

APPENDIX 2: CASE STUDIES

2.1 BIOTAPESTRY: CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT BRINGING BIODIVERSITY AWARENESS TO COMMUNITIES

The Biotapestry is an innovative engagement initiative delivered through the Gwent Green Grid Partnership (GGGP). Its purpose is to inspire communities, schools, and interest groups by raising awareness of biodiversity, climate resilience, and green skills through interactive and creative experiences.

The project set out with a clear ambition: to increase understanding of climate and nature across the five counties of Gwent. Biotapestry has been brought to life through a series of engaging events and collaborations. As well as sessions in libraries across the county, it connected with local groups such as Maindiff Court Health & Wellbeing workshop, Wyesham WI, and Usk Embroiders. It also featured during Alfred Russel Wallace Day in Usk, weaving together heritage and biodiversity themes to spark interest and participation.

Funding for Biotapestry has come through the Shared Prosperity Fund and Heritage Lottery Nature Networks, ensuring its integration within GGGP's broader programme of work. One of the key lessons learned is that creative, visual tools like Biotapestry are highly effective for community engagement and raising awareness. Linking biodiversity projects with cultural and heritage events, has proven to enhance participation and impact. Above all, ongoing collaboration with local groups and schools remains essential for sustaining engagement and building momentum for climate and nature action.

OBJECTIVES MET:

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

Biotapestry delivers interactive experiences for communities and schools, raises awareness of biodiversity and climate resilience, and supports health and wellbeing through creative engagement and workshops.

Objective 6: Support landscape scale projects and partnerships to maximise delivery.

The initiative is part of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership (GGGP), which operates at a regional scale and involves collaboration with multiple local groups, schools, and heritage events.



2.2 HEALTHY RIVERS PROJECT: RESTORING RIVER GAVENNY AND ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

The Healthy Rivers Project, part of the Nature Networks Programme under the Gwent Green Grid Partnership, is working to restore the River Gavenny in Monmouthshire while strengthening biodiversity and community involvement. This initiative blends practical conservation with education and citizen science, aiming to build resilience against climate and nature emergencies. Its purpose is clear: improve river ecosystems and water quality, engage local communities in nature-based activities.

Community engagements events included an otter talk organised in partnership with Abergavenny Civic Society talk attended by 40 people and a River Health Day. Volunteers removed 100 Himalayan balsam stalks, collected 4 kilograms of litter, tested water quality, insect safaris, kick sampling, microplastics and water testing, and litter picks. A family engagement day included river dipping, a nature trail, games and story telling.

The impact has been tangible. More than 120 people have taken part in river health activities, contributing to the removal of invasive species, better litter management, and ongoing water quality monitoring. There is an ongoing commitment from an active interest group to removing litter promptly. Educational efforts have deepened understanding of river ecology and climate resilience, while partnerships with Groundwork Wales and local interest groups have strengthened regional nature recovery work.

Funding for the project comes from the Heritage Lottery Fund's Nature Networks Programme, which allocated £1 million regionally to support 200 sessions across Gwent. Among the lessons learned is the power of combining citizen science with hands-on conservation to foster community ownership. Targeted engagement—such as talks and family days—has proven effective in boosting participation and awareness, and collaboration with local organizations remains essential for long-term success.

OBJECTIVES MET:

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

The project actively engages communities through talks, family days, river dipping, insect safaris, and citizen science activities like water testing and litter picks. These initiatives raise awareness, promote well-being, and encourage hands-on action for nature.

Objective 3: Undertake land management for biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience

Volunteers removed invasive Himalayan balsam and managed litter, which directly supports biodiversity and strengthens river ecosystem resilience.

Objective 5: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

The removal of invasive species and litter management addresses significant pressures on river habitats and native species.

Objective 6: Support landscape scale projects and partnerships to maximise delivery

The project is part of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership and collaborates with Groundwork Wales and local interest groups, contributing to regional nature recovery efforts.

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

Citizen science activities such as water quality testing, kick sampling, and microplastics monitoring provide valuable data to inform ongoing conservation actions.



2.3 MILL COMMON RESTORATION PROJECT: REVIVING HERITAGE, RESTORING NATURE, INSPIRING COMMUNITY.



Mill Common, located in Magor and Undy in Monmouthshire, is a historic woodland that serves as a vital green corridor for the local communities. Despite its ecological and social significance, the site had been facing serious challenges in recent years. The spread of ash dieback disease posed a threat to tree safety and biodiversity, while overcrowded veteran trees limited sunlight

penetration, affecting the health of ground flora. In addition, degraded paths and steps reduced accessibility, and the loss of historic viewpoints combined with heavy footfall put veteran trees at risk.

To address these issues, Monmouthshire County Council, supported by the Woodland Investment Grant through the National Heritage Lottery Fund on behalf of the Welsh Government, launched the Mill Common Restoration Project. The project set out with clear objectives: to restore ecological health through woodland management and replanting, improve accessibility for walkers and school routes, enhance community engagement, and protect veteran trees and ground flora through sensitive management techniques.

The restoration began with extensive tree management. Diseased ash trees were removed, and dense stands were thinned to allow more sunlight to reach the woodland floor. Plans were made to replant with a diverse mix of native broadleaf species, ensuring long-term resilience. Dead hedging was introduced around veteran trees to prevent soil compaction and create wildlife refuges. Alongside ecological work, infrastructure improvements were prioritized. Main pathways and steps were resurfaced to provide safer access, benches and signage were installed, and a community-designed sculpture trail was planned. Historic viewpoints overlooking the Gwent Levels and Severn Estuary were also restored.

Community engagement played a central role throughout the project. Public consultations were carried out through surveys and in-person sessions, and events such as guided walks, litter picks, and festive workshops helped foster local involvement. A Community Engagement Officer was recruited to lead these efforts and launch volunteering opportunities.



By winter 2024 through spring 2025, extensive felling had been completed, opening up the woodland to sunlight and encouraging regrowth and biodiversity—bees and butterflies were already being observed. In autumn 2025, additional tree works were carried out at Dancing Hill, and dead hedging was implemented. The community responded positively, with strong public support and concerns about dog access addressed by keeping the site dog-friendly. Social benefits were evident as participation in events grew, fostering local pride and stewardship.

Looking ahead, the project plans to begin replanting with native species in autumn and winter, complete pathway resurfacing, and expand volunteer programs. The woodland will be part of the National Forest for Wales scheme. Monitoring and adaptive management will ensure the woodland's long-term ecological resilience. Key lessons learned include the importance of transparent communication and consultation in building trust, the value of combining ecological restoration with cultural and recreational enhancements, and the need for sensitive management of veteran trees and ground flora to protect biodiversity.

OBJECTIVES MET

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

Community engagement was a core component, with public consultations, guided walks, litter picks, and festive workshops. These activities not only raised awareness but also promoted well-being and encouraged local stewardship of nature.

Objective 3: Undertake land management for biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience

The project undertook proactive woodland management, including felling diseased trees, thinning overcrowded stands, and implementing dead hedging to protect veteran trees and create wildlife refuges. These measures enhance biodiversity and strengthen ecosystem resilience.

Objective 4: Influence land management to improve ecosystem resilience

By positioning Mill Common as a flagship site for the National Forest for Wales, the project sets an example for best practice in woodland restoration and sensitive management, influencing wider land management approaches in the region.

Objective 5: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

The removal of ash trees affected by dieback directly addresses a major pressure on woodland ecosystems. Thinning and replanting with native species further mitigate habitat degradation and promote species recovery.

Objective 6: Support landscape scale projects and partnerships to maximise delivery

The project will serve as a flagship site within the National Forest for Wales initiative, contributing to a nationwide effort to create a connected network of woodlands that are managed for biodiversity and designed to provide accessible green spaces for communities.

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

Monitoring is embedded in the project's future plans, with adaptive management strategies to ensure long-term ecological resilience. Observations of biodiversity recovery (e.g., bees and butterflies) already inform ongoing actions.

2.4 MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL NRAP: DRIVING NATURE RECOVERY ACROSS MONMOUTHSHIRE

The Local NRAP is a strategic guide for reversing biodiversity decline and building ecosystem resilience in Monmouthshire. It replaces the 2005 Local Biodiversity Action Plan and aligns with national and regional plans such as the NRAP for Wales and Greater Gwent NRAP. The document explains why nature recovery is critical, outlines local biodiversity and ecosystem services, and addresses the nature emergency and its drivers (e.g., climate change, pollution, invasive species). It sets out a collaborative delivery framework through the Local Nature Partnership, identifies priority habitats and species, and includes a General Action Plan focused on policy integration, education, evidence gathering, and promoting ecosystem resilience. The plan is designed as a living document with annual reviews and signposts to partner action plans for specific habitats and species.

The NRAP was aligned with MCC's Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy alongside the Green Infrastructure Strategy, which together form four pillars: Council Emissions, Nature Recovery, Rivers and Ocean, and Communities and Climate. Both the NRAP and Green Infrastructure Strategy were approved by MCC Cabinet in July 2025 and officially launched during Wales Nature Week to raise awareness and encourage participation

Feedback from Local Nature Partnership members and public consultation was incorporated into the final strategy. Public engagement was also important with a public consultation launched at Usk Show September 2024 and promoted online and in libraries.

OBJECTIVES MET

Objective 1: Embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels

The NRAP integrates biodiversity into MCC's Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy, ensuring nature recovery principles are embedded in council policies and planning frameworks. Actions include influencing partner plans and policies to adopt nature-positive approaches.



Objective 4: Influence land management to improve ecosystem resilience

Through partnerships and advocacy, the NRAP encourages nature-based solutions and sustainable land management approaches that strengthen ecosystem resilience.

Objective 5: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

The plan identifies major drivers of biodiversity loss, including climate change, pollution, and invasive species. Future development of the Local NRAP will include action plans to support habitat restoration and species recovery

Objective 6: Support landscape-scale projects and partnerships to maximise delivery

Delivery principles emphasize collaboration between Local Nature Partnership members and neighbouring partnerships to achieve landscape-scale impact.

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

The plan provides an evidence base to support nature recovery and aims to increase understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

2.5 PLANNING ADVICE: EMBEDDING BIODIVERSITY AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Monmouthshire County Council's Green Infrastructure (GI) team plays a critical role in shaping sustainable development by providing planning advice that ensures biodiversity and GI principles are integrated into development proposals and the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP). This work supports MCC's statutory duties and strategic objectives under the Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy.

The team aims to influence the RLDP so that nature recovery and GI principles are embedded into future planning policy, while also providing timely advice on development proposals to meet the Section 6 Biodiversity Duty. These efforts contribute to MCC's broader objectives of creating a Green Place and a Connected Place.

The team handled a substantial volume of consultations and responses over the past two years. In 2024, 556 formal consultations were received, and 654 formal responses were issued. This trend continued in 2025, with 624 consultations and 641 responses processed. These figures highlight the ongoing demand for ecological and GI planning advice and reinforce the importance of maintaining adequate resources to meet statutory obligations and service targets.

In addition to planning applications, the biodiversity team provided advice to Active Travel schemes, Highways projects, Ordinary Water Consents and SAB applications. Significant time was also dedicated to providing advice on the Replacement Local Development Plan including:

- Compiling nature recovery based policies and contributing nature recovery elements to strategic policies
- Providing appropriate advice on responding to representations, redacting sensitive information, and liaising with consultants on the HRA
- Procuring and workshopping a Recreation Mitigation Strategy for the Severn Estuary SPA.

Resource constraints are a particular challenge, as limited officer time (1.5 FTE) affects the ability to meet 21-day response targets. Balancing RLDP policy development with statutory consultations and national planning requirements also presents competing priorities. Dedicated resources are essential to maintain statutory compliance and deliver strategic objectives.

OBJECTIVES MET:

Objective 1: Embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels

The service ensures biodiversity and Green Infrastructure principles are integrated into development proposals and the RLDP, influencing planning policy and statutory consultations.

Objective 4: Influence land management to improve ecosystem resilience

By shaping RLDP policies and providing advice on Active Travel, Highways, and water-related projects, the service indirectly influences land management practices to support ecosystem resilience.

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

Activities such as contributing to Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA), responding to representations, and developing the Recreation Mitigation Strategy demonstrate evidence-based planning and monitoring.

