

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Place Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 29th January 2026

Report Item 8: Scrutiny of Bio-diversity and Resilience ~ Section 6 Report to Welsh Government

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the report, highlighting the following important issues for the Cabinet Member's consideration:

- Concerns were raised about unresolved planning applications related to soil imports and water quality sampling not meeting NRW requirements, the council's process for addressing such issues being queried, especially when adopting sites with ongoing problems. The Committee requested a follow-up from officers on these planning concerns and welcomed further discussion to resolve ongoing issues.
- Members asked about net biodiversity gains in planning applications and difficulty of identifying the biodiversity officer for planning.
- Issues were raised where sites start work, but become overgrown, affecting biodiversity, and questioned how these are monitored and managed.
- Cases were highlighted where green infrastructure plans (e.g., trees, hedges) are not implemented, and subsequent applications conflict with original biodiversity commitments, asking how these are enforced and monitored.
- Members welcomed the reference to the Nedern Brook and suggested inviting relevant people to discuss it at the Severnside Area Forum.
- Members expressed support for "nature isn't neat" but raised concerns about neglected weeds on roads and pavements, highlighting resident complaints about maintenance and potential damage to infrastructure.
- It was suggested to create walkways through areas managed under the "nature isn't neat" scheme, proposing non-linear paths wide enough for two people, and the use of information boards to enhance public experience and understanding.
- Members acknowledged the challenge of changing public perceptions about "nature isn't neat" and the need for better communication and engagement on the balance between biodiversity and community expectations. They recommended education and training for both Members and residents on eco-friendly practices.

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- Members emphasised the need to strive for regenerative farming, highlighting the shift to monoculture and the environmental impact of large poultry units, and called for more engagement with farmers on sustainable practices.
- It was noted that there is a lack of large country parks in Monmouthshire compared to urban authorities and suggested more free-access parkland for lower-income residents.
- Members welcomed seeing otters return to Abergavenny, expressing concern about river health and the sustainability of wildlife populations.
- It was suggested more could be done to engage young people in environmental and biological studies, using local sites like the old cemetery in Abergavenny as educational resources under the Welsh curriculum.
- Members commented on the richness of local grassland habitats, mentioning a personal flower study identifying about 30 species in a small area, and encouraged making more of such sites for education.
- Members praised the Mill Common Project, expressing pride in the community's involvement, the planting of trees, and the educational value, and called for greater recognition of these efforts.
- There were some concerns that current engagement activities for biodiversity tend to attract those already supportive, questioning how to reach disengaged or unaware residents and broaden community engagement.
- Members asked about specific plans and indicators to measure whether communication and outreach efforts are increasing understanding and participation across a wider cross-section of residents, and how to assess shifts in attitudes and behaviours. It was suggested that councillors may need training to better address residents' concerns about biodiversity and resilience.
- Members requested more information about the tree warden scheme pilot project and its progress, expressing interest in seeing it expanded across Monmouthshire.
- Members questioned whether there will be new roles (ecologist roles) and queried the cost savings from internal hires versus consultants.
- Members welcomed the use of new machinery for the Neddern Brook, seeking clarity on operational impacts and community engagement.

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- Members queried if there was ongoing work with farmers to dig trenches and make ponds to help prevent downstream flooding, referencing news reports about such initiatives.
- Local flooding issues were raised, specifically in Mathern Village, mentioning regular flooding under a bridge and near Mountain Brook Lodge, and concerns about sewage seepage into the brook due to a nearby pumping station.
- Concerns were voiced about NRW's (Natural Resources Wales) enforcement approach, stating that smaller pollution incidents are not being monitored or enforced, and highlighted issues with unlicensed soil imports in the area.
- Phosphate and poultry farming issues were raised, in terms of the RLDP (Replacement Local Development Plan) phosphate delay, members requesting an update on when the Planning Inspectorate would review it and how the timetable might be affected.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions. The Committee requested that officers consider the points raised by the Place Scrutiny Committee and make any amendments to the report as appropriate. The feedback would be provided to the Cabinet Member to take into account prior to approving the report for submission to Welsh Government.