**Surrey Climate Commission draft response to local government reorganisation consultation**

1. The urgency of the climate crisis was underlined this month by the Met Office report on the UK’s changing climate and experience of extremes of weather. The Government recognises the scale and importance of the challenges of mitigation and adaptation, and we welcome the Secretary of State for NZ and Energy’s decision to deliver an annual State of the Climate speech and debate in Parliament.
2. There is by now an impressive array of policies, advisory bodies and spending commitments (mainly on technology) at the national level in the UK. However, no such institutional development has been invested in to enable local and regional governments and their partners in England to support the radical action they wish to take on climate mitigation and adaptation for their communities, environments and businesses. We strongly urge the Government to legislate to enable the unleashing of imagination, community leadership and investment at local and regional levels. All implementation in the end is *local*: the national climate strategy depends on the capacity of local and regional actors to deliver the new energy infrastructure. But that also requires local understanding, commitment and action from people in communities of all kinds - and that in turn depends on processes of community engagement and learning that only well-equipped local authorities and their partners can provide.
3. The UK lacks a ‘climate constitution’ - a clear co-produced strategic map of responsibilities, capabilities and roles at all levels of governance from the national to the local - including the neighbourhood and parish, where research by Surrey Climate Commission and others has confirmed there is great demand for participation and clarity about how to contribute to accelerating the scale and pace of action to address the climate and biodiversity crisis. We urge the development of a ‘mesh’ or matrix governance framework for climate policy and action at all levels from nation to neighbourhood. To this end we recommend a *climate and communities summit*of central Government, the DAs, combined and mayoral authorities, County Councils Association, LGA, UK100 and Mission Zero, to be held this autumn, to agree on such a framework and pave the way for a) a duty of local climate action and b) full integration of climate strategy in the emerging restructured English local government system, to which we turn next.
4. The current major reorganisation of local government in England represents a great opportunity to do this, one that must not be missed. There is consistent and strong demand from local authorities in all the major parties for a duty of climate action (for mitigation and adaptation) to be placed on local government, consistent with the climate strategy and goals to 2050; and for commensurate resources to be made available for local government and partners to be able to act on such a duty. We propose that the new strategic authorities and unitaries in England be given such a duty and new funding streams to allow it to be fulfilled. Every mayoral / combined authority should be seen as a critical actor in climate policy - an enabler of top-down policy and an orchestrator of bottom-up action in counties, city districts and neighbourhoods.
5. Local authorities’ duty of climate action should encompass: a) mitigation in line with climate policy; b) adaptation; c) local community engagement to build understanding, consensus and incentives for acceptance of new infrastructures; d) integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation into all services and plans; e) integration with nature recovery strategies and projects. Each strategic authority should establish a multi-sector local Climate Commission as an advisory body, generator of research and progress reports, and facilitator of local citizen forums.
6. The justification for this overall approach is twofold. First, effective climate action must be ‘multi-level’ - it requires careful local and regional implementation, and especially when we consider the diversity and actual/potential vulnerabilities of local environments, communities and economies. Second, effective climate action is a national priority over generations, and should thus be embedded by law in the duties of local and regional government: the UK cannot afford to have local government bodies rejecting any responsibility and interest in climate action.