



1.0 Introduction

This note outlines discussions had at the West Midlands Greener Together Forum on the 19th March 2024, where we discussed the benefits of our regions waterways. The Forum brought together the following speakers;

Paul Wilkinson is a Senior Ecologist at the Canal and Rivers Trust spoke about their work on restoring the regions canals to help nature to thrive and their plans for the next few years.

Emily Prestwood is the Energy Development Manager at the Birmingham Energy Institute joined to to share their partnership work on creating the River Cole Community Commons project.

Sally Clague is the Senior River Restoration Officer with Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust shared their work on restoring the River Stour and the Trusts wider work they are planning on waterways in the region

Elsbeth Sage is the Local Nature Recovery Strategy Co-Ordinator at the West Midlands Combined Authority spoke how blue infrastructure will be included within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Please see the presentations from the meeting [here](#) and the Forum Terms of Reference [here](#).

2.0 Questions answered at the Forum

- **What are the chances of using the big canal network to transport freight (on electric barges), and get some lorries off the road? Would that be opposed to greening the waterways?**
 - Exploring all options at the Canal and Rivers Trust, big infrastructure schemes will need to be put in place to support this. Big challenges, if canal has locks, we have to be careful with water levels and climate change is exacerbating issues with keeping water levels at the correct level.
- **Since WMCA has done very little to expand the cycling network, a lot of active travel depends on using towpaths. What is being done to improve the towpaths for cycling?**
 - Since 2019 the WMCA has invested, over £70m investment in active travel with more to come. In 2019 – there were 4 miles of segregated cycle track, in 2021 there were 17 miles, by 2025 there will be 30 miles, by 2027 there will be 60 miles and more.
 - Adam Tranter was appointed as cycling and walking commissioner for the region in December 2021.
 - The Starley Network is the West Midlands' long-term vision for cycling and walking.
 - Transport for West Midlands owns and operates cycle hubs at - Rowley Regis, Longbridge, New Street station Birmingham, Selly Oak, Stourbridge Junction
- **Is there the possibility of Dudley canal no.1 becoming a SSSI site to prevent development?**
 - Likely that will occur via Planning process and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements. Difficult as there will always be development that affects our natural spaces, but BNG promotes the mitigation hierarchy of avoid, reduce, mitigate compensate of biodiversity lost during developments.
- **How can members of the Forum / public be involved in these projects?**
 - Anyone interested in citizen science to keep their eye out for the City Nature Challenge on social media, it's running on 26th-29th April and involves using the iNaturalist app to record nature.
 - Can get involved with the Birmingham River Champions network by emailing birminghamriverchampions@gmail.com
 - To be involved in the River Cole Project, please email E.Prestwood@bham.ac.uk