



## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CABINET

17TH DECEMBER 2019

### CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS – BIODIVERSITY DUTY

#### REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR ANN CRIMMINGS, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE

**Author:** Hannah Williams – Council Business Unit (01443 424062)

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which considered a report on the progress in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (attached as Appendix 1) and;
- 2.2 Agree the recommendation of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which is to agree to submit the report to Welsh Government on the actions undertaken to further the 'Biodiversity Duty' by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Council is required to report progress in the discharge of its biodiversity duty to Welsh Government.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 contains a new Biodiversity Duty (s.6) which states that public bodies, including Local Authorities:

*"...must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions".*

- 4.2 A report setting out proposals for the implementation of the new Biodiversity Duty in Rhondda Cynon Taf was prepared in 2017, in consultation with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership.
- 4.3 The biodiversity duty was considered by the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on [12th December 2017](#).
- 4.4 As part of the Council's performance management arrangements, a Service Self Evaluation (SSE) is undertaken by each Council service in the autumn to inform the Service Delivery Plans for the forthcoming year. The inclusion of a 'Biodiversity Duty' question in 2017 provided a baseline and some initial priorities for the Action Plan. The follow up question, in the Service Self Evaluation 2018, provided additional information.

## **5. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP**

- 5.1 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 where they received a presentation, in conjunction with the report of the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which updated Members on the progress made in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty. Alongside Members and key officers were two external representatives from organisations, which have previously engaged with the Council in tackling the issues associated with climate change
- 5.2 The Steering Group were informed of the key areas of the local plan, which set out proposals for the implementation of the new biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf and its significance on both a local and national level.
- 5.3 A robust discussion took place in respect of the importance of creating a sustainable management solution and creating a sense of ownership in local communities, with the Group agreeing that communications would play a crucial role in promoting the message to local residents.
- 5.4 Members were pleased with the work being undertaken within Rhondda Cynon Taf and were content that the action plan sought to address and monitor the key themes, which have arisen from previous work. Therefore, it was resolved to recommend to Cabinet the submission of the report to Welsh Government.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a plan of action regarding the Biodiversity Duty and to report to Welsh Government, as set out in S.6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 Should the Cabinet agree the recommendation of the Climate Change Steering Group, the Biodiversity Duty Report will be submitted to Welsh Government and published on the Council's website.

- 8.2 'Action for Nature: the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf' is currently being reviewed by the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership. The plan can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/PlanningandBuildingChange/Countryside/Biodiversity/ActionforNature.aspx>

This work will provide an opportunity for members of the public, wildlife and community organisations, and public bodies to contribute their projects and ideas for the conservation of wildlife across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- 8.3 Additional themes or actions that may arise in the future in respect of the Council's Biodiversity Duty, will be considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in the first instance, prior to recommendations being made for Cabinet consideration.

## **9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

## **10. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 10.1 The initial input from the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership, Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee and the Senior Leadership Team, together with the Service Self Evaluation process has enabled a wide range of interests and expertise to contribute to the Biodiversity Duty Action Plan and reporting process.

## **11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 11.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, financial implications may arise in association with the actions the Council undertakes to comply with the Duty and these will be considered as and when necessary.

## **12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 12.1 The Biodiversity Duty contributes to a number of the Wellbeing Objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan 2016-2020.
- 12.2 Biodiversity is central to 'ecosystem resilience', which is the focus of both the Environment (Wales) Act and the Resilience Goal in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

### **13. CONCLUSION**

- 13.1 On the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met to discuss the report on the progress in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty, which is a statutory duty of the Council to prepare a plan of action regarding the Biodiversity Duty and to report to Welsh Government, as set out in S.6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
- 13.2 At the meeting, following a number of queries, Members were content that the action plan sought to address and monitor the key themes, which have arisen from previous work. Therefore, it was resolved to recommend to Cabinet the submission of the report to Welsh Government.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2019**

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS –  
BIODIVERSITY DUTY**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND  
COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR ANN CRIMMINGS,  
CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE**



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP**

**18<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019**

**BIODIVERSITY DUTY**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET'S CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPION (COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS)**

**Author: Elizabeth Dean, Environment Planner**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members on progress in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty and to seek approval to submit the required update report to Welsh Government.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Steering Group:

- 2.1 Consider the proposed report to Welsh Government on the actions undertaken to further the 'Biodiversity Duty' by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, and
- 2.2 Subject to any amendments, recommend to Cabinet the submission of the update report to Welsh Government.

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Council is required, by the provisions of s.6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, to report to Welsh Government on action to comply with the Biodiversity Duty, every three years, with the first report due at the end of 2019.

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 contains a new Biodiversity Duty (s.6) which states that public bodies, including Local Authorities:

*"...must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions".*

## **4.2 The Biodiversity Duty Report**

4.2.1 A report setting out proposals for the implementation of the new Biodiversity Duty in Rhondda Cynon Taf was prepared in 2017, in consultation with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership. The biodiversity duty was discussed with the Council's Senior Leadership Team in October and was considered by the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee in December 2017.

4.2.2 The Report includes a description of the biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf and its contribution to local well-being as well as its national and international value. The report then considers the main impacts of Council services on biodiversity, highlighting areas of good practice and scope for improvement under the following themes:

- public engagement,
- planning,
- estate management,
- water management,
- education,
- advice to the public,
- corporate planning,
- working with neighbours and statutory bodies

## **4.3 The Council's response to Net Zero – The Committee on Climate Change**

4.3.1 Climate change and biodiversity are interdependent. Many of the underlying drivers of climate change also affect wildlife, for example pollution and land use change. Also, as the climate changes habitats and species need to adapt or move if they are to survive. Biodiversity makes an essential contribution to natural processes such as carbon storage in plants and the movement of water through the landscape. Biodiversity is central to 'ecosystem resilience', which is the focus of both the Environment (Wales) Act and the Resilience Goal in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

4.3.2 Following the recommendations of the Cabinet (18/06/19), further work on biodiversity and climate change is proposed within the context of the new draft Corporate Plan. This will build on current programmes, such as the restoration of extensive peat-bogs and upland heath through planning agreements with windfarm developers. For example, the joint working with Neath Port Talbot at the Penycymoedd wind farm has recently attracted additional funding from The Heritage Lottery for the 'Lost Peatlands' project. The Healthy Hillside project is another

example of a successful project, piloted in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which may now receive additional funding from Welsh Government, allowing further sites in RCT and elsewhere to be brought into conservation management. The project, which is co-ordinated by the Wildlife Trust has been targeted at sites with a history of wild fire and involves the Council, the Fire Service, specialist organisations such as Butterfly Conservation and PONT (conservation grazing) and other landowners such as Llantrisant Town Trust.

4.3.3 The County Borough is one of the most wooded in Wales, with approximately one third of the area wooded. In recent historical terms, woodland cover has increased significantly and much of this has been through natural woodland regeneration. The County Borough has unusually high levels of urban tree cover (in gardens, parks, transport corridors etc.) at 18.5% compared with a Wales average of 16.3%. The management of much of this woodland falls within the Council's remit, providing not only carbon storage, landscape, wildlife and aesthetic benefits but also shade and shelter for residents as the climate warms and water interception and storage if rainfall increases. The impact of increased storminess due to climate breakdown is also a management consideration.

4.3.4 The important role of undisturbed soils and natural vegetation in storing carbon has been recognised by the Council. Delivering natural carbon storage solutions, such as those provided by trees, peatbogs, heathlands, dry and marshy grassland and other natural habitats across the County Borough will help to reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses and enhance air quality. Understanding and working with natural processes, including natural woodland regeneration, will help the Council to achieve both climate and biodiversity benefits through an approach which will be cost effective, sustainable and multi-outcome.

#### **4.4 The Action Plan Spreadsheet**

4.4.1 An Action Plan spreadsheet has been set up to monitor progress against the proposed actions. The actions include matters identified in the 2017 report and actions arising from the Service Self Evaluation process (see below). A number of new opportunities have also been included.

4.4.2 Members will be aware that as part of the Council's performance management arrangements a Service Self Evaluation (SSE) is undertaken by each Council service in the autumn to inform the Service Delivery Plans for the forthcoming year. The inclusion of a 'Biodiversity Duty' question in 2017 provided a baseline and some initial priorities for the Action Plan. The follow up question, in the SSE 2018, provided additional information.

- 4.4.3 The actions are grouped under the themes listed above. Each Action is classified as either a 'project' or 'on-going' and the lead officer identified. Columns provide for the start date, progress 17/18, progress 18/19, progress 19/20, comments and completion date to be recorded.
- 4.4.4 A copy of the Biodiversity Duty Action Spreadsheet (A3) is appended to this report.

#### **4.5 Statutory Report to Welsh Government**

- 4.5.1 Subject to members' approval, the 2017 Biodiversity Duty Report (appendix 1) and the 2019 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan Spreadsheet (appendix 2) will comprise the Council's first submission to Welsh Government with regard to the provisions of S6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

#### **4.6 Review of the Biodiversity Duty Report and Action Plan Spreadsheet**

- 4.6.1 Following submission to Welsh Government, the Biodiversity Duty Report will be published on the Council's website.

*'Action for Nature: the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf'* is currently being reviewed by the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership. The plan can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/PlanningandBuildingChange/Countryside/Biodiversity/ActionforNature.aspx>

This work will provide an opportunity for members of the public, wildlife and community organisations, and public bodies to contribute their projects and ideas for the conservation of wildlife across Rhondda Cynon Taf. Additional themes or actions that come forward, which are relevant to the Council's Biodiversity Duty, will be considered for inclusion for the next 'Biodiversity Duty' reporting round. A further report will be brought to Members in this regard.

### **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

### **6. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 6.1 The initial input from the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership, Scrutiny Committee and the Senior Leadership Team, together with the

Service Self Evaluation process has enabled a wide range of interests and expertise to contribute to the Biodiversity Duty Action Plan and reporting process. The views of this Scrutiny Committee will inform the deliberations of Cabinet.

- 6.2 The review of the Biodiversity Duty Plan and the next three year reporting round will reflect the results of a wider public involvement in the review of *Action for Nature* described in para 4.5 above.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, financial implications may arise in association with the actions the Council undertakes to comply with the Duty and these will be considered as and when necessary.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a plan of action regarding the Biodiversity Duty and to report to Welsh Government, as set out in S.6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

## **9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 9.1 The Biodiversity Duty contributes to a number of the Wellbeing Objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan 2016-2020. In the Corporate Performance Reports, Biodiversity is a cross cutting theme. This reflects the ways of working promoted in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

- 10.1 The Council is required to report progress in the discharge of its biodiversity duty to Welsh Government. The report and the action plan presented at Appendix 1 & 2 present the current position and Members are asked to consider and approve this report for submission to Welsh Government.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

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**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP**

**18<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019**

**BIODIVERSITY DUTY**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION &  
COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH COUNCILLOR ANN  
CRIMMINGS, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE AND &  
HERITAGE SERVICES**

Background papers:

Officer to contact: Elizabeth Dean, Environment Planner

## Biodiversity Duty in Rhondda Cynon Taf (2017)

### 1. Introduction

In March 2016 the Environment (Wales) Act came in to force. Its purpose is to secure healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems in Wales, while still meeting the challenges of creating jobs, housing and infrastructure. The Act provides a framework for a more integrated approach to managing natural resources, ensuring that long-term sustainability will be a core consideration in all decision making.

The **New Biodiversity Duty** will help reverse the decline and secure the long term resilience of biodiversity in Wales. The Act requires Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, and all public authorities (including Local Authorities)

**“to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing, promote the resilience of ecosystems so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”.**

The Local Authority should prepare a Plan setting out what it proposes to do to comply with the new Duty. The local authority is required to report to Welsh Government on action to comply with the new Duty, every three years, with the first report due at the end of 2019.

This document sets out proposals for the implementation of the new biodiversity duty in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It includes a ‘biodiversity tour’ of Rhondda Cynon Taf, a description of the contribution of biodiversity to local well-being as well as its national and international value. This provides the context for the implementation of the Duty across all Local Authority functions. The proposals focus on the most significant areas for biodiversity impact, with scope for modification as our knowledge and understanding grows. The proposals are being developed collaboratively with stakeholders across the authority, with partners and interested members of the public. They seek to identify and build on areas of good practice, aiming for continuous improvement across all relevant Council services.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 is part of a suite of interrelated legislation including the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 (see Appendix One below). The Biodiversity Duty will be of relevance for the Public Service Board in the production of the Well-being Plan for Cwm Taf, contributing in particular to the goal of creating ‘A Resilient Wales’. (see <http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160225-spsf-2-individual-role-en.pdf> )

***Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, and includes all species of plants and animals and the natural systems that support them***

## 2. Biodiversity in Rhondda Cynon Taf

'The south Wales Valleys support a treasure trove of biodiversity. Like all good treasure troves it had been lost and long forgotten and has only now been re-found, and like some giant archaeological dig, one discovery has led to another; one find has spurred on the finding of the next.

Local people have started to see how their valued local patch fits into a bigger context and experts have gradually realised the significance of our biodiversity. The surprise is the greater because the Valleys have been viewed as derelict and despoiled, depressed and degraded. This is surely the last place biodiversity would thrive? However, the reality is very different. With an open mind (and a little knowledge) the secret behind the success of Valleys biodiversity is obvious. Partly as result of nutrient poor but varied soils, partly because of an intense and complex topography, geomorphology and geology, partly down to our wonderful mild wet climate, partly due to traditional small farm management and the Valleys industrial legacy, and partly due to the daily interactions of people with their environment: **all of the components for a rich biodiversity are in place**. Blessed with this heady mix of conditions and circumstances, the South Wales Valleys support a range and variety of lowland and upland habitats, which is not bettered anywhere in southern Britain. **Rhondda Cynon Taf lies at the heart of the Valleys and at the heart of this wealth of biodiversity**. This is where landscape and biodiversity come together, where the views have biodiversity substance and depth. This is no shallow and brittle postcard image based on pretence and faded reputation. This is a biodiverse landscape, which is 'breath-taking', and dynamic, and integral to a unique sense of place and belonging. To prove a point let us take a quick tour of Rhondda Cynon Taf. But where should we start?

Perhaps we should begin in the high-hedged, rhos pastures of the lower Ely and Taff Valleys, and the pastures of the Upper Cynon Valley. Here internationally important communities of purple moor-grass and rush pasture are still characteristic landscape features. These **rhos pasture** flower in summer with devil's-bit scabious, meadow thistle and heath spotted orchid and host precious colonies of marsh fritillary and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. No planned landscape this, ancient field patterns are marked by even more ancient hedge-banks cut from the original 'wildwood'. Dormice find a home in the **hedgerows** of hazel, oak, ash, hawthorn, willow, blackthorn, rose, dogwood, spindle and holly, and through this network of hedgerows our remnant ancient woodlands stay connected and viable.

The valley sides of the Rhondda, Cynon and Taff illustrate biodiversity connectivity beautifully. From any bus stop in Pontypridd, or Porth, or Aberdare or Mountain Ash look up at the complex of habitats which forms the valley side **ffridd**. A complex

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mixture of acid grassland, heath, bracken, woodland, scrub and flushes runs for mile on mile along our main valleys: interconnected in an ever-changing intricate habitat mosaic. The ffridd is home to bluebells, lizards, slow worms, grayling butterflies and rare upland bumblebees. Bracken slopes with abundant dog violets are important habitat for fritillary butterflies including important dark green fritillary populations (and potentially the rare high brown fritillary). Now if you look closer you can see the signs of **colliery spoil**, small drift workings, egg shaped mounds, and, if you are lucky you'll find one of our remaining tip systems, constructions, which rival the Celtic Hill Forts of Dorset. Sites such as the Gelli Tips, Old Smokey, Wattstown and Dare Valley Tips tell an often hard and tragic story, but now support habitats of enormous biodiversity and cultural value. These are landforms of unique value and a living testimony to a sense of place, which is still strong in our mining valleys. Coal tips are proving particularly important for their lichen-heath communities in which heathland grows amongst white, encrusted mats of *cladonia* lichens. Some of the best examples of lichen-heath in Wales occur on old coal spoil tips in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Recent work has confirmed how important these tips are as invertebrate habitat: survey work on 5 RCT Tips has recorded 85 bee species (including scarce and rare species), this is half the known Welsh bee fauna and a third of the UK list.

From a coal tip, created in the 1890s, wander straight into an **ancient upland oak wood** where stunted welsh oaks cling to the valley side, with a carpeted ground flora of wimberry, heather, ferns, mosses and exposed slabs of pennant sandstone, with their lichen rich bedding planes. These sheep grazed woods are home to classic Welsh woodland songbirds: redstart, wood warbler and tree pipit. In the valleys bottoms **mixed deciduous woodlands** supports oak, ash, sycamore and wych elm with alder and willow on wetter ground. Here there is a rich understorey of hazel coppice and holly, and on the southern limestone dogwood, spindle, and field maple and even the occasional wayfaring tree. These woods have wonderful ground floras with bluebell, wood anemones, violets, sanicle, wild garlic, primroses, mochatel, twayblades and toothwort. The recovery of woodland fungi and lichen communities is testimony to the clean air. Branches, bowls and twigs are cloaked in a multitude of lichens and tree fungi: rare things like willow glove and golden-eye lichen have recently been found, rare things wait to be found: these are exciting times for our local lichenologists and mycologists.

Stand on a summer's evening in the courtyard of an ancient farm, or barn, or terraced house and count the bats tumbling out of their daytime roosts. On an autumn dawn, shiver by a disused railway tunnel or mine adit and watch for swarming bats (a prelude to hibernation) – perhaps you'll be the one to discover a major bat hibernation site. RCT supports at least 13 species of bats, including rare things like barbastelle and lesser horseshoe. On the other end of the scale, Pontypridd is known by bat surveyors as 'Pip City', an affectionate reference to the abundance of common and soprano pipistrelle bats living in the town.

Certain habitats can be 'traced back' to the retreat of the last ice sheet 8,000 years ago. Much of our **peatbog** habitat started to form at that time, as glacial lakes, hollows and upland plateaus gradually succeeded through fens, and swamp into peat. These quaking, shaking wonders are home to cranberry, sundews and bog asphodel which flower amongst the sphagnum peat-mosses and the tussocks of moor-grass and deer grass. These are places where the occasional snipe still breeds. Llantrisant Common, Hirwaun and Tonyrefail are particularly important areas for lowland bogs, with peat and pollen records which chart the changing face of vegetation over 8 millennia. History can be traced deep beneath 9 metres of peat, deep down to the remnant water of the lost glacial lake. Misused and misunderstood these lowland bogs have somehow survived and now efforts to conserve and restore them have begun. In the uplands our extensive blanket bogs were similarly treated, drained for pasture or afforested with sitka spruce. However now, where the wind turbines turn, you will also find extensive peat-bog restoration, delivered as planning permission requirements. In the years to come there is the prospect to recover hundreds of hectares of upland peat bog, swaying in the summer breeze with hundreds of thousands of cotton-grass heads, holding atmospheric carbon, and naturally storing and controlling upland storm water to provide the 'greenest of green' flood protection for the Valley communities below. You may feel a wave of hope that perhaps we do have the capacity to learn? This is wilderness, but wilderness close to home and a biodiversity, which is largely un-chartered and unknown. While you are there, make sure to dip into a forestry plantation edge where siskin and crossbill abound, club-mosses shelter, heronries sway in western hemlocks and on summer dusks, nightjars 'churr'.

In early June take the time to visit your local **species-rich grassland**, a hay meadow or cow or pony grazed pasture: in the winter it may just look like a field but in the early summer the floristic display is proof of another nationally rare habitat. We are very lucky in Rhondda Cynon Taf to still have a superb grassland heritage, which is a vibrant part of our biodiversity fabric. Pastures and road verges are places where flower rich displays of birds-foot trefoil, black knapweed, ox-eye daisy, common-spotted orchid rough hawkbit and red clover thrive: in which common blue butterflies, mother shipton moths, grasshoppers and countless bees flit, hum and buzz. The dry grasslands of the upper valleys slopes are more acidic but just as beautiful with heath bedstraw, tormentil, greater burnet, bluebell and sheep sorrel, while on the limestone there are cowslips and bee orchids. In the autumn, on a bright sunny morning visit and look for another indicator of biodiversity wealth, the reds, oranges, yellows and purples of wax cap fungi.

On a summer's day pause and cool your feet in an upland stream, or meander along the Cynon, Rhondda, Ely or Taff. **Rivers** which forty years ago were dead and lifeless and are now healthy, biodiverse watercourses, home to multitudes of stone

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and mayflies, dipper, grey wagtail, brown trout and, of course, otter. All our main rivers once had floodplains. Places were winter floodwater spill, and **floodplain** grassland, woodland and wetland flourish. Pant Marsh at Talbot Green is home to species-rich grasslands and flag iris, just up the road Coedcae Marsh has sedge beds, adder, and marsh cinquefoil. The lagoons and wet pastures of Tirfounder Fields, Aberdare supports regionally important numbers of breeding and wintering water birds, grass snake and dragonflies. These stunning landscapes hold and gently release storm water, precious wildlife refuges which save our living room carpets from flood.

On a crisp winters day take in our glacial landscapes and the cwms: birthplaces of the glaciers, which gouged and ground out the valleys. Marvel at the majesty of Cwm Parc, Cwm Saebren and Cwm Dare. These most southerly **glacial cwms** in the UK are home to peregrine falcons and stranded arctic alpine plants – flowers and ferns, which cling to the coolest, shadiest ledges and wait in hope for tundra summers to return. At the head of the Rhondda Fawr stand in the terrace streets of an alpine village called Blaenrhondda and feel the presence of Pen Pych rise above. Travel up the Rhondda Fach to the scree slopes of Cefn Craig Amos and Tarren Maerdy, where from their school desks kids from Maerdy Comp compose words and pictures from the jumble of frost shattered sandstone on the hillside backdrop to their school.

Where industry has been cleared, experience some '**brownfield**' biodiversity. Post-industrial sites often support amazing mosaics of grassland, wetland and woodland habitats all naturally developed on apparently derelict land. These eclectic mixtures of habitats hold many a biodiversity surprise and a home to newts, frogs, dingy skipper butterflies and red-belted clearwing moths.

Whichever way you wandered, on the way home count the ferns in your neighbour's front wall, can you find the classic four of harts-tongue, maidenhair-spleenwort, rustyback and wall rue? Make a note to take more care when you next re-point your wall and try to encourage your own fern garden. At the gate pause and watch a leaf-cutter bees ferrying neatly rolled leaves to nest chambers in the drainage holes of your UVPC double-glazed windows. Look up, and marvel that your swifts in the loft and house martins under the eaves have come back to you from across the Sahara and far beyond, and a thousand places you'll never see. Feel equal pride that your year-round house sparrows can nest and 'chirrup' from your bird-friendly soffit boards. Also, with your trusty moth trap you can boast a list of 300 macro-moths in your terrace garden, 50 bee species (with lawn full of solitary bee mounds), twenty frogs in the pond and dozens of slow worms in the compost heap. After all, biodiversity does start at home.'

### **3. Biodiversity's contribution to local well-being and its national and international value**

The public engagement undertaken for the Natural Resources Wales Rhondda Pilot in 2015/16 and the Well-being Assessment undertaken for Cwm Taf in 2016/17 have both highlighted the importance of the landscape and wildlife to local people. It is one of the assets which people value and it contributes to their sense of place and to local culture. The importance of 'the outdoors' for both physical and mental health was widely recognised. Some people also expressed interest in becoming more involved in looking after local green space.

Under S.7 of the Environment Act, Welsh Government publishes lists of the habitats and species of principal importance in Wales. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, most of the terrestrial habitats are represented and a large number of the species, reflecting how valuable our biodiversity is in a national and international context. Perhaps most telling is the extent of the 'priority habitats' in RCT (20% of the non forested area) and Merthyr (23%) compared with a Glamorgan figure of 16% and Wales as a whole at 18%. See appendix 2

The extent of semi-natural habitat, the diversity of habitat types and the 'connectivity' both from the lowlands to the uplands and from the south to the north are among the reasons why the valleys are so important for biodiversity in Wales.

### **4. Significant areas of biodiversity impact**

#### **4.1 Public engagement with biodiversity in RCT**

The knowledge and understanding of local biodiversity generated by local people should not be underestimated. From the heyday of the Victorian naturalist to the present, an interest in their local environment has inspired, enthralled and entertained. It is a pastime that can provide pleasure to many, regardless of income or education. In the past, few professional ecologists visited the area compared with the national parks or the coast, little was written about the Valleys in academic journals and local knowledge remained largely untapped. Since the advent of Biodiversity Action Planning (arising from commitments at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and subsequent UK and Welsh Government policy) the importance of the Valleys for biodiversity has been recognised. Professional ecologists are now more engaged locally, but typically their work is task orientated such as the detailed surveys required for a proposed development site, or river sampling to assess pollution levels. This data is very useful and adds to our knowledge but it cannot replace the day to day observations, enthusiasms and expertise for both common and rare wildlife that comes from local people.

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan partnership was established in Rhondda Cynon Taf in 1997, along with similar partnerships across Wales. The partnership was set up to prepare a Local Biodiversity Action Plan for the area. Anyone with an interest in wildlife was encouraged to join, so that local knowledge and understanding would inform and shape the Plan. The Partnership continues to review, update and implement the action plan and to support, develop and celebrate local expertise.

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The Council has also developed strong relationships with specialist voluntary organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Glamorgan Bird Club, PONT (an organisation promoting conservation grazing) and the South East Wales Biodiversity Recording Centre (SEWBREC) who can provide specialist advice and volunteer support for joint projects.

There is potential for public engagement to be further developed both to sustain, support and develop local capacity and for local knowledge and expertise to be more widely used within the Council. For example SEWBREC currently provide information to support the Planning function, but there could be advantages for other departments as well. There is also potential to promote the wildlife value of Council owned land and explore opportunities to link local communities to local wildlife sites.

#### 4.2 Biodiversity and the Planning System

The Local Development Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf (2011) and the associated Supplementary Planning Guidance, for Nature Conservation and for Planning Obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy, provides the framework for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the statutory land-use planning process. Nationally protected sites such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are underpinned by local Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) which have been identified in the Local Development Plan. Development proposals should avoid damage to the biodiversity value of these sites. To ensure decisions are soundly based, SEWBREC supply the Council with data regarding planning applications and where appropriate developers must supply adequate information about the habitats and species present on the site, the impact of their proposals and any mitigation or enhancement proposed. The Council's ecologist provides advice to the Development Management team and assists in the negotiation of S106 and similar agreements with developers to ensure the protection of biodiversity features on development sites and their long term management, typically for 25 years. For protected species, such as bats, protocols have been developed to minimise risks for both the developer and the council.

Much of the current planning work is being taken forward at a regional level. The Valleys Task force, the Cardiff City Region Deal, the strategic plan for the Cardiff region etc. will all need to address the Biodiversity Duty, as will the review of the Local Development Plan. Monitoring outcomes and collating evidence of the multiple benefits of current policies (for public open space, children's play, active travel, landscape, flood risk reduction, wildfire risk reduction, carbon and water storage as well as biodiversity) will be an important consideration.

#### 4.3 Biodiversity and land /estate management

The Council has extensive land and property holdings across the County Borough. The portfolio includes offices, schools, roads and parks plus many amenity areas in housing developments, town centre public spaces and extensive former land reclamation sites and old railway lines. The management of this estate can make an important contribution to biodiversity. For example, the NRW 'Rhondda Pilot' in 2014-16 identified that in excess of 60% of the land in Rhondda is in public ownership (NRW and Council). There are examples of good practice in land and

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property management, for example protocols relating to essential maintenance works undertaken in the bird nesting season, the introduction of biodiversity management of road verges and the use of conservation grazing to reduce wildfire risk.

There is a need to better understand both the opportunities and the constraints for developing good practice further. Council proposals for development and protocols relating to the disposal of assets are two areas where further work is proposed.

#### 4.4 Biodiversity and water management

The local authority has a variety of responsibilities relating to water including ordinary watercourse consents, flood risk management planning and water pollution prevention. In many of these areas Natural Resources Wales have parallel powers relating to the main rivers. The flood risk management plan for RCT has been informed by an understanding of the geology, topography, climate, biodiversity and industrial history of the County Borough. The constricted and heavily developed valley floor, the steep valley sides, the historic use of culverts where the watercourses meet the built up area and the high rainfall totals all contribute to the flood risk. Upstream management, including restoring peat-bogs on the extensive upland plateau has been identified as a potential risk reduction option. This has been taken forward in planning agreements negotiated as part of wind farm planning consents

Good practice is being developed in relation to ordinary water course consents and there is potential for closer integration with development management, for more sustainable drainage systems in new developments (SUDS) and for reducing water pollution.

#### 4.5 Biodiversity and education

The local authority has overall responsibility for education within the County Borough, although most of the service delivery is delegated to schools. The land and buildings are subject to the same biodiversity considerations as the rest of the Council's holdings, however there will be additional opportunities for schools to develop and use their grounds for outdoor teaching and learning, including about biodiversity. A number of schools have taken advantage of the Tidy Towns initiative, where the Keep Wales Tidy community officer and a council team can assist in developing outdoor classrooms, gardens, food growing and woodland areas.

Learning outside the classroom can provide memorable experiences for pupils, spark an interest in wildlife, encourage countryside care and citizenship as well as the beneficial educational outcomes. The early years curriculum (foundation phase), promotes outdoor learning. 'Walk to the Wild' has been developed to assist schools to use wild spaces, typically in Council ownership, within walking distance of the school, for half day curriculum based outdoor learning sessions, particularly for Key Stage Two.

There is scope to develop the opportunities for schools to learn more about local wildlife, to increase outdoor learning both in school grounds and in the locality.

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There may also be opportunities to work with the youth service, libraries, informal and continuing education.

#### 4.6 Biodiversity and advice to the public

Many Council officers provide advice to the public and some of this may create opportunities or have implications for biodiversity. Obvious examples include advice regarding invasive species or pest control where good practice has been developed. Generally speaking, where there is a good understanding of biodiversity in relation to Council policy and practice, this will feed through to public advice.

There are opportunities to develop this, for example through the Council's website. There may also be opportunities relating to advice about training and career development.

#### 4.7 Biodiversity and corporate planning

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 has established a new framework for corporate planning, based on seven goals for wellbeing in Wales and five ways of working. Biodiversity is explicitly recognised as a contributing factor in creating a resilient Wales and this, combined with the new Biodiversity Duty in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, should ensure that biodiversity is considered. A short section on biodiversity has been included in the 2016/17 Corporate Performance Report and the Biodiversity Duty requirements have been included in the 'Place' element of the refreshed Corporate Plan. The Service Self Assessment for autumn 2017 includes a section on biodiversity that will provide a baseline for reporting and inform the 2018/19 Service Delivery Plans.

The public consultation for the well-being assessment in summer 2016 identified wildlife, local landscape quality and outdoor activity as important to peoples' well-being. The environmental assessment also highlighted the importance of biodiversity as an asset for Cwm Taf. The assessment was published in March 2017 and the Wellbeing Plan will be completed by May 2018.

There are examples of good practice in Service level planning. The Local Development Plan and the Flood Risk Management Plan are examples where biodiversity has been an integral consideration. Future opportunities include emergency planning, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools programme and the Local Transport Plan.

#### 4.8 Working with neighbouring authorities and other statutory bodies

Much of the work of the local authority is undertaken in partnership with neighbouring or similar authorities, or with other statutory bodies. The appropriate scale for biodiversity action can vary from very local, to regional and national. The joint working with Neath Port Talbot and Natural Resources Wales to restore peat bog and heath land on Penycymoedd wind farm is one example. The coal and mineral spoil working group (led by Merthyr Tydfil) is a broader initiative considering industrial and cultural heritage, the geology, biodiversity, landscape and amenity value of old coal spoil tips cross the Valleys area. 'Healthy Hillside' is a joint project

between the Council, NRW, the Fire Service and the Wildlife Trust to manage the hillsides for biodiversity and reduce the risk of wildfire. Housing Associations have also developed best practice, for example in relation to bats and nesting birds in building refurbishment.

NRW is the main statutory body with biodiversity responsibilities. NRW is represented on the Public Service Board for Cwm Taf and will prepare an Area Statement to inform local decision making. NRW also has statutory responsibilities relating to the planning process, protected species, SSSIs and SACs and provides advice through the area and supports the Local Biodiversity Action Plan partnership. NRW is also a major landowner in RCT managing the public forest estate. All public bodies will be subject to the Biodiversity Duty and this, combined with the requirements of the WFG Act, may lead to new ways of working with the Council.

There is scope to develop joint working further. When resources are scarce, collaboration can help make progress that would not be possible alone.

#### 4.9 Other aspects as identified

It is anticipated that there will be other areas of Council work with opportunities or implications for biodiversity that are revealed as discussions with stakeholders proceed. There is scope for these to be added to the continuous improvement action plan.

### **5. Monitoring and reporting**

A spreadsheet of actions for continuous improvement is being developed to support the Biodiversity Duty. The Council is required to report to Welsh Government by December 2019, and subsequently every three years, on progress made in implementing the Duty. This report and the associated spreadsheet will provide the information to meet this requirement.

## Appendix One

### Legislation for sustainable development to secure the long term well-being of Wales

For Wales to develop sustainably, we need to change the law to put in place the key elements that will enable it to happen:

- A clear idea of what we are aiming for and an undertaking of the key principles that guide us;
- A clear picture of the natural resources we have, the risks they face and the opportunities they provide; and,
- An efficient process that ensures the right development is located in the right place to make it happen.



## Appendix Two: S.7 Habitats and Species in RCT and Merthyr

	Rhondda	Cynon	Taf	Merthyr
<b>Mammals</b>				
Water Vole		√		
Barbastelle Bat			√	
Hedgehog	√	√	√	√
Brown Hare	√	√	√	√
Otter	√	√	√	√
Harvest Mouse			√	
Dormouse		(√)	√	
Pine martin		(√)		
Noctule	√	√	√	√
Common Pipistrelle	√	√	√	√
Soprano Pipistrelle	√	√	√	√
Brown Long eared bat	√	√	√	√
Greater Horseshoe Bat			√	√
Lesser Horseshoe bat	√	√	√	√
Red Squirrel				
<b>Birds</b>				
Skylark	√	√	√	√
Tree Pipit	√	√	√	√
Nightjar	√	√	√	√
Lesser Redpoll	√	√	√	√
Common Linnet	√	√	√	√
Ringed Plover			√	
Hen Harrier	(√)	(√)	(√)	(√)
Cuckoo	√	√	√	√
Lesser Spotted woodpecker			√	
Yellowhammer			(√)	
Reed Bunting	√	√	√	√
Kestrel	√	√	√	√
Pied Flycatcher	(√)	(√)	(√)	√
Red Grouse		(√)		(√)
Herring Gull	√	√	√	√
Black Headed Gull	√	√	√	√
Grasshopper Warbler	√	√	√	√
Spotted flycatcher	√	√	√	√
Curlew			√	
Marsh Tit			(√)	
Willow Tit		√		
House Sparrow	√	√	√	√
Wood Warbler	√	√	√	√
Golden plover	(√)		(√)	
Bullfinch	√	√	√	√
Starling	√	√	√	√
Song thrush	√	√	√	√
Ring ouzel	(√)	(√)		(√)

Lapwing	(v)	(v)	(v)	v
<b>Fish</b>				
Eel	v	v	v	v
River Lamprey	v	v	v	v
Atlantic Salmon	v	v	v	v
Sea/Brown Trout	v	v	v	v
<b>Herptiles</b>				
Slow worm	v	v	v	v
Common toad	v	v	v	v
Common lizard	v	v	v	v
Grass snake	v	v	v	v
Great crested newt	v	v	v	v
Adder	v	v	v	v
<b>Invertebrates</b>				
Grey Dagger	v	v	v	v
Knot Grass	v	v	v	v
Flounced Chestnut	v	v	v	v
Brown Spot Pinion		v	(v)	v
Beaded Chestnut			v	(v)
Green Brindled Crescent	v	v	v	v
Ear Moth	v	v	v	v
Mouse Moth	v	v	v	v
Anaria funebris			v	
Andrena tarsata	v	v	v	
Dusky Brocade	v	v	v	v
Garden Tiger	v	v	v	v
High Brown Fritillary	(v)		(v)	
Centre Barred Sallow	v	v	v	v
White Clawed Crayfish			(v)	(v)
Bembidion testaceum		(v)	(v)	
Dark Brocade	(v)	(v)	(v)	(v)
Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary	v	v	v	v
Bombus humilis	v	v	v	v
Bombus muscorum	(v)	(v)	(v)	(v)
Bombus rudarius			(v)	
Bombus sylvarum			(v)	
Minor Shoulder-knot		v		v
Mottled Rustic	v	v	v	v
The Crescent			v	
The Broom Tip			(v)	
Latticed Heath	v	v	v	v
Small Heath	v	v	v	v
Goat Moth	(v)	v	(v)	v
Small Blue	v	v	v	(v)

Oak Lutestring	√	√	√	√
Small Square Spot	√	√	√	√
Figure of Eight	√	√	√	√
Small Phoenix	√	√	√	√
September Thorn		√		
August Thorn	√		√	
Grey Mountain Carpet	√	√	√	√
Galium Carpet	√	√	√	√
Dingy Skipper	√	√	√	√
Long Horned Bee		(√)	√	
Autumnal Rustic	√	√	√	√
Spinach	(√)	(√)	(√)	(√)
Marsh Fritillary		√	√	√
Garden Carpet	√	√	√	√
Double Dart		√		√
Narrow Bordered Bee Hawk Moth		(√)	(√)	(√)
Small Emerald		√	√	
Ghost	√	√	√	√
Grayling	√	√	√	√
The Rustic	√	√	√	√
Rosy Rustic	√	√	√	√
Currant Shhot-borer			(√)	
Wall Brown	√	√	√	√
Lipsothrix errans				(√)
Brindled Beauty	√	√	√	√
Lackey			√	
Dot Moth	√	√	√	√
Broom Moth	√	√	√	√
Pretty Chalk Carpet			(√)	
Meloe proscarabaeus			(√)	
Meloe violaceus			(√)	
Meotica anglica			√	
Rosy Minor	√	√	√	√
Drab Looper			(√)	
Shoulder-striped Wainscot	√	√	√	√
Powdered Quaker	√	√	√	√
Potamanthus luteus			(√)	(√)
White Letter Hairstreak	√	√	√	√
Mullein	√	√	√	√
Shaded Broad-bar	√	√	√	√
White Ermine	√	√	√	√
Anomalous	√	√	√	√
Hedge Rustic	√	√	√	√
Feathered Gothic			√	
Blood Vein	√	√	√	√
<b>Vascular Plants</b>				

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Deptford Pink			√	
Euphrasia officinalis subsp. anglica	√	√	(√)	(√)
Yellow bird's-nest			√	
Stag's-horn Clubmoss	√	√	√	√
Lesser Butterfly-orchid				(√)
Ley's Whitebeam				√
Globe-flower		√		√
Wood Bitter-Vetch		√		√
<b>Lichens</b>				
Caloplaca herbidella				(√)
Collema fragrans		(√)		
Toninia sedifolia		(√)		(√)
Usnea florida		(√)		(√)
<b>Fungi</b>				
Clavaria zollingeri	(√)	√	(√)	(√)
Cotylidia pannosa		(√)		
Entoloma bloxamii				(√)
Geoglossum atropurpureum		(√)		(√)
Hygrocybe spadicea		(√)		
Hypocreopsis rhododendri			(√)	
Microglossum olivaceum	(√)	(√)	(√)	(√)
<b>Habitats</b>				
Broadleaved mixed and yew woodland				
a) Traditional orchards	(√)	(√)	(√)	(√)
b) Wood pasture and parkland	√	√	√	√
c) Lowland Beech and Yew		√	√	√
d) Upland mixed ash				(√)
e) Wet Woodland	√	√	√	√
f) Lowland mixed deciduous	√	√	√	√
Boundary and Linear Hedgerows	√	√	√	√
Arable Field Margins			(√)	
Coastal and Floodplain Grassland		√	√	√
Lowland Meadows	√	√	√	√

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Lowland Calcareous Grassland			(√)	
Upland Calcareous Grassland		√		√
Lowland Dry Acid Grassland	√	√	√	√
Dwarf Shrub heath				
a) Lowland Heathland	√	√	√	√
b) Upland Heathland	√	√	√	√
Fen, Marsh and Swamp				
a) Upland flushes, fens and swamps	√	√	√	√
b) Lowland fens		√	√	
c) Purple Moorgrass and Rush pasture	√	√	√	√
d) Reedbeds		√	√	(√)
Bogs				
a) Lowland Raised Bog	(√)	√	√	√)
b) Blanket Bog	√	√		
Rivers	√	√	√	√
Standing Open water and Canals				
a) Ponds	√	√	√	√
b) Mesotrophic Lakes	√	√	√	√
c) Eutrophic Standing water	√	√	√	√
Inland Rock				
a) Rock outcrops/scree	√	√	√	√
b) Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land	√	√	√	√
c) Limestone Pavement				√

Key :

√ = Definite Present

(√) = Probably/Potentially/Occasionally Present

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<b>2019/20 Biodiversity Duty: Action spreadsheet</b>		<b>main contact</b>	<b>on-going or project</b>	<b>started</b>	<b>progress 2017/18</b>	<b>progress 2018/19</b>	<b>progress 2019/20</b>	<b>comments</b>	<b>completed</b>
<b>1. Public engagement with biodiversity in RCT</b>									
1.1	LBAP partnership	Richard Wistow	on-going	1997	meetings held in April, July and Sept 2017 and Jan 2018	meetings held April, July, Oct 18, Jan 19. 10 year review of Action for Nature commenced Jan 19	meetings held April, July, planned for Oct 3rd. Slow progress with LBAP review due to delay in WG funding.	timetable for the review of the LBAP considered at J19 meeting, progress report to Ap and Jul19, engagement events summer 19.	
1.2	Recorders' Newsletter	Richard Wistow	on-going	1997	Recorders' Newsletter no 37b published	delayed due to other work pressures	summary for 2018 produced and distributed Sept 19		
1.3	council sites and community groups	Liz Dean/ Richard Wistow	on going	1997	Welcome to our Woods meetings and supporting action, SEWBRC bio-blitz at Maerdy Colliery in July. Use of Key Countryside sites by various groups including Coed Lleol	Welcome to our Woods meetings and supporting action, liasion with Wildlife Trust re community engagement at Llanharan quarry.	Pontyclun wildflower walk, Beddau Biodiversity Ramble, Aberdare Park moth and bat events, Dare Valley Country Park bird and student events, monthly summer childrens events at Dare Valley and Ynysangharad Park (Magnificent minibeasts, muddy masterpieces, beautiful butterflies, den building)	As part of partnership working in 2019/20 further discussions held with the Wildlife trust for South and West Wales to explore potential community engagement work on RCT 'Countryside' sites. The hope is to try to develop a initial programme for work on pilot sites in 2020/21	
<b>2. Biodiversity and the Planning System</b>									
2.1	implement current policy and guidance	Richard Wistow	on-going	2011	An ecological review has been undertaken for at least 1184 planning applications received by the Local Planning Authority, including the review of SewBrec data searches	An ecological review has been undertaken for at least 724 planning applications received by the Local Planning authority, including the review of SewBrec data searches	Up to September 2019 an ecological review has been undertaken for at least 396 planning applications received by the local planning authority, including the review of SEWBREC data searches	The description of ecological review covers the full range of ecological scrutiny practised in the planning process. This begins with initial shifting and consideration of ecological potential for the huge majority of planning applications, through to those sites requiring site visits, scoping of required ecological assessments, review and scrutiny of submitted ecological assessments to mitigation development and ultimately ecological recommendations in accordance with adopted planning policy.	
2.2	monitor implementation of planning mitigation	Richard Wistow/Jen Wakeford	on-going	2019			PPW10 includes reference (6.2.12). Using existing S106 quarterly meetings and monthly biodiversity meetings to establish procedures.		

2.3	monitor the impact of development on SINC	Richard Wistow/Clare Hewitt	on-going	2011	During 2017-2018 two Site of Importance Nature Conservation (SINC) sites were affected by development. An application for a cycle track secured a mitigation scheme via conditions and a long term woodland management plan was secured through a s106 agreement for a small supermarket proposal	data regarding the impact of development on SINC and any mitigation is published in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report on 31st October 2019	data regarding the impact of development on SINC and any mitigation is published in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report on 31st October 2020		
2.4	management of S106 agreements	Richard Wistow	on-going	1998	23 S106 Agreements with long term habitat management requirements. Process co-ordinated through the RCT S106 Register meetings process.	Continued progress on S106 agreement delivery. Key actions in 2018/19 included the delivery of peat bog restoration at Hirwau Industrial estate, similar peatland restoration on three windfarm sites, and action towards securing long-term habitat management of Pant Marsh. The S106 Register meetings provide vital Council lead/over view of this process.	to end Sept 19: outline management plans prepared for 5 sites (Parc Eirin, Cefn yr Hendy, Danygraig Heights, Pant Marsh and Llanharan Quarry) where land and funding is vested with the Council. Works have been undertaken at Cefn yr Hendy, Pant Marsh and Parc Eirin. On-going work at Penycymoedd (including Heritage Lottery bid, approved in August). Annual monitoring of 14 (developer) management plans by ecologist/tree officer. 24 agreements under negotiation/awaiting trigger points.		
2.5	evidence relating to the multiple benefits of negotiated S106 agreements to inform the review of the LDP	Liz Dean / Richard Wistow	project	2015	contract let to Wildlife Trust to digitise S.106 agreements for biodiversity	further work with the Wildlife Trust to develop 'opportunity' mapping and associated management plans	Continued liaison with Wildlife Trust towards the completion of the 'opportunity' mapping project in accordance with LDP review programme		
2.6	Ensure the new Biodiversity Duty is reflected in the review of the LDP	Liz Dean / Richard Wistow/ Owen Jones	project	2018		brief discussion with Owen Jones 06/18, PPW10 published 12/18 reinforces current LDP policy and includes extensive references to Biodiversity Duty (6.2.2, 6.2.12, 6.4.2, 6.4.5, 6.4.9, box p136).	Report on LDP preparation to cabinet (18/06/19). Note prepared for the LDP Review Report (08/19). Welsh Government published the Development Plans Manual and the National Development Framework for consultation		
2.7	and in the new Strategic Plan for the Cardiff City Region, City Deal and Metro proposals	Liz Dean / Richard Wistow/ Owen Jones	project	2018		brief discussion with Owen Jones 06/18, PPW10 published 12/18 reinforces policy	Strategic Development Plan (regional) reported to Cabinet (06/19). Issue of Biodiversity Duty and SDP raised at Wales meeting in June. Welsh Government published the Development Plans Manual and the National Development Framework for consultation.		
2.8	and in the new Strategic Opportunity Area proposals	Liz Dean/Sarah Mee	project	2018	SOAs to cabinet	brief discussion with Owen Jones 06/18	Regeneration to lead on each. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cynon Gateway – Energizing the Region: Sarah Mee</li> <li>• The Wider Pontypridd, Treforest – Edge of the City, Heart of the Region: Debbie Pike</li> <li>• Pontypridd Town – Pivotal in the Region: Andrea Vlrgo</li> <li>• A4119 Corridor: Regional Rhondda Gateway: Rhian Jones</li> <li>• Llanilid on the M4: Driving the Regional Economy: Rhian Jones</li> </ul>		
2.9	use of sewbrec data	Richard Wistow Bethan Jenkins	on-going	2009	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC		

2.10	Green Infrastructure Assessment	Liz Dean/ Clare Hewitt	on going	2019		PPW 10 published 05/12/18 with requirement for GI assessment	brief note prepared, discussions with LDP team		
2.11	Ensure new statutory nature conservation designations are mapped onto Corporate GIS systems - responsible body ITC	Michael Brutsch	project	2019			SSSI layer updated 30/04/19	RCT Ecologist is the most likely consultee that NRW will contact when new SSSI are designated.	
<b>3. Biodiversity and land /estate management</b>									
3.1	cut and collect	John Spanswick/ Steve Owen/Gareth Henson/ Richard Wistow/Marie Fowler	on-going	2016	First full season of cutting using new 'Cut and Collect machine' primarily focused on pilot site network in Taff Ely area, with smaller number of Cynon Valley sites. Production of commissioned grass verge invertebrate survey report by Liam Olds assessing a sample of RCT conservation verges.	Expanded programme of mainly autumn/winter conservation grass verge and open space management using 'cut and collect' machine. Extended programme of sites in the Cynon Valley and new sites in the Rhondda. Discussions with Cemeteries department regarding extension of works to new cemetery sites.	Numerous meetings and training sessions with Streetcare, following the transfer of grasscutting. Visits, lists and mapping of additional sites in Cynon, Rhondda and Taf for 2020. Grassland notices for Cemeteries.	Re-organisation of service provision has seen the 'Cut and Collect' machine operation moved to the Streetcare Department.	
3.2	Transfer of management works from Parks and Countryside section to Streetcare to identify biodiversity training/information provision (as raised in 2017SSE), in particular with regard to the Wildlife Law aspects, such as protocols for nesting birds, sensitive areas (e.g. dormouse priority areas, SSSI) etc.	Richard Wistow/ Nigel Wheeler	project	2018		meeting requested email of 26/06/18, 15min slot at senior management meeting in 27/09/18, 4 SSE covered (fleet, waste/streetcare, highways, transportation). Meeting with Steve Owen 23/10/18, tool box talks for supervisors.	meetings with team leaders held, site signs, notices etc. supplied, social media proposal for 2020 season in preparation.	grass verge management transferred from Parks to Streetcare in April 2018. Parks supervisors transferred from April 2019.	
3.3	Corporate Estates Department liaise with Council's Countryside section regarding occasional third party requests for positive biodiversity land management licences on Council owned land	Richard Wistow/ Richard Skinner	on-going	2017		on-going working between Corporate estates and Countryside section, with ecological advice provided as opportunities arise. This led in 2018/19 to Corporate estates successfully identifying a new conservation grazing area at Cwm Fields, Beddau, which has been included in the Countryside Conservation grazing land portfolio.	ecological advisory role continued as opportunities and issues arise, including advice on potential grazing opportunities for 'rented' grazing sites.		
3.4	Japanese Knotweed management on Council land	Ray Edwards	on going		266 sites treated	321 sites treated, input to Wales wide Wildlife Trust led bid to WG for INNS funding from 2019.	Wildlife Trust grant bid approved. Council treatment data available end of April 2020		
3.5	Fly Tipping control/removal	Nigel Wheeler/ Tim Jones	on going		3731 flytips removed	3150 flytips removed	data available end of April 2020		
3.6	Corporate estates department liaise with Council's Countryside section regarding biodiversity implications of land disposal, and building refurbishments, demolitions and new developments	various	on going		on-going advisory role as issues arise.	on-going advisory role as issues arise.	ad hoc advice given for example Cwmbach school roof collapse and bat issues		

3.7	Healthy Hillside/Grazing site work	Richard Wistow/ Kelly Daniels	on going	2013	As part of Healthy Hillside partnership project 4 RCT owned sites put forward for positive fire prevention management. Through partnership funding two of these received initial management. In addition grazing licences let for 4 RCT owned conservation grazing sites.	Healthy Hillside partnership developed an EnRaW Welsh Government grant bid to bring forward funded management on up to 5 RCT Council owned sites. Continued pilot management on 2 of these sites. Continued RCT Conservation grazing programme, and through planing agreement requirements secured conservation grazing on 2 other sites (Aberdare College and Hirwaun Industrial Estate).	Healthy Hillside EnRaW project successful, although details still in discussion with WG and project success not yet formally announced. 6 RCT conservation grazing sites and an additional planing related grazing scheme started.	Health Hillside project identified in RCT and Merthyr Community Safety plan as a multiple partnership project delivering best practice for grass fire prevention	
<b>4. Biodiversity and water management</b>									
4.1	ordinary water course consents	Liam Swanwick/ Richard Wistow	on going	2012	observations on 16 ordinary watercourse applications	observations on 36 ordinary watercourse applications	observations on 30 ordinary watercourse applications (to end Aug).		
4.2	introduction and operation of sustainable drainage (SUDS) regulations	Owen Griffiths	on going	2015	observations made (esp on relationship with planning) to Owen Griffiths in drainage who responded to WG	Sardis House training workshop led by Owen Griffiths and Liam Swanwick on SUDS introduction in Jan 2019. Similar presentation to be given to SLT and to members. Biodiversity a strong feature, Council responsibility for management for the lifetime of the development. SUDS in Council development eg Abercynon Park and Ride	no full applications to end August	see Park Lane School below	
4.3	Park Lane School SUDS	Richard Wistow / Darren Miller / Mark Powell	project	2019			email from RW to Owen Griffiths et al, agreed to marshy grassland approach suitable for 'cut and collect' 04/19, design in progress, draft text for Corporate Performance Report May19. Issues re space for proposed women's football pitches, design currently on hold.	objective to achieve flood risk reduction for the school, utilizing space between Aberdare Park and a redundant pitch. A marshy grassland site, which can be 'cut and collect', provide outdoor education space for the school and contribute to the rhos pasture network for the marsh fritillary butterfly.	
<b>5. Biodiversity and education</b>									
5.1	walk to the wild	Liz Dean	on going	2014	6 school engagements at Aberdare Park Primary (Aberdare Park), Cilfynydd Primary (Albion tips), Ponty High (Albion tips and school grounds), YGG Llyn y forwen (Darren Park), Ynysboeth (former school grounds) and one INSET day for teachers held in Pontyclun. Additional projects through WG funding at Ponty High and Ferndale comprehensive	delay in WG grant, delay in letting the contract. Inset day held at Dare Valley Country Park in Sept. 6 school engagements undertaken at Alaw primary (Garth Park), Gwaunmeisgyn primary (school grounds), Penygawsi primary (school grounds), Cwmbach Church in Wales primary (Brodeg woodland Cwmbach), oaklands primary, Parc Lane Special School (Aberdare Park). Additional works with Ponty High and Ferhill Comp with WG funding. Funding ceases March 2019. Input to regional bid for outdoor learning funding.	Grant funding ceased. Regional bid for outdoor learning failed. Training meeting and AGM of the RCT and Merthyr Outdoor Learning Group held at Ynysangharad Park Pontypridd, 4th July. Activities led by Rhian Vale, 12 mostly teachers attended. New chair elected (Ian Timbrell Cwmbach Community School).	Ambition to continue 'Walk to the Wild' if funding can be identified and to publish the resources generated to date on the website.	Mar-19

<b>6. Biodiversity and advice to the public</b>									
<b>7. Biodiversity and corporate planning</b>									
7.1	Service Self Evaluation of Biodiversity	Lesley Lawson/ Liz Dean	on going	2017	service self evaluation for biodiversity prepared, issued in Oct 17, responses collated and priority actions for 2018/19 identified	action plan updated, question for autumn 2018 SSE included, best practice note prepared for WG. Input to corporate performance report for 17/18	Action plan updated, Input to corporate performance report for 18/19		
7.2	Biodiversity Duty Plan	Richard Wistow/ Liz Dean	on going	2016	one page information report to CwmTaf PSB mar/apr 17. Draft Biodiversity Duty Plan prepared, presentation to Senior Leadership Team Nov 17, Scrutiny Committee report in Dec 17	meeting with Alan Netherwood July 18, action plan updated	Action plan updated, report to scrutiny 10th Oct and Cabinet 21st Nov to allow submission to Welsh Government by December 2019.	legal duty to report to WG in Dec 19	
7.3	Procurement Services continue to address biodiversity within its service provision and consider in policy reviews and associated documentation and processes.	Liz Dean/ Steve Vaughan		2018		initial contact re ethical procurement policy. Policy under review, documentation on WG website. Discussion about single use plastics (05/07/18)	Through consultation with relevant service areas and suppliers, the Council's Procurement Service is in the process of implementing a robust approach to the reduction of single use plastics. The approach adopted to date, aligns itself with the 'Plastics Recycling Route Map' for Wales.		
<b>8. Working with neighbouring authorities and other statutory bodies</b>									
8.1	input to area statements	Liz Dean / Richard Wistow		2017	initial expression of interest completed and circulated to other Council staff	attended workshop at WBP conference 09/18, NRW presentation to RCT LBAP meeting in Jan 19, NRW ecosystem meeting on 21 feb 19	attended workshop on 8 May, submitted paperwork. Submission re data gaps (natural regeneration of woodland, soil carbon). Agreed to participate in Audit Commission review of AS process.		
8.2	WG ENRaW grant bids	Richard Wistow/ Liz Dean	project	2018		attendance at Wales LBAP meetings, S wales co-ordination meetings from Jul18, input to bids for Rhos pasture, Healthy Hillside, pollinators, outdoor learning, Wales wide LNPPartnerships, Hirwaun Industrial Estate, Bridgend Green Spaces, KWT community Officers, Groundwork skills development, Ramblers Wales wide, Vale led bridleways. Various bids submitted by 3rd Dec deadline.	Successful bids for Rhos Pasture (Butterfly Conservation), Healthy Hillside (Wildlife Trust), LNP partnerships (WCVA/WBP), Hirwaun Ind Estate (RCT), KWT, Pollinators and freshwater Invertebrates (Buglife), bridleways (Vale).		
<b>9. Other</b>									

**Appendix Three: Priority Habitats in RCT and Merthyr from Priority Habitats of Wales: a technical guide edited by Jones, Stevens, Blackstock, Burrows and Howe (2003) CCW/WAG/Biodiversity Wales**

Welsh LBAP area	upland oak wood	upland mixed ash wood	wet wood land	lowland beech and yew	lowland mixed deciduous	total natural broadleaf woodland	lowland meadow	lowland calcaereous meadow	lowland dry acid grassland	purple moorgrass and rush pasture	lowland heathland	reedbed	fen	lowland raised bog	coastal floodplain and grazing marsh	upland heathland	blanket bog	upland calcaereous grassland	limestone pavement	maritime cliff and slope	coastal vegetated shingle	sand dune	salt marsh
RCT						1700	44	0.2	1400	1500	400	0.8	130	9	130	980	850	0	0	0	0	0	0
Merthyr						510	10	28	500	260	160	0	25	0	0	450	0.2	30	1	0	0	0	0
Glamorgan	3200	3100	1200	690	1600	9800	240	260	5400	5500	2100	84	730	30	3200	3800	1000	30		310	17	1500	1600
Wales	39000	17000	9000	4000	12000	82600	1700	1200	39500	35200	12500	460	6200	1830	54600	79000	56200	650	54	3500	110	6200	5800

(NB excludes priority habitats on WG Forestry land)

Welsh LBAP area	total	LBAP land area	% cover of priority habitat type
RCT	7200	37021	20
Merthyr	2000	8647	23
Glamorgan	35700	224552	16
Wales	387300	2115359	18

(NB excludes priority habitats on WG Forestry land)