



# A nature-rich West of England

Policies for the next Mayor



The next Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) will take the helm at an unprecedented time. As we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic, there is an urgent need to support the unemployed and mental wellbeing, and to heal tears in our social fabric. We face a Climate Emergency, as acknowledged by the Government and authorities across the West of England – and action to decarbonise, soak up carbon and build resilience to a changing future remains paramount. We also face an Ecological Emergency, as acknowledged by Bristol City Council and Bath & North East Somerset Council – and immediate action to reverse ecological decline is in everyone’s interest.

**This exceptional time presents a unique opportunity for the next Mayor – to boldly lead a green recovery towards a resilient and nature-rich West of England where everyone can thrive.**

The West of England is an area of natural wealth and beauty. From the Severn Estuary – internationally important for waders and one of the UK’s greatest intertidal habitats – to the wetlands of the North Somerset Levels, rich pockets of ancient woodland, two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and cities and towns nested in internationally cherished landscapes: the area’s natural beauty and heritage attracts visitors the world over and is a key draw for the people who call it home.

But nature is in real trouble. The UK State of Nature Report 2019[1] reports that, since 1970, 41% of species have declined in the UK. The recent Global Assessment from the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services[2] highlights that one million species are at risk of extinction globally. This decline is a tragedy in itself – but also reflects wider ecological breakdown, with reverberating impacts on society.

A prosperous society is built on a healthy natural environment and the plethora of services it provides – from clean air and water to pollination and food production, nutrient recycling, carbon sequestration, climate regulation, natural resources and much more. Continued apathy is a ticking time bomb and, frankly, bad management.

Nature provides exceptional solutions to the challenges of our time:

- Captures & locks up carbon
- Provides shade & cools down increasingly hot cities
- Reduces flooding and improves water quality
- Regulates the local climate and improves air quality
- Pollination & food production
- Supports our health and wellbeing
- Supports new green jobs

The West of England’s resilience and prosperity relies on a healthy natural environment. Working with nature simply makes good business sense.



# We urge the next West of England Mayor to:

infrastructure & planning

## Secure nature’s recovery

We need 30% of the West of England to be managed for nature by 2030 – and to integrate nature everywhere else. We need to double our tree and woodland cover in response to the nature and climate emergency. We need all our water catchments to be in good ecological status.

A Nature Recovery Network[3] – a spatial plan for restoring nature – has been developed by the West of England Nature Partnership. This follows the principles that places for nature need to be bigger, better, more abundant and more joined-up. Partners are working together but we need the support of the Mayor to help unlock innovative policy, investment and land to secure nature’s recovery.

Actions to drive progress to 2025:

**Declare an Ecological Emergency and deliver a clear Action Plan that addresses nature recovery locally as well as WECA’s global ecological footprint**

**Drive investment and delivery of the West of England Nature Recovery Network**

**Help unlock land for nature recovery through the Joint Assets Board and a public call-for-sites**

**Ensure that the Spatial Development Strategy and all WECA funding ensure no loss of irreplaceable habitat and deliver quality environmental net gain**





## Champion natural solutions & ensure infrastructure is green to the core

Nature provides exceptional solutions to the climate crisis and to delivering resilient, thriving places for communities and businesses. So-called Nature Based Solutions can be low cost and highly effective compared to grey infrastructure but receive a fraction of the funding.

We welcome the adopted West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy<sup>[4]</sup>, but it needs to be at the heart of planning policy and its ambitions need to be matched with investment.

Actions to drive progress to 2025:

Ensure all strategic and local planning and transport decision making is based on a clear set of Climate and Ecological Emergency criteria

Drive investment and delivery of the West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy

Advocate cultural change that ensures natural solutions are systematically considered instead of, or alongside, traditional grey infrastructure

Unlock public and private investment in the urgent delivery of Nature Based Solutions

## Improve health and wellbeing for all

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of nature for health and wellbeing, as well as stark inequalities in access to nature. RSPB's Recovering Together 2<sup>[5]</sup> report highlights the value of nature and its unequal distribution between people from different economic and ethnic backgrounds.

Actions to drive progress to 2025:

Champion delivery of '15 minute neighbourhoods' with nature-rich active travel routes and high quality, accessible natural green and blue spaces

Promote the greenbelt as a nature-rich, accessible asset that connects people to nature

Ensure that inequalities in access to nature are identified and addressed to improve health and wellbeing for all

skills & growth

## Lead a green recovery

We urge the next Mayor to make the West of England a national exemplar of a green recovery by supporting green skills & jobs, and ensuring a prosperous economy that works with nature (by ensuring good management of our 'natural capital').

Actions to drive progress to 2025:

Support skills & training for new green jobs – reflecting young people's priorities and changing rural prospects arising from the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (which will replace the Common Agricultural Policy as we leave the EU)

Ensure WECA funding supports businesses that work with, and not against, nature

Push for a better understanding of the West of England economy's impacts and dependencies on the natural environment, and support schemes (e.g. the Landscape Enterprise Network) that help coordinate corporate action, mitigate risk and unlock much needed investment







**Avon**  
Wildlife Trust



The countryside charity  
Avon and Bristol



**National**  
Trust



We are ready to work with the next Mayor to develop ambitious programmes of action in these areas.

[1] <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/state-of-nature-report/>

[2] <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

[3] <https://www.wenp.org.uk/nature-recovery-network/>

[4] <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/west-of-england-joint-green-infrastructure-strategy/>

[5] <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/get-involved/campaigning/rspb-greenspace-report.pdf>

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