

Draft ESERG Workplan

1. Introduction

The West Midlands European Strategy (WMES) was published in Spring 2008 and focuses on the region's engagement with Europe, what our priorities should be and how we intend to make a success of them.

Over the past two decades most of the day-to-day European activity undertaken within the West Midlands has focussed on the use of EU Structural Funds, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Many parts of the region have benefited greatly from resources made available under ERDF while all parts of the West Midlands have been eligible for ESF resources. The retention of these Funds for 2007-2013, albeit on a reduced scale, means that continued attention will need to be given to the most effective use of these monies in the forthcoming period.

However, the strategy looks beyond Structural Funds and makes the case for a more comprehensive approach to European working. It has been drafted at a key moment in the EU's development, as Europe strives to fulfil the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs and to adapt to the challenges posed by climate change and wider impact of globalisation. During 2008-2009 the EU will conduct a root-and-branch review of its budget to suggest how it can be best aligned with the Union's policy priorities. These are among the matters that form the background and context to this strategy.

The West Midlands European Strategy focuses on the following four priorities:

- maximising the opportunities of the Single Market
- becoming a more successful player within the innovation, research and development arena
- responding to the challenges of climate change and environmental protection
- engaging with the social cohesion dimension

2. Tackling climate change and ensuring environmental protection

This workplan deals with the third priority – responding to the challenges of climate change and environmental protection. The Strategy seeks to highlight the linkages between key developments at the European level with regional priorities in the West Midlands.

2.1 European Context

Policies: the flow of policy and legislation coming from the EU institutions on sustainable development is already substantial and is likely to grow. Amongst the most significant recent developments are:

- **Climate and Energy:** the agreement by European heads of government in January 2007 which agreed an ambitious climate and energy package with set targets by 2020 – to reduce greenhouse gases by at least 20%; to increase to 20% the share of renewables in energy consumption; and a 20% increase in energy efficiency.
- **Common Agricultural Policy:** the CAP is a significant feature of the EU budget and farmers' income. The CAP has been the subject of continuous reforms and there is a gradual shift of resources away from agriculture towards wider rural development.
- **Other issues:** upcoming initiatives will look at energy, waste, emissions, the urban environment, biodiversity, green public procurement and the EU's environmental technology sector.

Programmes: the latest EU financial period runs from 2007-2013. It will be increasingly important to consider the environmental dimension within mainstreaming EU programmes. The region should seek to make a major effort to succeed within the following programmes:

- **7th Framework Programme:** areas relating to energy and environmental protection, Concerto (area-based energy strategies)
- **Competitiveness and Innovation Programme:** specifically the Intelligent Energy Europe programme and the Eco-Innovation programme
- **Interreg IV:** specifically the IVB trans-national strand (North West Europe) and IVC inter-regional strand (EU-wide)
- **LIFE+:** the EU's dedicated programme for the environment

2.2 West Midlands context

Policies: the West Midlands European Strategy is based on the established policy framework at regional level which deals with climate change and environmental protection. These include:

- **West Midlands Economic Strategy** – is the UK's first low carbon regional economic strategy and sets carbon reduction targets for 2008-11. The WMES notes that to meet EU and UK targets for reductions in CO₂, the region must consider the three key sources of emissions: the home, transport and economy. It proposes to invest in low carbon technologies which move the region towards greater self-sufficiency, more decentralised and sustainable production, greater levels of efficient energy consumption and improved waste management facilities.

- **Climate Change Action Plan** – the West Midlands partners are currently taking forward a regional Climate Change Action Plan. The European dimension could bring significant additional value to this Plan. It is envisaged that under the leadership of Government Office for the West Midlands, partners will stimulate European initiatives that will help meet Action Plan objectives, such as helping businesses in the Region to become more energy efficient, and promoting this as a strong economic driver.
- **European Rural Strategy** – the recently developed Rural Strategy sets out the following priorities: increase level of engagement of regional partners in the WM in EU Trans-National Programmes in order to support projects focusing on the rural agenda; ensure a good match between the projects developed for EU Trans-National funding and key regional and local strategies and their priorities; improve the region’s input into the European policy agenda; empower and resource local and regional organisations with “hands-on” support and specific expertise in order to develop and to drive forward funding applications under EU Trans-National Programmes to address the WM’s rural agenda.

Programmes: West Midlands partners have recognised that there is currently a discrepancy within the region between the funding opportunities offered by the large number of EU trans-national funding programmes and the low level of our achievements. EU Connects, the major new initiative funded by the partners was established in order to help close the gap. EU Connects has published baseline research on the West Midlands performance in certain EU trans-national programmes during the 2000-06 period. The research focused on the Interreg, Lifelong Learning and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programmes and provides a very useful baseline on the current experience of organisations under these funds. There are clearly opportunities to increase engagement in these funds and to deliver meaningful projects which contribute to regional and European priorities.

3. Membership

The workplan will provide the focus for the work of the European Strategy Environment and Rural Group (ESERG) in the region. The ESERG has the following membership

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Nic Cole (chair)	Government Office West Midlands	Nic.cole@gowm.gsi.gov.uk
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Sarah Faulkner	National Farmers Union / Rural	Sarah.Faulkner@nfu.co.uk
tbc	Chambers of Commerce	
Richard Elsdon	Sustainability West Midlands	Elsden_Richard@perkins.com

Secretariat – will be provided by Aled Thomas, European Programmes Policy Officer at Advantage West Midlands

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West Midlands in Europe - Xenia Tsitiridou will be a key source of information on the latest policy and funding developments in Brussels.

EU Connects - will provide advice and support to organisations in the West Midlands seeking to apply for EU trans-national funding.

4. Workplan

Based on the actions identified the in the European strategy, the ESERG has outlined the following draft workplan.

Action	Expected activity	Lead Partner(s)	Funding Sources / Resources	Timescale
1. Ensuring effective policy engagement on the major legislative issues that will have a significant impact on interests within the region.	Undertake a policy horizon scan to identify upcoming policy changes which will impact on the themes of environment and rural and disseminate the findings of that scan to regional partners.	WMIE		By November 08 Could be done on a rolling basis (every 6 months?)
	Work with partners to collect and form regional responses to consultation exercises on European policies	Lead allocated according to policy under consultation		
	Participation in appropriate networks to positively influence emerging European policies and legislation	Lead allocated according to policy area		
2. Supporting applications to EU environmental and rural programmes which support regional and European priorities and targets.	Disseminate bidding opportunities and build capacity within regional partners to bid for and secure European funding	ESERG Secretariat		
	Advise and support EU Connects to develop its plan for engaging local partners.	ESERG		
	Promote the sharing of advice, best and good practice and information about bids which have been successful in the past.	EU Connects		
	Identify a short list of priority projects and programmes to target	ESERG partners		

	resources upon in the WM region eg EU 6 th Environmental Action Programme			
	Explore the possibility of providing a project development/travel grant to support the development of bids to European Programmes	ESERG Secretariat		
3. Contribute to the on-going debate on the Common Agricultural Policy and make the case for a continued shift of resources from agricultural subsidy to rural development.	Identify and respond to invitations to contribute a regional perspective on CAP issues to DEFRA and/or the EC. This will require the development of an appropriate and fully representative network of key partners	AWM		
4. Encourage inward and outward study visits, placements and partnership building with European partners on climate change issues including energy conservation, rural development, sustainable construction and waste.	Identify funding programmes to support this action and secure resources for study visits and partnership building exercises around agreed regional priorities [need to specify the priorities]	ESERG task group		
5. Build sustainable networks, within the region and with European partners, to share experience with partners and adopt innovative solutions to common issues.	Provide small travel bursaries to enable short visits and interchanges to take place to support the prioritised and named network and partnerships	ESERG secretariat		

6. Establish links and encourage interchange with other European initiatives and programmes such as PURPLE and ERRIN and establish links with the other three European Strategy Priority Groups.	Identify opportunities and ensure the region is adequately represented and is making best use of the groups it already has.	TBA		
	Seek to learn from other existing partnerships in the regions and in successful regions in Europe and model a West Midlands approach to transnational engagement which is based upon and informed by their experience.	TBA		
	Identify suitable members of the European Strategy's other three Priority groups to become Environmental and Rural champions within those priority groups.	ESERG Chair		
7. Communications	Devise and develop a consistent communications plan which engages partners in the work of the ESERG and which disseminates information, good practice and key messages about the environmental and rural aspects of the European Strategy.	ESERG task group or draft developed by Secretariat/EU Connects and WMiE?		