
Report to: Green Economy Panel

Date: 20 February 2018

Subject: 25 Year Environment Plan

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1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To inform the Panel of the key points in the government's new 25 Year Environment Plan and to provide a steer on the areas in which it feels West Yorkshire Combined Authority (the Combined Authority) should focus its resources and effort.

2 Information

- 2.1 The 25 Year Environment Plan, published in January 2018, sits alongside the Industrial Strategy and accompanying Clean Growth Strategy to set out the government's approach to safeguarding the environment and future proofing the economy.
- 2.2 In the Plan, the government recognises its important role in protecting and improving the environment in the UK and beyond and pledges to show leadership on conservation, climate change, land use, sustainable global food supplies and marine health. Key themes are for the UK to champion sustainable development, lead in environmental science, innovate to achieve clean growth and increase resource efficiency.
- 2.3 The Plan is framed in the context of Brexit and the opportunity this brings to make the behavioural and institutional changes necessary to build sustainable, enduring growth.
- 2.4 Central to the Plan is the 'natural capital approach' – natural capital being defined as the sum of elements of nature that directly or indirectly bring value to people and the country at large, for example through providing food, clean air and water, energy etc. The Plan acknowledges this wider value of natural assets, giving the environment its due value as a contributor to the economy and wider society, for example through health and wellbeing benefits to citizens.

2.5 Within the Plan, the government sets out 6 goals for the next 25 years:

- Achieve clean air
- Achieve clean and plentiful water
- Achieve a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife
- Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
- Conserve and enhance beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

2.6 In addition, the government plans to manage pressure on the environment by:

- Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Minimising waste
- Managing exposure to chemicals
- Enhancing biosecurity

2.7 The Plan sets out 6 key policy areas around which action will be focussed. Further detail on each area is provided in this report:

- Using and managing land sustainably
- Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes
- Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing
- Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste
- Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans
- Protecting and improving the global environment

2.8 It is worth noting that the Environment Plan shows good alignment with the Leeds City Region Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan (GBISDP), with a number of the policy areas identified in the Environment Plan already being progressed as part of the Leeds City Region approach. The publication of the Environment Plan has come at a timely point allowing further detail to be incorporated into the GBISDP prior to its publication in the summer.

2.9 The key implications and opportunities of the Environment Plan for the Combined Authority and the wider Leeds City Region are still being developed and a full report on these will be presented to the next meeting of the Panel in April. However, the Panel may wish to consider the information provided in the report and indicate the areas where they feel the Combined Authority should be concentrating its effort and resources in advance of the report to be presented at the April meeting.

2.10 To assist the Panel in making more informed comments on where the Combined Authority should focus its effort and resources, this initial assessment of the Environment Plan has identified the following areas where it could be beneficial for the Combined Authority to focus on:-

- Opportunities presented by a new agricultural policy in the wake of Brexit to utilise public money for public goods. Should the Combined Authority be targeting a new agricultural policy and the funds it brings in a devolution ask to Government?
- Opportunities presented by reforms to developer contributions to secure investment in natural capital. What approach should the Combined Authority take in influencing future reforms and should it look to target a Leeds City Region-wide fund for natural capital investment?
- Influencing future Planning Policy Guidance on Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS). What, if any, role should the Combined Authority play in influencing future policy? Is this a role which should be left to the Local Authorities given the limited planning role of the Combined Authority?
- Implementing fully the Green Streets Design Principles into West Yorkshire Transport Fund projects to ensure the Combined Authority contributes to the delivery of the policy goal to create 1 million street trees and 12% overall woodland cover.
- Opportunities presented through the creation of a Northern Forest and the allocation of £5.7m towards this project. How should the Combined Authority look to support the LNP and the White Rose Forest in the delivery of its portion of the Northern Forest?

Using and managing land sustainably

- 2.11 This chapter sets out a new approach to using and managing land sustainably, in the context of Brexit as an opportunity to reform the way land is managed to support cost effective, sustainable growth. Going forward, this shift could provide further opportunities to explore a devolved system of agricultural subsidies which prioritise public funding for public goods within the Leeds City Region. This is something that is being investigated as part of the GBISDP.
- 2.12 **Embedding an ‘environmental net gain’ principle for development, including housing and infrastructure.** This means putting the environment at the heart of planning and development, and that wider natural capital benefits will be assessed as part of the planning process. This will include establishing ‘strategic, flexible and locally tailored approaches that recognise the relationship between the quality of the environment and development’. Actions the government will take on this area include:
- Working with interested parties to reduce costs to developers by expanding the net gain approaches used for wildlife to include wider natural capital benefits such as flood protection, recreation and improved water and air quality – streamlining environmental process, whilst achieving net environmental gains.
 - Producing stronger new standards for green infrastructure.
 - Exploring, with government, reforms of developer contributions, how tariffs could be used to steer development towards the least environmentally damaging areas and to secure investment in natural capital.

- 2.13 **Improving how we manage and incentivise land management.** The most important proposal within this policy area is delivering a new environmental land management system as the UK withdraws from the Common Agricultural Policy. This will mean a shift to a system of 'paying farmers public money for public goods' and will incentivise and reward land managers to restore and improve natural capital and rural heritage. Proposals will be set out in a Command Paper in spring which the government will consult on.
- 2.14 **Improving soil health and restoring and protecting peatlands.** This will include developing a soil health index and ending the use of peat in horticulture.
- 2.15 **Focusing on woodland to maximise its many benefits.** Key priorities include expanding woodland cover and ensuring existing woodlands are better managed and protected to maximise the range of benefits they provide. This will include an ambition to plant 11 million trees, the development of a Northern Forest and appointment of a National Tree Champion to support the approach.
- i. **The key policy of note here is supporting the development of a new Northern Forest**, which will mean £5.7million of government funding to plant a forest that crosses the country, along the border of the M62. The Local Nature Partnership (LNP) through the White Rose Forest Partnership will be at the forefront of delivering the funding within the Leeds City Region.
- 2.16 **Reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion.** This section sets out actions to reduce the risk of harm from flooding and coastal erosion including greater use of natural flood management solutions, building on the raft of government work that has been done in this area since 2015. Key areas of focus are:
- i. **Expanding the use of natural flood management solutions.** The key action is learning from the £15m National Flood Management funding to develop knowledge and identify and promote practical solutions for local implementation. The Combined Authority is already taking action on this area, having secured £12.2m through the Local Growth Fund to deliver Natural Flood Management measures (i.e. tree planting, dam enhancements, soakaways and peat restoration).
 - ii. **Putting in place more sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)** and exploring a range of solutions to deal with excess surface water. Within this, the most important action is the pledge to amend Planning Practice Guidance to clarify construction and ongoing maintenance arrangements for SuDS in new developments, tightening links with planning guidance for water quality and biodiversity.

Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes

- 2.17 This area focuses on the government's goal to 'balance the needs of a growing, vibrant society with the ability to access green space'. It includes work to start to restore and create areas of wetland, woodland, grassland and coastal habitat to provide chance for wildlife to flourish.

Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing

- 2.18 This section highlights the links between access to nature/green space and the positive impact on a person's wellbeing. It sets out a plan to make it easier for more people from every background to access and enjoy nature.
- 2.19 **Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces**, including using green spaces to improve both mental and physical health. This relates to both the Leeds City Region SEP Priority 3 on clean energy and environmental resilience and GBISDP. The GBISDP highlights the benefits of access to green and blue infrastructure for health and wellbeing and commits to increasing access for citizens.
- 2.20 **Encouraging children to be close to nature**, in and out of school, with a particular focus on disadvantaged areas.
- 2.21 **'Greening' our towns and cities** by creating more green infrastructure and planting one million urban trees. Urban greenspace is unequally distributed and the provision of more and better quality green infrastructure will make places more attractive to live and work in and have long term health benefits. The two key areas in this theme are:
- i. **Creating more green infrastructure**, with an initial focus on places where there is not enough green infrastructure or where it is poor quality. The government will draw up a national framework of green infrastructure standards to ensure new developments include accessible green spaces.
 - ii. **Planting more trees in and around our towns and cities.** Government aims to achieve 12% of overall tree cover by 2060 and in doing so will consider how to bring woodland closer to where people live. The Combined Authority will look to contribute through the Green Streets design guidance which works to integrate green and blue infrastructure into designs of West Yorkshire Transport Fund schemes and other city region investments.

Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste

- 2.22 This chapter focuses on cutting pollution and pursuing measures to make the UK more resource efficient to both ease pressure on the environment and boost productivity. This will be done through improving the regulatory

framework so it provides environmental protection and promotes economic growth.

2.23 **Maximising resource efficiency and minimising environmental impacts at end of life.** This means making sure that resources are used more efficiently and are kept in use for longer to minimise waste and reduce environmental impact by promoting reuse, remanufacturing and recycling. This links to the Leeds City Region Resource Efficiency Fund which provides financial support and advice for SMEs looking to become more resource efficient in the way they do business. Opportunities are being explored to extend the Resource Efficiency Fund beyond its initial three year programme.

2.24 **Reducing pollution** by tackling air pollution in the Clean Air Strategy and reducing the impact of chemicals. This includes a fund of £475m for LAs with biggest pollution issues to tackle hotspots in their areas, of which Leeds is a beneficiary.

Securing clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans

2.25 This chapter sets out the importance of the seas and oceans for maintaining our environment and sets out an approach to maintaining them.

Protecting and improving our natural environment

2.26 This chapter sets out the plan to lead by example in tackling global environmental issues. For example through domestic measures, such as publishing a second national Adaptation Programme in 2018 to address issues from the UK's climate change risk assessment, as well as international measures such as supporting developing countries to mitigate/adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Putting the plan into practice

2.27 Key proposals that the government will put in place to ensure the delivery of the plan include:-

- **Consulting on setting up a new independent body** to hold government to account and on a new set of environmental principles to underpin policy making
- **The government will develop a set of metrics to assess progress towards the 25 year goals.**
- **The Plan will be refreshed regularly**, proposed at every 5 years, and progress will be reported annually.
- **The government will explore creating a Natural Environment Impact Fund**, a facility to blend capital from a range of sources (public, private, philanthropic) to provide technical assistance funding and repayable finance to projects with potential to improve natural environment and generate revenue.

3 Financial Implications

3.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

4 Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5 Staffing Implications

5.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

6 External Consultees

6.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

7 Recommendations

7.1 That the Panel notes the information provided in the report on the government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

7.2 That the Panel notes the intention to provide a further report at the next Green Economy Panel analysing any significant implications for the Combined Authority of the proposals within the 25 Year Environment Plan.

7.3 That the Panel provide comments and steer on the areas in which it feels the Combined Authority's efforts and resources should be focussed.

8 Background Documents

None.

9 Appendices

None.