

West Midlands Regional Assembly

**Regional Planning and Environment Executive
15th December 2009**

Green Infrastructure in the West Midlands

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive about a renewed West Midlands initiative to promote the benefits of green infrastructure, (GI) so it becomes an essential part of the development of sustainable communities and a positive and recognised element of sustainable economic growth.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Executive **supports** the renewed initiative of the Forestry Commission and other partner's in promoting the work on green infrastructure.

3. Report Detail.

- 3.1 The attached paper prepared by the Forestry Commission sets out the positive progress carried out in the region in the past and several actions are identified to realise the full extent of potential benefits of GI to sustainable economic growth. The paper was developed by the Forestry Commission to stimulate debate at the recent Regional Observatory Conference "Fit for the Future".
- 3.2 The paper sets out the different perceptions of GI, the benefits of GI for different sectors and how GI may be linked to the economic challenges the region faces. It argues that GI should become a key element of the creation of sustainable communities and a recognised element of sustainable economic growth. Currently, it is argued there are still major issues regarding the level of acceptance and priority given to GI and as to whether adequate levels of funding for creation and maintenance can be found. There is a risk that a narrowing of priority issues onto economic matters will

undermine the inclusion of GI into thinking, planning and action.

- 3.3 Progress on embedding GI into key regional and local planning and economic development is still patchy, despite some good progress in recent years. For example:
- The RSS revision process has incorporated GI thinking into draft policy, the RES encompasses some aspects of the environment.
 - GI strategies are being produced for most Growth Point locations in the West Midlands
 - Environmental and GI are key drivers in the Regional Spatial Strategy for the Black Country and within the Core Strategy for the Black Country.
 - A GOWM Defra Agenda Group is looking to support the West Midlands initiative on GI.
- 3.4 The paper suggests several possible actions that will form the basic for further discussion as the initiative progresses. It is important that the Executive, which through the former Regional Environment Partnership, was closely involved in developing and helping to fund work on GI in the West Midlands, are involved in the renewed initiative and link the work into the development of the proposed Strategy for the West Midlands.

Chris Blakeley
Strategic Advisor
c.blakeley@wmra.gov.uk
0121 678 1056