

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 22 nd November 2022
Report Subject	Biodiversity Duty Update
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report details how Flintshire County Council is making progress in delivering its biodiversity duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Flintshire County Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2020 – 2023, titled 'Supporting Nature in Flintshire' is explained and the progress of action to deliver objectives is reviewed, highlighting key areas of biodiversity work within the County. The report includes the statutory Section 6 report which will be submitted to Welsh Government in January 2023 at the end of the second 3-year reporting round.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members note the content of this update and confirm their support for officers in their ongoing work associated with improving biodiversity.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY UPDATE
1.01	Background Nature is our planet's life support system and consequently essential for human survival. Our natural environment provides our food, water, air, building materials, medicines and landscape. Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth and biodiversity loss continues as a direct result of human impacts, through habitat loss and degradation, over exploitation, pollution, climate change and the invasion of non-native species.
1.02	The Local Authority has a responsibility to function sustainability and lead by example when it comes to protecting and enhancing our natural environment. To meet the challenge of reversing the decline in biodiversity it is essential that we act and ensure that, as a Local Authority, we meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
1.03	Flintshire County Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan is produced in response to the enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The Act requires that Public Authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. "Supporting Nature in Flintshire" is Flintshire County Council's second biodiversity duty plan and covers the period from 2020-2023. This updated plan continues the previous good work in delivering biodiversity action and maintains progress to embed biodiversity as consideration across all departments.
1.04	It is a statutory requirement that progress against the Biodiversity plan is reported to Welsh Government within the specified 3 year reporting schedule. The next Section 6 report is due to be submitted in January 2023.
1.05	<p>The Section 6 report (Appendix 1) details the progress made in delivering action to meet the plans 20 actions under 6 objectives.</p> <p>When last reported to Cabinet in 2021 of the 20 actions, 20% were making good progress, 65% making some progress and 15% not started or had no progress. To date in 2022, 35% are making good progress and 65% some progress with 0% having no progress at all.</p>
1.06	Objective 1 - Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels Since 2019 there has been much progress in engaging key departments across the Council. We continue to maintain a strong relationship with Streetscene and Transportation in the management of our estate, we support our Regeneration and Capital Housing teams in the development of linked green infrastructure projects. We have ongoing communication with social value and impact assessment staff and most recently we have engaged with staff developing and delivering the Climate Change Strategy.

The integrated impact assessment process now fully considers biodiversity and environmental impact, guidance documents and staff contacts accompany the assessment forms to provide additional guidance if needed by project managers.

Implementation of the duty now features within the Council Plan and the Climate Change Strategy, in addition to the Portfolio Business Plan. The required social value element within the procurement process now provides an opportunity for environmental considerations and has successfully been implemented for biodiversity benefit and consistency and ensure social, economic and environmental factors are not compromised.

Additional environmental impacts and opportunities within the procurement process are being considered in detail through a specific officer group implementing the climate change strategy.

Progress has been made developing internal communication. The Biodiversity Officer works closely with Streetscene and Transportation, Regeneration, Energy and Climate Change teams and is building stronger working relationships across Capital maintenance, Education, Aura and Housing. This has provided opportunities to highlight areas where practice can be changed to benefit biodiversity for example, within play areas and school design.

Training and demonstrations in specific systems and machinery have been provided to Streetscene and Countryside staff including non-chemical weed control, various cut and collect machinery and electric grounds management equipment. Communication regarding tree protection has also been circulated internally.

The re-scheduled Greener Development Conference coordinated by the Biodiversity Officer and colleagues in the regional nature partnership (Bionet) will be hosted on 24th November 2022 with attendance of staff from various departments across Flintshire County Council. The conference is expected to attract 150 delegates and will promote biodiversity within design and development.

We host a wide range of activities and events and has included bat walks and talks, site bioblitzs, recorder days, woodland and tree days, meadow events, plant walks and talks.

In addition to physical events which were impacted throughout Covid, we have built on our virtual promotion and publicity through the Flintshire County Council Nature webpages which have been updated and the Bionet website and social media platforms.

Within the reporting period we ran our first Flintshire Eco Champions schools programme which was completed in 2022 after facing delays as a result of Covid. The programme visited a total of 20 primary schools.

In 2022 the addition of grant funded biodiversity staff across the region has allowed continued progress in terms of collaboration including; species and habitat monitoring, spatial data collection, publicity and events (social

	<p>media content, greener development conference, Bionet awards, resource development). North East Wales Local Authorities have also collaborated to grant fund a regional local nature partnership officer post which should be in place by 2023.</p>
1.07	<p>Objective 2 - Safeguard species and habitats of principle importance and improve their management</p> <p>In consultation with Bionet, the regional nature partnership, the first three priority habitats (grassland, woodland and wetland) for our area have been outlined on the nature partnership website with short, medium and long term targets. This document will evolve online and provide evidence of change and guidance for regional conservation project priorities. It can be viewed here https://www.bionetwales.co.uk/nature-recovery-plan/</p> <p>In addition, the website contains an online downloadable resource which provides project case studies which are delivering the plan.</p>
1.08	<p>Objective 3 - Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation</p> <p>Grant funding has enabled good progress to increase wildflower areas and tree planting across our council estate.</p> <p>This shift from conventional grass mowing management to a more varied practice, benefits both nature and carbon emissions/sequestration while helping to improve local urban conditions through increased absorption of pollution, reducing surface water flooding, providing noise and visual barriers, increasing the value of properties and providing shade and urban cooling.</p> <p>Applications for Bee friendly status were submitted for Wepre Park, Greenfield valley Heritage Park and Flintshire County Council in 2022. The applications were provisionally approved pending some further action which is in progress. We are aiming to complete this work by 2023.</p> <p>We now have 157 Wildflower sites mapped. This includes 97 sites in active management (this equates to 11.8 Ha) with 43 going through consultation or installation and another 7 which are proposed.</p> <p>We have also included and are expanding sites at burial grounds, contaminated land sites, active travel routes and play areas within this project. Grant funding has been instrumental in the installation and/or ongoing management of these sites with investment in required machinery to support the change in management.</p> <p>View publicity created about our wildflower work here; https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ea6c55e884b444f8995e45bd2406f2fa A winter programme of tree planting has been undertaken since the launch of the Urban Tree and Woodland Plan in 2018. Although there was impact on community planting events due to Covid, business sponsorship, grant funding and partnership working enabled some progress towards increasing canopy cover in 2020.</p>

	<p>A Welsh Government grant obtained for tree planting in 2021 supported planting on urban greenspaces across Flintshire. Additional grant created a 12 hectare woodland extension to our largest park, Wepre Park and further grant applications are ongoing.</p> <p>Tree planting projects directly deliver themes within the Natural Resources Wales Area Statement including; Develop and improve urban and rural green infrastructure (and specifically increase urban tree canopy) and Increasing woodland cover for social, environmental and economic benefits for North East Wales. They also address medium and longer term targets set out in the Nature Recovery Plan targets; To Increase the extent of native broadleaf and mixed woodland and trees under favourable management and Increase native broadleaf and mixed woodland, canopy cover, connectivity and resilience in North East Wales, while contributing towards resilient ecological networks.</p>
1.09	<p>Objective 4 - Tackle key pressures (Climate change/Invasive non-native species/habitat loss) on species and habitats</p> <p>Flintshire County Council has a published Climate Change Strategy available to view here https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Climate-Change/Climate-Change-Strategy-2022-2030.pdf</p> <p>Biodiversity staff and members of the Access and Natural Environment team were fully involved in the development of the strategy and are now represented on the various officer forums for plan delivery.</p> <p>The many areas of work outlined throughout this report will support enhance and deliver for the Climate Change Strategy in addition to the Section 6 duty.</p> <p>The County Ecologist works to enable greener development across the county and ensure that important species and habitats are protected.</p> <p>Non-native species impact and control is a significant and increasing area of work. Biodiversity staff work in partnership across the authority particularly with Streetscene, Rights of Way, Housing and Customer Services to provide advice and guidance with regard to invasive species as appropriate. Where invasive species are identified on Flintshire County Council land we will work with departments to undertake the appropriate control which is often long term treatment.</p> <p>The majority of additional invasive non-native control work relies on volunteer involvement and events, these events faced cancellation and major disruption in 2020/21 due to Covid.</p>
1.10	<p>Objective 5 - Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring</p> <p>Action to date has been recorded through internal plan reporting and grant funding reports.</p> <p>In 2020 we began to use interactive mapping to track and evidence change in addition to the above reports. This will allow a more effective</p>

	<p>level of post project monitoring. Through 2022 we have been developing our use of mapping platforms to monitor and evaluate action.</p> <p>There is also a requirement to report on actions in the Council Plan through the internal system InPhase and through the Climate Change Strategy groups.</p>
1.11	<p>Objective 6 - Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery</p> <p>In 2022, Bionet completed a 3-year project to improve its effectiveness, visibility and sustainability. This provided the regional network needed to support Local Authority and other member action. Through this project the Biodiversity Officer obtained grant funding to increase hours to full time. In 2020/2021 this was complimented by additional grant funding to contract temporary part time support to deliver specific grant funds. While this is not a long term solution it provides a short term structure for effective delivery of commitments in Flintshire.</p> <p>In 2022 WG grant funding provided additional revenue funding to continue the uplift in hours of the Biodiversity officer and recruited two additional Biodiversity officers on short term temporary contracts. The key role for these positions is delivering projects under the Local Places for Nature funding plan but they will also support outcomes to fulfil our statutory duty, undertake survey and monitoring, publicity and promotion and events.</p> <p>Grant revenue will also contribute towards a regional nature partnership officer who will be able to lead on regional conservation collaboration.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	FCC revenue budget enables employment of one part time Biodiversity Officer, who works closely with the wider Access & Natural Environment Service and other portfolio colleagues to maximise resources for biodiversity benefit.
2.02	Additional revenue grant funding has been secured on a short term basis to enable the recruitment of supplementary biodiversity staff. This ensures delivery of grant funded projects and statutory functions and allows for additional biodiversity action within the climate change strategy, effective survey and monitoring and proactive environmental education, publicity and promotion.
2.03	Grant income raised for biodiversity projects within the three year reporting round has significantly increased and now supports widespread change for biodiversity benefit across the public realm in Flintshire.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Some areas of work have been subject to consultation with the regional nature partnership. Where changes in land management and or biodiversity enhancement are planned consultation often involves, a wide range of internal colleagues, Councillors, communities and local Town and Community Councils.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	There is risk that if external funding is not secured resources and action will reduce in Flintshire, local biodiversity will continue to decline with implications for resilience to climate change.
4.02	The Biodiversity officer is the singular permanent member of staff in this field and is limited by capacity and scope. To succeed in addressing the nature crisis in Flintshire and to realise additional benefits from the natural environment such as improved health and wellbeing and economic gain, will be reliant on the successful engagement of other officers and departments across Flintshire County Council and their ability to include biodiversity consideration and benefit as part of their existing work.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – FCC Section 6 report to Welsh Government Appendix 2 –‘Supporting Nature in Flintshire’ Biodiversity Duty Plan 2020-2023

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Contact Officer: Tom Woodall, Access & Natural Environment Manager Telephone: 01352 703902 E-mail: tom.woodall@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Biodiversity - The variety of life found on earth. It includes all species of plants and animals, their abundance and genetic diversity.</p> <p>Ecosystem - An ecosystem is made up of living organisms (plants, animals and microorganisms) in conjunction with their non-living environment (air, water, minerals and soil) and all the diverse and complex interactions that take place between them</p> <p>Sustainable development - Ensuring that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.</p>

NRW - Natural Resources Wales is the largest Welsh Government Sponsored Body. NRW were formed in April 2013, largely taking over the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and the Environment Agency in Wales, as well as certain Welsh Government functions.

Bionet - The North East Wales Biodiversity Network (Bionet) was formed in October 2009 and renamed in 2010. It brought together partnerships that had existed in the Counties of Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. The broad aim of the network is to conserve, protect and enhance biodiversity for current and future generations. Coordination and collaboration are seen as being important to the partnership alongside other objectives that include raising awareness and the promotion of biodiversity and identifying local priorities to deliver local and regional biodiversity improvements.