

## Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Tuesday 8 June 2021
<b>Report Subject</b>	Biodiversity Duty Update
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside
<b>Report Author</b>	Andrew Farrow Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report details how the Council is making progress in delivering its biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The 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.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1	That the Committee supports the progress with the biodiversity strategy.
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### REPORT DETAILS

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY UPDATE</b>
1.01	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>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.</p>

1.02	As a local authority we have 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	The Council's first Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan (2016 – 2019) was 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. Progress of this first plan was reported to Welsh Government in January 2020 and 'good progress' was made in 67% of the target areas.
1.04	"Supporting Nature in Flintshire" is the 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.
1.05	The biodiversity update (Appendix 1) details the progress made in delivering action to meet the plans 6 objectives. Of the 20 actions, 20% were making good progress/completed, 65% were on track and making some progress with 15% not started or no progress.
1.06	<p><b>Objective 1 - Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels</b></p> <p>The Biodiversity Officer is now included on the integrated impact assessment board and with the Natural Environment Team, provide comment and input into higher level plans across portfolios eg Active Travel Schemes. The required social value element to procurement also now provides an opportunity for environmental considerations.</p> <p>Work to develop the Nature Partnership, which maximise effectiveness, supports collaborative conservation action across North East Wales, is ongoing through the Local Nature Partnerships Cymru project, which funds officer time and promotion/publicity activities for nature recovery. In March 2021 the regional nature partnership website was launched:  <a href="https://www.bionetwales.co.uk/about/">https://www.bionetwales.co.uk/about/</a></p> <p>Restrictions as a result of Covid greatly impacted on volunteering opportunities, engagement events and activities throughout 2020. As circumstances allow it is planned to reinstate our previous volunteering opportunities (species specific and invasive control) and combining activity and event delivery with our countryside service and conservation partners.</p>
1.07	<p><b>Objective 2 - Safeguard species and habitats of principle importance and improve their management</b></p> <p>In consultation with the Regional Nature Partnership (Bionet) the first three priority habitats for our area have been outlined on the nature partnership website with short, medium and long term targets.</p>

	<p>This document will evolve online and provide evidence of change and guidance for regional conservation project priorities. It can be viewed at <a href="https://www.bionetwales.co.uk/nature-recovery-plan/">https://www.bionetwales.co.uk/nature-recovery-plan/</a></p>
1.08	<p><b>Objective 3 - Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation</b></p> <p>Grant funding has enabled progress in increasing tree and wildflower areas across our Council estate, this work will continue through 2021. Grant funded machinery purchased in 2020 will support changes in amenity grass management to allow more areas to grow and benefit biodiversity with a late summer 'cut and collect'. This shift from conventional management will benefit both nature and carbon emissions/sequestration.</p> <p>Key supporting action to work towards bee friendly status includes reduced use of chemical weed control and investment in the Foamstream system, currently being effectively used by Streetscene and Countryside Services.</p> <p>This spring newly developed wildflower sites have included sites in Flint, Mold, Buckley, Penyffordd, Bagillt and Connahs Quay.</p> <p>Biodiversity enhancements at greenspaces in Flint have been delivered, supporting the draft Flint Green Infrastructure Plan (Tree planting and wildflower areas at Cornist Park and Swinchiard Recreational ground) Work with Streetscene has been positive and grant funding has enabled 10 wildflower roadshow sites to be installed May 2021. Additional sites will be added in the autumn 2021. Future work will also consider; cemeteries for wildflower enhancement and management for biodiversity where appropriate; and also the roundabout sponsorship scheme and how it can complement future wildflower sites.</p> <p>The Biodiversity Officer is working collaboratively with Denbighshire County Council to use innovative mapping systems to target and evidence conservation action.</p> <p>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 have enabled progress towards increasing canopy cover.</p> <p>Often short term specific funding and resources dictate the scope of tree planting projects. The 2021 Townscape Trees Project funding has been approved to maximise planting opportunities through the use of external consultants to work with the Natural Environment Team to plan, consult and prepare tree planting sites. The grant will also fund the purchase of trees and contractor installation.</p> <p>Key urban planting schemes to date have taken place in Flint, Connah's Quay, Saltney and Mold with additional planting at a number of school sites including Nercwys, Nannerch, Broughton and Holywell.</p>

1.09	<p><b>Objective 4 - Tackle key pressures (Climate change/Invasive non-native species/habitat loss) on species and habitats</b></p> <p>Changes in our grounds maintenance regimes and delivery of tree planting schemes will help to reduce the impacts of climate change and contribute to our carbon reduction strategy.</p> <p>Our Flintshire Eco Champions education programme (run in conjunction with Energy staff) also supports this action.</p> <p>There will also be further opportunity to look at specific sites within our landholdings in terms of improving biodiversity value and carbon sequestration which often go hand in hand.</p> <p>Unfortunately a conference on greener development which had been organised by the Biodiversity Officer and colleagues and due to take place March 2020 was postponed due to Covid. This will be re-arranged to align with any future restrictions and may be moved online.</p> <p>The majority of work to tackle invasive non-native species relies on volunteer involvement and events, all these events were cancelled in 2020 as a result of Covid. As a result of collaboration with the North Wales Wildlife Trust, some management for key projects (E.g. Controlling Himalayan Balsam along the River Alyn) was undertaken by their staff when it was safe to do so. The Biodiversity Officer will be mapping invasive non-native species records and control measures in 2021 and continuing ongoing communication with Streetscene, Valuation &amp; Estates and Housing where sites are reported.</p>
1.10	<p><b>Objective 5 - Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring</b></p> <p>In 2021 we will begin to use interactive mapping to track and evidence change in addition to the above reports. This will allow a more effective level of post project monitoring.</p>
1.11	<p><b>Objective 6 - Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery</b></p> <p>The nature partnership is in year 2 of a 3 year project to improve its effectiveness, visibility and sustainability. This will provide the regional network needed to support local authority and other member action.</p> <p>The Biodiversity officer has obtained grant funding to increase hours to full time. In 2020/2021 this has been complimented by additional grant funding to contract temporary part time support to deliver specific grant funds.</p>

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	<p>The Council's revenue budget enables employment of the Biodiversity Officer part time, who works closely with the wider Access &amp; Natural Environment Service and other portfolio colleagues to maximise resources for biodiversity benefit. Resources to deliver action are secured through external funding streams.</p>

2.02	The biodiversity update (Appendix 1) provides a detailed breakdown of grant funded action.
2.03	Grant income for biodiversity projects (excluding Countryside Service projects) for 2020/21 exceeded £220,000.  Confirmed biodiversity grant funding for 2021/22 is approximately £232,000.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT</b>
3.01	Some areas of work have been subject to consultation with the nature partnership. Where changes in land management are planned consultation often involves, councillors, communities and local town/community councils.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
4.01	There is risk that if external funding is not secured, that 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 specialist in this field and is limited by capacity, the engagement of other officers and partners and their ability to include biodiversity as part of their existing work. Resilience with the authority has improved with the integration with Access & Natural Environment Service, but there is risk should this post be lost.

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 - Biodiversity Duty Update Appendix 2 - 'Supporting Nature in Flintshire' Biodiversity Duty Plan 2020-2023

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

7.00	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Biodiversity</b> The variety of life found on earth. It includes all species of plants and animals, their abundance and genetic diversity.</p> <p><b>Ecosystem</b> 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><b>Sustainable development</b> Ensuring that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.</p> <p><b>NRW</b> 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.</p> <p><b>Bionet</b> 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.</p>