

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Progress Report

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

December 2022



Version Control	
Title	Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Progress Report 2022
Purpose	To assess our progress and performance since the Section 6 duty came into force (May 2016) and evaluate how well we have done to help citizens hold us to account on our performance. This plan meets the council's responsibilities under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to report on the progress it has made in meeting its Nature Recovery Objectivities for the preceding reporting period (2019/22)
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1. Introduction & Context

1.1 Reporting Structure

This report has been produced in response to the legislative requirement for public authorities to report on progress made **under Section 6** of the **Environment (Wales) Act 2016** which requires:

“Public authorities that exercise their functions in relation to Wales have a duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience of ecosystems.”

A public authority, in complying with the Section 6 duty, must have regard to:

- The Section 7 list of habitats and species of principle importance for Wales
- The State of Nature Report published by Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
- Any area statement which covers all or part of the area in which the authority exercises its functions, once these are produced.

The report considers how the Biodiversity Duty applies Blaenau Gwent County Council, how other plans, policies and interrelated commitments have been met, and how we have performed against the objectives of Blaenau Gwent County Council’s Forward Plan for biodiversity, with the use of case studies. Throughout the document we have also acknowledged how work has contributed to the Welsh Government Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) objectives. There is a requirement to report on the plan in December 2022 and every three years following this. The plan will be subsequently reviewed and an updated forward plan shall be published by the end of 2022.



Figure 1. Parc Bryn Bach is an important site for biodiversity delivery in Blaenau Gwent. It is a Local Nature Reserve and a Valleys Regional Park. It lies 18Km South of Brecon Beacons National Park and it provides important green infrastructure for the people and wildlife of Tredegar.

Credit: Nadine Morgan

1.2 The Public Authority: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is a democratic organisation made up of 33 elected councillors which employs 2940 employees who are responsible for day to day management and operation of the public body.

1.3 Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan

In response to the Environment Act, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council developed and produced a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan in 2019.

This Forward Plan follows guidance prepared by Welsh Government and considers the seven Wellbeing Goals contained in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the principles of Sustainable Development objectives of the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales and the Ecosystem Approach Principles (Section 7.1, 7.3, 7.4 & 7.5).

Opportunities and objectives have been identified and developed for each service area through Service Area Action Plans to ensure Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's compliance with the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Duty.

Carrying out the requirements under the new biodiversity duty will help to:

- contribute to physical and mental health and wellbeing of people who live and work in the borough;
- offer opportunities for community engagement and volunteering
- take action to intercept and help break down air, water and soil pollution;
- take action to reduce flood peaks; and
- play an important role in tackling global climate change and take action to regulate local climate.



Figure 2. Hedgehogs are a Section 7 species that have benefited from closer working practices with grounds and operational staff and the Ecology and Biodiversity Officers.

Credit: Nadine Morgan

Box.1 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Forward Plan Aims

To maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, by 2022, aims to:

1. Reduce overall resource use; reuse where possible and recycle everything recyclable.
2. Increase biodiversity and ecosystems understanding in the council staff and councillors through appropriate channels including Service Area Environment Champions and the Councillor Nature Champion role.
3. Embody the challenge of integrating the Active Travel, Wellbeing of Future Generations, Planning and Environment Acts to encourage sustainability in the ways we live, work and play.
4. Promote responsible use of natural resources in Blaenau Gwent by working in partnership with others to initiate action and behaviour change.
5. Maintain and enhance biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience on council owned land, particularly with regard to priority species and habitats.
6. Support the Blaenau Gwent & Torfaen Local Nature Partnership.

These aims also contribute to meeting the council's corporate and well-being objectives



Figure 3. Working across service areas with the grounds team and a local farmer, a large area within Ebbw Vale cemetery is managed for wildflower conservation. The site supports a number of invertebrates including the Section 7 species- Dingy skipper

Credit: Nadine Morgan

Box.2 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Forward Plan Objectives

Governance & Partnerships:

Objective 1: Support the integration of Forward Plan objectives into council Corporate Business Plans and provide quarterly reporting

Objective 2: Provide a link to Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan and Public Service Board

Resources:

Objective to be set

Commercial Service:

Objective 1: Take further steps towards implementation of a “paperless office” via the further development of the iTrent system and the roll-out of the self service functions

Social Services

Objective 1: Green Infrastructure team (Environment Act leads) to attend Provider Managers meeting annually

Objective 2: Encourage nature friendly management at our Provider Services outside spaces

Objective 3: Engage our citizens and staff with the environment through involvement in environmental projects within our Provider Services

Regeneration & Community Services

Objective 1: Work towards the Local Development Plan (LDP) aims, including the production of Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Guidance

Objective 2: Maintain and enhance biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience on council owned land, particularly with regard to Section 7 priority species and habitats in partnership with community groups, Gwent Wildlife Trust and others.

Objective 3: Ensure that the Council Embraces the Well-being of Future Generations Act across the service functions and contribute to improving educational standards in relation to biodiversity.

Objective 4: Support the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in its work as a strategic partnership of organisations and individuals directing and delivering nature conservation in both Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent boroughs, at local and wider landscape scales

Education

Objective 1: Engage schools and students via educational sessions and eco-councils and embed sustainability

Objective 2: Green Infrastructure team (Environment Act leads) to attend a Head Teachers meeting annually

Objective 3: Encourage nature friendly management on school grounds

Objective 4: Engage young people with the environment through the youth service

1.4 Support of Delivery

The Council recognises that resilient ecosystems underpinned by a biodiverse landscape deliver multiple benefits for the people of Blaenau Gwent. We are committed to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and working in partnership with others to ensure the sustainability of the subsequent benefits and their contribution to the well-being goals. Therefore, it is acknowledged that compliance with the Section 6 duty is relevant to all parts of the Council including Chief Executive, Elected Members and a Nature Champion, and officers at all levels.

The Natural Environment Team is responsible for leading, reporting on and providing advice related to the implementation of the Environment Act across the council.

The Natural Environment Team can provide guidance on fulfilling the Council's Biodiversity Duty however implementation of each action plan will be the responsibility of the individual Service Area managers, considering biodiversity and ecosystem resilience in line with the functions of those service areas.

Partnership organisations such as Local Nature Partnership, community groups and volunteers are vital in implementing delivery of biodiversity action. Organisations such as Aneurin Leisure Trust, Tai Calon and Gwent Wildlife Trust are key stakeholders in making changes to land management as they directly manage land and Local Nature reserves on behalf of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The partner organisations, community groups and volunteers draw on advice and guidance from the Natural Environment team to support their work.

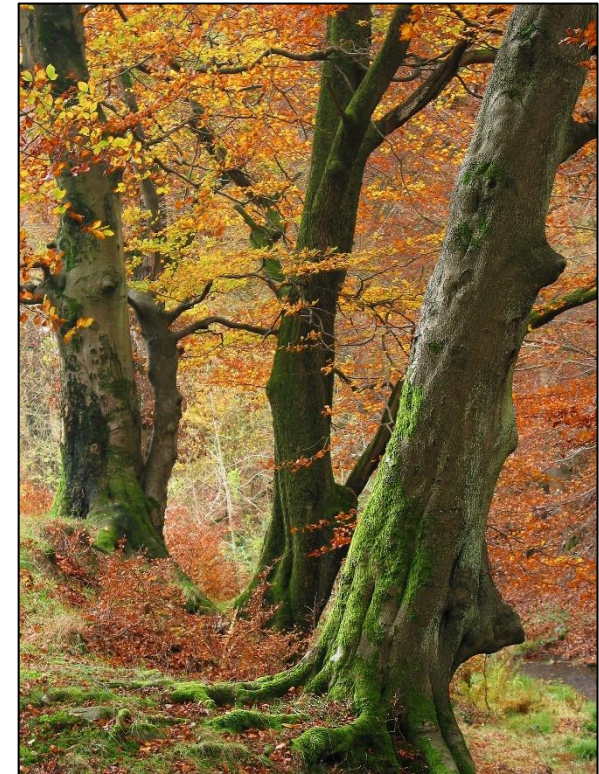


Figure 4. Silent Valley Local Nature Reserve is managed by Gwent Wildlife Trust and their volunteers. The semi-natural beech woodland is the highest and most westerly occurring example of its kind in the whole of the UK and as a result has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Credit: Jane Corey

Box.3 Local Nature Partnership

Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership was formed in 2017, merging two existing Local Biodiversity to share resources to deliver Local Nature Partnership coverage across both Local Authority areas. Previously to the merging, Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership existed. Through the Welsh Government Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing (ENRAW) grant award (via Wales Council for Voluntary Action) an LNP Coordinator recruited to facilitate action up until the end of June 2022.

The LNP brings together a wide range of organisations, including representatives of Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen local authorities, Natural Resources Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth, Public Service Boards and Keep Wales Tidy, as well as individuals interested in local nature.

Delivery shall also be guided by the Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan which has been produced by the Resilient Greater Gwent ENRAW grant. This document will then help to inform the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan for both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.

1.5 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Wellbeing Plan & Corporate Plan

Blaenau Gwent's Public Service Board (PSB) was established in 2016, under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. It brings together a range of public sector organisations with a focus on improving the wellbeing of the area. Building on findings of Blaenau Gwent's Wellbeing Assessments and the Blaenau Gwent We Want Engagement Programme, five local wellbeing objectives have been developed which sets out the direction for action and agenda for change. These are detailed within, The Wellbeing Plan 'The Blaenau Gwent We Want' (2018-2023).

During the Blaenau Gwent We Want Engagement Programme, people told us that they treasure the natural assets Blaenau Gwent Has. This influenced the objectives developed by the PSB and resulted in Objective 3: Blaenau Gwent wants to look after and protect its natural environment. Creating a vibrant area that lives in harmony with its natural environments, using resources in a fair and sustainable way.

The Corporate Plan (2018-2022) is the council's roadmap setting out our visions, values and priorities. One of the Council's priorities is a 'strong & environmentally smart communities', which aims to improve the access to and quality of open spaces.

1.6 Five Ways of Working needed for public bodies to meet the Wellbeing Goals

Blaenau Gwent Wants to Look After and Protect the Environment	
Applying Sustainable Development (or Five Ways of Working)	
Long-term	<p>The Public Services Board will need to ensure it consider the long-term impacts of its decisions, ensuring that actions taken forward are not at a detriment to the area's vibrant natural environments and biodiversity. We recognise we have a finite amount of natural resources and therefore must consider how we fairly use these resources in a sustainable way, and protecting them for future generations will be important.</p> <p>The impacts of current and long-term future trends, such as climate change, will have on local people and communities and the natural environment. Therefore, using a long-term approach we will look to take action to lower Blaenau Gwent's carbon emissions and protect and grow the natural assets that we have to create more resilient communities.</p>
Prevention	<p>Taking a preventative approach will be key to ensuring Blaenau Gwent uses its fair share of resources in a sustainable way, and ensures the area minimises its contribution climate change.</p> <p>Taking a preventative approach, we will protect the area's natural beauty and nature so everyone can enjoy the well-being benefits now and for future generations.</p>
Integration	<p>Successfully looking after and protecting our natural environments needs all of our well-being objectives to be successfully delivered. However, we also recognise how Blaenau Gwent's natural environment is a valuable asset which can be used as a springboard to promote social, economic and cultural well-being across the other well-being objectives.</p>
Collaboration	<p>Looking after and protecting the natural environment will require us to work collaboratively with a wide range of partners. Collaboration will also be required to maximise the opportunities for local people and communities to be able to benefit from their natural environments and by collaborating we hope to reduce the amount of resources we use and therefore our carbon footprint.</p>
Involvement	<p>We will work closely together with people and local communities, as well as a range of wider stakeholders to meet this objective. This objective cannot be met by the Public Services Board alone and requires the active buy-in and participation of everyone in our area to make it happen.</p>

Source: The Wellbeing Plan 'The Blaenau Gwent We Want' (2018-2023).

1.7 Decarbonisation Plan 2020-2030

It is widely recognised that climate and biodiversity are intrinsically linked, with climate change now highlighted as one of the five drivers for biodiversity loss.

BGCBC Decarbonisation Plan sets out how we intend to deliver on becoming carbon neutral by 2030, and ensures that decarbonisation is built into our long term plans to improve wellbeing in Blaenau Gwent.

Decarbonising the council will involve a number of different transitions in each of these high impact areas (e.g. travel, electricity). The plan includes transition summaries which identify key challenges in achieving carbon neutrality in each of these areas. One of the transition pathways is Sequestrations, as land owner the council is responsible for substantial carbon stocks already captured; trees and peatland are the main two natural carbon stores. Many of these sites are designated as Local Nature Reserves. Deindustrialisation in Blaenau Gwent has resulted in another wave of landscape change, we now have the highest proportion of woodland coverage of all Welsh local authorities.



Figure5: Location of Local Nature Reserves across Blaenau Gwent

2. Summary, highlights and barriers against BGCBC Forward Plan Objectives

2.1 Governance & Partnerships

Objective 1: Support the integration of Forward Plan objectives into council Corporate Business Plans and provide quarterly reporting

Objective 2: Provide a link to Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan and Public Service Board



Summary of Functions:

- Corporate performance, scrutiny and democratic services
- Policy, partnerships & engagement

Highlights:

- Holder of corporate business plan and progress monitoring,
- objectives are included in all Service area business plans where relevant
- Gateway to many engagement forums
- link to well-being plan
- Share action on Section 6 duty with other public bodies via Public Service Board
- Development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Significant progress with climate change work including Blaenau Gwent Assembly where key recommendations have been made around biodiversity and green space, particularly its protection and improvement
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem a key part of development of the Gwent Wellbeing Assessment

- Led on delivery of BG on the Move project with associated biodiversity benefits on the Ebbw Fawr Trail. Funded by PSB
- Number of environment community based projects have been funded through participatory budgeting programme
- Aligning decarbonisation plan with biodiversity
- Coordinating the implementation of the Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan with PSB agenda.



Figure 6: Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan produced as part of the Resilient Greater Gwent Project

Credit: Sheryl Edwards

2.2 Commercial Services

Objective 1: Take further steps towards implementation of a “paperless office” via the further development of the iTrent system and the roll-out of the self service functions

Summary of Functions:

- Customer service
- Communications
- Organisational Development
- Procurement

Highlights:

- External communications with residents, businesses & tourists
- Internal communication led by Environment Champions group
- Consider local, regional and global impacts of procurement of goods
- Contribute to procurement strategy
- Contribute to Organisational Development strategy
- Encourage work culture changes for example taking meetings outside and actively travelling (cycling or walking) to work
- Pay slips and expenses now paperless with further development to streamline processes
- Low carbon project in line with the ambition to have a zero carbon public sector by 2030
- New Agile working model: less commuting but also less business travel
- New Hybrid Mail system
- Introduction of ULEV of Blaenau Gwent fleet vehicles



Figure 7: Some of the electric vehicles that have been deployed

Credit: BGCBC

2.3 Social Services

Objective 1: Green Infrastructure team (Environment Act leads) to attend Provider Managers meeting annually

Objective 2: Encourage nature friendly management at our Provider Services outside spaces

Objective 3: Engage our citizens and staff with the environment through involvement in environmental projects within our Provider Services

Summary of Functions:

- Adult Social Services
- Child Social Services

Highlights:

- Multiple opportunities exist in children's and adult's services
- Using green spaces
- Improving and enhancing social service property gardens and grounds- ongoing development
- Engaging well-being of children in council care

2.4 Regeneration & Community Services

Objective 1: Work towards the Local Development Plan (LDP) aims, including the production of Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Guidance

Objective 2: Maintain and enhance biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience on council owned land, particularly with regard to Section 7 priority species and habitats in partnership with community groups, Gwent Wildlife Trust and others.

Objective 3: Ensure that the Council Embraces the Well-being of Future Generations Act across the service functions and contribute to improving educational standards in relation to biodiversity.

Objective 4: Support the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in its work as a strategic partnership of organisations and individuals directing and delivering nature conservation in both Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent boroughs, at local and wider landscape scales

Summary of Functions:

- Frontline integrated services
- Public Protection
- Property Services
- Infrastructure
- Regeneration
- Planning



Figure 8: Volunteers restoring a pond that has been encroached by scrub and become silted up

Credit: Nadine Morgan

Highlights:

- Appropriate land management
- Involving local communities
- Engaging more people in their local green spaces
- Improving access and quality of local green spaces
- LDP policies: supported the inclusion of ecosystem resilience in LDP 2018-2033
- 5 Local Nature Reserves designated in March 2019
- Increasing efficiency of council buildings
- Supported the LNP
- Resilient Greater Gwent project has several work streams delivering on maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and improving ecosystem resilience.
- Local Places for Nature being delivered



Figure 9: Common toad was safely moved before pond restoration works were carried out.

Credit: Nadine Morgan

2.5 Education

Objective 1: Engage schools and students via educational sessions and eco-councils and embed sustainability

Objective 2: Green Infrastructure team (Environment Act leads) to attend a Head Teachers meeting annually

Objective 3: Encourage nature friendly management on school grounds

Objective 4: Engage young people with the environment through the youth service

Summary of Functions:

- Inclusion and school improvement
- Transformation & performance
- Youth service

Highlights:

- Engaging schools and students via educational sessions and eco-councils: Service Level agreement with schools
- Attend Head Teachers meetings
- Management for nature on school grounds
- To get students involved in the council e.g. work placement projects
- Developing Ecology and Education Action Plan



Figure 10: Children from Beaufort Hill Primary School took part in 'Eels in the Classroom' project and helped to look after the eel before releasing them in the ponds at Beaufort Woodlands LNR.

Credit: Nadine Morgan

3. Review of S6 Duty

3.1 What has worked Well

- Embedding biodiversity into corporate plans and council objectives ensures biodiversity is considered at decision making.
- More resilient ecosystems retained and enhanced through development and design schemes.
- Habitats restoration and creation- increase ecosystem resilience
- Increased community engagement- raising awareness as to the reasons for land management changes
- Increased community involvement- practical conservation, biological recording
- Enabling community groups to manage sites for biodiversity
- Sharing best practice
- Decision makers are aware of wildlife legislation including S6.
- Enhanced green infrastructure resulting in increased ecological connectivity.
- INNS control
- Implementation of natural flood management techniques
- Delivery of WFG goals and objectives, Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, and the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales, Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan
- Collaboration on landscape scale projects



Figure 11: Roseheyworth Woodlands LNR

Credit: Nadine Morgan

3.2 What have the Barriers been?

- Covid 19 e.g. Unfortunately, Community Options closed in March 2020 and staff were redeployed to essential services and as a result limited progress has been made within Social Services – Adult services has prioritised supporting the delivery of essential services and a number of non-regulated services have focussed of supporting citizens in their own homes and in the community who are assessed as being critical in need.
- Changes in staffing has resulted in disrupted continuity of delivery of biodiversity projects
- Limited staffing resources- management changes are not possible if the will incur a cost and there are restraints to budgets
- Changes in priorities within service areas Some sites allocated in Local Development Plan include designated sites such as SINC's and Priority Habitats
- Public perception of land management changes is not always welcomed
- Practical challenges, limited by seasonal constraints
- Conflicts around tree planting on priority habitats
- Can be challenging to secure funding for projects

4. Case Studies

4.1 Case Study 1: Biodiversity and Outdoor Learning in Schools Project

Outdoor learning isn't a subject or topic; it's an outlet for learning.

The aim of the project:

- Reverse the decline in biodiversity by increasing, restoring and enhancing urban green spaces (school grounds)
- Create learning opportunities for school children and cultivate an appreciation of nature conservation and biodiversity

This is an opportunity to help empower young people and support the new curriculum and other initiatives such as Forest Schools, Eco Schools and Healthy & Sustainable Living. Being in the outdoors can improve health and wellbeing, encourages the learning of new skills and give a greater understanding of school grounds to share with the whole school community. Time outdoors in nature can promote ambitious, capable learners and can inspire pupils to be ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

Through a Service Level Agreement, BGCBC Biodiversity Officer works with 24 schools across Blaenau Gwent, from Early Years to Secondary Schools. Each schools have a Biodiversity Management Plan, with actions identified within those plans carried out within the school grounds. Activities have included:

- ❖ Tree Planting
- ❖ Hedgerow Planting
- ❖ Pond restorations
- ❖ Orchards
- ❖ Altering grass cutting regime/wildflower seeding
- ❖ Installing animal homes i.e. bat boxes, bird boxes, hedgehog boxes

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Service Areas: Natural Environment, Education, Grounds Team

Collaborative Partnerships: Gwent Wildlife Trust, Keep Wales Tidy, Aneurin Leisure Trust, Blaenau Gwent Outdoor Learning Wales (OLW), Local Nature Partnership



Figure 12: Tree Planting with school children






Credit: Becky Ward

To date, a substantial amount of work has been carried out, working with schools to increase the biodiversity within their grounds and to raise awareness of biodiversity conservation amongst school children.



Figure 11-14: Pond dipping, Leaf identification and tree planting for the Queen's Green Canopy

Credit: Becky Ward, Nadine Morgan

Green spaces designation, improvement and use		Improve quality of life	
Increase Understanding of the importance of biodiversity		Promote learning through biodiversity	
Encourage Local Community involvement		Considering biodiversity in planning and development	

4.2 Case Study 2: Biodiversity & Wellbeing Outreach Programme-Bryn Bach Park & Bedwelty House and Park

BGCBC Natural Environment Team have an SLA with Aneurin Leisure Trust-Bryn Bach Park to deliver a biodiversity and wellbeing outreach programme.

The aim is to promote and raise awareness of biodiversity conservation by improving Aneurin Leisure Trust grounds/managed sites.

The vision for both sites is to:

- A biologically diverse site, where existing features and informed management combine to maximise the value of the site for nature conservation;
- A site that all members of the community are able to use and enjoy;
- A site that proudly retains its sense of history, at the same time as offering new possibilities as a focus for the community in the local area;
- And, above all, a site that helps develop a sense of the reserve as a special place, of great value to the local area and the wider region

Actions delivered are carried out in accordance with the Ecological Management Plan and Biodiversity Enhancement Plan, and include:

- ❖ Tree planting
- ❖ Woodland management
- ❖ Pond restoration
- ❖ Grassland management
- ❖ Native bulb planting
- ❖ Hedgerow planting

Elements of the projects that train, upskill and build capacity will ensure that local communities and in house staff of partner organisations will be able to continue to contribute to strengthening ecological networks. Communities will be more connected with their local and regional environment. The project promotes a change in behaviour, with people making lasting changes which benefit their own wellbeing and encourage biodiversity.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Service

Areas: Natural Environment, Grounds Team, volunteers

Collaborative Partnerships: Gwent Wildlife Trust, Keep Wales Tidy, Aneurin Leisure Trust, Bryn Bach Park, Bedwelty House and Park, Groundworks Wales, Tai Calon, Friends of Bedwelty House and Park, Local Nature Partnership, Valleys Regional Park



Figure 15: Sowing native wildflowers at Bryn Bach Park with volunteers and Gwent Wildlife Trust

Credit: Nadine Morgan

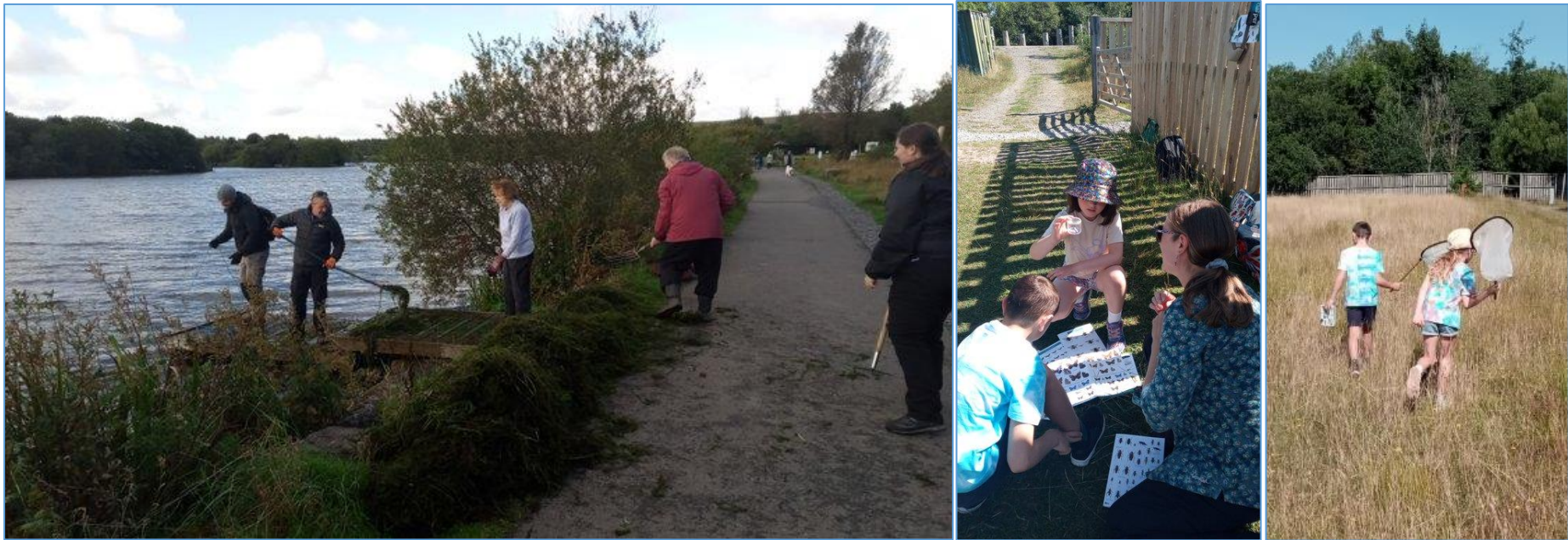








Figure 16: Volunteers removing weed from the lake at Bryn Bach Park, and one of the Wildlife Wednesdays engagement sessions delivered in the summer

Credit: Nadine Morgan

Green spaces designation, improvement and use		Improve quality of life	
Increase Understanding of the importance of biodiversity		Promote learning through biodiversity	
Encourage Local Community involvement		Considering biodiversity in planning and development	

4.3 Case Study 3: Resilient Greater Gwent Project

The Resilient Greater Gwent project has been funded by Welsh Governments Enabling of Natural Resources and Well-being Grant (2019-2022), and was led by BGCBC. The Resilient Greater Gwent (RGG) project demonstrates a landscape wide approach and connectivity across South East Wales; to create and enhance resilient ecological networks, providing sustainably managed natural resources and principles for communities.

The project supports cross-sector collaboration to bring a broad range of environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits. The project envisages a South East Wales that has a rich and growing biodiversity resource valued by local people who engage with it for their health and well-being. Actions are being taken against the five drivers of biodiversity loss; climate change, pollution, habitat change and loss, invasive non-native species and exploitation.

The vision is for a Gwent that has thriving ecosystems, resilient to the impacts of climate change such as severe weather events and adaptable to changing conditions, supporting robust populations of Wales' diverse wildlife and plant life. Ecosystems are providing services used sustainably and valued by communities in the region.

The overall project is based around two work streams:

Resilient Ecological Networks

This set out to create an evidence based strategic plan to direct nature recovery action in Greater Gwent that would support biodiversity and resilient ecological networks. The project involved: monitoring & reporting developments against the Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and Adaptability (DECCA) Framework and included incorporating the latest thinking in land management and the use of communication tools to increase ecosystem resilience understanding and developed examples of best practice.

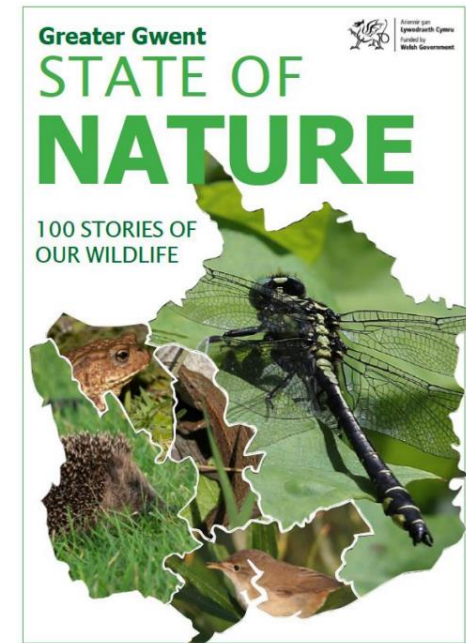
- ❖ The Greater Gwent State of Nature Report

To enhance the resilience of our ecosystems, The Greater Gwent State of Nature Report (GGSoN) was published in July 2021, together with a summary leaflet and was distributed at various public events. The

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Service

Areas: Natural Environment, volunteers

Collaborative Partnerships: Resilient Greater Gwent Partnership, Gwent Green Grid Partnership, Local Nature Partnership, community groups



data and information amassed for the GGSon is invaluable for the region's ecosystems as it looked at the data surrounding 100 species and species groups across Gwent. It identified species and habitats that are thriving and recovering and those at risk. Thus, it informed the development of the Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan as a strategic guide towards nature recovery at a regional scale across Gwent, which in turn is informing the Local Nature Action Recovery Plans (LNRAPs) of the five local authority partners.

❖ Rivers

The Rivers Project was led by Blaenau Gwent CBC and aims to deliver a joined up landscape scale approach to improving our blue networks.

As part of the rivers workstream River Partnerships covering Gwent have been established with meetings held. These partnerships look to improve our rivers through collaborative working. River Rangers are also out monitoring the rivers. In connection with the River Restoration Centre training for the Citizen River Habitat Survey (cRHS) has been set up and undertaken. The cRHS allows members of the public to become involved in citizen science and help monitor the rivers across Gwent. RGG and GGG Partners have worked with the RRC to coproduce a highlevel river restoration strategy and 5-year plan which will support an integrated, collaborative approach to long term river restoration across Gwent.

❖ Colliery Spoil Invertebrates

Led by Buglife Cymru, this project looked to increase our knowledge of the distribution and diversity of invertebrates found on colliery spoil sites within Gwent through survey work and awareness raising events.

As part of the work stream a Colliery Spoil Habitat Assessment Form was used to complete a list of key invertebrates for colliery spoil site, done to facilitate site assessments. Spotter sheets based on the same form were produced and are available on Buglife website. Surveys of some of our colliery spoil sites in Gwent were completed, and management recommendations were made. Volunteer events and workshops have been an integral part to the delivery of this work stream. Outreach and engagement events such as identification workshops were well attended, and working parties engaged in maintaining the colliery spoil habitat with activities such as scrub clearance.



Figure 17: Buglife leading a guided walk at Sirhowy Valley Woodlands

Credit: Buglife

❖ SINC & LWS

SINCs (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) and LWS (Local Wildlife Sites) was led by Gwent Wildlife Trust. The aim is for a fully functioning Greater Gwent Local Wildlife Site System based on the lessons learnt developing the Monmouthshire Local Wildlife Site System.

As part of this workstream 700 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation were reviewed and 92 Local Wildlife Sites were created. Central to the success of this work having positive long-term impacts for wildlife, is engaging with the landowners

❖ Invasive Non Native Species (INNS)

Led by Caerphilly CBC, this project aims to combat invasive non-native plant species over the whole of South East Wales allowing for a strategic approach to be adopted and to build upon the successful controls already being implemented when addressing INNS in the region. The project will target catchments throughout the region and be directed through a collaborative steering group that is made up of representatives of all the key partner organisations.

The INNS project has surveyed 60ha of land and treated approximately 1700 sites for the management of INNS, particularly Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed. Both council owned land and publicly accessible green spaces have been treated across Gwent.



Figure 18: Japanese Knotweed treated as part of the programme

Credit: Aileen Vaughan

❖ Urban Biodiversity

This workstream is led by Blaenau Gwent CBCs Biodiversity Officer. Similar to the sustainable communities, it will also engage with communities, but in particular, working with schools, private and housing associations residents. People will be encouraged, informed and supported to take steps to notice and help the biodiversity on their doorstep enabling them to make informed choices to protect wildlife in their gardens and community spaces.

Projects in this workstream involved working with groups within the community and providing wildlife recorder packs to individuals, community groups and schools. Across Gwent similar recorder packs were distributed, linking closely with each local authority's individual projects. Packs covered animals such as bats, reptiles, butterflies and hedgehogs and could include items such as bird feeders and ID guides, bat boxes, bat detectors, hedgehog holes and metal plate markers, nature and wellbeing books, fruit plants and herbs.

In some parts of Gwent activities were sent out each week to encourage engagement and to receive feedback, activities including things like wildlife gardening, recipes using garden herbs, Big Garden birdwatch ID events and bat survey events. Individuals have been encouraged through these events to submit their records to SEWBReC and enabled users to get a really good insight and understanding of the type of wildlife that be found right on your doorstep.

Sustainable Communities

This took a community and place-based approach, engaging with communities to add value to this ecosystem resilience work. This work stream focused on building capacity and skills and community action, to encourage and enable sustainable behaviour change and positive environmental behaviours.

In order to achieve this, new community and volunteering groups and opportunities were created, capitalising on the increased number of people willing to assist in conservation work and participate in Citizen Science in the UK. This increase was in part due to the impact of the pandemic, which resulted in people exploring and valuing their local green spaces and places more. Through this workstream more people have become increasingly connected with and appreciative of nature and are making sustainable lifestyle choices. The actions and opportunities delivered through the subprojects of this workstream have supported physical and mental wellbeing, so developing both resilient ecosystems and communities.



Figure 19: Volunteers participating in a Bioblitz at Trevor Rowson LNR- being shown how to use recording equipment. Pollinator Pack was produced as part of the Sustainable Communities.

Credit: Nadine Moraan







Resilient Greater Gwent Partnership

The Partnership is made up of several organisations and include:

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- Buglife
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Gwent Wildlife Trust
- Monmouthshire County Council
- Newport City Council
- Natural Resources Wales
- SEWBRc
- Torfaen County Borough Council
- Technical Ecology



The aim of the Partnership is to successfully promote increasing awareness and knowledge of enhancing resilient ecological networks; demonstrating a continued sustainability of natural resources.

Green spaces designation, improvement and use		Improve quality of life	
Increase Understanding of the importance of biodiversity		Promote learning through biodiversity	
Encourage Local Community involvement		Considering biodiversity in planning and development	

4.4 Case Study 4: LNP & Local Places for Nature Project

Another partnership project funded by Welsh Government to enhance nature ‘on your doorstep’. The project aims to support the management of roadside verges for wildlife, planting new hedges and managing existing ones, dry stone walling, supporting management of urban meadows and providing training for local communities.

Activities that have taken place include:

- Hedgerow/tree planting at Bryn Bach Park, Beaufort Woodlands, Abertillery Park, Six Bells Park, Nantyglo Welfare Park and Cwmtillery Lakes
- Altering cutting regime at Pant Y Fforest, Ebbw Vale
- Hedgerow management at Beaufort Woodlands
- Pond restoration at Cwmcelyn
- Community group training on cut and collect machinery at Sirhowy Valley Woodlands
- Production of Parks Biodiversity Enhancement Plans
- Production of Woodland Management Plans
- Botanical surveys carried out for highway verges
- Biodiversity Interpretation







Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Service
Areas: Natural Environment, Grounds Maintenance, volunteers

Collaborative Partnerships: Resilient Greater Gwent Partnership, Gwent Green Grid Partnership, Local Nature Partnership, community groups, Aneurin



Figure 20. Biodiversity Interpretation signage to raise awareness about why the cutting regimes on verges and green spaces have been altered

Credit: Nadine Morgan

Green spaces designation, improvement and use		Improve quality of life	
Increase Understanding of the importance of biodiversity		Promote learning through biodiversity	
Encourage Local Community involvement		Considering biodiversity in planning and development	

4.5 Case Study 5: Nature Isn't Neat: Gwent Green Grid

The Gwent Green Grid Partnership aims to improve and develop green infrastructure, as well as provide green job opportunities within the area. Green infrastructure has a crucial role to play in addressing nature, climate change and health emergencies.

Monmouthshire County Council, working with Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen councils as well as Natural Resources Wales along with other partners. The organisations will work together to ensure that the area's natural resources are resilient to pressures and threats and thereby better able to provide vital health and well-being benefits for current and future generations.

The partnership will help deliver the Gwent PSB commitment to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act through collaborative projects with will involve community engagement.

One of the collaborative projects is 'Nature Isn't Neat', which aims to encourage various organisations and individuals to manage grasslands, open spaces and parks for biodiversity by altering the cutting regimes. By implementing this scheme of works it is creating a rich tapestry of habitats for pollinators across the Greater Gwent network.

Some of the sites which have had their cutting regime altered are, several verges across Blaenau Gwent, roundabouts and schools. Interpretation boards have been installed at these sites to raise awareness of the importance of the changes in management. Community engagement has also taken place with Pollinator Monitoring workshops delivered at Bryn Bach Park.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Service






Areas: Natural Environment, volunteers

Collaborative Partnerships: Resilient Greater Gwent Partnership, Gwent Green Grid Partnership, Local Nature Partnership



Figure 21-23 (left-right). One of the verges in Waunlwyd has been left for pollinators and wildlife, Volunteers participating in Pollinator monitor training, interpretation board installed at Beaufort Woodlands LNR.

Credit: Nadine Morgan

Green spaces designation, improvement and use		Improve quality of life	
Increase Understanding of the importance of biodiversity		Promote learning through biodiversity	
Encourage Local Community involvement		Considering biodiversity in planning and development	