



Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience (Environment Wales Act 2016, Section 6) Report

Monmouthshire County Council

December 2025



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Title	Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience (Section 6) Report 2026
Purpose	Statutory Requirement: Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016
Owner	Monmouthshire County Council
Approved by	(Single Cabinet Member Decision: Biodiversity Champion)
Date	31/12/2025
Version Number	1.1
Status	Post Place Scrutiny
Review Frequency	Every 3 years following 2025
Next review date	December 2028
Consultation	Officers and Elected Members

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INTRODUCTION

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 (MCC) must take a pro-active approach to improve and not reduce biodiversity and ecosystem resilience when carrying out its functions.

The legislation also requires Public Bodies to prepare a 'Forward Plan' to outline how they shall meet the duty and report on that plan every three years from the first reporting round in 2019. A revised '**Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan**' was adopted by MCC in 2024.

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. Guidance has been made available by Welsh Government¹, and this has been followed where appropriate throughout the report. A specific data gathering exercise was undertaken to engage with relevant council service areas for report preparation.

This report considers how the Biodiversity Duty applies to Monmouthshire County Council, how other plans, policies, and interrelated commitments have been met, and how we have performed against the objectives of Monmouthshire County Council's Forward Plan for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, with the use of case studies.

The legislation establishes a requirement to report on the plan in 2019, 2022 (submission included 2023 progress), 2025 and every three years thereafter.

Monmouthshire County Council is a democratic organisation made of 46 elected councillors which employs around 4,500 officers responsible for day-to-day management and operation of the public body. Monmouthshire County Council falls into Group 3 of the "Types of organisations and possible S6 actions relative to their functions" as specified in the Welsh Government Reporting Guidance. This means that the minimum actions that the organisation should be reporting on include actions related to buildings management, procurement, sustainability, awareness raising, training, or in partnership with other organisations; actions related to grounds management, cascading funding criteria, providing education and training; and, actions related to land management to maintain and enhance biodiversity, and promote the resilience of ecosystems.

Monmouthshire County Council is approximately 850 km² and has a population of approximately 94,142 (2018 census). It is a rural county with agriculture and forestry shaping the rich biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems in the landscape. Monmouthshire's

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/section-6-biodiversity-and-resilience-ecosystems-duty-reporting-guidance>

Section 6 duty applies to the whole of the Unitary Authority area including the Monmouthshire part of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park (BBNP) where Monmouthshire County Council has functions such as community infrastructure, waste, grounds maintenance and highways.

Further information on the Biodiversity & Ecosystems Resilience of Monmouthshire is included in Appendix 3.

A CORPORATE COMMITMENT TO DELIVER

Monmouthshire County Council first declared a **Climate Emergency** in 2019. This declaration focused on the decarbonisation of Monmouthshire County Council but also identified the importance of managing green spaces to reduce energy use, absorb carbon and be resilient. The plan was updated in 2021, the emphasis on nature recovery was strengthened and action addressing water quality was added to improve protection of our rivers and coasts.

In March 2022, the **Motion for Rivers and Ocean** passed by MCC elected members, took the *Motion for the Ocean* model developed by the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group, and adapted it to recognise the importance of taking a catchment to coast approach to protecting water quality. MCC produced a report containing recommendations for how the council should act to realise clean, healthy, and productive rivers and oceans, alongside the commitment to tackle the climate emergency.

In October 2022, Welsh government published the Recommendations of the '**Biodiversity Deep Dive**'² as part of the two-part UN biodiversity summit COP15. The main aim of this work is to protect 30% of land and seas by 2030. Of relevance for Local Government is the action to Embed Nature Recovery in Policy and Strategy in Public Bodies in Wales.

In 2023 Monmouthshire County Council adopted the **2023-28 Community and Corporate Plan**³. This Plan sets the Council's ambition for the council and county of Monmouthshire as summarised in Figure 1 below.

The **Green Place** objective positions the considerations of the Climate and Nature emergencies alongside other challenges and opportunities for the county. The Plan acknowledges the outstanding beauty of Monmouthshire. As custodians of this stunning place, we need to encourage residents and visitors to enjoy it, protect it and conserve it. The natural world in all its guises is the backdrop to our tourism and visitor economy. It also commits to work with others to promote access to our special places whilst protecting the environment, support nature recovery, reduce our carbon emissions, reduce the risk of

² [Biodiversity deep dive: recommendations \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

³

https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/documents/s34696/Community%20and%20Corporate%20Plan%20-%20Version%203.0_Council.pdf

flooding, and promote the circular economy. The plan sets out three areas of for achievement:

- Council operations are net zero by 2030 and local communities are supported to reduce their own carbon footprint.
- Nature recovery improved environmental and river health.
- Sustainable local agriculture and farming practices with public services and residents consuming more local and seasonal produce.

Our Community and Corporate Plan – at a glance

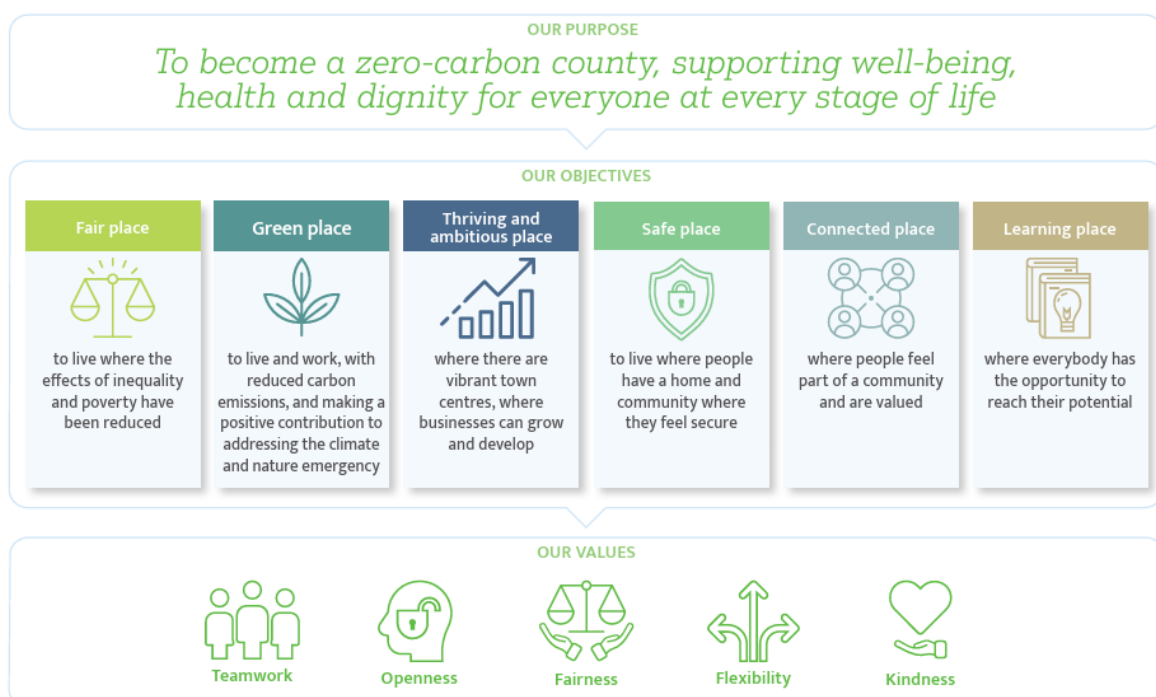


Figure 1 Community and Corporate Plan

The Community and Corporate Plan recognises that we are a partner in the Public Service Board, which is responsible for setting well-being objectives for the county of Gwent. The local authority's own **Well-being Objectives** are set by Council and form the backbone of the Community and Corporate Plan.

These significant changes in Wales, Gwent and Monmouthshire have triggered a need for a change in the governance structure around Climate and Nature. In 2024 this led to the declaration of a **Climate and Nature Emergency** with a revised approach based on four key pillars, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Climate & Nature Strategy planning

The Nature Recovery pillar includes 3 key and interconnected plans for delivery:

- ✦ Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2024-2028),
- ✦ Monmouthshire Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (2024), and
- ✦ Monmouthshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2024).

The **Local Nature Recovery Action Plan for Monmouthshire**⁴ is a key element to effective delivery of Nature Recovery by providing practical actions that meet the objectives of strategic plans, as well as promoting collaborative working with communities and other stakeholders to achieve common goals. Prepared by MCC in partnership with the Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP), the Monmouthshire Local NRAP will comprise four parts and will focus on habitats and species that are national priorities for conservation and are locally important. It takes the big ideas from the national and regional nature recovery plans and turns them into simple, local actions. These are things communities can do to help nature recover. A **Community Action plan**⁵ forms an important part of this and was prepared in response to the public consultation. Part 1 of the Strategy: **Our strategy for nature recovery in Monmouthshire** identifies actions and targets for promoting ecosystem resilience, raising awareness and other actions not related to any specific habitat or species. These will follow during the next reporting period.

The **Green Infrastructure Strategy**⁶ has been updated to reflect the statutory and guidance requirement of Planning Policy Wales edition 13. Setting out Monmouthshire's approach to the delivery of GI; it identifies a clear vision, aims, strategic objectives and associated principles to inform and contribute to a range of national, regional and local goals plans and

⁴ <https://www.monlife.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Local-NRAP-Part-1-v1.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.monlife.co.uk/outdoor/green-infrastructure/monmouthshire-local-nature-partnership/monmouthshire-local-nrap-action-plan/community-action-plan/>

⁶ <https://www.monlife.co.uk/outdoor/green-infrastructure/strategy-and-guidance/>

objectives. It forms a delivery mechanism for Nature Recovery, supports ways of addressing health and well-being outcomes, identifies solutions for tackling climate change, supports active travel, public rights of way and provides the framework for partnership working through a GI approach.

Governance and Delivery of the Section 6 duty is ultimately the responsibility of the Chief Executive of Monmouthshire County Council; however, it is acknowledged that compliance with the Section 6 duty is relevant to all parts of the Council including Elected Members and the Biodiversity Champion who sits on the Council's Cabinet. A major enabler of action is the Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery team who prepared the Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan, have taken a lead on reporting, review and updating the Forward Plan. However, as this report will show, the delivery of the biodiversity duty is far reaching with large scale delivery from services that may have in the past seemed to not fully be aware of the need to consider biodiversity in their decision making and operations. Some of the most significant delivery areas including Grounds & Cleansing, Development Management & Planning Policy and Highways including Flooding. Volunteers and partnership organisations are recognised as key enablers to biodiversity action including the Wye Valley National Landscape, key roles being directly employed by Monmouthshire County Council. Policy and governance teams support local community groups in grassroots project delivery e.g., community food growing and tree planting.

DELIVERY: OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

During the 2020-23 report preparation, a review of each of the Forward Plan objectives was undertaken which resulted in an updated Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan. The Objectives broadly align with the [Welsh Government Nature Recovery Action Plan](#); however, they also identify matters that are relevant to Monmouthshire such as the importance of partnership working.

Objective 1: Embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels	•Corporate Policy, Well-being Policy and Planning, Strategic Plans e.g. RLDP, Consents, Operational decisions,
Objective 2: Provide nature-based opportunities to raise awareness, support health and well-being and encourage action for nature	•Environmental Education, Health & Wellbeing activities in nature, providing interpretation and guidance, supporting local groups and citizens to act for nature.
Objective 3: Undertake land management for biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience	•Management of Council estate for nature recovery.
Objective 4: Influence land management to improve ecosystem resilience	•Supporting other landowners and stakeholders to make positive changes e.g. Regenerative Farming and Natural Flood Management.
Objective 5: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats	•Addressing drivers through project and procedure e.g. Delivering net benefit through Development Management, Invasive non-native species control, impacts of lighting.
Objective 6: Support landscape scale projects and partnerships to maximise delivery	•Collaboration, co-design and co-production through Catchment Partnerships, landscape partnerships, project partnerships.
Objective 7: Use improved evidence, understanding and monitoring to inform action	•Nature Networks, undertaking and encouraging others to undertake monitoring and biological recording.
Objective 8: Monitor the effectiveness of the plan and review	•Undertake statutory reporting and assess the need to update the plan.

The attached [Action Plan \(Appendix 1\)](#) details the progress towards Milestones and Measures and reviews each of our commitments with an up-to-date description of progress.

The table also identifies the current funding status of the action and where available the source(s) of that funding. The actions make up the 'living' element of the Section 6 plan. These will evolve as additional legislation, policy, funding come into place.

Key Achievements include adoption of the Nature Recovery and Green Infrastructure Action Plans, launch of the Nature Networks mapping portal, and delivery of capital projects through the Gwent Green Grid Partnership. Training initiatives, school engagement, and community awareness campaigns were implemented, including the incredibly impressive Biotapestry. Woodland management and National Forest accreditation has been progressed with securing of TWIG funding.

KEY CHALLENGES

Delivery of the Section 6 duty is challenging, particularly for service areas that do not have experience of previously considering this kind of legislation. There are three significant **key challenges** to discuss in this review

- 1 Incompatible Legislation: Event Licensing.** This has been a significant area of work during the 2024/5 period. In England and Wales, the primary legislation for events involving alcohol, entertainment (e.g., live music, dance, film), and late-night refreshment is the Licensing Act 2003. The four core licensing objectives are strictly limited to: The prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, The prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm.

Applications are made to the local council (licensing authority), which consults with "responsible authorities" such as the Police, Fire Authority, and Environmental Health. If an event attracts "relevant representations" (objections) related to these objectives, a hearing must be held. However, biodiversity loss – even where it could lead to a wildlife crime - is not considered to be a relevant representation.

Conflicts with the Section 6 duty arise because the standard licensing objectives do not explicitly cover environmental protection or biodiversity, which fall under separate legislation like the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Licensing legislation makes a presumption in favour of permission whereas the Conservation Regulations, for example, take a precautionary approach.

Recent examples have included festival sites in Monmouthshire where critically endangered curlew pairs are known to breed at the very time of year the event will take place. There are no mechanisms to seek ecological information for the events and no way of securing any avoidance, mitigation or compensation measures. Critically, there is no way that a licence cannot be granted on this basis.

Other than relying on the voluntary corporation of site owners, solutions to this problem are not forthcoming and go beyond the powers of Monmouthshire County Council and Welsh Government. Changes to the Westminster established legislation, clear guidance

on implementation of the two pieces of legislation, or case law are necessary to resolve this issue.

- 2 **Public Perception: Nature Isn't Neat** This Nature Isn't Neat is an approach that encourages us all to alter the way we manage grassland on our verges, open spaces and parks to benefit nature. Grasslands in green spaces are allowed to grow in the spring and summer to create meadow areas and space for nature.

It continues to be our adopted and established approach to grassland management in Monmouthshire County. It has been widely supported by residents and referenced as best practice across Wales and beyond. However, during the last reporting period there has been some concern raised by residents to our approach with concerns raised around associated, yet often unrelated issues such as “pernicious weeds” in the street scene, and other challenges such as highways management. Concerns relating to lack of flowers, grasslands looking “scruffy”, dog waste, rodents and wildfires are also sometimes raised. These complaints are not significant in number but require resources to address and alleviate concerns.

Substantial publicly available information has been prepared in relation to the benefits of this type of management including pollinators, water and carbon storage on the MonLife website⁷. In response to concerns we are preparing a new Nature Isn't Neat campaign for 2026 including refresher training for Grounds operatives (mowers), an information sharing session with elected members, and a wider public campaign during the summer months.

- 3 **Future Resource Implications:** Many of the activities that help Monmouthshire County Council to meet its Environment (Wales) Act Section 6 duties are either directly or indirectly funded by external grants, often competitive in nature. ENRaW, Rural Development Programme, Nature Networks, Local Places for Nature, Coastal Capacity, Active Travel, Shared Prosperity Fund and The Woodland Investment Grant have all enabled significant delivery and capacity building at Monmouthshire over the last 5 years, and more generally in the sector to support partnership delivery. However, by its nature, much of this funding is linked to Welsh Government's Programme for Government with much of the current funding comes to an end in March 2026 and most significantly during March 2027.

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill, currently progressing through the Senedd (Stage 3 as of December 2025), introduces legally binding biodiversity targets, strengthened environmental governance, and new statutory duties across the Welsh public sector. For local authorities, this translates into increased

⁷ <https://www.monlife.co.uk/outdoor/green-infrastructure/nature-isnt-neat/>

responsibilities, reporting duties, scrutiny, and operational obligations which will require additional capacity, skills, funding, and long-term strategic planning.

Through the Gwent Green Grid Nature Networks fund legacy, a Green Finance plan is being developed to identify opportunities to generate income from ecosystem services and nature-based solutions across the region, however it is not clear at this time that the markets will be significant enough to deliver a meaningful level of financial and nature benefits.

REVIEW: MEASURES AND MILESTONES

As the Forward Plan was refreshed in 2024, detailed review and update will not be undertaken during this reporting period. Review will instead include updated set of Measures and Milestones against which the next round of reporting will be set.

Milestone 2024-5	Recommendation for 2026-28
RLDP adopted with relevant policies and planning guidance in place	Retain as work is ongoing through Examination, Adoption and beyond
Asset Management Strategy adopted with relevant policies in place	Complete, Remove
Nature Recovery Action Plan Adopted	Retain as work is ongoing in relation to Habitat and Species considerations
Green Infrastructure Action Plan Adopted	Complete, Remove
Nature Networks mapping portal goes live	Complete, Remove
Access to Food Growing process in place	Complete, Remove
Pilot Tree Warden Scheme launched	Retain as launch is not complete
	NEW: Ecologist (Highways and Operations) in post
	NEW: New: Management Strategy implementation for Neddern Brook

Measures 2024-5	Recommendation for 2026-28	Target
Number of MCC officers completed Nature Recovery training via Thingi	Retain and add Elected Members to the target audience.	50 total
Number of MCC officers receiving bespoke operational training	Retain	10 per year
Number of young people / teachers / support staff engaged	Retain	TBC following funding confirmation for 2026-2029
Number of MCC sites with National Forest Accreditation	Retain	4 total
Service Level Agreement with SEWBRc	Retain	2 per year

Number of Natural Flood Management schemes supported by MCC	Retain	TBC following funding confirmation for 2026/7
Number of Town & Community Councils engaged	Retain	5 per year
	New: Number of members/ officers/ operatives trained with bespoke operational training	25 per year
	New: Area of Nature isn't Neat land maintained at 38Ha	38Ha
	New: Number of Sites Managed in accordance with a GI management plan	5
	New: Number of new Green Infrastructure Management Plans for MCC sites	3
	New: Number of county farms taking part in activity as exemplars for nature friendly, sustainable, and regenerative agriculture	TBC following funding confirmation for 2026/7

CONCLUSION

Monmouthshire County Council has strengthened its approach to nature recovery by embedding biodiversity considerations across services, improving land management, and working closely with partners and communities. Key achievements include the adoption of major strategic plans, enhanced training, and delivery of practical nature-based projects.

Significant challenges remain including legislative gaps, public perception issues, and uncertainty around future funding but the Council is committed to continued progress. The next reporting period will focus on maintaining momentum, improving evidence and monitoring, and supporting ecosystem resilience across the county as part of our wider Climate and Nature Emergency response.

APPENDIX 1 ACTION PLAN

APPENDIX 2 CASE STUDIES

APPENDIX 3 BIODIVERSITY & ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE, MONMOUTHSHIRE

Monmouthshire is a large and varied county, with the estuarine coast at the southern limits and the uplands of Bannau Brycheiniog to the north west. The landscape takes us from the wooded Wye Valley to our boundary with the eastern valleys of Gwent.

Monmouthshire has major biodiversity and ecosystem resources, many of which are internationally or nationally recognised. The Monmouthshire Unitary Authority area contains the following resources:

✦ The Severn Estuary European Marine Site (EMS)	✦ The Severn Estuary is designated as a Special Area for Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Ramsar Site (Wetland of international importance).
✦ Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	✦ There are seven other SACs in Monmouthshire: Cwm Clydach woodlands*, River Wye, River Usk, Sugar Loaf woodlands*, Usk Bat Sites*, Wye Valley woodlands and the Wye Valley (and Forest of Dean) bat sites.
✦ Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	✦ There are 68 SSSIs in Monmouthshire, 16 of which are within BBNP area. Most are woodland or grassland sites with others designated for their wetland or geological interest.
✦ National Nature Reserves	✦ Cwm Clydach*, Coed y Cerrig*, Fiddler's Elbow and Lady Park Wood.
✦ Local Nature Reserve	✦ Cleddon Bog
✦ Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)	✦ There are approximately 833 non-statutory SINC sites predominantly in relation to grassland and ancient and semi-natural woodland areas within the Monmouthshire planning area and eight SINCs within the BBNP part of the County.
✦ Priority habitat and protected species	Priority habitats and species are those recognised as being of principle importance for nature conservation in Wales listed on Section 42 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

*Sites within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park

The South East Wales Area Statement published by Natural Resources Wales in 2019 identified five landscape profiles in Monmouthshire which are useful to illustrate the differences across the county: Bannau Brycheiniog and Black Mountains, South Wales Valleys, Central Monmouthshire, Wye Valley and Wentwood, and the Gwent Levels (see map below).

The landscape profiles primarily share the same natural habitats but with clear differences which give them their distinctive character.



Landscape Profile Areas in Monmouthshire

Central Monmouthshire is noted for its undulating lowlands comprising pasture and arable farmland with isolated pockets of woodland. It is a valuable farming area with agriculturally improved pasture and arable fields. Hedgerows provide important links between small, isolated, ancient woodlands, often on hilltops and steep valley sides where farming is difficult. Parcels of unimproved grassland remain and considered in the context of massive historical decline are of significant ecological importance.

Wye Valley and Wentwood is predominantly a wooded and riverine landscape. The steep sides of the Wye Valley are clothed in extensive blocks of internationally important woodlands, designated as the Wye Valley Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Wye Valley is home to internationally important bat species including Greater Horseshoe Bats and Lesser Horseshoe Bats with many of their roosts included in the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites SAC. Parts of the Wye Valley are known to be used by at least 15 species of bats including the rare Barbastelle Bat and Bechstein's Bat. The area is also important for species such as dormouse, nightjar, and woodland invertebrates.

In the south, the unique Gwent Levels form an extensive coastal habitat along the Severn Estuary comprising reclaimed agricultural land drained by a network of ditches known as reens. The reens support a particularly diverse community of insects and other invertebrates (for example water beetles) and are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Following a successful reintroduction program at Magor Marsh SSSI in 2012, water voles have spread across the Gwent Levels with the furthest record 16km from the original release site.

Outside of the Monmouthshire Planning and Nature Recovery Action Plan area but within the administrative area of the MCC Unitary Authority, are areas of the Bannau Brycheiniog and Black Mountains and South Wales Valleys (Eastern Valleys) landscapes. The Bannau Brycheiniog landscape profile includes the Vale of Ewyas and surrounding upland in the Black Mountains, and the distinctive peaks of the Skirrid and Sugar Loaf framing the Usk Valley at Abergavenny. With exposed upland moorland with extensive views, this is a landscape noted for tranquillity, dark skies, and limited development. Conifer and broad-leafed woodland are present. Pastures are often enclosed by thick hedgerows, often with narrow lanes, scattered small settlements are in the valleys with prehistoric archaeology and Medieval sites including Llanthony Priory and historic parkland.

The Eastern Valleys includes the Bloreng mountain and eastern slopes of Mynydd Garn-wen, some areas are included in the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site. Common land is a large and important component of the Eastern Valleys and there are extensive areas of beech woodland. Cave systems across the area are important to internationally important bat roosts protected by the Usk Valley Bat Sites SAC. The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal on the National Park border is a perfect example of how this once industrial landscape can provide for wildlife today.

The two major rivers in Monmouthshire are the River Usk and River Wye. Both are designated as Special Areas of Conservation and together with their tributaries provide important wildlife corridors and migratory routes for key species such as otters, shad and white clawed crayfish. Another important freshwater habitat in Monmouthshire is the Llandegfedd Reservoir, designated as a SSSI for supporting overwintering wildfowl.

Despite having a wealth of protected and priority species, Monmouthshire's ecosystems are currently facing significant challenges. Grassland sites are at risk from poor management, air pollution and development pressures. The Wye Valley is our most ecologically rich area, but quality of the woodland is under threat from lack of management and the spread of ash dieback and invasive species. A considerable proportion of reens and ditches on the Gwent Levels are degraded and at risk from unsuitable development. Freshwater habitats are under threat from water abstraction, pollution, and siltation. Monmouthshire, like the rest of the world, is facing a Nature Emergency.

Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act says that the Welsh Ministers will publish, review and revise lists of living organisms and types of habitats in Wales, which they consider are of key significance to sustain and improve biodiversity in relation to Wales. An updated list is expected in 2024 however, in its absence, the list compiled in response to section 42 of the NERC Act 2006 is referenced.

An audit of the Section 7 species and habitats that occur in Monmouthshire undertaken in 2022 are included in the Nature Recovery Action Plan that will be published for consultation alongside this document. These are our 'Priority' habitats & species for nature recovery in Monmouthshire. Additional habitats and or species may be identified as local priorities continue to be developed through the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan.

The Greater Gwent State of Nature was published in 2021 and used existing data to analyse the status and trends of species within the Greater Gwent area. The report analysed individual species and groups of species representing over 500 individual species, presented as 100 different stories of these species and species groups. Of all the species and species groups analysed, 34% of species showed a decline in their numbers or are predicted to continue to decline. Only 12% showed stable populations. Twenty-one percent showed a welcome increase in their numbers, but the remaining 21% did not have enough data to describe the population trends.