



Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Service and Performance

Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel – 14th May 2024

Nature and Biodiversity Update

For Information

Purpose	To present the latest progress report on meeting the Council's Biodiversity duty and measure the success of Nature Recovery work against Corporate Objectives and Policy Commitments
Content	The report concludes that Scrutiny of the Council's Nature Conservation Team has been a success and all measures to monitor Nature Recovery work within the County are now in place
Councillors are being asked to	Endorse the conclusion of the report
Lead Councillor(s)	David Hopkins
Lead Officer(s)	Mark Wade – Director /Phil Holmes – Head of Service
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Legal Officer	Jonathan Wills
Finance Officer	Peter Keys
Access to Services Officer	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 Following a comprehensive Scrutiny Inquiry through 2018 and approval of recommendations arising in July 2019 there have been eight subsequent progress reports to Scrutiny on Nature Recovery and Biodiversity (25.09.19, 31.3.20, 1.09.20, 14.12.20, 22.3.21, 15.3.22, 13.9.22, 8.3.23). The last report concluded that all the Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations in relation to Nature Recovery had been satisfied and there was no longer a need to report back to this Panel.

1.2 Nature Recovery work delivered by the Council's Nature Conservation Team is now very much ongoing business as usual, with the primary focus being meeting Corporate Objectives and Policy Commitments. The work is overseen by the Climate Change and Nature Recovery (CC&NR) Programme Board and Steering Group (set up following Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations in order to monitor Nature Recovery work), as well as the Climate Change and Nature Recovery Service Transformation Committee which has overseen the production and adoption via Cabinet and Council respectively of two key Nature Recovery documents over this past year, namely the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (LNRAP) and the Council's Section 6 Action Plan.

2. Briefing/Main Body of Report

2.1 The nature recovery objectives for Swansea set out in the recently adopted LNRAP are to be independently monitored annually by the Swansea Nature Partnership. The objectives in the Section 6 Plan which are derived from the LNRAP are monitored by Welsh Government to whom there is a requirement to report progress against objectives every three years. The most recent report was submitted to Welsh Government in Jan 2024. Both the CC&NR Programme Board and Steering Group also monitor progress on a regular basis.

2.2 Additionally, Nature Recovery Objectives are set out in the Corporate Plan and in Council Policy Commitments. Performance against these objectives and achievements are monitored on a quarterly and annual basis through the Council's inPhase monitoring system and also reported on via Annual Performance reviews of the Corporate Plan. This ongoing RAG monitoring of identified Nature Recovery actions enables any issues to be picked up at an early stage. The latest update completed in April 2024 confirmed all actions were green.

2.3 Specific task and finish objectives such as preparation of specific plans and strategies relating to Nature Recovery are also identified in the Natural Environment Section's Action Plan and the Planning and City Regeneration Service Plan with progress monitored on a monthly basis.

2.4 There are therefore currently seven mechanisms in place besides Scrutiny to monitor progress of achievement of Nature Recovery Objectives. This more than adequately addresses any concerns of the original Scrutiny Inquiry that there was insufficient oversight. Updates on /approval of Nature Recovery matters are also now being provided to CC&NR Service Transformation Committee. The Nature Conservation Team responsible for Nature Recovery and Biodiversity matters is performing to its maximum capacity with the resources it has available, and all supporting policies and plans are in place to ensure that Council meets its Biodiversity Duty.

- 2.5 As the work of the Nature Conservation Team is orientated toward meeting Corporate Objectives and Policy Commitments, updates against those Objectives and Commitments are already reported via other workstreams but are duplicated for ease of reference as Appendix 1. Given that the Council is so heavily dependent on grant funding to deliver its Nature Recovery duties it is important that any revisions to Corporate Objectives and Policy Commitments are consistent with Welsh Government's broader conservation goals aimed at preserving and enhancing Wales' natural environment including the conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 2.6 The current focus is on 30 x 30 targets, i.e. the commitment to protect 30% of land and sea within the County for nature conservation by 2030. This aligns with global efforts to address biodiversity loss, protect ecosystem services and contribute to the overall health and resilience of the natural environment of the area. Protecting significant proportions of land and sea can safeguard habitats, conserve nature species and promote sustainable land and marine management practices.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The detailed scrutiny of the Nature Conservation Team over the past six years has achieved what it originally set out to do. Key objectives for meeting the Council's biodiversity duties are now firmly embedded in Council policy and there is joined up partnership working in place with other environmental organisations working throughout the County, whilst common goals for taking action to achieve Nature Recovery are all in place.
- 3.2 This is a significant Scrutiny success and officers are grateful to the Panel and its predecessor Committees in helping to achieve this outcome. If any issues requiring scrutiny do arise in future the monitoring provisions in place will ensure these are identified at an early stage and reported back as appropriate.

4. Legal implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5. Finance Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 6.1 This report is for information only and an IIA is not therefore required.

Background Papers:

Local Nature Recovery Plan 2023 [Swansea Local Nature Recovery Action Plan - Swansea](#)

Section 6 Plan 2024 [Report - Corporate Template \(swansea.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Corporate Plan Steps and Success Measures, Policy Commitments Progress Update

Appendix 1

Corporate Plan Steps

Objective Step	Progress	RAG
Develop a new County-wide tree planting map allowing us to plant thousands of new trees	Tree Opportunity Map prepared Dec 23. Step completed	Green
Aim to make neighbourhood greening improvements	Ongoing project work across County. New Green Infrastructure (GI) improvements underway in Sandfields, High St, Townhill	Green
Develop and monitor the delivery of the Section 6 Corporate Biodiversity Plan and the Resilient Wales goal through annual business planning and reporting mechanisms to 2028. Report to Welsh Government every three years in line with our Biodiversity Duty	Last report to Welsh Govt Jan24. Section 6 Plan approved by Council March 24	Green
Contribute to the review, delivery and monitoring of the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (LNRAP) and a County wide GI Strategy	Swansea LNRAP adopted Nov 23 will be monitored end of year annually. Step completed. Preparation of County wide GI strategy on hold until late 24 pending completion of the Local Development Plan Review GI Assessment	Green
Work to improve the ecosystem resilience of Council owned Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and greenspaces	Ongoing project work across the County. Habitat management undertaken at Several Council owned SSSIs, LNRs and SINCs	
Continue to deliver a programme of wildflower planting and management and take actions that help to control invasive non-native species	Ongoing project work across the County. Wildflower meadows managed and invasive species controlled at several sites	
Engage with local communities to encourage volunteering and to support them taking action to enhance and maintain their local greenspaces	Ongoing project work across the County. A wide range of local community biodiversity/GI projects and volunteer events can activities undertaken	

Corporate Plan Success Measures

Success Measure	Progress	RAG
Agreed an updated tree planting and management strategy	Tree Opportunity Map prepared Dec 23. – to be considered as part of Council's Tree Management Strategy review and County wide GI Strategy	Green

Plant hundreds of new trees	346 trees planted April 23- March 24 (target 300)	Green
Produced a series of Wild About your Ward maps to support communities in identifying opportunities for enhancing local greenspaces and wildlife sites and engaging them in volunteering activities	Ward maps prepared. Action completed	Green
Drafted Management Plans for Council owned Local Nature Reserves	Management Plans prepared for all 6 Council owned sites. Action completed	Green
Targeted treatment and/or removal of Invasive Non-Native Species on nature sites	Ongoing project work across the Council's LNRs with 3-5 year treatment programmes, including at Mumbles Hill, Dunvant Brickworks, Pwll Ddu and in Clyne Valley Country Park	Green
Continued amenity grassland and road verge management trials to establish as species rich wildflower meadows	Ongoing project work across the County establishing, managing and monitoring wildflower meadows	Green
Prepared a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan and County wide GI Strategy	Swansea LNRAP adopted Nov 23. Action completed. Preparation of County wide GI strategy on hold until late 24 pending completion of the Local Development Plan Review GI Assessment	Green

Policy Commitments

Commitment	Progress	RAG
We will develop a new city-wide tree planting map allowing us to plant thousands of new trees in communities	<p>Four tree reports have been prepared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing tree canopy cover analysis - Swansea Habitat Carbon - Tree and Woodland Planting Opportunity - Tree Canopy Growth projections Swansea Central Area <p>The existing canopy cover and opportunity mapping reports are supported by an interactive mapping database. The intention is for these reports to be used by a number of services across the Council to take a strategic approach to tree planting.</p> <p>Commitment achieved</p>	Green
We aim to make neighbourhood greening improvements	A significant number of green space improvements have been undertaken across the County following on from Wild about your Ward mapping, working in partnership with community groups	Green

	<p>and organisations, Friends of groups, Community Centres and Schools. Tree planting has been undertaken across many sites and nature trails installed. Hundreds of individuals and stakeholders have attended training and awareness raising events as well as engaging in project delivery. Training seminars have been held focusing on GI and biodiversity. Environmental improvements have been carried out on Council owned SSSIs, LNRs and SINC, with feasibility studies and survey reports undertaken and management plans prepared.</p> <p>Ongoing commitment</p>	
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