

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **26th September, 2024**

Report Subject: **Declaring Nature Emergency and Adopting Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (LNRAP) & Pollinator Policy**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor H. Cunningham – Cabinet Member Place & Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Nadine Morgan, Ecologist**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
25 June 2024	27th June 2024	22nd July 2024			Place 10 th September 2024		26 th September 2024	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1.1. To declare a Nature Emergency within BGCBC.
- 1.1.2. To tackle the Nature Emergency by adopting the:
 - Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)
 - Pollinator Policy

2. Scope and Background

2.1. Background-Nature Emergency:

- 2.1.1. A nature emergency is a situation where urgent action is required to reduce or halt the loss of biodiversity and will be a step in protecting biodiversity in the county.
- 2.1.2. Wales declared a Nature Emergency in June 2021 and 11 of 22 Council's across Wales have declared a Nature Emergency.

2.2. Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (LNRAP):

- 2.2.1. LNRAPs identify local priorities for the conservation of species and habitats and have been developed throughout Britain by partnerships of local stakeholders. Each LNRAP reflects the priorities of the Wales NRAP and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) National Plan, covering priority habitats and species that are at risk or whose status are

uncertain, as well as more widespread habitats and species of local concern. There are 6 objectives within the LNRAP:

- Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels;
- Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management;
- Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation;
- Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats;
- Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring;
- Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.

2.3. Background- Pollinator Policy:

2.3.1. The Pollinator Policy has been produced to reflect current National priorities and legislation. The policy will promote the creation of pollinator friendly habitats on land owned by BGCBC. The policy outlines the following actions:

- Reducing the number of cuts to grassed areas – This will allow a longer growing period, enabling plants to set seeds and encourage greater diversity of plant species
- Introduce perennial native wildflower mix to formal beds and where appropriate to other urban area green spaces. Planting schemes in all other public areas will directly reflect the policy. *
- On A & B highways routes, where safe to do so, change the time of verge cuts and reduce to 2 cuts per year. Identify opportunities for the development of meadow areas within amenity and open spaces.
- Continually review our grass cutting and planting practices ensuring compliance with emerging legislation and best practice.
- Continue to develop more habitats for solitary bees e.g. bee bank, grasses, tree holes and bug hotels.
- Reduction in herbicide and pesticide usage: continue to monitor any herbicide usage and actively reduce the amount applied annually. Ensure where usage is required, that techniques etc implemented are kept up to date with best practice.
- Encourage local community groups to avoid using herbicides and pesticides and if required use organic wildlife friendly alternatives or natural pest control
- Utilise the appropriate signage, such as the Nature Isn't Neat interpretation boards, to raise awareness of the changes in practice and the underlying reasons.

- Monitor the effectiveness of the changing practices. We will visit sites that have been subject to the changes to see if pollinator supporting habitats have been created and sustained.
- Apply to the [Bee Friendly Caru Gwenyn](#) scheme which will accredit Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as a Pollinator Friendly council.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1. To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CLT/Committees/Other groups)

3.1.1. It is recommended that that Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council:

1. Declare a Nature Emergency
2. Approve the adoption of the LNRAP,
3. Approve the adoption of the Pollinator Policy

3.1.2. The following statement emerged as the preference for declaration of a Nature Emergency during Members workshops.

“Blaenau Gwent CBC has declared a Nature Emergency to recognise urgent action to be taken to halt the loss of biodiversity and is committed to maintaining, protecting and enhancing spaces to create resilient ecosystems that contribute to our requirements in our Net Zero carbon goal.”

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

4.1.1. The Corporate Plan (2022-2027) is the council’s roadmap setting out our visions, values and priorities. One of the Council’s priorities is a to ‘Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.

4.1.2. Councils are under a legal duty via the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 6 to have to seek to ‘**maintain and enhance**’ biodiversity and seek to ‘**promote the resilience of ecosystems**’ in exercising its functions.

4.1.3. The Gwent Public Services Board (PSB) brings together public bodies to work to improve economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being across Gwent. The PSB is responsible for overseeing the development of a regional Well-being Plan, a long-term vision for the area, under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

- 4.1.4. Gwent PSB has eight statutory member organisations responsible for carrying out their well-being duties under the Act, including Blaenau Gwent CBC and the other four Gwent Local Authorities. Within the Gwent PSB's Wellbeing Plan 2023-2028, objectives include:
- 4.1.5. "...climate ready-Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected..."
- 4.1.6. One of the Steps identified to help achieve this is to "Take action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment".
- 4.1.7. The Gwent Well-being Plan was subject to a public consultation period during 2022-23, including a combination of regional and local, public and stakeholder engagement exercises. An emphasis on the environment emerged clearly from the consultation process, with people highlighting the impact of climate change and the need to protect and restore our environment by encouraging more green spaces, renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions.
- 4.1.8. Within the Wellbeing Plan 2023-2028 it acknowledges the Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan, which was produced as part of the Resilient Greater Gwent Project led by BGCBC, as the strategic framework aiming to halt and reverse negative biodiversity trends. With the Local Nature Recovery Action Plans being the focus more on local action to promote biodiversity in each Local Nature Partnership area found within Gwent.
- 4.1.9. There are now Local Delivery Groups (LDG) of the Gwent PSB in each of the five Gwent local authority areas. The Blaenau Gwent LDG, known as the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership, has identified Climate & Nature and Food (including food resilience & local growing) as key areas of focus for local well-being delivery based on the Well-being Plan consultation response and its own, more recent, stakeholder engagement.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1. *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

- 5.1.1. The actions that are described within the LNRAP and Pollinator Policy are proposed to be delivered under existing budgets.
- 5.1.2. The adoption of these policies will further serve as a further mechanism to lever in extra external funding to enhance the objectives further.

5.1.3. Where actions to change working practice are required it is proposed that these be implemented in a budget neutral manner.

5.2. *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

5.2.1. Failure to adopt these policies will contribute to a continuing decline in biodiversity and undermine the council's efforts to comply with the Environment Act, Section 6 Biodiversity Duty, which requires us to protect and enhance biodiversity.

5.3. *Legal*

5.3.1. By working towards these goals we aim that BGCBC becomes an Ecologically Positive Council – no net loss to biodiversity in the Blaenau Gwent area; delivering on our statutory duty as a local authority to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote resilience of ecosystems as outlined in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

5.3.2. A public authority, in complying with the Section 6 Duty, must have regard to :

- The Section 7 list of habitats and species of principle importance for Wales
- The State of Nature Report published by Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
- Any area statement which it covers all or part of the area in which the authority exercises its functions.

5.3.3. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 includes a number of provisions that support nature recovery, such as a requirement to set objectives for the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems.

5.4. *Human Resources*

5.4.1. Ongoing commitment of BGCBC to work as a key partner in the delivery of the LNRAP and for the Ecologist/Biodiversity Officer/Nature Recovery Officer to continue to provide support to the Local Nature Partnership as secretariat and LNRAP project organiser.

5.4.2. External funding is provided by Welsh Government's Local Places for Nature grant on an annual basis, to deliver LNRAP and other biodiversity related work. This funding also funds Nature Recovery Officer and Biodiversity Officer. This funding comes to an end in March 2025.

5.4.3. The Countryside Rangers help to implement the actions within the LNRAP and also carry out actions that are outlined with in the ecological management plans for our 10 Local Nature Reserves and 1 candidate Local Nature Reserve. These posts are funded through SPF with funding coming to an end in March 2025.

5.5. **Health and Safety**

5.5.1. N/A

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1. **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1. Nature Emergency:

6.1.2. The 'State of Nature 2023' found that on average there has been a 20% decline in species abundance across Wales since 1994. Of 3,897 species that have been assessed using Red List criteria, 18% (663) species are threatened with extinction.

6.1.3. The 'Greater Gwent State of Nature' Report describes what is known about the status and trends of a selection of species within Greater Gwent.

Condition	UK (3816 species assessed)	Wales (249 species assessed)	Gwent (500 species assessed)
Declining	38%	37%	47%
Stable	34%	35%	12%
Improving	27%	28%	21%
Data deficient	--	--	21%

Table modified from the State of Nature 2023 report and Greater Gwent State of Nature 2021

6.1.4. It is difficult to assess the condition of our protected sites due to lack of data that is submitted to Local Records Centres such as South East Wales Biological Records Centre. Where the condition is known, many are not in a favourable condition.

6.1.5. Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP):

6.1.6. In response to this ongoing decline, Welsh Government published its Nature Recovery Action Plan, which sets six key objectives to halt the decline in biodiversity which are reflected in the Gwent Nature Recovery Plan. The Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Recovery Action Plan sets these objectives in the local context, inviting partners to work together on the themes within the Natural Networks approach. The document and actions will be reviewed and updated regularly as part of the LNP meeting structure.

6.1.7. The Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) for Wales was launched in 2015 by the Wales Biodiversity Strategy Board. It sets out how Wales will deliver the commitments of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the associated Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The NRAP for Wales was reviewed in 2019 to refocus the document considering rapidly changing policy and

environmental change, including the declaration of a climate emergency by the Welsh Government in April 2019. Two main articles of legislation influence the NRAP for Wales, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Since the review of the Wales NRAP, the Welsh Government also declared a nature emergency in Wales, in June 2021.

- 6.1.8. The Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan (GGNRAP) is a strategic document, set in the context of national and regional legislation and policy drivers, aiming to halt and reverse negative biodiversity trends identified in both the State of Natural Resources Report and the Greater Gwent State of Nature Report. It provides guidance for public bodies and organisations, as well as helping guide the Local Nature Recovery Action Plans which focus more on local action to promote biodiversity in each Local Nature Partnership area.
- 6.1.9. The LNRAP has now been updated to reflect, a changing environment, the availability of biodiversity information and changes in the LNRAP process. The production of this ensures that LNRAP targets reflect the conservation needs of habitats and species.
- 6.1.10. The LNRAP is a working document allowing flexibility within actions to be undertaken to achieve the objectives and targets set out within the document.
- 6.1.11. BGCBC have been working with the partnership to implement actions within the LNRAP habitat and species action plans. Much progress has been made towards set targets – a few of the significant achievements include:
 - The identification of habitats across the borough (through a suite of surveys since 2001 and up to date ecological surveys being carried out during 2024) Blaenau Gwent now has a good picture of the habitats and species that occur in the borough.
 - The designation of sites with significant value for nature conservation (>140 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation have now been designated and are/will be protected through local and national policies)
 - The designation of Sites with value for the local community and biodiversity (2 further sites have been identified as candidate LNRs – also protected through local and national policy)
 - Raising the profile of biodiversity and its conservation (a wide range of events have been organised including Go Wild)
 - An active Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and sub groups (the LNP meets regularly to discuss LNRAP projects – the partnership

is an alliance of wide ranging organisations who work together to protect and enhance biodiversity across both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen borough's, region and country)

- The successful bids for external funding to deliver actions and meet LNRAP targets, and have more recently included:
 - ENRaW Resilient Greater Gwent
 - ENRaW Gwent Green Grid Partnership
 - Local Places for Nature and LNP Cymru

6.1.12. Local Nature Partnership website 'Project' page has an interactive map which shows the Local Places For Nature projects.

<https://lnp.cymru/Projects>

6.1.13. Monitoring and evaluation is also undertaken as part of the Local Places for Nature grant condition. This is done on a quarterly basis.

6.1.14. Further to this, Welsh Government undertook a 'Biodiversity Deep Dive'- an independent expert led review was commissioned in 2021 to assess how nature recover across land and sea can best be accelerated in Wales.

6.1.15. *Pollinator Policy:*

6.1.16. It is widely recognised that pollinators play a vital role in the security of our food supply and the quality of our natural environment. There has been an ongoing decline in the numbers of pollinators and therefore action is being taken by both Welsh Government and Westminster to try and halt this decline.

6.1.17. Welsh Government published their Action Plan for Pollinators in July 2013, which sets out their strategic vision, outcomes, and areas for action to improve conditions for pollinators and halt their decline. The Action Plan for Pollinators has since been reviewed: Review 2013-2018 and Future Actions.

6.1.18. Councils are under a legal duty via the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 6 to have to seek to '**maintain and enhance**' biodiversity and seek to '**promote the resilience of ecosystems**' in exercising its functions. The proposed Pollinator Policy is fully in accordance with this.

6.1.19. One of the main objectives included within the LNRAP is delivering action to improve conditions for pollinators and increase the network of grassland connectivity with favourable condition.

6.2. *Expected outcome for the public*

6.2.1. Nature recovery is a long term goal and there is still plenty to do. We have produced an Action Plan for Nature Recovery that outlines what

activities we will be focusing on between now and 2030. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect progress made and the findings of monitoring or emergence of new best practice. Updates to the plan will need to incorporate new Welsh Government commitments for 30% of land and sea to be protected by 2030 (30 x 30).

6.2.2. The objectives of the LNRAP are included within pages 18-22 of the LNRAP document appended

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

6.3.1. Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership and species and habitat conservation experts have been consulted in the formation of the LNRAP and its targets/actions. A formal consultation of the draft LNRAP document was made during the spring and summer of 2023 and the LNRAP was amended to include comments. Consultees included all members of the Local Nature partnership, key officers within BGCBC and others that have been involved in the production of the document.

6.3.2. 3 Member workshops were held on 11th, 18th, and 24th April 2024 to raise awareness in relation to the agenda items:

- 1 Local Nature Recovery Action Plan
- 2 Pollinator Policy
- 3 Nature Emergency

6.3.3. A total of 18 members attended over the 3 workshops:

6.3.4. Following the official adoption of the LNRAP a copy of the document and the website link will be sent to all members of the Local Nature Partnership and the Council.

6.3.5. The LNRAP is a long-term strategy, and the continuing dedication of staff as well as resources will be necessary to ensure the successful implementations of actions and targets as set out in the LNRAP. Declaration of a nature emergency and adoption of the policies described will further form part of the dialogue advanced by the Council's Biodiversity Assistant who currently provides education sessions within the County's schools. The work will provide a platform for further participation with the County's Youth Forum.

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

6.4.1. The LNRAP is a long-term strategy, and the continuing dedication of staff as well as resources will be necessary to ensure the successful implementations of actions and targets as set out in the LNRAP.

6.5. *Preventative focus*

6.5.1. Halting Biodiversity Loss and Reversing Declines.

6.5.2. The diversity and abundance of wildlife is in continued decline.

6.5.3. A special report on global warming published by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in October 2018 indicated that if temperatures increase by only 1.5 degrees Celsius, 6% of insects, 8% plants and 8% of vertebrates would be lost. If the planet was to become two degrees warmer those figures would rise.

6.5.4. It is widely recognised that climate and biodiversity are intrinsically linked, with climate change now highlighted as one of the five drivers for biodiversity loss.

6.5.5. To declare a nature emergency is a situation where urgent action is required to reduce or halt the loss of biodiversity and to create more resilient ecosystems will be a step in protecting biodiversity in the county.

6.5.6. Wellbeing

6.5.7. Healthy communities rely on well-functioning ecosystems. They provide clean fresh water, clean air, medicines, and food security. Most people go about their daily lives not realising that they are dependent on biodiversity in ways that are not always apparent or appreciated. Extensive international research has shown that spending time in the outdoors and nature has positive benefits to a person's wellbeing. The measurable effects on people's physiology as we commune and interact with nature are revelatory to see and in the fact-checked world in which we live, demonstrate that age-old belief in the recuperative qualities of harmonising in the natural world are based on fact.

- "the practice of forest bathing or experiencing a woodland can reduce anxiety by 29 %"
- " Connecting our children to nature allows for healthy, lifelong behaviours to be established"
- "Spending 120 mins a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing"
- "45% of people in the UK said that visiting green spaces helped them cope throughout the pandemic"

6.5.8. Ecosystem Services

6.5.9. Biodiversity enables our natural systems to function properly by providing many important services such as soil formation and nutrient recycling, and pollution breakdown and absorption, as well as biological resources such as the water we drink, the air we breathe and the food we eat. Ecosystem services can be defined as the benefits (both direct

and indirect) that people derive from nature. This can be a practical sense, providing food and water and regulating the climate, as well as wellbeing aspects such as reducing stress and anxiety. These can be characterised as regulating, provisioning, supporting and cultural.

6.6. *Collaboration / partnership working*

6.6.1. Working in partnership with a wide range of organisations, groups, and individuals such as:

- Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature partnership
- Gwent Green Grid Partnership
- Community Groups
- Across BGCBC Service areas

6.7. *Integration (across service areas)*

6.7.1. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan 2022-25. For example:

- We work with the Neighbourhood Services Team to begin implementing an alternative cutting regime for biodiversity benefits,
- Work as part of a multidisciplinary Team with Education Services through the implementation of the Schools Biodiversity and Outdoor Learning Service Level Agreement. Advice and guidance have been provided Social Services (Adult and Child) with opportunities for biodiversity enhancement identified at several Flying Start Hubs.
- Liaise with Governance to embed biodiversity and ecosystem resilience into policy.
- Environment Champions

6.8. *Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions*

6.8.1. BGCBC Decarbonisation Plan sets out how we intend to deliver on becoming carbon neutral by 2030, and ensures that decarbonisation is built into our long term plans to improve wellbeing in Blaenau Gwent.

6.8.2. One of the transition pathways is Sequestrations, as land owner the council is responsible for substantial carbon stocks already captured; trees and peatland are the main two natural carbon stores. Many of these sites are designated as Local Nature Reserves and SINC.

6.9. *Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment)*

6.9.1. See attached appendix

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1. State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements

7.1.1. As part of the reporting and monitoring of objectives and actions within the LNRAP, we will follow a 'Plan/Do/Review' process through the regular team catch up meetings and use of the 'RAG' system to show progress made on deliver. A summary will be provided for each Local Nature Partnership (LNP) meeting, with a more detailed report produced annually.



7.1.2. The summary reports and progress updates provide at quarterly LNP meetings will directly feed into our corporate performance arrangements such as corporate Business Plans, Annual Members Briefings and as part of our quarterly monitoring for the Local Places for Nature grant.

8. Background Documents /Electronic Links

8.1.1. LNRAP Document



FINAL-designed-version-ENG-03-01-24.pdf

8.1.2. Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen LNP Website

[Home : Blaenau Gwent & Torfaen Local Nature Partnership \(bgtorfaenlnp.wales\)](http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/media/xdndjdt0/greater-gwent-nature-recovery-action-plan.pdf)

8.1.3. Pollinator Policy



Blaenau Gwent CBC
Pollinator Policy June

8.1.4. Gwent Nature Recover Action Plan

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/media/xdndjdt0/greater-gwent-nature-recovery-action-plan.pdf>

8.1.5. Greater Gwent State of Nature Report

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/countryside/resilient-greater-gwent/>

8.1.6. State of Nature Wales 2023

<https://stateofnature.org.uk/countries/wales/>