

Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 - Section 6
The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty
Report 2020-2022



Torfaen County Borough Council



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Summary

This report sets out Torfaen County Borough Council's three yearly reporting obligation for 2020-22 as required under section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, otherwise known as the public bodies' biodiversity duty and resilience of ecosystems duty or the S6 duty. The report format follows Welsh Government guidance and outlines the local authority's contribution to the six objectives of the national Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) 2020.

This is the second three yearly compliance report and includes contributions from a broad range of Council officers. Detailed responses were received from officers in the Natural Environment Policy and Streetscene Operations Team, Development Management, Public Protection, Strategic Regeneration, Highways Traffic and Engineering, Property (Energy Management), Planning Policy and Implementation and the Public Services Support Unit (PSSU).

During this period there was a significant increase in the level of engagement with the responsibilities of the S6 duty from across a wider range of Council services with many more proactive contributions to the preparation of this report. There are many examples of good practice such as the ongoing integration of the public bodies' duty into the land use planning process, the substantial progress made in diversifying green space management, the Climate and Nature Emergency Declarations with its joint action plan and delivery structure, and Torfaen's first Green Infrastructure and Tree Strategies.

Landscape scale cross boundary projects such as the South-East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU), Resilient Greater Gwent (RGG), Gwent Green Grid Project (GGGP) and Local Places for Nature (LPfN) demonstrated the value of partnership working over a wider area. The local authority also has a joint Nature Partnership with Blaenau Gwent.

In addition, there is a rolling programme of habitat management on all seven Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and strategic heather cutting on the local authority owned section of the Blorenge Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) contributes to our statutory obligations as a landowner as well as managing fire risk. 14% of local authority grassland is now managed for biodiversity and carbon storage through an annual cut and collect method. Other actions include meadow restoration, tree planting, conservation grazing and river habitat management.

Sustainable decision making depends on the availability of a good evidence base. Work around a Green Infrastructure Assessment with its updated GIS layers and the continued access to biodiversity data from the South-East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) are important sources of reference for project officers and decision makers. Progress on a Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) was informed by updated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) studies along with ecology and landscape candidate site assessments. A GIS analysis of council-managed grassland has helped consolidate existing spatial information and signpost opportunities for the future. A fresh assessment of biodiversity was published

through Gwent-wide State of Nature Report followed by a Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP).

A framework of governance and support for the biodiversity duty is now embedded within the policy development and deliverables of the Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan, and along with a Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020, Tree Strategy and a Council Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan 2019 (BERP), all add weight to a growing policy framework for implementation of the Section 6 duty.

As well as detailing the weight of positive action that has taken since 2019, the officer consultation identified some gaps in coverage, so in accordance with Welsh Government's S6 reporting template, several actions are suggested to help contribute to further embedding the S6 duty across Council services.

1.0 Introduction and context

The layout and content of this report follows guidance set out in Welsh Government's Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1: Guidance for Section 6 - The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty, Reporting Guidance 2019.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the S6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales. The S6 duty requires that public authorities '**must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems**'. To comply with 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 day to day activities.

The natural environment of the County Borough is characterised by its heather moorlands, ancient woodlands and wildflower rich meadows that are known to support nationally declining and locally characteristic wildlife. Many of the species and habitats are of principal importance in Wales as listed under section 7 (S7) of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Torfaen also has four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), seven Local Nature Reserves (LNR) as well as over 150 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The Afon Lwyd, the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and the green space associated with the cycleway network are strategic linear wildlife corridors that stretch the length and breadth of the county borough, and with other notable features such as the largest urban tree canopy in Wales and a growing diversification of urban grassland all combine to form the core attributes of Torfaen's Green Infrastructure (GI.)

Implementation of the S6 duty contributes to the delivery of other statutory duties, especially sustainable development duty under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan 2022 with its net zero

carbon target. The Torfaen Well-being Plan 2018-2023 produced by the local Public Services Board (PSB) has embedded the natural environment into its objectives.

To help co-ordinate the implementation of the S6 duty across Council service areas, a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan 2019 was prepared. This includes a plan of action set against the Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) objectives. The delivery of this plan and the actions within it, now forms part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency declared in Torfaen June 2019 and the subsequent Nature Emergency declared in September 2021.

Preparation of this report has involved engagement and consultation with a broad range of council officers and departments, generating a range of detailed responses.

2.0 Highlights, key outcomes and issues

Through guidance set out in Planning Policy Wales ed. 11 2021, Torfaen's Development Management and Planning Policy and Implementation Teams continue to engage proactively with the s6 duty, by ensuring all planning applications seek to include biodiversity positive (net gain) enhancement measures where applicable.

The Natural Environment Policy and Streetscene Operations Group is responsible for managing of most of the Council's soft estate. This is evidenced by a programme of urban grassland management and by the health and safety considerations of trees. Through modifications in working practices the team has successfully introduced a nature friendly cut and collect schedule. 14% of council owned urban grassland is now managed for biodiversity through a single annual cut with a target to increase this in subsequent years.

These modifications have been possible with the availability of new equipment funded through the Welsh Government's Local Places for Nature programme and by the enthusiastic support of Streetscene Operational staff. Public perception surveys including one recently conducted through the Gwent Green Grid Nature Isn't Neat Project, indicate strong public support for the management of green space for nature.

The responsibility for trees falls within several Council departments. The Development Management Team considers trees through the planning process along with the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) procedure and the Asset Management Team has regard for trees when considering land disposals. The Natural Environment Policy and Streetscene Operations Group is responsible to managing and increasing the Council's tree resource. Given the environmental value of trees, the Council approved Tree Strategy pulls together the responsibilities of all relevant departments under a single plan.

The Natural Environment Policy and Streetscene Operations Team has practical responsibilities for managing vegetation in respect Public Rights of Way, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and local authority owned Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). An on-going programme of management has improved the condition of the LNRs for both people and wildlife.

Practical projects funded through the Welsh Government's Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant have been instrumental in promoting behaviour change in green infrastructure management. Community engagement at one site prompted a visit from Julie James MS Minister for Climate Change, to see the changes in grassland management that have taken place.

Policy development and integration of the S6 duty into plans, projects and programmes is evidenced by the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, draft Green Infrastructure and Open Space Assessments. These have provided evidence to inform the emerging Replacement Local Development Plan and the new green infrastructure layer on the Council's in-house GIS layer. Climate change and declines in nature are two sides of the same coin so a decision to blend the S6 duty with net zero carbon targets and the Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy has assisted with the integration of biodiversity into Council policy.

Although there is now a broader understanding of the S6 duty across service areas some compliance gaps remain. Continued engagement with the leads of teams such as Asset Management, Property Management, Highways and Engineering and Drainage and Flood Management are necessary to ensure compliance risks are minimised and opportunities maximised.

Nonetheless, overall, there has been an encouraging change in the way the natural environment is valued and integrated into the day-to-day decision making and operational activities of the Council.

3.0 Evidence base and policy framework

During 2020-2022, work has concentrated on the development of an evidence base and policy framework to assist with statutory obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The following local and regional plans, policies and strategies form that broad evidence base and policy framework for the implementation the S6 duty from national to local.

National (Wales)

- State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) 2020.
- The Nature Recovery Plan for Wales (NRAP) 2020.
- Future Wales: The National Plan 2040.
- Planning Policy Wales Ed 11. 2022.
- Technical Advice Note 5: Nature Conservation and Planning 2009.

Regional (South East Wales)

- South-East Wales Area Statement 2020.
- Gwent State of Nature Report 2021.
- Green Infrastructure Action Plan for Pollinators in South-East Wales 2015.
- Natural Resource Management Plan for South-East Wales.

- South-East Wales Uplands Natural Resource Management Plan.
- Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) 2022.

Local (Torfaen)

- Draft County Plan 2022
- Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020.
- Draft Green Infrastructure Assessment 2022.
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan (BERP) 2019.
- Tree Strategy 2021.
- Well-being Plan 2018 -2023.
- Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) 2002.
- Local Development Plan 2013.
- Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan 2022.
- Draft Open Space Report and Assessment 2021.

3.1 Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan.



Climate change is one of the five main threats to biodiversity. In June 2019 elected Members declared a climate emergency followed by a nature emergency in 2021. In response a **Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan** was developed which involved officers from across the Council including Leadership, the Policy Development Forum and the Heads of Service Forum.

To help develop the plan, consultation took place with communities across Torfaen for their ideas on how to reduce carbon. Further community engagement coincided with the United Nation's Climate Change Conference (COP26) followed by the establishment of a Climate Ambassadors Network.

In 2022, Torfaen's Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan was approved and to specifically respond to the nature emergency the Council will:

- Work to understand how much carbon is stored in the land we own to better direct resources to where they have most impact;
- Improve the management of green infrastructure on Council owned land;
- Maximise biodiversity gain through the planning process;
- Deliver on the commitments of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan (BERP);
- Train staff and Elected Members to understand their role in the net zero carbon journey and responding to the nature emergency;
- Consider the climate and nature emergency in decision making. This will be delivered by including climate change and biodiversity in the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA);
- Establish a Cabinet sub-group to support delivery of the climate and nature emergency action plan.

3.2 Torfaen Green Infrastructure Strategy and Open Spaces Report and Assessment.

The **Torfaen Green Infrastructure Strategy** is designed to assist in shaping and coordinating the delivery of green infrastructure in Torfaen, to provide social, environmental and economic well-being benefits now and in the future. The strategy demonstrates how green infrastructure can help adapt to climate change, reverse the decline in biodiversity and support healthy living and well-being, while also supporting sustainable growth and economic development.

Overall, at the strategic level Torfaen's Green Infrastructure Network is extensive and generally well-connected, much of which is accessible. At the local level, particularly in and around Torfaen's towns, there are place-specific opportunities to strengthen the quality, connectivity and accessibility of the green infrastructure network.

This Strategy provides a strategic framework or "big picture" for developing a functional, connected network of natural areas that supports the current and future well-being needs of local populations in Torfaen (objective 1 of the Torfaen Well-being Plan). It outlines principles, priorities and opportunities for strengthening the resilience and connectivity of Torfaen's Green Infrastructure Network.

Further to the Torfaen Green Infrastructure Strategy a draft **Open Space Report and Assessment** 2021 provides a more focussed assessment to help protect and create a network of high-quality open spaces with multifunctional benefits. Once adopted, the assessment will inform the Council's Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) policy development mainly in relation to the provision of open space in new

developments and the protection of existing open space. It will build on the high-level Torfaen Public Service Board (PSB) Green Infrastructure Strategy by providing a more site-specific assessment of green spaces and will be used to inform the site-management of open spaces and as a mechanism for directing funding to appropriate sites where improvements to the quantity, quality and accessibility of open spaces can be made. The assessment will ensure a coordinated approach is taken to meeting TCBC's open space needs and protecting and developing the County Borough's network of open spaces. The Open Space Report is accompanied by an assessment, ward profiles and investment priorities. Together, these documents form the evidence base and strategy for protecting and enhancing the green infrastructure assets across the borough.



Sample map of green infrastructure assets in Cwmbran

4.0 Section 6 (s6) action report

This section is a compilation of actions undertaken across the local authority in support of the S6 duty. Actions are listed under each NRAP objective. Note that some actions contribute to more than one objective.

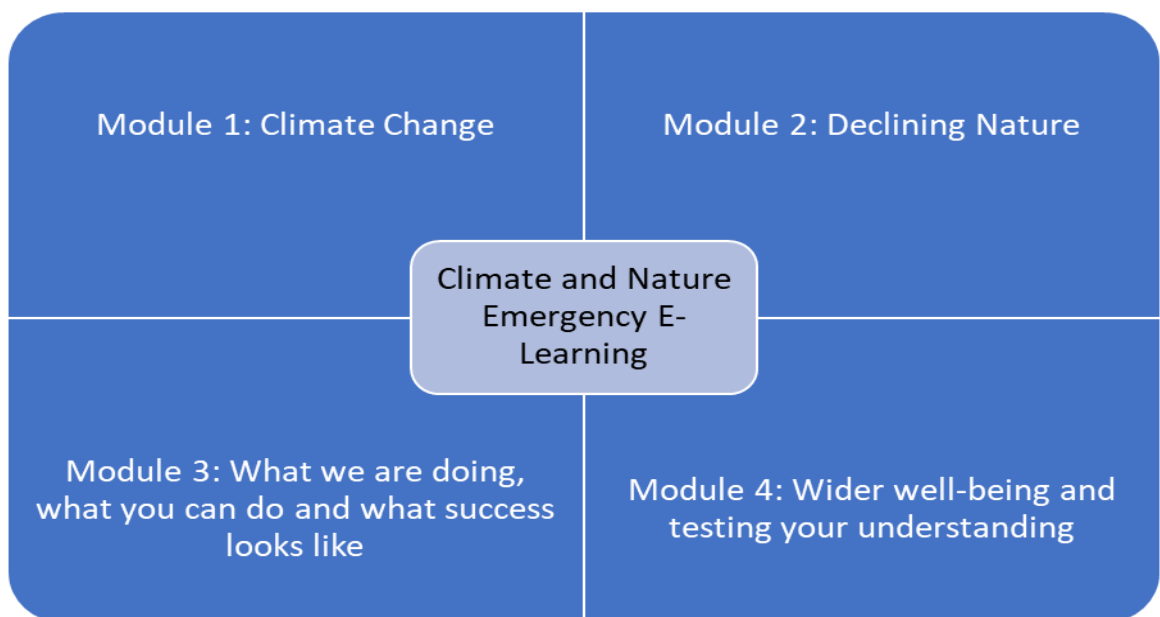
4.1 NRAP Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels.

This objective measures actions taken to embed the S6 biodiversity duty within decision making and across council services. A suite of plans, programmes and strategies across several service areas provide a framework for this objective. This

section also sets out the measures and activities undertaken to raise awareness of the S6 across departments

4.1.1 Actions taken

- A stand-alone **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan 2019** is in place setting out how the local authority will embed biodiversity within its day-to-day functions. Progress with this plan is monitored through Climate Change Delivery Group. Where necessary the plan will be reviewed in accordance with recommendations within this report
- The **Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan** and Cabinet sub-group is now in place (see case study). A staff **E-learning resource** is currently under development with the aim of training 1000 staff by 2027. Training will cover the following four areas.



- **Torfaen Corporate Plan 3 2016-21** included cleaning and greening as one of its three priority areas. Its vision is for:

Cleaner and greener communities and a sustainable local environment that residents can be proud of.

- The Draft **County Plan and Well-being Statement** sets out the Council's well-being objectives. These include an objective to:

Respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment.

- **Torfaen Business and Services Plans** are in place to help with the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities and the Torfaen Well-being Plan. The Environment and Streetscene Operations has lead responsibility in environmental policy. Its service plan sets out its vision:
 1. *We provide day to day provision of environmental policy and advice to the wider Council and stakeholders relating to biodiversity, landscape, trees, access, play areas, cemetery services and allotments;*
 2. *We provide advice to Welsh Government (WG) in the development of Valleys Regional Park;*
 3. *We provide advice to Torfaen and Public Service Board (PSB) on the role of green Infrastructure in achieving well-being;*
 4. *We secure external funding to support activities within the team plan and Public Service Board (PSB) Priorities.*
- The **Torfaen Well-being Plan 2018-23** prepared by the Torfaen Public Service Board (PSB) includes two biodiversity and ecosystem resilience related objectives. These are:

Objective 1 – develop a functional, connected network of natural areas that support the current and future well-being needs of local populations.

Objective 2 – develop adaption and mitigation responses to the impacts of climate change.

- Internal reporting protocols include a **Well-being Assessment Template** with links to Well-being Plan objectives, the five ways of working and Corporate Plan priorities. This is a mandatory requirement for internal officer reports and council decision making.
- A Public Service Board **Torfaen Green Infrastructure Strategy** sets out the importance of both the green and blue infrastructure, with a shared vision. It states:

Torfaen has a well-connected and multi-functional green infrastructure network of distinctive biodiverse and resilient natural spaces providing social, environmental and economic well-being benefits for people, our natural resources and ecosystems are managed in sustainable ways to maintain, protect and enhance the networks integrity and connectivity. The interdependency of Torfaen’s rich biodiversity, landscape and heritage is widely recognised.

- Draft **Open Spaces Report and Assessment** supplements the Torfaen Green Infrastructure Strategy by providing more detail on the value of green infrastructure assets to help inform sustainable land use decision making.
- **Torfaen Tree Strategy 2021** aims to consolidate, in to one over-arching document, the Council's approach to the protection, enhancement and safe management of urban trees and woodland. It sets out six objectives:
 - The **Internal performance management** procedure includes biodiversity outputs including *land under positive management for biodiversity*.
 - Ecology and landscape staff are actively involved an all stages of the **land use planning** process. Officers are consulted on planning applications and policy direction, and regularly attend planning meetings, site visits and planning appeal hearings. All advice is offered within the context of Planning Policy Wales 11 and the Torfaen Local Development Plan and relevant Technical Advice Notes (TANs).
 - Biodiversity retention and enhancement is integrated into **Replacement Local Development Plan**, with a proposed change in policy to protect all green infrastructure within the urban boundary.
 - Publication of **Ecology Survey Guidance Note (2020)**, Development Brief Masterplan Guidance (2020) and draft House Extension and Alterations Supplementary Planning Guidance have all included s6 duty requirements.
 - Potential sales of local authority owned green space are handled by Torfaen County Borough Council's **Asset Management Team**. Ecology and landscape officers are routinely consulted on sale of land proposals. Also, advice has been provided on the requirement to survey for European Protected Species (EPS) prior to the disposal of large buildings.
 - A **Climate and Nature Emergency** was declared by the Council with a commitment to prepare an action plan. This was followed by a Cross-cutting Scrutiny committee workshop.
 - Team Leader Ecology and Landscape Policy is consulted on all **ordinary watercourse land drainage consent applications** under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991.
 - A **Torfaen Green Infrastructure Assessment** is in place to help inform sustainable decision making regarding the quantity, quality and accessibility of green infrastructure assets in Torfaen.

- Natural resource management is a cross-cutting theme that compliments the raising awareness activities under the **sustainable development duty** of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015
- A variety of s6/green infrastructure presentations and workshops were delivered across services. Including those to councillors through members seminar's, place-based area meetings and for the emerging Replacement Local Development Plan.
- **Community Councils** in Torfaen have received S6 presentations and were engaged in the Torfaen Green Infrastructure consultation process.
- A follow on **Streetscene Chargehand** workshop was run to discuss progress with alternative ways of managing green space.
- In a follow up to the councillor seminar in 2018, a public bodies biodiversity duty **members seminar** was held in summer of 2022.
- **Biodiversity and green infrastructure workshops** with Elected Members and other stakeholders were held as part of the Replacement Local Development Plan consultation to outline policy.
- Officers of Ecology and Landscape Team work closely with the **land use planning** process to ensure the s6 duty is applied to all planning decisions. Advice provided follows the guidance set out in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and recent advice from Welsh Governments Chief Planning Officer to local authorities re-emphasising that where biodiversity enhancements cannot be secured then consideration must be given to refusing planning approval.
- During this reporting period (2019-22) around 50+ **press releases** were sent out in Torfaen that relate to biodiversity/nature/climate change in some way.

4.2 **NRAP Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management.**

This NRAP objective measures actions taken to protect and enhance species and habitats listed as important for Wales according to section 7 of the Environment Wales Act 2016.

4.2.1 **Actions taken**

- Seven **Local Nature Reserves** (LNRs) and one **Site of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) are managed in accordance with agreed management plans.

- Approximately 163 **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)** are designated in Torfaen.
- A county borough wide network of **green spaces and road verges** are managed for wildflowers and pollinators.
- Several **roundabouts** are planted with wildflower turf and seeds.
- An approach to **biodiversity off-setting** was introduced to ensure that an area allocated for development in the Torfaen LDP that supports s7 species and habitats can be retained by managing and enhancing an adjacent poor-quality habitat.
- Through the land use planning process, 15 metre buffers are recommended around **ancient woodland**.
- Three strategic linear **ecological corridors** are identified in the current Torfaen Local Development Plan.
- Where **SINCs** are unavoidably damaged or lost, mitigation and/or compensation is always sought in accordance with the step-wise approach set out in Planning Policy Wales 11.
- Two LNRs have a **Green Flag Award**. In addition to this Pontypool Park and Cwmbran Boating Lake also have Green Flag status.
- A control programme for the management of **Invasive Non-native Species (INNS)** such as Japanese knotweed is in place on local authority land.
- **Azolla weevils** were successfully introduced to control a substantial area of invasive water fern on the Monmouthshire – Brecon Canal on the outskirts of Cwmbran.
- **Section 7 species and habitats** are of material consideration in the land use planning process. Where these features are present on a proposed development site, measures to protect and enhance are always requested as per Planning Policy Wales 11.
- An **internal performance measure** covering land under positive management for biodiversity is reported on an annual basis.
- A **Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)** for Greater Gwent has been produced with a range of nature conservation actions.
- As referred to in Technical Advice Note 5 (Nature Conservation and Planning) the **Torfaen Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)** with its suite of species

and habitat action plans remains a key source of local biodiversity information for the planning system.

- Two new **orchards** were planted at Brooklands Park and Cwmbran Boating Lake.

4.3 NRAP Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation.

This objective relates to positive action taken to improve and create habitats, this may include tree planting, the management of protected sites or changes in grassland management.

4.3.1 Actions taken

- **Landscape improvements** including native tree and pollinator friendly planting has taken place across several areas including Oakfield Gardens and Garn yr erw play area.
- A planting plan for a **sustainable drainage rain garden** at Ysgol Panteg has a strong biodiversity emphasis.
- The **South-East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU)** is working with landowners and commoners to restore peat bog habitats on the uplands of Mynydd Maen and Blaenavon.
- The **Torfaen Tree Strategy** highlights the value of trees especially urban trees and the need to develop a plan to increase the amount of tree canopy cover in the county borough.
- **Heather management** has taken place on the Bloreng SSSI to establish a mosaic of vegetation that is both variable in age and structure. This work is supported by local landowners and commoners. An updated management plan for the Bloreng SSSI has now been finalised.
- **Conifer tree management** has taken place on upland habitat adjacent to the Bloreng SSSI. These trees threaten the integrity on the SSSI and as a landowner Torfaen County Borough Council is obliged to contribute to keeping the site in favourable condition.
- All seven **Local Nature Reserves** are managed for people and biodiversity.

- **Two new ponds** were established at Garn Lakes LNR using funding from the Resilient Greater Gwent project to create habitat to support species such as great crested newt.
- Several roadside verges and roundabouts have been seeded with **native wildflowers** as part of Torfaen's Pollinator Action Plan. Others are managed through a programme of cut and collect.
- Working with livestock from Greenmeadow Community Farm a **conservation grazing** trial has taken on two grassland sites.

4.4 NRAP Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats.

Pressures on biodiversity can be mitigated by adopting nature-based solutions. Reporting under this measure includes any action that reduces pressures on the natural environment.

4.4.1 Actions taken

- Through guidance set out in Welsh Governments Future Wales, Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and the Local Development Plan the **Development Management Team** has a statutory duty to embed the s6 duty into land use planning decisions. This team is a key enabler of the s6 duty.

In determining planning applications and other consents the team is proactive in providing advice on proposals that impact on the environment and protected species and habitats. This is evidenced by, where necessary, undertaking ecological surveys, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 assessments.

The team follows the step-wise approach to addressing biodiversity within planning determinations, with mitigation/compensation and enhancements secured in line with advice provided by the Council's in-house ecologist.

There are many examples of planning applications that were modified to protect habitats and enhance ecosystem resilience through the adoption of nature-based solutions such as formal and/or in-formal landscape design, sustainable urban drainage systems, and green roofs etc.

- The **Public Protection Team** has regulatory responsibilities including Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing. This service contributes indirectly to the s6 duty and the pressures on species and habitats through the environmental permitting of industrial activities, clean air monitoring

and pollution control. Pollution is recognised as one of the key threats to biodiversity.

- **Planning Policy and Implementation** has commenced work on a Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP), with proposed policies on the biodiversity and green infrastructure. A Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and Candidate Sites Assessments including updated ecological surveys have been completed. Biodiversity and green infrastructure Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is currently in preparation. An **Ecology Survey Guidance Note** also was published in 2020.

As a key enabler of the S6 duty this team has sought to ensure all sites considered for inclusion in the RLDP are acceptable in terms of their impact on biodiversity and green infrastructure. As an example, a site south of Cwmbran, designated as a SINC was rejected due to its ecological value and connectivity to surrounding habitats.

- The **Highways, Traffic and Engineering Group** are responsible for highway maintenance, safety and improvements. Where schemes have a proposed impact on biodiversity advice is provided by the in-house ecologist to ensure impacts are minimised and mitigation and enhancements included. An example is of this on-going development of an **Active Travel** route.
- **Strategic Regeneration** is responsible for the delivery of regeneration projects with biodiversity built into all levels of project development and delivery. One example is the regeneration of the post- industrial landscape at **The British**, near Talywain. A masterplan for the work aspires to create '*a sustainable community benefitting from a dramatic natural landscape with a wealth of historic character*' using nature-based solutions to create an over-ground watercourse with a pond and reedbed. A partnership arrangement with Gwent Wildlife Trust has helped engage the local community through a series of community walks and volunteer habitat management tasks.

Through the appointment of a Canal Coordinator in 2021 progress has been made in recognising the biodiversity value of the **Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal** as a strategic ecological corridor. A cross departmental team is currently working on an updated Canal Management Plan. A series of awareness raising walks were conducted by Gwent Wildlife Trust in the summer 2022 and a recent public engagement survey has demonstrated how canal users value biodiversity.

Two **Place Making Plans** for Blaenavon and Pontypool were commissioned in 2022. The Pontypool Plan includes the enhancement of existing green space.

- A programme of treatment for the control and management of **invasive non-native species** (INNS) especially Japanese knotweed is in place.

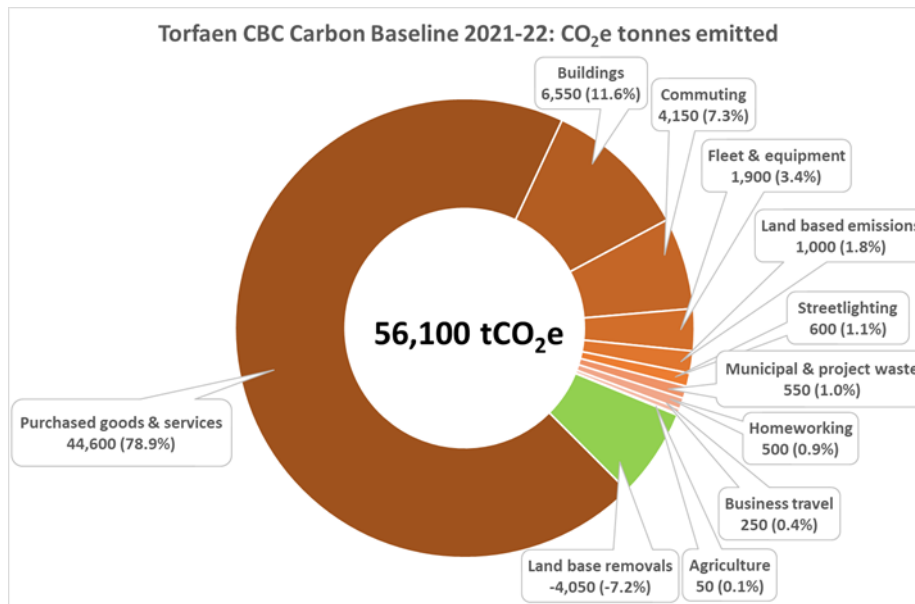
- Management of other **INNS** is taken on a case-by-case basis. For example, the pulling of Himalayan balsam on Henllys Local Nature Reserve and the introduction of *Azolla* weevils to control water fern on the Monmouthshire to Brecon Canal.
- **Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)** are important requirements of the land use planning system. Well-designed SUDS on development sites can also help protect and enhance biodiversity.
- The **Energy Management Team** has been activity advancing opportunities to reduce carbon emissions in line with the Council's net zero carbon 2030 target. In doing so, the team are incorporating biodiversity enhancements where possible to ensure net gain.
- In March 2022 a motion was passed by the Council to promote the inclusion of **hedgehog highways** wherever possible in Torfaen.

4.5 NRAP Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring.

Making informed sustainable decisions requires a reliable evidence base to ensure actions are targeted and cost effective. Reporting under this measure can relate to accessing to information from Local Environmental Records Centres (LRCs) and other environmental information.

4.5.1 Actions taken

- To help measure progress toward **net zero carbon** the Council has used Welsh Government's Reporting Guide and toolkit to estimate how much carbon is stored in land the Council owns and manage. The following pie chart illustrates the value of green in off-setting carbon emissions.



- A Service Level Agreement is in place with the **South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc)**. This provides a screening service for all planning applications and has capacity to also provide data searches for officers and project managers requiring biodiversity data to inform decision making and project planning.
- A **Green Infrastructure Assessment** has been prepared to provide an evidence base for the forthcoming updated Torfaen Replacement Local Development Plan
- A **Green Infrastructure layer** is now in place on the Council's internal GIS system.
- The **list of species and habitats of principal importance in Wales** as set out in section 7 of the Environment Wales Act (2016) is actively considered through the land use planning process.
- Work has commenced on updating the **natural environment pages** on the local authority website, to ensure information is relevant and assessable to all.
- The publication of a **Gwent State of Nature Report (2022)** has updated information on the conservation status of a comprehensive range of habitats and species.
- A **sample ecological survey** conducted by Gwent Wildlife Trust in 2021 of council managed cut and collect sites has identified several as potential SINC quality.

4.6 NRAP Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.

Reporting under this objective includes action taken to develop a framework of governance for biodiversity action. For example, by ensuring an officer is responsible for monitoring progress.

4.6.1 Actions taken

- The Council's **Executive Member for the Environment** oversees the implementation of our Public Bodies Biodiversity Duty.
- **Ecology and biodiversity advice** is provided by qualified officers in the Ecology and Landscape Policy Team. Specialist advice is available to all officers and decision makers regarding compliance of the S6 duty.
- **External funding** through a range of funding streams has been secured to support projects that are in addition to core biodiversity duties. This report provides several grant aided case studies that exemplify Torfaen's approach to this objective.
- Torfaen County Borough Council has supported the development of the Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership and its merger into a joint the Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership. Torfaen currently hosts an **LNP Co-ordinator** funded through LNP Cymru.
- Through the Resilient Greater Gwent project, a **State of Nature Report**. This will provide the most up to date assessment of the state of nature in south-east Wales and provide an evidence base for decision making.
- Ecology and Landscape Policy Team has expanded to include **additional ecology staff** as well as the previously mentioned Local Nature Partnership and Local Places for Nature Co-ordinator.

5.0 S6 Duty Review – Performance management and improvement recommendations.

In accordance with Welsh Government guidance, this section highlights some key issues about the operation of the s6 duty within the Council, and the measures needed to further embed the duty across services. In doing so it acknowledges the significant progress made in behaviour change since the previous report. The following recommendations listed in Table1. should be included in a forthcoming update of the Torfaen Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Action Plan (BERP).

Table 1. Recommendations

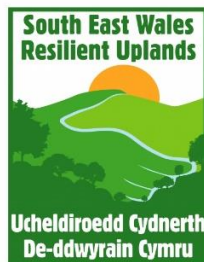
	Issue	Action	Responsible Department/Team	Timescale
1.	Although implementation of the s6 duty across the local authority has improved significantly, some respondents to this reporting round highlighted the need for continued staff training.	Work with departmental leads and other staff across service areas to raise awareness of the s6 duty through a range of mechanisms such as bespoke training and link to the Climate and Nature Emergency E-learning module.	Environment Policy and Streetscene Operations	2023
2.	By securing biodiversity enhancements, the Development Management and Planning Policy and Implementation Teams are key enablers of the s6 duty. However, there is currently no monitoring procedure in place to measure the number of planning applications that secure enhancements.	Work with the Development Management Team to monitor and measure the percentage of planning applications with biodiversity enhancements		2023
3.	The local authority has a successful track record in securing external resource to support practical action for biodiversity.	Wherever possible continue to access funding to support and complement existing s6 commitments.	Environment Policy and Streetscene Operations	2023 -25
4.	Decision making at all levels must demonstrate adequate consideration of the s6 duty. The Well-being template attached to committee reports should be monitored to ensure biodiversity is embedded within decision making.	Assess a representative sample of committee reports for S6 compliance and offer recommendations.	Public Service Support Unit (PSSU)	2023
5.	Promote wider officer use of best available environmental information such as green infrastructure assessment and in-house GIS	Promote use of in-house GI and natural environment information in decision making through officer training.	Environment Policy and	2023

	layer to aid project management and sustainable decision making.		Streetscene Operations	
6.	The local authority manages most of its soft estate through a programme of regular green space management.	Work with the Streetscene Operations Team to develop a programme of grassland management that recognises the multi-functional benefits of green space and to increase extent over time.	Environment and Streetscene Operations	2023-25
7.	The local authority owns green space that is let for grazing and other purposes. These areas have a role to play in off-setting biodiversity impacts and for carbon storage.	Asset Management and other decision makers to identify areas of green space that can be used to enhance biodiversity, carbon storage and public well-being.	Asset Management	2023
8.	It is important internal project management systems are adapted to consider the s6 duty at the earliest stage.	Embed the S6 duty into project management systems.		2023

Appendix 1. Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience projects – case studies.

The following case studies are examples of key projects that were delivered during the period covered by this report (2020-22). All contribute to biodiversity protection and enhancement, and the resilience of ecosystems and support the storage of carbon in Torfaen.

a. South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU)



The upland landscape across Torfaen, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent faces a range of challenges from landscape crime, loss of habitats and key species to poor infrastructure and fragmented communities. Building on previous wide scale community engagement the project has focussed on new collaborative action to improve the uplands and create more resilient communities.

The project's collaborative approach included input from the three local authorities, Gwent Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Services, Commons Associations, action groups, farming unions and Brecon Beacons National Park. The focus was on land management to improve soils and water quality, biodiversity, and carbon storage.

Strengthening relationships between stakeholders and commoners to support upland communities, building capacity through volunteering, training and community engagement, increasing farm competitiveness and viability through diversification and the development of innovative business opportunities was also a project aim. Tackling the underlying causes of upland degradation caused by poor land management and anti-social problems such as fly-tipping, arson and illegal off-roading and providing opportunities for quiet recreation and enhancing the area's tourism offer were all explored. The following are a few examples of projects currently underway.

- Peatland restoration – including a restoration study, monitoring, drone surveys and two practical restoration projects;
- 10-year landscape crime management plan;
- South-East Wales wildfire plan;
- Mynydd Maen commons innovation plan;
- Heather and bracken management;
- Land management advice and training.

This project came to an end during the period of this report, but a newly appointed officer will continue to take forward core elements of the SEWRU project.

b. Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant (ENRaW): Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership – LNP Cymru.



A Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership was established in 1999 to oversee the implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). This partnership was made up of representatives from Torfaen County Borough Council, other government bodies, non-governmental bodies, conservationists and interested members of the public. In 2018 the Torfaen partnership merged with Blaenau Gwent to form a **joint Local Nature Partnership (LNP)**.

Funding has been made available through Welsh Government's Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant (ENRaW) and administered through Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to employ a Wales wide network of LNP co-ordinators under the banner of LNP Cymru. Torfaen hosts the co-ordinator for the Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen LNP.

The project aims to make a long-term, sustainable difference to halting and reversing the decline of the natural environment, as detailed in the Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan and Natural Resource Policy, through using Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) principles to harness the collective resources of communities, volunteers, public bodies and businesses (beyond traditional audiences) to take informed, evidence-driven collaborative action within local authority or national park areas.



c. Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant (ENRaW): Local Places for Nature

The Local Places for Nature (LPfN) programme was designed with the aim of trialling local scale interventions that support nature. The primary focus of LPfN is to engage communities and encourage participation in the efforts to create places for nature, in turn contributing to the preservation and sustainability of biodiversity alongside the social and wellbeing benefits of interacting with nature. Importantly, the scale of intervention aims to be relatively small and local, but visible, to establish and develop accessible 'nature on their doorstep'.

In Torfaen the scheme has been running for two years and funding has helped to restore linear habitats such as hedgerows and dry-stone walls. It has been a catalyst for a successful change in the management of urban grassland through the purchasing of much needed cut and collect equipment. It also helped increase the amount of tree planting undertaken in parks and other green space. Small grants were provided to community groups and support was given to a conservation grazing trial. Establishing an evidence base and monitoring was also a feature of the programme.

Several community events have taken place. The LPfN Coordinator was interviewed for BBC Wales Radio and BBC Wales News and engaged with the Big Green Week initiative in partnership with a community arts project called Head4Arts Cariad Coed (Love Trees).

This year Julie James MS Minister for Climate Change visited a site in Pontypool to view the work that has taken place with residents to change the way their local green space is managed.

This winter will see a continuation of the LPfN work through the management of Local Nature Reserves and ancient woodland sites.



Nature Networks green space signage



Julie James MS Minister for Climate Change on visit to Torfaen to coincide with International Biodiversity Day.

d. **Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant (ENRaW): A Resilient Greater Gwent (RGG).**



A Resilient Greater Gwent

Resilient Greater Gwent (RGG) was funded through Welsh Governments Enabling of Natural Resources and Wellbeing grant, this cross-sector collaborative project ran from 2019-summer 2022 and was delivered under several sub-project headings.

The project achieved:

- Enhanced biodiversity and resilient ecological networks in Gwent;

- Engendered a culture change to put biodiversity at the heart of decision making;
- People were increasingly connected with nature and sustainable lifestyles were encouraged; supporting their health and well-being;
- Actions were taken against the five anthropogenic drivers of biodiversity loss; climate change, pollution, habitat change and loss, invasive non-native species and exploitation.

The following are examples of the work undertaken through the Resilient Greater Gwent project:

- Delivery of Wildlife & Wellbeing packages;
- Urban Bat Biodiversity Surveys (citizen science);
- Creation of an urban area masterplan to create a site incorporating play, wellbeing, amenity greenspace and biodiversity;
- New Local Nature Reserve interpretation boards with QR codes linking communities to SEWBRc (South East Wales Biological Records Centre);
- Church yard management plans commissioned to encourage local volunteer groups to manage these areas for the benefit of biodiversity;
- Creation of Householder and Small Development Biodiversity Guidance Note to aid the Planning and Development team in securing biodiversity enhancements through the planning process;
- Treatment of INNS (Invasive Non-Native Species) across the borough;
- Riparian zone scrub management and habitat creation along the Afon Lwyd;
- Actions implemented in response to the production of the Gwent NRAP, such as pond/scrape creation and pond restoration.

e. Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant (ENRaW): Gwent Green Grid Project (GGGP).



The **Gwent Green Grid Partnership** aims to improve and develop green infrastructure – a term used to describe the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect villages, towns and cities. Green infrastructure has a crucial role to play in addressing nature, climate

change and health emergencies. Monmouthshire County Council (lead partner), works together with Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen Councils, as well as Natural Resources Wales, Forest Research and the Severn Wye Energy Agency, to ensure the area's natural resources are healthy, resilient to pressures and threats and thereby better able to provide vital health and well-being benefits for current and future generations.

The project has delivered a range of well-being benefits for local communities and improvements to green spaces, urban parks, cycleways and public rights of way. It has also supported woodland management and creation, and taken action to protect and enhance vital habitats for pollinators.

The GGGP will bring to life the Gwent Public Service Board's commitment to implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, through improved collaboration with partners involving local citizens and delivering across all seven well-being goals.



Nature Isn't Neat Interpretation Board

Nature Isn't Neat is a sub project of the over-arching GGGP. It supports partners to diversify the way public space is managed and builds on the work already started in Torfaen. It has produced a variety of interpretation material including videos and on-site signage along with funding to help support land management for biodiversity.

f. Friends of Henllys Local Nature Reserve (LNR)



The **Friends of Henllys Local Nature Reserve (LNR)** are an established and fully constituted volunteer-led community group with an aim to maintain and enhance the LNR for people and wildlife. Volunteers are encouraged to undertake practical nature conservation and access management tasks and to promote the value and respect of this green space within the local community.

The group has clocked up over 11,000 volunteer hours completing a range of important hands-on land management interventions. None more so than the labour-intensive control of Invasive Non-native Species (INNS), notably Himalayan balsam. In addition, it has managed several small areas of grassland through the traditional manual method of scything and adopting the cut and collect approach. Recording wildlife from bats to moths is an important monitoring tool so all records are submitted by the group to the local biodiversity records centre.

Another strength of the group is its ability to be self-sustaining through a range of successful funding applications, including those from Keep Wales Tidy, the Welsh Government funded Local Places for Nature and the Gwent High Sheriffs' Community Fund, with grants of over £40,000 having been secured to date. More recently support has been received to establish a small-scale native wildflower trial. A community orchard established in few years ago is now bearing fruit for both people and wildlife and is a source of fruit to produce the groups very own apple juice.

Henllys LNR is extremely popular with local dog walkers and other users. The group is proactive in its role as a community educator, engaging users through on-site interpretation material. It also has a social media presence across multiple platforms.

This education role is extended to the local primary school, cubs, beavers and a scout group. When children are involved in practical tasks or citizen science activities such

as pond monitoring, it helps build their environmental awareness, self- pride and confidence and helps engender a sense of ownership in the LNR.

The group has been awarded the Community Green Flag award for the last eight years as well as a Keep Wales Tidy, Tidy Wales Biodiversity Award.