

West Midlands Combined Authority

Natural Environment Programme Summary

Protecting, restoring and enhancing our region's natural environment for people and biodiversity



WMCA Environment Programme

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Environment Programme is split into four distinct themes (natural environment, air quality, climate adaptation and circular economy), with a cross-cutting theme of behaviour change. These themes work alongside WMCA's net zero WM2041 agenda to create a better environment and tackle climate change. Each theme has a clear plan with priorities for delivery, as well as opportunities for devolution of powers and resources from government to the region.

Natural Environment Context

The WMCA area is heavily urbanised, with around 3 million people living in the region. As a result, our natural habitats are fragmented and there is wide inequality in access to green space.

There is a critical role for nature in helping us to adapt to the changing climate.

Our natural environment programme began with the publication of the **West Midlands Natural Environment Plan (2021-2026)**, produced in collaboration with stakeholders. The key elements of the programme are described below.



WMCA Natural Environment Programme

Nature Recovery

Nature for Communities

WM Forest Partnership

Natural Capital Finance

Nature Recovery

WMCA has been appointed by government as the Responsible Authority to deliver a **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**, and identify the priorities for nature recovery and natural environment outcomes for the region. The challenges presented by our urban setting, particularly around climate impacts and the inequality in access to green space, mean that our approach to nature recovery will include solutions that can deliver multiple outcomes for nature and people. Further work in the programme that supports nature recovery includes the production of:

- **Brownfield Habitat Compensation Design Guide**
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Habitat Bank legal guidance**
- **Sustainable Urban Drainage guidance**

Natural Capital Finance

Our Natural Environment Plan highlighted the need to develop innovative funding and investment mechanisms to support and accelerate delivery. In 2023, WMCA was selected as one of four areas in England to take part in Defra's **Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC)** programme. LINC is part of the government's Green Finance Strategy and is building the capacity and capability of partners to attract finance at scale to shift the region's approach to natural capital delivery.

West Midlands Forest Partnership

To support tree planting in the region, WMCA secured £300k from the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Fund. This funding has helped us to set up a **West Midlands Forest Partnership** and complete an **'iTree survey'** providing data and insight into the region's tree stock. We engage with the wider regional community through our dedicated website, the **Virtual Forest** (wmvirtualforest.co.uk). In 2023/24 we hosted nearly 40 **tree giveaways** across the region, giving away almost 4,000 trees to individuals and organisations.

Nature for Communities

WMCA recognises the important role of community groups in improving our natural environment and access to green space. WMCA has provided £1.6m to 55 community groups and organisations through a **Community Green Grant** programme (2021-23) and the **Community Environment Fund** (2023-present), supported through Commonwealth Games Legacy funding. Initial analysis of the programmes shows the following impacts:

£1.6m to
55 projects



40 projects
improving green
and blue space
in the region



8 new full-time
jobs created



19% people in
WMCA within 15
minute walk of
improved green
or blue space



West Midlands Walking Trail is a WMCA led proposal for a new long distance walking trail, creating a route around the region with shorter routes connecting more people with the network and opportunities for outdoor recreation. In 2024, we completed a business case and we are currently seeking funding to deliver this project.

More information

If you would like more information about any of the content in this document, please visit wmca.org.uk/nature or email the WMCA Environment Team: environment@wmca.org.uk