

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **9th December 2020**

Report Subject: **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022) 2019/20 annual report**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanna Wilkins, Executive Member Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Clive Rogers, Head of Community Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
16/09/20	Oct 2019	24.11.20			19.10.20	09.12.20		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on how the Council is meeting its statutory duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. As the members will be aware the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan was passed by Full Council in October 2019.
- 1.2 The biodiversity and ecosystem resilience duty under Section 6 of the Act requires that “a public authority must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.”¹

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In order to comply with the Environment (Wales) Act The Council has produced a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (Appendix 1). This is attached for information as a reminder.
- 2.2 This report gives the overview of annual progress against the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022) for 2019/20.
- 2.3 To maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council by 2022 aims to:
- Reduce overall resource use; reuse where possible and recycle everything recyclable.
 - Increase biodiversity and ecosystems understanding in the council staff and councillors through appropriate channels including Service

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/3/section/6/enacted>

Area Environment Champions and the Councillor Nature Champion role.

- Embody the challenge of integrating the Active Travel, Well-being of Future Generations, Planning and Environment Acts to encourage sustainability in the ways we live, work and play.
- Promote responsible use of natural resources in Blaenau Gwent by working in partnership with others to initiate positive action and behaviour change.
- Maintain and enhance biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience on council owned land, particularly with regard to priority species and habitats.
- Support the Blaenau Gwent & Torfaen Local Nature Partnership.

2.4 The three delivery mechanisms are Service Area Action Plans; Environment Champions network and advice from the Natural Environment team.

2.5 Progress in 2019/20 by Service Area against the delivery mechanisms and activity plan for 2020/21 is shown in Appendix 2.

2.6 There have been four quarterly Environment Champions meetings, with ten champions in the network representing all Service Areas and Councillors. Meetings were held across council offices and at Parc Bryn Bach. Active travel opportunities noted. Topics included resource use and urban wildlife.

2.7 From the review of progress, the Forward Plan (2019-22) has not been changed. Minor amendments have been made to accurately reflect the Service Area structure, recognising that Organisational Development sits within Commercial Services.

2.8 The annual report and Forward Plan do not cover statutory duties included in the Rights of Way, Planning or Active Travel Acts but is connected to these through the Welsh government's commitment to sustainable development as the best way to improve the well-being of Wales now and for future generations.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 The Community Services Scrutiny Committee supported Option 2 at its meeting on 19th October 2020.

3.2 Options Appraisal

- **Option 1:** Members to not approve the annual report 2019/20 or the activity plan for 2020/21.
- **Option 2: Preferred option** Members to approve the annual report and activity recommended this year to meet the Section 6 Duty.

3.3 To follow the duty public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning,

including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day to day activities².

3.4 *Approval of the annual report*

Goes beyond the minimum to show a proactive approach to meeting the duty; embeds the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into business planning and enables an efficient mechanism for reporting and meeting the requirement to report to Welsh Government.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 **Corporate Plan Priority:**

Continued efforts to meet the aims of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022) primarily contributes to meeting the following priority:

4.2 Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities

- To improve the access to and quality of open spaces for the benefit of our communities, businesses and visitors. Welsh Government funding – Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing (ENRAW) has provided significant levels of funding to support enhancements in this area of work helping to fund improvements at Local nature reserves – Beaufort Ponds and Woodlands, Parc Nanty Waun, Trevor Rowson, Sirhowy Woodlands, Granny’s Wood by working in partnership with local community groups.

4.3

Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

Continued efforts to meet the aims of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022) meets all of the well-being plan objectives:

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- To look after and protect the environment
- To forge new pathways to prosperity
- To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play

4.4

Benefits provided by resilient ecosystems across the well-being goals are shown in appendix 7.2 of the Forward Plan (Appendix 1).

4.5

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

4.6

Continued efforts to meet the aims of the Forward Plan directly contributes to actions needed for the ‘resilient Wales’ goal:

² <https://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/natural-resources-management/environment-act/guidance-for-section-6/?lang=en>

4.7 “A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change)”

By implementing the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 the Local Authority will maximise its contributions to the Well-being Goals.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impact on Budget*

There has been a cost neutral impact on budgets from implementing the Forward Plan. Officer time was funded through existing revenue budgets. Additional external revenue and capital funding to deliver further biodiversity and ecosystem resilience related schemes of work were secured and delivered as follows:

Source – Project	Forward Plan Aims met	Amount	Schemes of Work
ENRaW* - Resilient Greater Gwent	Council owned land Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working Working in partnership	£42,000	Invasive Non Native Species work Support for Go Wild! Event Urban biodiversity
ENRaW* - LNP Cymru	Support the LNP Council owned land Working in partnership	£7,500	Hedgerow creation at Cwmtillery Lakes Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Pond excavation at Cwmcelyn Pond LNR Hedgerow Management at Beaufort Hills Ponds & Woodlands LNR
ENRaW* - Gwent Green Grid	Council owned land Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working Working in partnership	£43,629	Woodland management Access improvements
Welsh Government - Active Travel	Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working Working in partnership	£406,000	Tarmac path in Central Valley LNR
Planning - Biodiversity S106 payments	Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working	£0	N/A

Actions in 2020/21 will have a cost neutral impact on budgets. Officer time will be funded through existing revenue budgets. Additional external revenue and capital funding to deliver further biodiversity and ecosystem resilience related schemes of work have been secured as follows:

Source	Aims to be met	Amount	Schemes of Work
ENRaW* - Resilient Greater Gwent	Council owned land Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working Working in partnership	<£77,000	Invasive Non Native Species work BGCBC owned Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) surveys x5 (GWT and Buglife) Urban biodiversity Action across LNRs
ENRaW* - LNP Cymru	Support the LNP Council owned land Working in partnership	£61,000	Priority habitat work: hedgerows, meadows Verge & grass management
Welsh Government - Active Travel	Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working Working in partnership	£TBC	TBC
Planning - Biodiversity S106 payments	Embody the challenge of integrating legislation and five ways of working	£0	N/A

*ENRaW – Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being grant from Welsh Government

5.2 *Risk*

The main risk is that failure to meet the aims of the plan will result in the Authority failing to meet its statutory duty and miss out on funding opportunities for delivery of the council corporate objectives and Blaenau Gwent well-being plan.

5.3 *Legal*

The legal implications of failing to meet the Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 are currently unknown.

5.4 *Human Resources*

The ways of working that will develop by working towards the aims of the Plan will contribute to staff health and well-being. For example, by raising awareness of the nearest Local Nature Reserves to council buildings.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Is gathered quarterly through business plan reporting.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Biodiversity underpins the health and resilience of all of our ecosystems. In turn, these ecosystems support all life on Earth. This means that taking positive action for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience in Blaenau Gwent will enhance the natural resources the public utilise such as clean water, air and food production including pollination services. The natural environment is also a vital resource to enhance mental and physical health and well-being.

6.3 **Involvement** (*consultation, engagement, participation*)

Activities that meet the aims of the Plan are undertaken between the Natural Environment team and other service areas.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term** (*forward planning*)

The Plan covers the 2019-22 period and will be revised and renewed in line with up to date policy, legislation and evidence. Meeting the duty enables support for long term management of Local Nature Reserves.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

Contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience will help to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide positive opportunities to maintain and build mental and physical health and well-being.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The work on the Environment Act duty fits with the Blaenau Gwent well-being plan and ways of working could be shared with members of the Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board. Support for the Blaenau Gwent & Torfaen Local Nature Partnership will assist with a strategic approach to environmental and ecological management in both boroughs.

6.7 **Integration** (*across service areas*)

Access to a healthy natural environment has many benefits to all service areas. Integration will be driven by Environment Champions.

6.8 **Equalities Impact Assessment**

A brief Equality Impact Assessment was submitted with the Forward Plan and has not needed to be updated as the Plan has not changed.

All service area business plan objectives and actions will take into account each of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. They are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Environment Champions network will be open to all and will strive to be representative of employees across the council.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1 The identified delivery mechanisms will continue to be monitored quarterly by the Governance and Natural Environment teams in the 2020/21 Financial Year.
- 7.2 A report will be submitted to the Community Services Scrutiny committee in the first quarter of the 2021/22 Financial Year summarising progress made, action planned for 2021/22 and any updates on the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan 2019-2022.
- 7.3 The Forward Plan should be revised and approved by March 2022 for the next agreed period.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022)*
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/3/contents/enacted>
- <https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160321-frequently-asked-questions-en.pdf>
- <https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/150512-biodiversity-and-resilience-of-ecosystems-duty-en.pdf>
- <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/Nature%20and%20mental%20health%20infographic.pdf>
- <https://www.wcva.org.uk/about-us/news/2017/04/doing-your-bit-for-a-resilient-wales>

Glossary

Biodiversity - means 'biological diversity' which refers to all the variety of life on Earth (plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms) as well as to the communities that they form and the habitats in which they live.

Ecosystem - dynamic network of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit.

Ecosystem Resilience - is the ability of an ecosystem to maintain its normal patterns of nutrient cycling and biomass production after being subjected to damage caused by an ecological disturbance, for example extreme weather events caused by climate change, outbreak of disease or human exploitation.