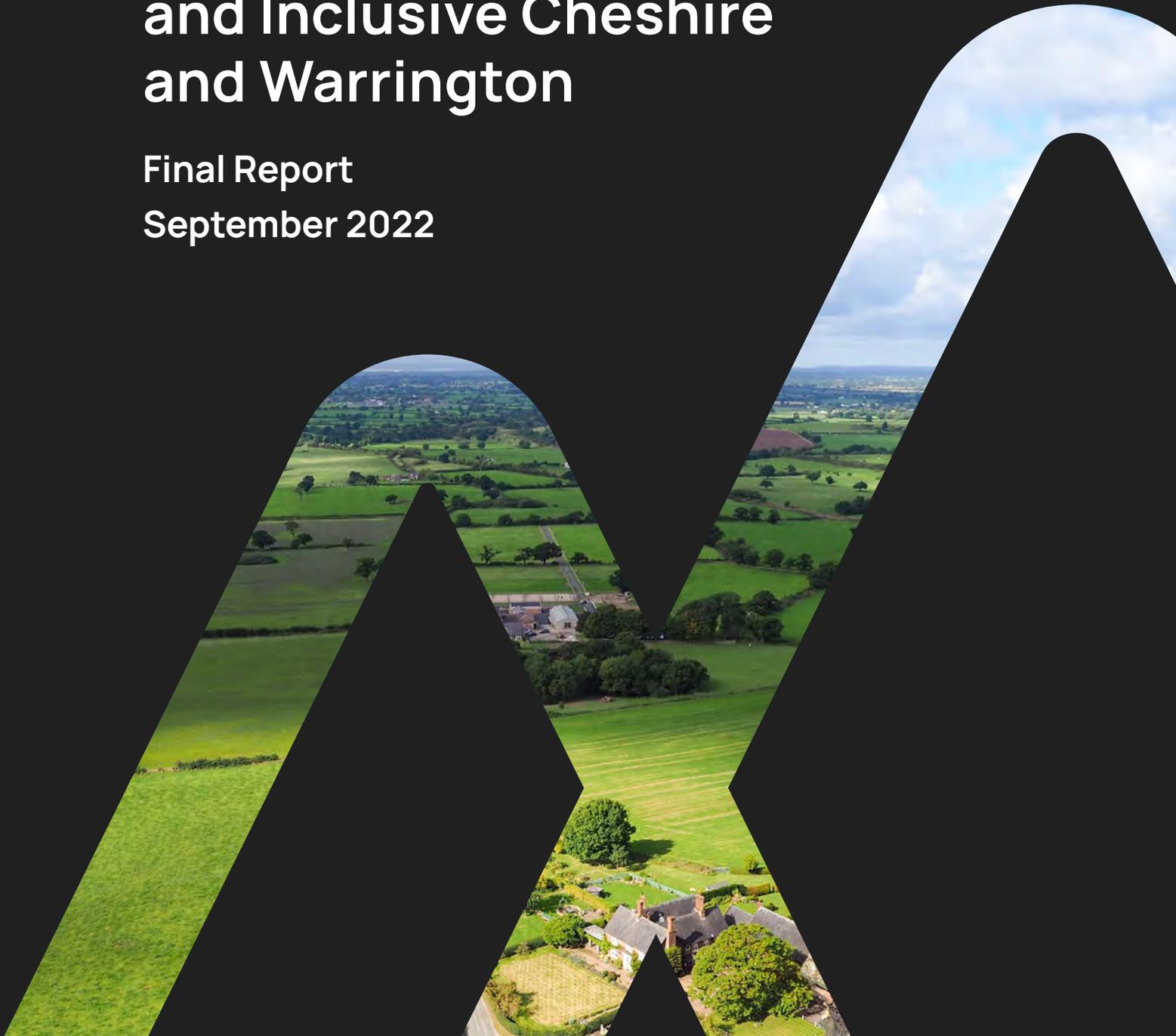




Cheshire and Warrington
Sustainable and Inclusive
Growth Commission

Towards a Sustainable and Inclusive Cheshire and Warrington

Final Report
September 2022





The Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission was set up by the Subregional Leaders' Board in November 2020, with the aim of contributing towards realising Cheshire and Warrington's ambition of becoming the most sustainable and inclusive subregion in the UK.

Its work has been divided into collation, planning, engagement and promotion phases, with this final report produced in September 2022.



About the Commission

The Commission is made up of elected representatives from each local authority and a local enterprise partnership board member, as well as representatives from carbon intensive industries and agriculture, finance and investment, energy, and experts from civil society including university, housing and local nature sectors, and has also worked with expert advisers from beyond the Commission. The Commission's Secretariat is drawn from the LEP with support from the Local Authorities.

The Commission has been working on four themes: Inclusive Economy, Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Land Use, and Net Zero. For each of these themes the Commission has developed an evidence base for Cheshire and Warrington's current position, a vision representing where the Commission believes the subregion should aim to be and a set of recommended actions to achieve these visions. Several of the recommendations cross-cut multiple themes.

The Commission went out to consultation on the draft document between March-May 2022 to hear a wider range of views from across the subregion and check whether the proposals were supported or required changing, a drawing summarising the recommendations was used for this, shown on page 5-6. The feedback from the consultation has been used to sense check, review and update the recommendations, creating this final report. Further details on the consultation findings and responses can be found within this report.

The Commission would like to thank all those who took the time to feed into the consultation and help shape the final report and hopes that this powerful partnership approach can be extended into the actions needed to make the visions a reality.

The next steps will be for this report to be published and promoted within a 6 month promote phase. This will include targeting the priority actions and recommendations to the organisations that can address them, and raising awareness of the need for change more widely to the sectors and stakeholders that need to take action for Cheshire and Warrington to meet the vision and objectives.

Introduction and Purpose

Within Cheshire and Warrington, and nationally and globally, the global pandemic and other recent events have hit some of the most vulnerable people in our communities the hardest, including the lowest paid, young people, women and minorities, and those living in more deprived areas with fewer facilities and green spaces.

It has brought about an increased awareness of the inequalities in society and stimulated greater collective action across all sectors of society to meet basic needs, address poverty and hunger, including through calls for fair employment.

It has come at a time when the effects of climate change are becoming ever more real and visible across the globe, and no one can deny that it poses a serious risk to our local society and economy. This area has especially high carbon emissions across our industrial sector, and agriculture as well as transport and housing. We also need to contend with the serious risk that global warming poses to food security and production, biodiversity loss, health and infrastructure, and with impacts such as flooding and sea level rise, the latter of which some models predict will affect parts of the area by 2050 without mitigation¹.

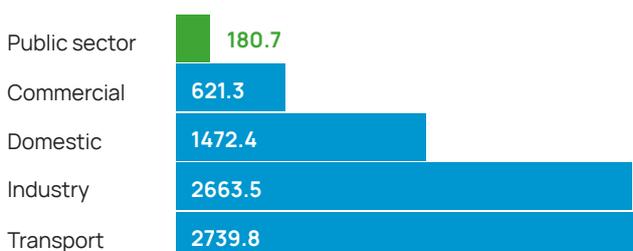
The bar chart portrays the data on the level of emissions in five key subsectors across the Cheshire and Warrington area in 2019. This shows that Transport and Industry are the highest emitting sub-sectors in the subregion producing similar levels of CO₂, followed by the Domestic sub-sector. Land use emissions have not been included in this chart but are analysed in detail in the Sustainable Land Use section of this report. The Natural Capital Audit which studied this in greater detail found this figure to be much higher at greater than 400 ktCO₂, and recent BEIS Greenhouse Gas emissions data for agriculture includes methane and nitrous oxide at a

total of 943 ktonnes of combined emissions.

It is in this context that the Leaders of Cheshire and Warrington committed not to return to the 'old normal' - an economy that worked for many but not for everyone, and in which the impact of our activities on the earth's natural resources was not fully acknowledged or addressed.

In response to these challenges Cheshire and Warrington's Leaders set out an ambition to become the most sustainable, inclusive, healthy and growing subregion in the country. As well as delivering benefits and improving outcomes for local people from all backgrounds and the environment, delivering against these ambitions will enable the area to be better able to attract both public and private investment and become a leading example of a just transition to a green, fair and growing economy: distributing the benefits of local economic development more evenly within the area; and also exporting skills and know-how within the UK and globally.

We already have excellent progress to build on. Partners within the Leaders' Board have already taken steps to strengthen support to their places, residents, businesses and organisations so that all people, regardless of their background or circumstances, are helped to live their best lives, alongside reducing emissions and becoming carbon neutral. The Commission's Promote stage will roll out a series of good practice case studies across the Commission's themes.



Territorial Emissions in Cheshire and Warrington (kt CO₂)

Source: UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics: 2005 to 2019, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

¹ Climate Central | Land projected to be below annual flood level in 2050

National and international context

Whilst the Commission has been underway, the sustainable and inclusive growth agenda has generated increasing national and international profile, for example in the context of the UK's hosting of the global COP-26 climate change conference, the UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper and Net Zero Strategy. The war in Ukraine has drawn attention to the fragility of international supply chains and volatility of pricing and availability of energy and food staples in particular. It has highlighted the importance of making the country self-sufficient and resilient in these areas for food and energy security and tackling the cost of living, alongside getting to net zero.

The UK government set out the key overarching legislation for the country to reach net zero by 2050 in the Climate Change Act. We know that decarbonisation will be required in each sector of the economy, and that transport, industry, housing and land use are major contributors to carbon emissions. This means we can be sure that cars and other vehicles, homes, industry, and land-use/ agriculture will need to be decarbonised and/or 'retrofitted' to remove the use of fossil fuels in a move to clean heat and power, and this needs to be done in an inclusive way to ensure that projects benefit rather than further disadvantage the most vulnerable in the subregion.

Government has already committed to several pathways towards net zero across these policy areas, and unrelated to this, previously it has committed to levelling up. The Commission would like to see a joined-up roadmap from the new government including the investment and support from government to reach the net zero target, and to level up at the same time.

What does this mean for Cheshire and Warrington?

We can play our part in delivering sustainable and inclusive growth by delivering what we can locally, across a powerful partnership of the public, private and community sectors, and by working with and lobbying government to make the additional changes required nationally to help Cheshire and Warrington and other areas level up and reach net zero before 2050. This will require absolute clarity on the actions that are needed, their business cases, the barriers preventing delivery,

and generating the solutions to those barriers. Additionally, success will also depend on citizens/ individuals and subregional organisations playing their parts in generating a sustainable and inclusive economy.

We have excellent examples of progress we are making locally and several case studies which address the challenges that have been identified. We intend to disseminate these case studies to government and across the subregion to both attract investment, unblock regulatory and other barriers, and to inspire others to go further and faster towards decarbonising in an inclusive way and creating a genuinely green and fair economy for all.

By taking action together we can all help to create:

- An inclusive and thriving Cheshire and Warrington where we all benefit from the economic opportunities presented by the changes needed, and where nobody is left behind
- A sustainable Cheshire and Warrington where we use resources wisely, generate clean energy and heat, live fulfilling lives, and safeguard opportunities for our children and grandchildren to do likewise.
- A greener Cheshire and Warrington where we help nature recover and biodiversity to flourish and enjoy all the benefits this will bring
- A healthy Cheshire and Warrington with better homes, clean air, a more active population, and less traffic congestion
- A resilient Cheshire and Warrington where we are better prepared to cope with the disruption from extreme weather patterns and the wider shocks climate instability brings

The Leaders established this independent Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission to act as a catalyst for how the subregion can go further, faster towards achieving this vision building on the excellent work done to date. Its final recommendations for action are outlined in this document.

Consultation overview, findings and response

During the consultation process the Commission spoke to a wide range of people and organisations about their views on the content of the consultation document, including members of the public, public and private sector organisations, civil society and local interest groups. In total over 500 stakeholders were contacted, and a press release went out to the general public. This led to engagement with over 120 individuals across a mix of six online and in-person events and through an online survey. We also reached out to engage directly with the Cheshire and Warrington community and voluntary sector infrastructure partnership and suggest the subregion maintains an ongoing strategic relationship with them.

In terms of feedback, the majority of those who engaged in the consultation were supportive of the overarching and thematic visions set out, with some suggestions for improvement, including about the language used and the details of the recommendations, which we have attempted to address within this document. We are also issuing a shorter summary document for wider communications purposes.

A key point made by many of those who engaged was the need for co-creation and co-production as an essential part of addressing the challenges to achieve the goals set out. The Commission recognises that for Cheshire and Warrington to be successful in dealing with the effects of climate change and getting to net zero in an inclusive way, as well as developing a leading inclusive economy, an ever-greater level of partnership action will be required, across all sectors of society, including citizens and communities as well as businesses and organisations with direct responsibilities for delivery.

Likewise, there was a great deal of discussion about the deliverability of the recommendations put forward and the reality of the costs and therefore additional investment that will be required, alongside the risks involved with the projects. The Commission is clear that for each key priority adopted there should, where appropriate, be business cases completed in order of priority, and each project should be measurable in terms of its expected impact and outcomes towards delivering the vision.

A high number of those we engaged with pressed the importance of winning 'hearts and minds' on this journey towards sustainable and inclusive growth and not simply relying on technical solutions. It is acknowledged that strong, clear leadership will be needed to effect change alongside open and effective collaboration.

Each thematic working group has reviewed the feedback from the consultation and amended each thematic section. Recommendations have been amended to accommodate consistent or clear, evidence-based feedback and a shortlist of key priorities has been generated. These are projects or initiatives that the Commission believes to be the most deliverable in the shortest time, and the most important to focus on in the short term alongside being within the remit of subregional organisations, or outside our control but important to lobby for delivery sooner. These can be found at the beginning of the recommendations in each thematic section of this report. For example, a commonly recurring theme was the importance of green skills for achieving the goals set out in this report. In places, key priorities have been adapted to reflect this.

In addition to the key priorities identified, there is a wider list of recommended projects and initiatives, and it is the Commission's hope that others within the subregion will do what they can to co-create solutions to the challenges identified, and/or implement the recommendations within this document. The Commission will work with the sub-regional Leaders' Board and other stakeholders during the 'Promote' Phase (August to December 2022) to identify those who can lead and contribute towards delivering the priority actions and projects. Longer term the Commission would like to see that each year those with an interest in delivering sustainable and inclusive growth will come together to review progress and collectively plan for delivery of the visions until our goals have been reached.

We invite you to engage with us through an initial event in the autumn and to get in touch if you can offer support with delivery of the priorities/ recommendations via:

SIGCommission@cheshireandwarrington.com



INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

Vision and Overview

In response to the evidence we reviewed, and to the consultation feedback, our overall ambition is to encourage sustainable economic growth that combines increased prosperity with greater equality, creates opportunities for all, and distributes the benefits of increased prosperity fairly across the subregion.

We propose this will be delivered via the following priority actions:

- By ensuring that all projects promoted by the Commission mainstream inclusion into policy, investment, procurement and hiring, using best practice tools for inclusivity assessment.
- By implementing a joined up approach to inclusion in the subregion through shared initiatives such as social value (Fair Employment Charter, Anchor Networks), inclusive skills and employment, digital inclusion, and positive action
- By creating new and collecting existing data more efficiently to identify inequalities and inform policy making, and piloting recent and new approaches such as embedding lived experience in policy.

For the purposes of this work, we have defined 'inclusive economy' as the encouragement of economic growth that combines increased prosperity with greater equality, creates opportunities for all, and distributes the benefits of increased prosperity fairly.

When thinking about inclusivity, it is important to consider equality issues related to both 1) protected characteristics² and 2) to socioeconomic status (often but not exclusively considered in the context of areas of deprivation), as well as where these categorisations overlap.

An inclusivity assessment, built on and expanded from equality impact assessments to include socio-economic status etc, has been used to assess proposed projects throughout each theme. This assessment was designed for the Commission and is in the early stages of development, with a need for further refinement.

As business cases, programme delivery plans, and stakeholder engagement plans are developed and updated for projects adopted, the assessments will feed in, and be further developed, to help ensure that new investments and infrastructure minimise negative and maximise positive impact on vulnerable communities.

We have looked at both (a) how we can ensure that an inclusive approach is central to and mainstreamed through our environmental sustainability work and (b) how to address the inequalities in society more generally to bring about a more inclusive economy. With regards to this latter point the Commission recognised the vast breadth of the inclusive growth agenda and therefore decided that a focused approach dictated by existing data collection and analysis would provide a more manageable remit. It was agreed that the Commission would focus on recommendations that could address inequalities relating to work, education and skills via a lens of socioeconomic status/deprivation, sex, race, and disability.

At the subregional level, Cheshire and Warrington is performing well with high skills levels, employment rates and earnings, but the aggregated data hides inequalities across the subregion. 5% of the population (30 neighbourhoods) live in the top 10% most deprived places in the country on the Index of Multiple Deprivation³, whilst in the highest earning neighbourhood, annual household income is twice as high as in the lowest performing neighbourhood⁴.

Furthermore, significant gender disparities also remain in Cheshire and Warrington in terms of economic activity and earnings.⁵ The pockets of excellent activity taking place across the subregion are not joined up, and it is the view of the Commission that more joined up thinking and partnership working across the inclusive economy remit would help to deliver the outcomes sought.

² The Equality Act 2010 identified 9 protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. ³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019). ⁴ ONS Income estimates for small areas (2018). ⁵ Cheshire and Warrington LEP Skills Report April 2021

Summary of consultation feedback and response

The online survey came back with an overall positive response to the Inclusive Economy vision and recommendations, which is in line with the agreement that was heard at the consultation events. One of the frequently discussed topics at the consultation was the importance of engaging with community and voluntary sector and ensuring there is a sense of co-creation. The key priorities that were identified through discussion and through the survey were skills, delivering social value, a fair employment charter, and digital inclusion, all of which have fed into the key priorities to take forward to the Leaders' Board.

Recommendations

Key priorities following the consultation

Following the feedback from the consultation, the Commission established four strategic projects or 'big-ticket' items relating to inclusive economy that it considers are the most deliverable initially to achieve meaningful progress.

The four strategic project areas are:

1. Adopting inclusivity assessment for projects promoted by the Commission as an integral part of decision making and delivery – starting with the Shared Prosperity Fund
2. Delivering social value, through a new fair employment charter for Cheshire and Warrington
3. Ensuring digital inclusion is a core part of all digital / infrastructure strategies and delivery in Cheshire and Warrington
4. Ensuring that information, advice, guidance and support on skills and employment is targeted to where it is needed for 'levelling up' (to individuals with protected characteristics and to those with socio-economic deprivation such as the long-term unemployed, those in areas of deprivation, those on free school meals)

In addition, to engage with the community and voluntary sector on adoption of new policy with

inclusivity implications. It is recommended that the Cheshire and Warrington (Community and Voluntary Sector) Infrastructure Partnership is used as one of the methods for coordinating this.

It is also agreed that the subregion should ensure there is good quality and available information, advice and guidance (IAG) to all who need it (including households, businesses, schools and their pupils etc) on decarbonisation opportunities and challenges, and how these can be addressed.

Further recommendations and more detail on the key priorities

Delivering social value

The Commission recommends that the Leader's Board:

- Commit to establish and adopt a Fair Employment Charter which subregional organisations could sign up to with commitments to fair employment principles such as paying a living wage and embedding equality and diversity.
- Commit to the establishment of a subregional Anchor Network⁶ building on the good practice led by Cheshire West and Chester Council, and the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership. This would use the combined commissioning/procurement, employment and social value principles of anchor institutions to deliver an inclusive (and sustainable) economy – and would encourage the spending of local money with local organisations.
- Undertake a study to understand the scale and make-up of the socially-trading and cooperative sector in the subregion, and their potential to achieve inclusive economy outcomes and community wealth building.
- Makes information, advice and guidance widely available (e.g. via business support programmes) on shared ownership models of business (e.g. cooperatives, social enterprise etc), to encourage more of these organisations to be established within the subregion.

⁶ An anchor organisation is usually a large place-based organisation connected to the local community such as universities, hospitals or local authorities, with large scale employment or other fixed assets and land that connect them to the place

Ensuring inclusivity assessment informs decision making in the subregion

The Commission recommends that the Leader's Board:

- Adopts inclusivity assessment for projects promoted by the Commission as an integral part of decision making and delivery – starting with the Shared Prosperity Fund as a pilot. In the longer term to develop a version that includes sustainability and wellbeing assessment.
- Uses a new fair employment charter to promote inclusivity assessment to the private sector.
- Encourage the extension of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 (utilising where appropriate equality impact assessments) to include consideration of socio-economic disadvantage e.g. for HR, policy, investment and procurement decisions. This is designed to ensure that projects benefit rather than further disadvantage the most vulnerable in the subregion.
- Extend the approach and commitment to embedding lived experience of poverty in policy and decision making across the subregion to be able to draw upon the insight of real people to understand existing issues/ barriers and co-produce solutions.
- Commit to the ongoing robust analysis of inclusive economy data, address data gaps, and develop recommendations on where key inclusive economy initiatives could be shared and implemented more widely, to inform decision making. The longer term intention is to undertake a feasibility study on an ongoing Data Hub to oversee a robust evidence base that will generate more inclusive decision making.
- Commits to the development of a subregional Positive Action Toolkit to encourage and provide confidence on the use of robust positive action aimed at addressing the skills deficit. The toolkit would promote greater representation of protected groups such as those with a disability and from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and help address issues such as the gender pay gap, attainment, and the disparity in representation of males in post-16 education.

- Ensure that any potential asks of Government, and wider approaches to levelling up funding, properly consider inclusion.
- Commissions the LEP's Data and Labour Market Steering Group to carry out a pilot study (or PhD Studentship) to establish a clear understanding of the barriers to employment and progression in targeted geographical communities where the evidence collected to date shows that residents are at a disadvantage.

Digital inclusion

The Commission recommends that the Leaders' Board:

- Ensure digital inclusion is a core part of all digital strategies and delivery in Cheshire and Warrington on an ongoing basis and that mechanisms are established to routinely share good practice on digital inclusion
- Promote and embed good practice from the Digital Policy Lab project⁷ led by Cheshire West and Chester Council. This has produced a how-to guide/toolkit for local authorities and others looking to understand and tackle the digital divide.
- Lobby Government to provide funding for internet access and training to digitally excluded communities and individuals in the subregion.

Inclusive skills

The Commission recommends that the Leader's Board:

- Encourages the various skills bodies and programmes across the subregion to use and report monitoring and evaluation of reach to target groups, and ensure good practice on this is promoted within those organisations
- Ensure that information, advice, guidance and support on skills is targeted to where it is needed for levelling up (to individuals with protected characteristics and to those with socio-economic deprivation such as the long-term unemployed, those in areas of deprivation, those on free school meals etc). Building on good practice from Pledge, the Careers Portal, Youth Fed etc.

⁷ The Digital Policy Lab project involves Cheshire West and Chester Council working with a number of partner organisations to seek to improve data and understanding on digital inclusion and includes a resident consultation programme. [Understanding the Digital Divide - Co-operative Councils Innovation Network](#)

- Commission the creation of affordable, accessible short courses on green skills / carbon literacy at subregional education and training organisations and ensure these are promoted and available to disadvantaged areas and groups.
- Sponsor a marketing and engagement campaign showcasing inspiring stories of individuals with protected characteristics in attractive and non-stereotyped careers to encourage take-up in the subregion, potentially working with Pledge and Marketing Cheshire.

A photograph of several Mercedes-Benz eCitaro electric buses parked at a charging station. The buses are white with red accents and are connected to charging cables. The station has a metal frame structure with overhead charging equipment. The scene is set at dusk, with a blue sky and some lights visible in the background. The text 'SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT' is overlaid on the right side of the image in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. There are also two large, semi-transparent circles overlaid on the image, one in the center and one at the bottom right.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

Mercedes-Benz eCitaro electric buses for the
Warrington Own Buses fleet

Vision and Overview

In response to the evidence we reviewed, and the consultation feedback, the Commission considers that the subregion should set itself an objective of full decarbonisation of all transport in Cheshire and Warrington by 2035, to be delivered in an inclusive way through three priority activities:

- By creating a public transport system which is affordable, zero carbon, accessible and integrated across the subregion making bus use and other forms of transport sharing a first choice for residents, shoppers, commuters and visitors by 2030. Whilst recognised that this will be challenging, the Commission's view is that the target timescale will be vital;
- Creating an ecosystem which makes the adoption of electric or zero emission (rather than petrol or diesel) cars and other vehicles the most cost effective and accessible means of private and business transport by 2030 where public transport is not appropriate or available;
- By making active travel, on bikes and walking, an easy, clean, safe, and healthy option for all our residents, employees and visitors, fully integrating it with other forms of travel.

This will require a sustained collaborative effort from a range of delivery organisations including Department for Transport, Great British Railways, Highways England, local authorities, bus operators, private sector operators (e.g. taxis, haulage companies). Hence this is a long-term strategy covering 20+ years, but with some interventions that could start within 6 to 12 months. It will require a mix of working with and lobbying businesses and other public sector bodies alongside investing in specific projects.

In the UK surface transport is the largest contributing sector to greenhouse gas emissions of which most are caused by road transport, and these transport emissions have grown overall since 2013. It is therefore essential that the transport network is decarbonised if the UK, and Cheshire & Warrington is to successfully shift to a low and zero carbon economy.

The majority of Cheshire and Warrington residents live and work in the sub region, re-enforcing the importance of connectivity within our area. Cross boundary movements are also important

as Cheshire and Warrington relies heavily on commuters from surrounding regions, as well as there being a number of Cheshire and Warrington residents that commute out for work.

Based on the Cheshire & Warrington Transport Strategy 120,000 jobs could be generated in the subregion along with 127,000 additional homes by 2040, with increases in demand for travel occurring across the sub-region. This will need to be reviewed in the light of subregional post-Covid trends towards increased home working, which acts as a curb on transport demand, when additional evidence is available. Google mobility data shows that public transport use has not gone back to pre pandemic levels as at July 2022.

Before the pandemic, a significantly higher proportion of Cheshire and Warrington residents travelled to work by car or van than the England average and evidence points to this still being the case due to current relatively low proportions of journeys to work involving public transport.

Therefore, it is unlikely that a policy based solely on improving public transport will lead to a substantial reduction in emissions meaning a rapid transition towards electric and zero emission vehicles and access to electric and zero emission vehicle charging and refuelling devices will be important.

As part of the process of developing recommendations, the sustainable transport working group undertook initial inclusivity assessment, reviewing the inclusivity implications of EV uptake/second hand EV market, bus use, liveable city and town centres and shared transport for young people from rural to urban areas. This included an assessment of impact across those with protected characteristics, those with socio-economic deprivation and those in rural areas, which has informed a stakeholder engagement plan for inclusivity.

Summary of Consultation Feedback and Response

There was broad agreement for the Sustainable Transport vision statement across the online survey and at the consultation events. The key issues that consultees repeatedly raised included barriers to active travel (particularly involving safety), the link between transport and nature and whether having zero carbon public transport by 2030 was a realistic target. These, among other issues, have been addressed in this updated version of the report and were used to inform the key priorities to take forward.

Consultees named some additional elements that they would suggest are included within the recommendations. These additional elements for consideration included green skills, the use of hydrogen for HGVs and the logistics sector, demand reduction and linkages to surrounding subregions. The Sustainable Transport group acknowledge these suggestions are worthy goals and where appropriate have added them to the wider recommendations. However, to ensure meaningful progress, the Commission agreed to narrow transport recommendations down to some key initial priorities that are within the remit of subregional organisations.

Recommendations

Key priorities following the consultation

Following the feedback from the consultation, the Commission established three big-ticket items relating to sustainable transport that are the most important to take forward first. These are:

1. The public sector role in supporting EV rollout, notably through the facilitation of rolling out public charging stations.
2. Establishment of multimodal transport at major interchanges in the subregion that connect all forms of public transport with accessible active travel routes.
3. Decarbonisation of public transport, including fully decarbonised buses as well as a series of other possible options such as on demand transport.

Taking on board consultee feedback, each of these key priority projects should be assessed under the following factors, engaging with key stakeholders, where relevant:

- Inclusivity (extending the use of the inclusivity toolkit)
- Behavioural change needed
- How to ensure community engagement
- Measurability and metrics

Further Recommendations and More Details on the Key Priorities

Develop a sub-regional zero-emissions transport infrastructure plan

- With the objectives of a faster roll-out of zero-emission vehicles, greater standardization of charging/zero carbon refuelling infrastructure and a stronger link to spatial (land use) planning.

A step-by-step pathway to streets for all

- To help identify the steps necessary to transition to car-free city/town centres in 30 years.

Encouraging bus use

Some of the recommendations for encouraging bus use include:

- A feasibility study looking at how a subregional integrated ticketing, timetabling and real time passenger information system could be rolled out.
- Lobby for open access platforms for electronic ticketing usable by different companies.
- Develop and implement bus priority measures in the Local Authority Bus Service Improvement Plans.
- Address changes in demand for bus services/ public transport, particularly in rural areas, through potential demand responsive bus or other transport sharing schemes (e.g. E-bikes, car sharing etc), for example the Cheshire East 'FlexiLink' scheme.

Encouraging active travel

Some recommendations for initiatives that local authorities should engage with and lobby relevant organisations to deliver:

- More walk/bike to school, bike to work schemes (which could include canals and waterways and an extension/network of active travel routes)
- Secure more/better bike storage at train stations and on trains/buses.
- Encourage the Dutch commuting model (leaving bikes at both ends of railway journeys)
- Address barriers to active travel associated with personal safety concerns and maintenance of walking/cycling routes.

Encouraging zero-emission vehicles

Some early steps local authorities could take include:

- Replacing their fleets with electric or hydrogen/ other zero emission vehicles as part of their regular replacement programs.
- Requiring all buses to have zero emissions by 2030.
- Incentivise sustainable transport use by reviewing parking policy in city/town centres.
- Commission work to help local authorities and the LEP to understand how best to support the 2nd-hand EV market, helping to improve inclusivity in accessing electric vehicles.

The Commission encourage supporting different types of zero carbon energy depending on the vehicle and the pathway that has been taken by the public and private sector in the decarbonisation of that vehicle (e.g. hydrogen, biofuels etc.)

Further measures

- Adopt low carbon materials for highway maintenance, improvement schemes, and new developments.
- Run a pilot study to assess shared transport schemes for travel from rural to urban areas.
- Investigate the issues and opportunities of supporting projects that turn plastic into fuel (e.g. hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel).
- Establish sub-regional stakeholder groups.

Establishing subregional stakeholder groups

SIGC recommend that local authorities and the LEP:

- Establish an inclusive subregional stakeholder group to engage with when developing transport policy and strategy to allow local people to report issues found in the transport infrastructure. The stakeholder group should engage closely with representatives from the voluntary and community and health sectors.
- Replicate best practice in terms of stakeholder engagement and work together as a subregion to share potential stakeholder lists.
- Lobby HS2 to improve stakeholder engagement, integration with wider transport networks and reduce environmental impacts.

An aerial photograph showing a vast expanse of green agricultural fields in Cheshire, England, viewed from the Sandstone Ridge/Beeston Castle. The landscape is a patchwork of vibrant green fields, some with hedges and trees. In the center, there is a cluster of buildings, including a large manor house with a grey roof and several smaller structures. A road winds through the fields. The foreground shows the rocky, weathered sandstone cliffs of the ridge, with some green vegetation growing on them. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds, and the overall scene is bright and clear.

SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

Cheshire's agricultural land as seen from
Sandstone Ridge/ Beeston Castle

Vision and Overview

In response to the evidence we reviewed, and the consultation feedback, our overall ambition is to make current land use net zero in the subregion and unlock the economic potential of the rural area. We propose this will be delivered through three priority activities:

- By realising the potential of the rural and land use sectors to generate sustainable economic growth and accelerate the move to regenerative agriculture and alongside this to deliver our carbon zero ambition in an inclusive way.
- By reversing the decline of Cheshire's natural environment and biodiversity and enhance climate resilience, connecting people and nature as part of our natural health service, improving access for all.
- By supporting producers, landowners and local authorities to increase the amount of accessible, fresh, low carbon, locally produced food available to people within the subregion including addressing food poverty.

To date, the focus to reach net zero has primarily been on heavy industry emissions. However, we recognise that the farming sectors in Cheshire and Warrington are also emitters but have the potential to be a key part of the solution. Additionally, new opportunities are emerging to deliver net zero, largely in rural areas, but also applicable to brownfield land in non-rural areas. We have reviewed land use from the point of view of agriculture, natural capital and biodiversity, vertical farming and innovation, diet change and energy/ renewables.

Agriculture is an important part of our economy in rural areas with 9,000 jobs and a further 5,400 jobs in agri-food. Cheshire is the 2nd largest milk producing sub-region in the UK resulting in higher-than-average herd sizes and milk yields. This means that this area in Cheshire and Warrington is a net emitter of nearly 1m tonnes of combined greenhouse gases at the cost of £30.5m annually. In addition, tree and woodland coverage is below the national average.

National policy driving change for agriculture practice could mean that Cheshire will in future have fewer total numbers of dairy farmers with a smaller number of bigger farmers operating a more intense system.

Farmers will have a special responsibility to protect carbon reserves already in soils and vegetation which will require a reduction in emissions and to return carbon to the soils. Moving to sustainable and regenerative agriculture with a focus on reducing carbon emissions, increasing renewables, and increasing sequestration, whilst expanding woodland, restoring grassland and bog (mire habitats), and enhancing biodiversity (including rewilding of appropriate land) is essential to addressing climate change and environmental degradation and will also improve the quality of life for our residents who can make the most of our natural capital.

Furthermore, the Commission believes that for our land and agriculture sector to play its role in the subregion achieving net zero by 2050 whilst maintaining a strong food production sector, there are two broad groups of economic and societal changes required:

- Behavioural change: diet change and food waste reduction.
- Improvements in agricultural practices: crop yield improvements, stocking densities and moving some horticultural production indoors (e.g. vertical farming).

As part of this process the land use working group undertook initial inclusivity assessment, reviewing the inclusivity implications of improving natural capital, encouraging regenerative agriculture, and diet and health pilot projects. This included an assessment of impact across those with protected characteristics, those with socio-economic deprivation and those in rural areas, which has informed a draft stakeholder engagement plan for inclusivity for these projects.

Summary of Consultation Feedback and Response

As well as a positive response in the online survey, there tended to be overall agreement to the Sustainable Land Use vision statement at the consultation events. Key issues that consultees felt strongly about included the potential for vertical farming, identification of green skills, the importance of the landscape to local culture, and the need to address the public buy-in necessary to achieve these proposed recommendations. Some linkages came across between the land use section and other themes. For example, the link between transport infrastructure, active travel and nature was highlighted. The feedback from the consultation has been used to inform the updated recommendations and to form the key priorities to take forward.

Recommendations

Key priorities following the consultation

Following the feedback from the consultation, the Commission established four big-ticket items relating to sustainable land use that are the most important to take forward first to deliver meaningful progress. These are:

1. Ensure Cheshire and Warrington's food supply chain continues moving towards carbon zero. To achieve this the Commission is supporting the shift towards anaerobic digestion and regenerative agriculture, including establishing a network of demonstration farms and likeminded farmers to share best practice (encouraging Council owned farms and rural colleges to join first).
2. Encourage the subregion to increase its self-sufficiency and climate resilient food production through vertical farming. This could be taken forward on brownfield sites and link in with the industrial sector and innovation in agritech, and should engage with all relevant organisations e.g. growers, landowners, supermarkets etc.
3. Addressing the nature crisis (covering species, biodiversity, carbon sequestration and people's access to nature) by using a biodiversity net gain plus approach on top of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be delivered at

a subregional level through a refreshed Local Nature Partnership strategy, to include climate change mitigation/adaptation approaches. To adopt the ambition to go over and above statutory requirements.

4. Encourage local authorities to run a pilot looking at diet, health and behavioural change. This priority can be pegged to the National Food Strategy and Sustainable Local Food Place Award.

In addition, the Commission agree that it is important to prioritise work looking at the green skills that overlap all four of the above key priority projects. Communication, marketing, and the narrative needed for public buy-in will also be an important aspect for achieving the key priorities.

Further Recommendations and More Details on the Key Priorities

Agriculture

Recommendations for subregional organisations:

- Improve green agriculture skills, and other green skills for land use. Work to engage industry and education to actively promote careers in the sector to attract more entrants to new courses.
- Work together to create an industry led world leading environmental sciences cluster at INCE/ Rocksavage bringing together local universities with global research leaders.
- Lobby the UK Government and other relevant bodies to accelerate the recognition of soil and tree planting for carbon sequestration/storage.

Recommendations for the Leader's Board:

- Lobby Government to invest in required infrastructure and connectivity to reach net zero and unlock the economic, social and environmental potential of the rural areas and agriculture including:
 - Invest in the national grid capacity to enable the switch from fossil fuels.
 - Deliver 100% coverage of broadband and 4G and 5G mobile phone signal.

- Invest in a pipeline network to enable the decarbonisation of our dairy sector by moving manure off site and into large scale Anaerobic Digestion.
- Bring together the oil and fertiliser sector, with landowners and research establishments to scope the opportunity for a proposed environmental science cluster as part of the net zero offer.
- Include land based low carbon technology and innovation in any County Deal/Levelling Up ask. Additionally, allocate resource to manage and support a project pipeline of land use (and natural capital) investment opportunities to decarbonise the dairy sector / agriculture, create growth and jobs, move towards a more plant-based diet and conserve resources with the move to a circular economy.
- Work with the private sector to identify gap funding and support for the projects that will springboard collaborations and commercialisation of local existing world leading companies to deliver new technologies that will accelerate the ability to address the climate crisis.
- Commission the new Net Zero post at the LEP to support investment in greenhouses/vertical farms near plants creating waste heat, and to look after the portfolio of land use related energy projects, remove blockages and facilitate investment.
- Ensure local planning policy prioritises schemes which maximise anaerobic digestion, solar PV and other renewables.

Recommendations for farms in the subregion:

- Engage with demonstration farm networks (starting with the Council owned farms etc), assessing the economic viability and market potential of land sparing by intensifying the most productive areas to spare the least productive areas for carbon sequestration, biodiversity etc. This could potentially include conversion to vertical farms for crops.
- Engage with the Local Food Sustainable Place Network to unlock new local food market demand and develop a direct to consumer supply chain, restoring pride in the production of high quality locally produced food.
- Engage with the Local Nature Partnership

to shape emerging environmental policy implementation including Biodiversity Net Gain, Trees for Climate, Local Nature Recovery Networks and implementation of the Natural Capital investment plan.

- Actively promote new innovative projects being delivered in the region such as anaerobic digestion (Grosvenor) and DEFRA funded Hedge and Edge (Cholmondeley) as case studies that can be scaled and rolled out.

Insetting-Offsetting/ Natural Capital

Recommendations for local authorities:

- Use the Natural Capital Audit to inform planning policy, use internal and external training to embed in working practices, and identify best value locations for investment, with the ambition to become national leaders in the field.
- Work together to host the natural capital evidence base on a GIS based system/portal and complete a data sharing protocol, and set up a mapping service to provide natural capital information to developers, updating evidence periodically to enable change to be tracked compared to the baseline. This will support the rollout of biodiversity net gain.
- Increase the volume of Hedgerows (encourage others to increase the size of existing ones) and restore bog (mire) habitats on Council owned land and via planning policy.
- Adopt the target of initiating 500,000 tonnes of CO2 sequestered in trees and hedges and 100,000 tonnes in our soils by 2030. Peatland is also very important to address but is a very small percentage of the area and the Commission considers the increasing biodiversity in nature, species and improving our soil is our initial focus.
- Convene relevant partners to establish a more suitable funding mechanism for the Local Nature Partnership.
- Work with the Environment Agency to secure more Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund projects in the area.
- Ensure that the investment opportunities in natural capital are held and promoted subregionally by an appropriate body and develop and deliver 5 investment deals in landscape scale restorations and enhancement projects by 2030.

- Bring together stakeholders to ensure that a field study is done to support the Defra ELMS test and trial (with Cholmondeley).
- Commission studies following the natural capital audit. These include identifying insetting and other investment opportunities and to identify where new green spaces provide the most benefits to local people's wellbeing.

Diet

Recommendations for the Leader's Board:

- Adopt the Sustainable Local Food Place Award across the sub region, including reconnecting consumers and producers, highlighting the health and low carbon benefits of local food through improved labelling.
- Adopt the recommendations of the National Food strategy to address food poverty, providing targeted healthy eating support for people on low income and, healthy start voucher scheme to support changes in diet. Work with government on the government's food strategy and lobby for changes where required.
- Works with GPs/the health sector to promote a range of projects suitable for natural health prescribing and link to diet as an extension of the Nature for Health Programme.

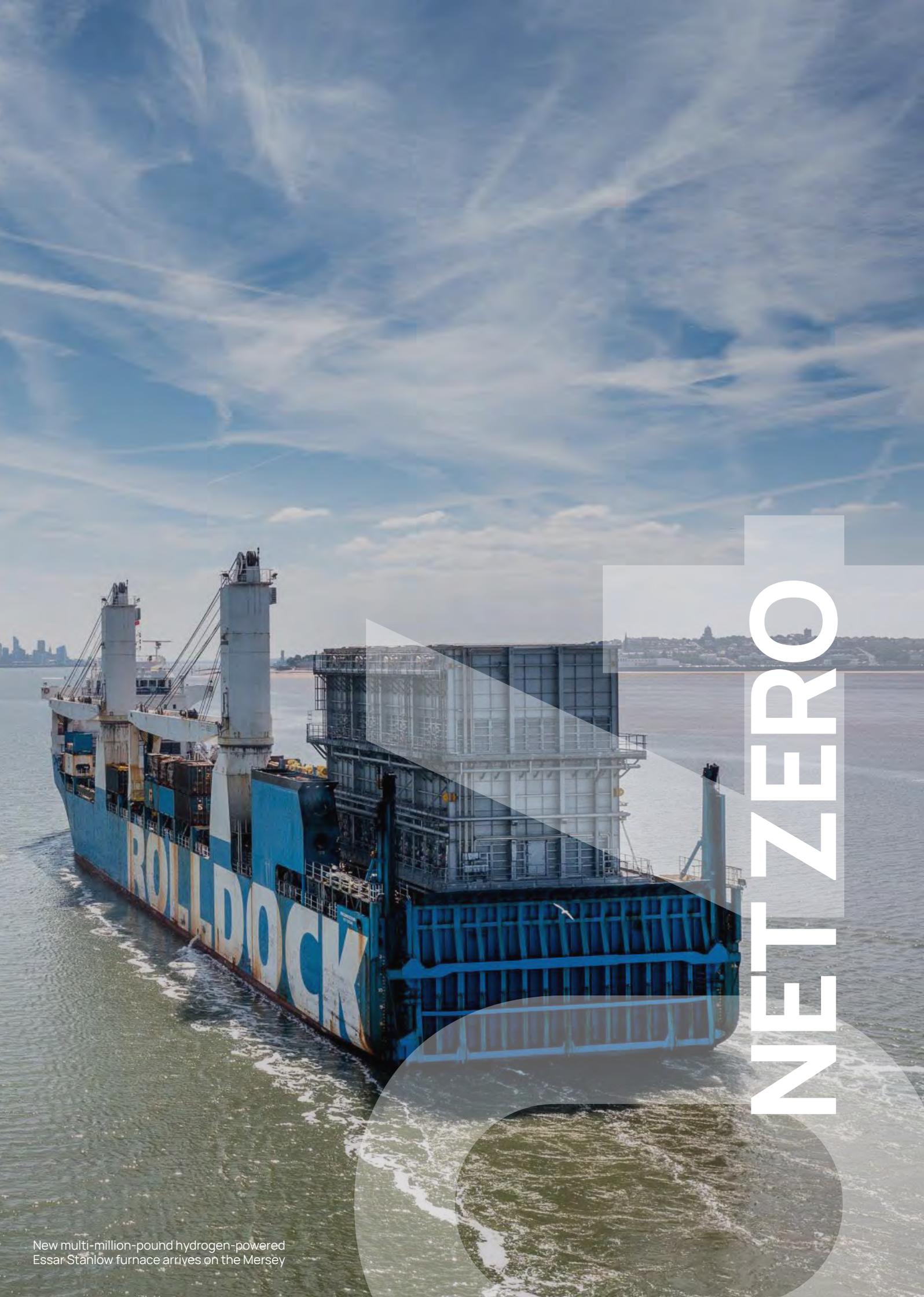
Recommendations for local authorities:

- Apply for a Sustainable Local Food Place Award.
- Review the potential of Council owned farms to deliver local food production.

Renewable Energy Generation

Recommendation for the Leaders' Board:

- Commission work to identify the total planning and infrastructure requirements for renewable energy generation to inform project development towards the Invest Net Zero Cheshire Pipeline.



NET ZERO

New multi-million-pound hydrogen-powered Essar Stanlow furnace arrives on the Mersey

Vision and Overview

In response to the evidence we reviewed, and the consultation feedback, our overall ambition is to support and develop carbon reduction projects across Cheshire and Warrington while creating employment in a way that generates opportunities for all. We propose this will be delivered through three priority activities:

Housing (and building) decarbonisation and retrofit.

- By speeding up decarbonisation and retrofitting of the existing housing stock and lobbying government to speed up decarbonisation for new builds.
- Retrofitting insulation and clean energy to housing, particularly social housing and disadvantaged households, will reduce carbon emissions, boost employment, save money on heating bills and improve the health of disadvantaged residents. A new cohort of workers will need to be trained in fitting and maintaining heat pumps and other low carbon technologies to service the residential and commercial markets.

Industrial decarbonisation.

- By building the UK's first net zero industrial cluster which can act as a blueprint for industrial decarbonisation, enabling us to export our skills and expertise around the world. Supporting our industry to move away from fossil fuels and adopt renewable energy and sustainable processes will make a significant contribution to lowering emissions, safeguard existing jobs and create new green jobs for all.

Circular economy.

- By developing a whole system circular approach to resource management including design, production, waste collection, disposal and recycling, energy distribution and the use of farm waste and slurry in anaerobic digestion, and looking at reductions in domestic energy consumption and demand.
- Our economic model of make, use, and dispose, needs to change to a circular, more sustainable, system where products can be repaired, reused

and recycled using fewer raw materials. We are seeking to take a regional approach to survey opportunities and work with business, public sector and agriculture to hasten this transition.

Cheshire and Warrington has some of the highest CO2 emissions in the country so reducing these is essential to meeting the challenge of the climate emergency, ensuring the future resilience and growth of our economy, and improving the quality of life of our residents.

The Net Zero sub-group considered a range of projects that will support the decarbonisation of industry in Cheshire and Warrington, including HyNet North West. The project is a game-changer. It will realise the potential of the hydrogen economy through the creation of state-of-the-art infrastructure. Alongside this, the Protos energy and resource hub at Ince is leading the way in low carbon energy and waste management with the deployment of innovative technologies including the UK's first plastic-to-hydrogen facility.

In addition to these schemes, there are other potential options for decarbonising existing energy systems at scale. The Government's energy white paper has set a goal of a decisive shift from fossil fuels to clean energy, in power, buildings and industry. A low-cost, net zero consistent system is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar, but to ensure the system is reliable, renewables need to be complemented by technologies such as nuclear, clean hydrogen and long-duration storage. We also have a great opportunity to link residents into green jobs in an inclusive way as they develop.

There is also a need for a new, sustainable energy flow model that puts less pressure on the eco system. The circular economy is what provides the economic system with an alternative flow model. It is based on renewable energy, smarter product design, supply chain collaboration, reuse and recycling.

Cheshire and Warrington lags behind the national average in terms of its green infrastructure with more houses with an EPC rating of Band 'D' or below (e.g. over 60% in Cheshire East, compared to 42.1% in England) Enhancing the quality of housing through a retrofit programme is essential

in the transition to net zero and creates supply chain opportunities for local SMEs. It also has the potential to improve the quality of life of our residents through improved health outcomes.

The net zero working group undertook initial inclusivity assessment, reviewing the inclusivity implications of the circular economy and retrofitting buildings. This included an assessment of impact across those with protected characteristics, those with socio-economic deprivation and those in rural areas, which has informed a draft stakeholder engagement plan for inclusivity.

Summary of Consultation Feedback and Response

There was an overall positive response to the Net Zero vision and recommendations in the online survey. The two main topics discussed at the consultation events that consultees felt strongly about were the barriers to housing retrofit and the green skills that will be needed to reach the Commission's targets. These topics also came up frequently in the online survey. Some people wanted the Commission to look into how they can aid retrofit beyond the social house sector and address development standards for new builds. These, among other suggestions, have been taken into consideration in this report.

Recommendations

Key priorities following the consultation

- Retrofitting insulation and clean energy to housing, particularly for disadvantaged households. Lobby government for consistent longer-term funding for housing retrofit schemes; complete a piece of work to understand the barriers to housing retrofit and produce a roadmap to increase delivery.

On green skills:

- Work with industry and education providers to ensure that there are appropriate education and training programmes in place to support an industrial decarbonisation workforce
- Work with the LEP to develop the skills needed for building retrofit and decarbonization

across the social housing, private housing rental and commercial sectors

- Include easy entry and progression routes to ensure people from all backgrounds can benefit.
- Lobby Government to ensure funding for the area's large hydrogen projects (HyNet and Cadent's Hydrogen Village) and to ensure a level playing field exists with long-term pricing support to incentivise industry to switch to low carbon. Support industry to establish a thriving hydrogen and zero carbon economy.
- Our economic model of make, use, and dispose, needs to change to a circular, more sustainable, system where products can be repaired, reused and recycled using fewer raw materials. Take a regional approach to survey opportunities and work with business, public sector and agriculture to hasten this transition.

Further Recommendations and More Details on the Key Priorities

Housing Decarbonisation and Retrofit

Recommendations for the Leaders' Board:

- By speeding up decarbonisation and retrofitting of the existing housing stock and lobbying government to speed up decarbonisation for new builds.
- Retrofitting insulation and clean energy to housing, particularly social housing, will reduce carbon emissions, boost employment, save money on heating bills and improve the health of disadvantaged residents.
- Work with the LEP to develop the skills needed for housing retrofit and decarbonization across the private rental and commercial sectors, with a key focus on the social housing sector as this is the sector where the Commission feel they can have the greatest impact.

Lobby Central Government to:

- Improve building standards to require new build properties to be zero carbon (cf the Future Homes Standards consultation)

- Review Social Housing policy and rules to allow retention of savings made on energy by the social housing providers to provide a fund for further improvements to prevent the cost of improvements falling to the occupants through rent rises
- Change the right to buy legislation to take account of any environmental improvements made in the value of the property
- Allow claw back of home improvement costs for local authorities in right to buy sales
- Lobby government for consistent longer-term funding for retrofit and decarbonisation scheme

In addition, the Leader's Board could work with the LEP to implement private landlord licensing schemes and criteria for investment funding that encourage higher standards of decarbonisation in the private and commercial sectors.

- Complete a piece of work to understand the barriers to housing retrofit and produce a roadmap to clarify and speed up the process

We recommend that:

- There should be carbon literacy training for suppliers, households, tenants and landlords. Policy advice and best practice is shared among suppliers and housing organisations.
- Local authorities review the feasibility of establishing heat networks in each local authority area (from a variety of heat sources) integrated with private wired power from renewable sources (which could be private, public, or community led), EV charging and broadband upgrade.

Building the UK's first net zero industrial cluster

Alongside the Commission's work, the LEP has been developing plans with the Cheshire Energy Hub and Net Zero North West to make Cheshire and Warrington the home of the UK's first net zero industrial cluster. The work has four key elements:

- Strengthening Cheshire and Warrington's energy R&D network
- Deliver reliable, cost-effective net zero energy
- Attracting investors looking to invest in net zero projects

- Ensuring that businesses have access to the green skills that they need and that residents can access these jobs

The Commission recommends that the following actions are incorporated into this work:

Green Skills

The LEP and local authorities should:

- Work with industry and education providers to ensure that there are appropriate education and training programmes in place to support an industrial decarbonisation workforce including skills 'escalators' to ensure all people can benefit.

Delivering Zero Carbon Energy

Recommendations for the Leaders' Board:

- Lobby Government to ensure funding for 2 large hydrogen projects (HyNet Phase 2 and Cadent's Hydrogen Village). Also, to ensure a level price playing field exists with long-term pricing support to incentivise industry to switch to low carbon. In addition, to support the development of other low carbon renewables and nuclear at scale to enable sufficient zero carbon power, and support the development of green hydrogen.
- Lobby BEIS/OFGEM to allow Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) to invest ahead of demand, to speed up the roll out of net zero infrastructure to support the energy and fuel transition.
- Ensure that planning policies and frameworks are aligned with and actively enable industrial decarbonisation and the transition to low carbon/renewable energy.

The Commission is of the view that the HyNet project is a crucial part of building the low and zero carbon energy system in Cheshire and Warrington and the North West. It will put in place the infrastructure that will enable hydrogen to be piped to where it is needed for industry. Blue hydrogen (using methane and capturing the carbon) will be used to build the new hydrogen economy and this will transition to green hydrogen when the required

production capacity and green power are available.

Strengthening Green R&D in Cheshire and Warrington

Recommendations for the Leaders' Board: Some opportunities include:

- Attracting an industrial decarbonisation catapult to Cheshire and Warrington.
- Lobbying BEIS/Ofgem to identify funding for SME decarbonisation programmes.

The LEP also considers that there is a strong case to find funding to commission consultants to develop business cases for several potentially investable projects:

- A hydrogen demonstrator at Thornton Science Park, supporting the development of HyNet.
- A Nuclear Technology Catalyst at Birchwood Park.
- Undertaking a low carbon R&D/innovation network mapping exercise.

Attracting Net Zero Investors

The Local Enterprise Partnership considers there is a strong case to:

- Develop a compelling low carbon inward investment proposition for Cheshire and Warrington.
- Lobby DIT to secure High Potential Opportunity status for low carbon investment sites/ opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington.
- Commission financial consultants to undertake a feasibility study into the creation of Cheshire and Warrington low carbon investment fund to invest in low carbon projects across the subregion.

Circular Economy

Recommendations for the Leaders' Board:

- Stimulate appropriate subregional organisations to develop a whole system circular approach to resource management including design, production, waste collection, disposal and recycling, energy distribution and the use of

farm waste and slurry in anaerobic digestion, and looking at reductions in domestic energy consumption and demand.

- Take a subregional approach to survey opportunities and work with business, public sector and agriculture to hasten the transition to a circular economy.
- Commission work on reinforcing the need for recycling campaigning and to spread best practice.
- Seek ways to support the Grosvenor Anaerobic Digestion trials and explore options to spread the news and engage with farmers.
- Engage with specialists to identify key opportunities in heat mapping.
- Support the development of a whole system approach to waste collection, disposal and energy distribution including the use of farm waste and slurry.
- Work with industry to encourage the submission of a business case for grant support for Protos Plastics Park to the Enterprise Zone Investment Fund.



For more information about the
Commission and next steps see

cheshireandwarrington.com/sigc

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