning, influencing policy. Link to policy levers so we are a demonstrator by delivering. If it works great, if it doesn't keep trialling.
- We are linked in with universities, measuring and pioneering the change we want to make. Innovation is really an opportunity for the Midlands. We will be serially innovative around environmental sustainability.
- Our Region has a (green growth) narrative that everyone understands.
- Decarbonisation of industry. Already at cutting edge, we should build on this.
- Economic/Investment and helping with efficiency.
- New business model opportunities.
- Resource pooling to mitigate challenges/risk to business.
- With collaboration its industry, NGOs, people, government bodies all being a part and contribution.
- Thinking about our sectors like agriculture and house building its about ensuring we are really bold with each of them. E.g. Lincolnshire produces 30% of our food. How do we sustain that and enable it with forward planning?
- Picking up shared interests across sectors, a lot of interests in same place. We need to leverage.

Achieving our vision

During this whole group discussion participants reflected on what might stop the region from achieving the vision, and the key areas of work that therefore needed to be delivered. The contributions were as follows:

What are the key areas of work / activity required to help us reach our vision?

- 2030 is a long way away – the plan needs to be robust, to ensure it won't be out of date over the coming decade and remains relevant.
- More of a systems thinking approach – what's the impact of some of our actions?
- Wider partnerships / Cross sector partnerships – we need more and not to just talk to ourselves!
- Nature based climate solutions – which deliver for both nature and climate emergency.
- Be visible – have a spatial vision for what we're aiming for. More than a list of environmental projects. It's about how we use the data (what's here and where do we want to be?)
- Relevance to those who live and work in the Midlands, especially with audiences we struggle to connect with.
- Data and evidence – using this to show the benefits and support business cases. Also use data to identify future challenges and risks.
- Resilience of the region – where are our climate vulnerabilities? Flood risks, drought, urban heat islands etc. Use solutions to address these. We need a spatial approach.
- Making best use of national policy mechanisms e.g. nature recovery work.
- Land use planning – need to factor natural capital into this arena. Maybe pilot a new approach.
- Planning White Paper – needs to do more to integrate.
- Finance – blending public and private funding. What delivery vehicles will deliver the change we're seeking?
- Stimulate demand for the products or services we want to see.
- Need a circular economy – be mindful of the waste and how it might be reused or recycled.
- Need to find a way to make the Midlands the Silicon Valley before the tech boom. Where are the leaders in this conversation over the next ten years? Where are the SMEs?
- We should be clear about where we want to get to, who is doing what and how do we get there?
- We need an accessible narrative. Every sector has its own language – there are a lot of barriers to understanding and engagement through the words we use.
- Green jobs – identify and map where there is the most potential.
- Traditional skills – retrofitting is SO crucial in what we need to do. We need the skillset to meet the change we're seeking.

Describing the changes needed

The final session explored how the Midlands Engine Environment Strategy might best achieve wider input and ownership across the region, and the next steps planned following the workshop.

Ways to ensure cross sector engagement & ownership

- Unique opportunity re. timeframes. Ambitious stories which go way beyond. New audiences have accessed green space over the recent lockdown(s). Let's connect with these groups. Show them the relevance and benefits.
- Tie into the Government's Ten Point Plan where appropriate – connect how what we want can contribute to this.
- How do we go WAY BEYOND the Ten Point Plan? It's worth working for. The language is so staid, needs translating into a brand with passion Wider conversations with other groups.
- Need a simple message to get across what we want to achieve.
- Importance of connecting with students so their voice is heard and the momentum is maintained.
- Use existing networks e.g. Water Resources East/West and their integrated water plans.

- Where are the gaps – what’s happening and where do we need to do more?
- Share more stories – share how and why to encourage others.
- There are still barriers with some sectors who might see this as an additional cost – govt is moving to seeing green issues as about jobs and resilience. We need to share good examples.
- Have to ensure everyone can see the benefit but also recognise the benefits will be viewed through different lenses. We need to help and understand the spectrum of reasons to engage and take action.
- Listen to those businesses who are the leading edge of thought leadership. What are the short-term investible propositions that will lead to delivery and also new ways of working? People buy into success.

Planned next steps

This read out provides an overview of the rich discussion of the workshop, and identifies a number of key themes, questions and challenges around Green Growth and sustainability. As part of our planned next steps, this content will be weaved into the wider Midlands Engine Green Growth Conversation, considering our key, strategic pan-regional priorities and areas of focus as we work towards a Green Growth Action Plan. The Midlands has incredible resources, talent and potential and the Midlands Engine Partnership will continue to champion our region as a leader in the Green Industrial Revolution. We value and welcome your continued engagement in the Green Growth Conversation as we look ahead to further roundtables, events and 1-1 conversations.

If you have any questions about the Midlands Engine Green Growth Conversation or about the above workshop, please contact: Hannah Walmsley (Hannah.Walmsley@midlandsendine.org) and Victoria Magreehan (victoria.magreehan@nationaltrust.org.uk)