

SUBJECT:	CLIMATE AND NATURE EMERGENCY STRATEGY 2024 – NATURE RECOVERY REPORTS 2024
MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	15th MAY 2024

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience (Section 6) Forward Plan and Action Plan 2024-28 and approval for public consultation of the;
- Monmouthshire Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) Part 1: Strategy
 - Monmouthshire's Green Infrastructure Strategy Vol 1&2 and Executive Summary
- Which sets out the Council's statutory duties and responsibilities and associated actions for delivery.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience (Section 6) Forward Plan and Action plan 2024-28 and gives approval for a public consultation exercise for the Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) Part 1: Strategy (Final Draft) and Monmouthshire's Green Infrastructure Strategy Volumes 1&2 and Executive Summary (Final Draft).
- 2.2 Appendix 2b Short Nature Recovery Action Plan (an abridged version of Appendix 1b) sits alongside the four Action Plans for the Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 As a local authority we now have a duty (via the Environment Act 2016) to maintain and enhance biodiversity in all our functions, so the responsibility sits across all services and functions. Climate change is having a significant impact on habitats and species and is one of many pressures on our natural world. In 2021 the Senedd declared a 'Nature Emergency' promoted by the State of Nature Report (2019) highlighting the extinction of 17% of species across Wales. In Gwent the State of Nature Report (2021) showed a 34% decline of assessed species. More recently the updated 2023 State of Nature report makes the stark statement that Wales is now one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth ([Wales State of Nature Report](#) - Summary page 3) and along with the rest of the world is facing a biodiversity crisis, with 18% (one in 6) species in Wales at risk of extinction ([State of Nature Wales 2023](#) website and [Wales State of Nature Report](#) - Headlines page 4).
- 3.2 The Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience (Section 6) Forward Plan 2024-28 (Appendix 1), outlines how the Council fulfils its legal biodiversity duties. It aligns with actions specified in the Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) and Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience (Section 6) Forward Plan key objectives:

Objective 1 Embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels

Objective 2 Provide nature-based opportunities to raise awareness, support health and well-being and encourage action for nature

Objective 3 Undertake land management for biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience

Objective 4 Influence land management to improve ecosystem resilience

Objective 5 Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Objective 6 Support landscape scale projects and partnerships to maximise delivery

Objective 7: Use improved evidence, understanding and monitoring to inform action

Objective 8: Monitor the effectiveness of the plan and review

- 3.3 As part of its statutory obligations the Council is also required to report every 3 years on actions taken to deliver its biodiversity duties; the current report for 2020-2023 has been prepared and submitted to Welsh Government after which it will be published.
- 3.4 The Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) helps to deliver the Section 6 Forward Plan and aims to provide practical, achievable actions designed to help reverse the decline in biodiversity and build ecosystem resilience in Monmouthshire. Supported by the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) the Plan will comprise 4 Parts. Part 1 is the Strategy that sets out our approach for nature recovery in Monmouthshire and a general Action Plan. Parts 2, 3 & 4 will be developed in collaboration with the Local Nature Partnership and will comprise, Habitat Action Plans, Species Action Plans, and a collation of case studies of projects.

Nature Recovery Action Plan Part 1: Strategy (Final Draft) includes the following key areas of action:

- Policies, plans and procedures.
- Education and Awareness
- Evidence and Understanding
- Promoting Ecosystem Resilience
- LNP Governance and Monitoring

- 3.5 The Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy (Appendix 3a) sets out the Council's approach to enhancing biodiversity and increasing ecosystem resilience through GI in line with the Forward Plan prepared under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It also sets out the Council's approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes through GI in line with objectives of the Gwent Well-being Plan (2023), South-East Wales Area Statement, Monmouthshire's Communities and Corporate Plan and the emerging Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy, seeking to deliver climate action through landscape scale projects and partnerships.

The Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy (Final Draft)

Core Aims:

- 1 Support Health and Wellbeing delivering strong communities and vibrant places; enriching people's lives through engagement and activity
- 2 Maintain and enhance biodiversity and support resilient ecosystems to address the nature and climate emergencies
- 3 Conserve, protect and enhance Monmouthshire's GI assets

GI Objectives:

- Improve Health & Wellbeing
- Enhance Biodiversity & Increase Ecosystem Resilience
- Increase Climate Change and Nature Resilience
- Strengthen Landscape Character & Distinctiveness
- Support Sustainable Economic Development

The relationship between the plans is set out in Appendix 5

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

4.1 All three reports have significant positive contributions to make to the Wellbeing Goals. In particular a Healthier Wales through health and wellbeing opportunities through projects and partnerships, well connected multifunctional green spaces and community growing initiatives. There are also benefits for a Resilient Wales, based on supporting nature-based solutions for land management, raised awareness through training and education of the nature crisis and working in partnership to deliver landscape scale projects to support resilient ecological networks. There is also significant potential to contribute to Cohesive Communities, by working collaboratively and in partnership with our communities. Finally contributing to a Globally Responsible Wales through sustainable use of natural resources to support Monmouthshire's local green economy and develop skills and learning. There are no negative impacts on the Well-being Goals.

4.2 There are no significant positive or negative impacts on the protected characteristics, safeguarding or corporate parenting. The principles of Long term, Prevention, Integration, Collaboration and Involvement have been used throughout the development of the Action Plans.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

5.1 Doing nothing is not an option. Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a duty on public authorities to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity where it is within the proper exercise of their functions. In doing so, public authorities must seek to promote the resilience of ecosystems. This means that Monmouthshire County Council must take a pro-active approach to improve and not reduce biodiversity when carrying out its functions.

In addition, the recent publication of Planning Policy Wales edition 12, specifically Chapter 6 has significant implications for biodiversity and green infrastructure which aims to avoid biodiversity loss, provide Net Benefit for Biodiversity, and protect and enhance green infrastructure, setting out requirements for Green Infrastructure Assessments / Strategies as part of the planning process.

6 EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 Updates on progress will be reported upon in line with statutory requirements as set out in the Section 6 duty.

7 REASONS:

- 7.1 To ensure that the Council delivers upon its statutory Biodiversity Section 6 duty and seek to fulfil requirements of Planning Policy Wales edition 12, supporting the Gwent Well Being Plan and South-East Wales Area Statement and addressing its commitments to the climate and nature emergencies through the Council's Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy and the Communities and Corporate Plan.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 Actions will be funded in different ways, some are zero cost or will require core funded officer time alone, others will involve Project and Partnership funding delivered through current grant programmes. It is anticipated that where additional funds are needed these will be subject to subsequent decision-making processes.

9 CONSULTEES:

SLT
Informal Cabinet
Climate and Nature Emergency Steering Group
Place Scrutiny

Summary of feedback from Place Scrutiny:

- Very supportive of the reports.
- Important to engage residents and schoolchildren with nature.
- Monmouthshire is an outstanding rural county, and the objectives should reflect that.

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1a &b – Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan 2024 and Actions V2

Appendix 2 – Nature Recovery Action Plan (Final Draft)

Appendix 3a & b – Green Infrastructure Strategy Volume 1 & 2 (Final Draft)

Appendix 4 – Green Infrastructure Executive Summary (Final Draft)

Appendix 5 – Nature Recovery Diagram

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