

### Questions from the citizens' panel

1. How can WMCA intervene in planning decisions?
  - a. How to balance with housing developments?

The WMCA does not have direct planning powers, but works closely with local authorities on their own planning policy. The WMCA is, however, the designated 'responsible authority for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which will provide evidence for improved planning policies for nature recovery at the local level. Local authorities, responsible for setting planning policy and making planning decisions, will ultimately be required to 'Have regard' to the findings of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy when making such decisions.

2. There are a lot of flats being built, how can more greenery be added?
  - a. There are several policies that help greenery get incorporated into new developments. Most Local Planning Authorities have policies around green space and amenity, which set a standard for developers to include some green space. However the strength with which these policies get applied vary. The new mandatory law of Biodiversity Net Gain, which became operational in February 2024, requires all developments to increase their biodiversity by 10%, which will see a rise in the amount of green space and biodiversity incorporated into new developments. There are also additional policies that are not yet mandatory but which are likely to be used in the future, such as the Green Infrastructure Standard developed by Natural England.
3. What influence does the WMCA have on the curriculum in schools?
  - a. The WMCA does not have any influence on the curriculum, but we do have influence on adult skills and training provision, so this could be an area where the WMCA influences more green skills courses.
4. What are the barriers to developing brownfield sites?
  - a. Brownfield sites are often contaminated by previous landuse; the remediation costs can reduce viability of developments. Brownfield sites can, in time, develop into "Open Mosaic habitats on Previously Developed Land" – this is a highly valued habitat that is something that is a consideration in the planning process and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
5. How do you calculate economic value of trees and greenspace?
  - a. Natural Capital Assessments are a tool that assess the economic value of nature, such as trees or green space. They estimate the costs of services that biodiversity provide, such as carbon storage, surface water absorption, air quality, and amenity and estimate the costs that these services would take if not done through nature. For example, the famous sycamore gap tree which was destroyed in Northumbria was valued at £660,000 due to its local importance.
6. Why would investors want to invest in green spaces? What return would they get?
  - a. Traditional finance (loans) requires payback and a return on this (interest). There is a place for this type of finance where environmental projects deliver

'benefits/outcomes' that can be sold (for example carbon to companies wanting to be net zero; water companies wanting to slow down the flows of rainfall into sewers; and developers needing to buy biodiversity units to compensate for impacts of a development). We may also see the emergence of new tradable outcomes around community green spaces and climate adaptation for local businesses and corporates who may want to buy/contribute to local projects as part of their charitable giving or corporate social responsibility commitments. When outcomes are traded this revenue will then be used to pay back the finance. Finance may also be brought to such schemes from investors who may offer lower rates/expectations of return to meet their own green objectives. It is likely that such schemes will also be supported by philanthropic funding too which helps remove financial risks for traditional investors.

Though this concept is relatively new for nature there is an established 'Social Impact Investment market' that has, after just 11 years, achieved a rate of investment of nearly £8bn/year. The UK government target for the nature finance market is to attract £1bn private investment by 2030 (recent reports suggest there is currently around £95m/year of such investment). Most investment in this area now is for Biodiversity Net Gain, carbon and water quality.

7. How can public get involved in managing spaces?
  - a. The public can be involved by supporting Non Governmental Organisations, typically Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust etc. Establish "Friends of" groups with engagement/responsibility for greenspace management.
  
8. Do we have the skills in the region to be able to put nature recovery actions into practice?
  - a. We do have significant professional and academic resource to provide strategic guidance, which will help us develop the right course of action for nature recovery and to develop our plans for delivery. However, there is a general lack of practical skills and resource for on the ground delivery of specialist land management tasks such as habitat creation and management as well as delivering nature-based solutions. The WMCA is looking to address this through providing support for adult skills in many areas and has supported training in sustainable drainage and green roof installation (Walsall College).
  
9. Why is water quality an issue now?
  - a. As climate is changing, with more extreme storms and water, the sewers (many of which are a legacy of Victorian urban infrastructure) are unable to hold the volume, and we will see more infringements of waste entering our watercourses.
  - b. Water treatment capacity will be overloaded during the winter with less water during the summer. Water holding capacity needs to increase, which is expensive and take a long time to build. Nature based solutions such as sustainable urban drainage, will slow down the water to prevent flooding.

10. Why are 15-minute or 20-minute so contentious?
  - a. There is the presumption that 20-minute neighbourhoods were going to prevent people from driving in their neighbourhoods. However, in Paris and the Netherlands this approach has been taken and it sees neighbourhoods having everything they need such as education, greenspaces and health provisions within 20 minutes, meaning people would be able to walk or use active/ public travel to access these amenities.