

Hampshire and the Solent devolution consultation: April 2025

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

The creation of a Mayoral Combined Authority creates the opportunity to establish a strong and compelling vision for the region.

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight are rich in natural capital, with incredible landscapes, habitats and species. These natural assets play a vital part in the region's identity, and people's pride and affiliation with place. The intensity of development, agricultural and industrial activity in the area puts this natural capital at risk - in turn undermining all other forms of capital that depend on the ecosystem benefits that nature provides. The region has pioneered some of the most innovative and impactful nature-based solutions in recent years and the 'nature sector' is a potential growth area for the region – offering new markets, skills and jobs.

Government must include a strong duty on the Mayoral authority, with ring-fenced funding to drive action for nature and climate in an integrated way to maximise benefits for both communities and business.

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Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority?

We would support a representative governance model that recognises the varied nature of the area, including rural and farming areas, towns and cities, wealthy and deprived communities, ensuring that a nature positive economy drives prosperity for all.

We also believe that there is a need to establish a strong cross-sector governance for delivery of nature's recovery, in line with implementation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

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Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the economy of the area?

Our region enjoys nationally and globally important natural assets, but it is also close to environmental limits, with the quality of our natural environment declining and at risk

from unsustainable growth and development. Because nature underpins every aspect of the economy and human wellbeing, a failure to secure nature-based resilience and healthy ecosystems represents a fundamental risk to every one of the region's socio-economic goals.

We suggest that growth in natural capital is explicitly recognised within regional economic plans (rather than being treated as an externality, as has been done in the past).

The 'green economy' has been comprehensively identified as the preeminent economic opportunity of our [time](#). Emerging nature-based solutions constitute a huge potential growth market, bringing significant new skills and employment opportunities.

Investment in nature leads to savings for public services, [including the NHS](#) and it builds stronger social capital.

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Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?

As before, we would welcome the opportunity for coordinated and strategic investment in nature recovery as part of a nature-positive devolution plan, which would bring wider social benefits.

For example, we know that nature plays an essential role in climate resilience, supporting cleaner air and cooler streets. Robust natural ecosystems are able to buffer communities from the impacts of extreme weather including flooding and drought.

Evidence shows that a thriving, wildlife-rich environment benefits both physical and mental health. People with nature on their doorstep are more active, mentally resilient and have better all-round health. However, just 35% of UK households with annual incomes below £10,000 are within a 10-minute walk of a publicly accessible natural green space.

A strategic focus on ensuring equity of access to nature would benefit the health and wellbeing of people across the region.

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Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve local government services in the area?

We believe that there is huge potential to make improvements to local government services, including in areas such as spatial planning and land-use decisions. Strategic approaches that consider impacts and opportunities (including those beyond authority boundaries) could be very beneficial for unlocking sustainable development alongside nature's recovery. For example, the Mayoral Combined Authority is well placed to deliver Local Nature Recovery Strategies and provide contributions towards national Environment Act targets, given the increased funding for nature's recovery at the regional level.

Strategic, nature-positive approaches to issues such as transport also opens opportunities to deliver effective green transport infrastructure across the region.

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Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?

The proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority has the opportunity to lead the way on a nature-positive, regenerative economy at a strategic level in a similar way as has been demonstrated by Nature North¹.

With only 5 more years to reach our Environment Act targets, the Mayor and Combined Authority must work urgently to invest in natural capital and integrate nature-based solutions for climate resilience.

We are calling for the Government to include a statutory duty for Mayoral Combined Authorities to publish local targets and plans to contribute towards the government's national commitments to halt species decline, protect 30% of our land and sea by 2030 and restore our rivers to good ecological health. There should also be ring-fenced funding for delivery of these outcomes, including through implementation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, working in partnership with key sectors and delivery organisations.

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Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?

¹ [Home - Nature North](#)

There is an opportunity to create a regional sense of identity, underpinned by our unique natural landscape which residents connect with, including the South Downs National Park, the New Forest National Park and the Solent Coast.

Decision-making must account for differences in rural and urban ways of life and economies. The Authority has an opportunity to bridge the rural skills gap and create new economic opportunities through providing tailored local skills support, enabling young people to enter rural industries such as farming, wet-land management, forestry and commoning.

The rural and urban economies in Hampshire are closely linked² - investment in rural areas is needed not only for their own sake, but to safeguard the natural environment, provide nature-based solutions to the climate crisis, support food production and a growing visitor economy. The economy in rural Hampshire is worth an estimated £7.5 billion [2016], accounting for 16% of overall local economic output³.

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² [Microsoft Word - Worth Report Final 03 01 12](#)

³ [Socio-economic profile of rural Hampshire 2016](#)