

Local Enterprise Partnership

07 July 2022

Environmental Sustainability Plan

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
<i>Reason why exempt:</i>	Not applicable
Purpose of this report:	Discussion
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Has it been included on the Forward Plan?	Not a Key Decision

Director Approving Submission of the Report:
 Felix Kumi-Ampofo, Director of Corporate Policy

Report Author(s):
 Laurie Heykoop, Senior Economic Policy Manager
laurie.heykoop@southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk

Executive Summary

The third pillar of the SEP, alongside Growth and Inclusion, is Sustainability. This paper outlines detail to take forward this pillar through the development of an Environmental Sustainability Plan (ESP), to further deliver on the SEP's commitments. The ESP will provide a framework for understanding the MCA's role in enabling sustainable economic growth. The scope is likely to include the natural environment, and the links between environmental, social, and economic prosperity. Through evidence-gathering and stakeholder engagement, this Plan will be scoped to identify where the MCA and partners can collaborate to deliver on the Climate and Environment Emergency declared in 2019 and exploit the opportunities therein.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

The climate emergency and the decline of ecosystems are impacting homes and communities, infrastructure, agriculture, water supplies, and the natural environment in South Yorkshire, and it will do so with increasing frequency and intensity in the years ahead. The impacts to society and the economy will be profound. All partners have a role to play. Co-operation on use of resources and collaboration at regional level will be of great benefit in addressing these challenges. Understanding these and setting out the policy frameworks to address them will give the region the tools it needs to meet the challenges.

Recommendations

That LEP Board members:

1. comment and input on the proposed development of the ESP and how they wish to be engaged in the progress and development of this work.

1. Background

1.1 Why the MCA is developing a plan for environmental sustainability

There are three main strategic imperatives.

Firstly, the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) (2020) enshrined three strategic objectives namely to achieve economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion for the region. In responding to this the MCA tasked the Executive to progress these workstreams. As detailed above, this requires a plan for collaboration to build upon that foundation and explore how the MCA can work with partners to deliver on environmental sustainability. The SEP identified that the climate emergency is threatening livelihoods and economic stability and emphasised the importance of growing green technology sectors, improving environmental sustainability, and embedding circular economy approaches among other ways to respond to the challenge.

Specifically, the SEP promised that:

SY MCA's plans for environmental sustainability will set out a more comprehensive vision and set of policy actions on the transition to a net-zero carbon and climate-resilient economy.

A second strategic imperative is that the UK government is taking forward powers in the Environment Act (2021) that require Local Nature Recovery Strategies to be developed to cover every area of England. The government's clear preference has been that MCAs, where they exist, lead such strategies and thereby take on a new statutory duty to deliver them. On 23rd March 2022, the MCA Board provisionally agreed that the MCA would lead on this for South Yorkshire.

Finally, the Environmental Sustainability Plan will enable delivery on the manifesto commitments outlined by Mayor Oliver Coppard. The Mayor's 'Plan' for South Yorkshire stated:

As Mayor I will ask the Mayoral Combined Authority to work with partners such as the Wildlife Trust to develop and deliver a South Yorkshire Natural Environment Strategy, so that we can protect and restore nature, and invests in our ecosystems.

2. Key Issues

This section explains the proposed principles and initial scope of this Plan. It is intended to underpin existing priority areas for the MCA, for example around decoupling economic growth from carbon emissions, i.e., 'clean growth', and explore where the MCA and partners could go further.

2.1 Defining 'environmental sustainability'

'Sustainability' is best understood as a principle which underpins approaches to securing long term economic, social and environmental prosperity. These 'three pillars' of sustainability reflect the three strategic outcomes of the SEP.

Economic, environmental, and social dimensions are inevitably interconnected. It is vital to emphasise the importance of environmental assets and how they underpin the shared economic and social goals in South Yorkshire.



Core principles

It's important, at the beginning of this process, to have a shared understanding of the term 'environmental sustainability', as it pertains to the MCA's role. The initial working definition contains the following principles:

- The needs of the present population are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
- Economic output is decoupled from pressures upon the natural environment
- Natural ecosystems are safeguarded and improved for the benefit of present and future generations

2.2 Proposed scope

In 2015 the UN established a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, intended to represent 'sustainability' in its broad, holistic sense. Of these, 5 goals in particular can be drawn upon to cover the initial scope of this Plan. These are Goals 6, 11, 12, 13 and 15. The ongoing scoping and engagement work will consider whether this could/should be expanded or tightened further.

Goal 6: clean water and sanitation

- Ensuring universal safe and affordable drinking water
- Protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems is essential

Goal 11: sustainable cities and communities

- Invest in public transport, create green public spaces, and improve urban planning and management

Goal 12: responsible consumption and production

- Reduce our ecological footprint by changing the way we produce and consume goods and resources
- Efficiently manage our shared natural resources, and the way we dispose of toxic waste and pollutants
- Encourage industries, businesses and consumers to recycle and reduce waste

Goal 13: climate action

- Integrate disaster risk measures, sustainable natural resource management, and human security into our strategies

Goal 15: life on land

- Reduce the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity which are part of our common heritage and support global food and water security, climate change mitigation and adaptation

2.3 Existing MCA activity

Working with the initial scope proposed above, this Plan will build on existing work in the MCA and across partners. These include:

- **Net Zero (NZ).** In November 2019, the MCA declared a Climate and Environmental Emergency. In January 2020, the MCA Board approved the Climate Response Framework (CRF) which split the challenge into five areas: Leadership, Carbon Reduction, Carbon Capture, Climate Adaptation, and Climate Economy to achieve a Net Zero economy by 2040. The MCA's Net Zero Work Programme is cross cutting, being delivered through all policy themes. At present, MCA-funded Net Zero interventions cover transport, housing, and infrastructure. Some other broader activities that the MCA supports, can and do have a beneficial effect on the climate goals of the region, but the impacts so far are modest.
- **Active and public transport.** Reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles has an important role in reducing air pollution and carbon emissions, improving health, saving space and more. The MCA has earmarked £126m over 5 years from the CRSTS programme for active travel investments and was awarded £8m for a fleet of zero-emission buses.
- **Flood risk management.** The *Connected by Water* action plan published earlier this year was co-developed by the MCA alongside multiple partners. It sets out how the region will respond to the challenge of flood risk. The MCA has an ongoing role in helping to identify funding opportunities to deliver against the plan, engaging the public on these activities, and more.
- **Woodland Creation Partnership.** In 2020, SYMCA funded a Woodland Creation Partnership with the aim of increasing tree coverage in the region, working with all local authorities and a range of other stakeholders. The project has supported multiple investments and recently secured £0.5m in funding from Defra to expand activities.
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).** SYMCA has provisionally agreed to fulfil a Statutory duty to deliver LNRS for South Yorkshire, responding to

new requirements on regional and local authorities to take greater management over the natural environment. Working closely with the SY Local Nature Partnership the MCA is preparing the ground in terms of stakeholder engagement and developing an evidence base ahead of commencement of the Strategy, slated for later in 2022.

2.4 **What this plan will deliver**

As can be seen in section 2.3, significant activity is already underway. However, these are not always connected within a common framework that ensures complementarity. At this early stage, the ambitions for this plan include the following:

- Inform all activities undertaken by the MCA, not just those that would be traditionally seen as falling into nature or climate themes.
- Identify 'gaps' in our areas of work whereby the MCA could go further towards realising environmental sustainability goals.
- Adopt a position of leadership on this agenda, working with relevant stakeholders to pursue better outcomes beyond what the MCA is capable of alone.
- Better understand and navigate the inevitable trade-offs, as well as the synergies and complementarities, between environmental and economic prosperity.

2.5 **Process**

The phases below set out the current expectation of the sequential steps this plan will follow.

Phase 1 – scoping and research

This initial phase will involve a continued refinement of the scope and establish a framework through which the MCA can better understand environmental sustainability, drawing upon a range of evidence.

Phase 2 – gap analysis

Findings from Phase 1 enable a more thorough consideration of existing activity undertaken by the MCA and partners, and importantly identify gaps in provision. This will also involve a comparative exercise to examine relevant strategic approaches by regional and local governments.

Phase 3 – developing actions

This phase will engage a range of external stakeholders to co-produce a set of actions that fill in the gaps in provision identified in Phase 2 and encourage some “stretch” to match ambitions with the scale of the challenge. This will involve the MCAs governance structures including the LEP Board, as well as a range of partners such the Local Nature Partnership, business groups such as the Chambers of Commerce, community groups and the general public.

Phase 4 – finalised plan

Finally, a set of actions will be developed for the MCA to consider and agree and to pursue with partners.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

Continue with existing areas of work without developing this Plan. This would miss the opportunity to provide a framework that explains the MCA's approach to the environment, and gaps in provision would remain unexplored.

Option 1 Risks and Mitigations

Risk: the MCA will have no clear way of meeting its climate and environment emergency declaration.

Mitigation: the MCA can do more of what it's doing as and when resources allow.

3.2 Option 2

Await the regulations and guidance for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy before proceeding with an overlapping Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

Option 2 Risks and Mitigations

Risk: we will lose vital mobilisation time.

Mitigation: waiting will ensure we at least know what resource will be forthcoming from Defra. However, this is unlikely to be enough to fund the full plan and we have funds to make a start now so do not need to wait.

3.3 Option 3

Proceed as set out in this paper

Option 3 Risks and Mitigations

Risk: this is a broad agenda so there is the potential for responses to be 'spread thinly'.

Mitigation: defining and limiting the scope at an early stage to focus minds on a targeted set of themes.

3.4 Recommended Option

Option 3

4. Consultation on Proposal

4.1 To maximise impact and success, this plan builds in contributions and engagement with a range of internal and external partners. A detailed engagement plan will be developed.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Following the decision to progress the scoping work will commence immediately. The legal process regarding LNRS is underway.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

6.1 Financial implications of this Plan have factored into the annual budget. Development of the LNRS is due to be fully reimbursed by Defra 'burden payments'.

7. Legal Implications and Advice

7.1 LNRS will be a statutory document.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

8.1 None at this stage but dependent on subsequent decisions, resourcing may be considered.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

9.1 Development of this plan will ensure consideration of equality and diversity issues, and this is likely to be most relevant when engaging with external stakeholders.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

10.1 Whilst a significant proportion of total emissions are outside the direct control of the MCA or constituent Local Authorities, programmes undertaken at regional level can and will drive down emissions, deliver added benefits and lay the groundwork for further reductions. Formalising the assessment of all programmes and aligning them to wider a wider Environmental Sustainability plan will give this greater impetus.

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

11.1 N/A

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

12.1 N/A

List of Appendices Included

A No Appendices.

Background Papers

None