

Swansea Council Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Monitoring Report to Welsh Government December 2019

A. Introduction

1. Since 2015, Swansea Council (together with all other public bodies) has been given increased responsibilities and legal duties to maintain and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity as a result of the following:
 - The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Resilient Wales Goal: *'A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change)'*
 - The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (Part 1) Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty which requires that : *'A public authority 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'*
2. In complying with the Section 6 Biodiversity Duty, the Council is required to prepare and submit to Welsh Government by the end of 2019 (and then every three years after this date) a report (Section 6 monitoring Report) outlining what it has done to comply with the Biodiversity Duty.
3. Since the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 came into force much work has been undertaken by the Council at both a strategic and operational level to maintain and enhance biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems.
4. This report is Swansea Council's first Section 6 Biodiversity Duty monitoring Report to Welsh Government. It provides an overview of the key Biodiversity Duty actions and initiatives that the Council has undertaken over the last 2-3 years showing how this work has contributed to the six objectives of the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales which are:
 - Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels
 - Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management
 - Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation
 - Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats
 - Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring
 - Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.

B. Background

5. Swansea is one of the most ecologically rich and diverse counties in the UK, with over 50% of the County's area being of significant biodiversity value including 17% of

international importance. Its unique variety of habitats and species and wonderful range of parks, greenspaces, nature reserves, beaches and landscapes needs to be maintained, enhanced and sustainably managed for the benefit of everyone now and into the future.

6. More detailed information about biodiversity in Swansea is provided in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) which is currently under review and will become the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Swansea.
<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/10113/Swansea-Local-Biodiversity-Action-Plan>
7. Our well-being, prosperity, quality of life, resilience to climate change and future survival is dependent on a healthy resilient natural environment and the multiple benefits (ecosystem services) it provides.
8. However, we know that our natural environment and biodiversity is under threat and in decline due to unsustainable human activities. Habitats and species are being lost at an alarming and unsustainable rate.
9. We need to reverse the loss of biodiversity through reducing harm and unsustainable use and moving to a situation where we are working with nature to maintain healthy resilient ecosystems that will continue to provide long-term benefits.
10. We need to embed the responsibility for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across all Council services, and work more collaboratively and effectively with our partners to address the challenges we face.
11. We need everyone to understand and appreciate the unique value and fragility of Swansea's outstanding natural environment and to play their part in looking after and enhancing it.
12. In addition, we urgently need to tackle climate change by reducing our use of carbon and by maintaining and enhancing ecosystems and a resilient green infrastructure network to help us mitigate for and adapt to the pressures of climate change.
13. The following section provides an overview of the more significant actions that Swansea Council has undertaken over the past 3 years to meet these challenges and comply with the Biodiversity Duty. They are grouped under the six Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales Objectives in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

C. Overview of Biodiversity actions and initiatives undertaken since the introduction of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016

14. Many of the achievements outlined in this report were actions already planned that nevertheless met the Biodiversity Duty. There are however additional actions that have been achieved as a direct result of the new Duty. These mainly relate to the embedding of the responsibility for maintaining and enhancing Biodiversity across the whole authority as outlined in Objective 1 below

OBJECTIVE 1

Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels

Swansea Well Being Plan –‘Working with Nature Objective’

15. In 2017 the Council and its Public Service Board’s Partners identified and adopted ‘Working with Nature’ as a key priority in Swansea’s Well Being Plan: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/localwellbeingplan> Council officers and Members have been actively engaged in the working group led by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Swansea Environmental Forum (SEF) to develop and deliver an action plan around this objective which states:

‘We want to work with nature to improve health and well-being, maintain and enhance biodiversity, reduce our carbon footprint and improve our knowledge and understanding of our natural environment.’

Scrutiny Inquiry

16. Between April 2018 and March 2019, a Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry Panel was established to examine:
‘What should Swansea Council do to maintain and enhance its natural environment and biodiversity and in doing so, promote the resilience of eco-system services?’
17. A report of the Inquiry findings and its 22 recommendations was submitted to Cabinet in July 2019 and an Action Plan for delivery agreed.
<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=124&MId=8501&Ver=4&LLL=0> One of the key Scrutiny Panel recommendations was implemented before the end of the Inquiry. This was the addition of a Corporate Objective for ‘*Maintaining and Enhancing Swansea’s Natural Resources and Biodiversity*’, building on the Public Services Board’s ‘Working with Nature’ Local Well-being Objective.

Corporate Priority for Biodiversity

18. In order to ensure that Biodiversity was given greater priority and embedded across all Council services, in October 2018 the Council adopted and published a new Corporate Objective for ‘*Maintaining and Enhancing Swansea’s Natural Resources and Biodiversity*’. The objective identifies 17 ‘steps’ or high level actions to be delivered and these have formed the basis of the Council’s first Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan. A copy of the Corporate Plan be found here:
<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/corporateimprovementplan>

Questionnaire to Heads of Service

19. In December 2016, and again in 2018, questionnaires were sent to all Heads of Service to raise awareness of the new Biodiversity Duty and to gather information on what each service was already doing to help maintain and enhance biodiversity, and also to ascertain what more could be done and what support might be needed to achieve this. This information has been incorporated into the Council’s Section 6 Action Plan for 2020-2022 which is under preparation.

Corporate Plan and Business Planning Reporting

20. Since the adoption of the new Corporate Objective for Biodiversity, there has been a requirement for the preparation of quarterly and annual progress reports relating to

delivery of the steps or actions set out under this objective, and the associated Performance Indicators as part of the Council's business planning and monitoring processes. The first annual report will be submitted to Council in December 2019

Corporate Biodiversity Working Group:

21. To promote engagement in, and shared responsibility for, delivering the new Corporate Biodiversity Objective, a Corporate Biodiversity Working Group has been set up to help review, monitor and report on progress in delivering the steps /actions listed under the Objective. The terms of reference of this officer group include helping to ensure that biodiversity is integrated into daily business operations and to provide a vehicle for awareness raising and capacity building; cascading information and best practice to all service delivery teams as well as exploring and testing new approaches to delivering the sustainable management of natural resources. It is also responsible for reviewing and monitoring the Council's Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan.

Scrutiny Panel for Natural Environment and Biodiversity

22. Following on from the Scrutiny Inquiry into how the Council is delivering against the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015, a Scrutiny Panel for the Natural Environment and Biodiversity has been established to provide ongoing scrutiny of the Council's progress in meeting the requirements of the legislation and its new Corporate Biodiversity Objective.

Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan /Section 6 Action Plan:

23. The biodiversity actions listed under the Corporate Objective for Maintaining and Enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity forms the basis of the Council's Section 6 Action Plan. This has been expanded to incorporate additional actions to be delivered over the next 3 years including:
 - Relevant recommendations of the Scrutiny Inquiry/Panel
 - The responses to questionnaires sent to all Heads of Service identifying any additional relevant existing and planned actions
 - Actions put forward by the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group
24. This Action Plan will seek to reverse the loss of biodiversity, promote healthy resilient ecosystems, strengthen green infrastructure and facilitate adaptation to and mitigation for the impacts of climate change. It will seek to ensure that our natural environment, together with the benefits and services it provides, are protected for the benefit of existing and future generations.

Climate Emergency Declaration

25. In June 2019 Swansea Council agreed a Notice of Motion declaring a climate emergency and has committed to a number of actions to work towards reducing the Council's carbon footprint.

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=177&MIId=8502&Ver=4&LLL=0>

It has also agreed to report on work undertaken by the Council in this area through the Council's Annual Review of Performance Report.

Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP)

26. The Council's LDP adopted in 2019 includes policies which seek to improve protection for biodiversity and promote ecological resilience in all new developments: <https://swansea.gov.uk/article/48659/Adopted-Local-Development-Plan-LDP> The policies are in line with Planning Policy Wales 10 and provide the appropriate framework for the Council to deliver the Section 6 Duty through the planning decision making process. LDP policies recognise both the importance of designated sites, and the wider ecological network of locally important and undesignated sites. Planning policies will be supported by emerging Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Networks.

Countywide Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy

27. Work has begun on preparing a Countywide GI Strategy to set out how all stakeholders can contribute to maintaining and enhancing the County's GI resource.

Green Infrastructure SPG

28. Green Infrastructure SPG is being prepared to provide guidance on the implementation of relevant LDP policies and setting out how all new development should explore opportunities to maintain and enhance the County's GI network.

Raising Awareness and Understanding

29. Numerous activities have been undertaken to raise awareness of biodiversity and the new Section 6 Duty. These include:

Talks and Training Workshops

30. Following its enactment in 2016, a number of training events were held for Council officers and Members to raise awareness of the Environment (Wales) Act and the Section 6 Biodiversity Duty. These have been complemented by a range of other in-house biodiversity training sessions including bat awareness and Aderyn (access to local biodiversity records) training for planners, GI training for officers Members and developers, Japanese knotweed training for Members. The Council has also run a well-attended programme of biodiversity identification and ecology training workshops for volunteers and the public. These have included reptiles and amphibians, mammals, water vole and mink, invertebrates, conservation grazing, invasive non- native species, submitting wildlife records, and ancient woodland survey methodology.

Environmental Events

31. A programme of environmental events is published annually. This provides details of hundreds of free or low cost environmental events in Swansea: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/environmentalevents>. These are also regularly posted on the 'Love Your Countryside' web site.
32. Guided tours of the County's specialist parks and volunteer days have been particularly popular events, together with an annual series of public 'Seashore Safaris' delivered across the shores of Gower, raising awareness of marine and coastal issues and biodiversity.

Schools

33. The Council supports Foundation Phase pupils to study and learn outdoors, ensuring a respect for nature, biodiversity and ecosystems. In support of this the Council's Nature Conservation Team have provided opportunities for children and young people to engage with nature via a range of initiatives such as:

- Outdoor activities delivered at the Council's Activity Centres in Port Eynon, Rhossili and Bishop's Wood, Caswell
- Regular field study visits and numerous public events at Bishops Wood Local Nature Reserve
- Development of an outdoor learning network and a project with four local secondary schools.
- Delivery of the NRW funded 'Our Nature, Our Future' project, which has enabled children in twenty local primary schools to benefit from advice on how to improve their school grounds for biodiversity. The pupils have also attended field study sessions with outdoor learning experts using wildlife sites that are within walking distance of their school. These schools have also benefited from training for their teaching staff so that biodiversity can be embedded within the curriculum.
- INSET days have been delivered to build capacity among teachers for working outdoors with pupils. Topics have included: an introduction to outdoor learning; group management and safety; sensory exploration of the outdoors; techniques for investigating biodiversity; environmental art; and using games to explain ecological concepts.
- Support for the Swansea Neath Port Talbot Forest School programme, which provides opportunities for young people to benefit from an outdoor learning experience in local native woodlands.
- Support for the RSPB 'Giving Nature a Home' project, which has provided a biodiversity outdoor learning experience for over 87% of schools across Swansea.

34. There are several examples of Swansea schools developing the theme of sustainability in an integrated way. Work within classrooms, through cross-curricular topics aligned to the science and geography curriculum is a key feature of sustainability education. Developing the outdoor environment and establishing links with projects and schools at an international level also supports learners to develop a better understanding of local bio-diversity as well as global citizenship. Numerous Swansea schools have been accredited with the platinum award for eco schools. A few schools have retained their platinum status on re-assessment. (In Swansea 100% of schools are registered to the Eco-Schools programme, 61% have achieved Green Flags and 36% of all schools have received Platinum Awards).

Development of the natural environment within Swansea school grounds has seen vegetable gardens grown, bug hotels opened, raised flower beds sown and literacy trails established. Consumption and waste reduction is a key theme in Swansea schools. A strong willingness by schools to re-cycle and re-use is championed by eco school committee members across Swansea. Nearly all Swansea schools have developed their own eco code to support sustainability. In the current statutory curriculum, schools have suitable resources and opportunities to support the education for sustainable development and global citizenship. In the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 cross-curricular work to develop ethical citizens will feature strongly as one of the

Interpretation

35. Interpretation panels have been designed and installed at Bracelet Bay and Swansea Bay providing information to the public on the rich biodiversity that can be found around the shore.
36. Information leaflets have been produced for Carmarthen Bay European Marine Site, and for Swansea's Ancient Woodlands.

OBJECTIVE 2

Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan

37. The Swansea LBAP is under review by the Local Nature Partnership and will become the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan

Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

38. Work has commenced on preparing Biodiversity SPG to assist the implementation of adopted Local Development Policies relating to development and ecologically important and protected sites and species. This guidance will give clear advice on the natural assets located within the County, necessary survey and licencing processes, and the Council's approach to ensuring mitigation and compensation of impact and the delivery of net benefit for biodiversity.

Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan:

39. This statutory plan adopted in March 2017 sets out the Council's policy for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of Gower AONB, which is a Category V Protected Landscape recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas. It is defined as: *'A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value; and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.'*

Provision of Ecological Advice

40. Responses to planning application consultations continue to be provided by the Council's Nature Conservation Team to Development Management Officers regarding the possible impacts of developments on protected species, habitats and sites. Recommendations for mitigation, compensation and ecological enhancements are made as appropriate. Similarly, guidance and advice is provided to other Council services, for example, Highways, Housing, Parks, Education and Corporate Property to ensure that their activities and projects do not impact adversely on biodiversity and wherever possible contribute to nature recovery.
41. The team has also provided ecological advice to inform the formulation of ecological policies in the recently adopted LDP, and is beginning to work with the Council's Drainage section to provide biodiversity advice in relation to the new Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) legislation.

New Designations

42. The Council has supported NRW to designate a new Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on land it owns in the Lower Swansea Valley (the Six Pit, Swansea Vale and White Rock SSSI)

Management of Council owned sites of ecological importance

43. An ongoing programme of preparing, reviewing and implementing management plans for Council owned Special Areas of Conservation(SAC's), SSSI's, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)) has continued to ensure their biodiversity value is maintained and enhanced.
44. The implementation of habitat and species management works has been largely funded through external grant aid from Welsh Government, NRW, Rural Development Plan, National Lottery, Landfill and other grant sources. This work has included:
- Woodland: ongoing rhododendron control in Clyne Valley Country Park, management of SAC woodland at Bishop's Wood Local Nature Reserve.
 - Lowland meadow: bracken control at Duvant Brickworks
 - Grassland/heath: fire breaks in urban commons, at Pwlldu coastal heath/grassland and Kilvey Hill
 - Gower Commons: work has been undertaken to enable grazing of Fairwood Common SAC
 - Fen, marsh, swamp: scrub removal at Swansea Vale
 - Sand dunes: sand dune creation and restoration at Swansea Bay.
45. A small capital grants programme (through the Gower Landscape Partnership) has enabled the Council to manage its own sites and support other SINC landowners to improve the condition of priority habitats and species on their land. For example, sea buckthorn control at Llangennith Burrows.

Farm and business tenancy agreements

46. These are in the process of being updated to ensure the biodiversity value of land is recognised and safeguarded. For example, grazing of marshy grassland at Garth Farm in Glais and grazing of coastal grassland and heath at Pwlldu Cliffs LNR.

Friends of Parks Agreements /Memoranda of Understanding

47. These have been amended to ensure that biodiversity is taken into consideration by the Friends Groups when undertaking management activities or events within their adopted Park or Greenspace.

OBJECTIVE 3

Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation

Activities

48. The Council is working with partners and voluntary groups, to improve biodiversity and ecological resilience through restoration of degraded habitats, new habitat creation and improving ecological connectivity. Ecological connectivity mapping has been used to identify gaps and priority areas for habitat creation and enhancement.

49. These habitat and green infrastructure enhancements provide a range of ecosystem services and also help to improve the quality of the residential environment and reduce inequalities in access to greenspace. Practical examples include:
- The creation of verge habitats and wildlife corridors by reducing and carefully timing verge cutting and by substantially increasing uncut areas
 - The creation of new ponds and an otter holt at Llys Nini RSPCA reserve
 - Creation of new ponds at Cadle Heath LNR and Swansea Vale Nature Reserve
 - Conversion of four World War 2 bunkers in Clyne Valley Country Park to create bat habitat
 - Collaboration with Bug Life to create and improve habitat for pollinator species as part of their 'B Lines' project
 - Fencing and planting of thousands of marram grass plants on Swansea beach to create new sand dune habitat and reduce problems caused by wind-blown sand.
 - Installation of dipper boxes on a bridge over the river Morlais in collaboration with the Council's Countryside Access Team
 - Supporting Swansea Environmental Forum's Community Green Spaces project which helps local communities to improve and manage local green spaces.

Tree Planting Projects

50. The Council has supported and delivered a number of tree planting projects through partnership working with the Swansea Tree Forum, Coed Cymru, Coeden Fach, the Woodland Trust, Trees for Cities and local community groups. Wherever possible, native trees of local provenance have been used.
51. A new woodland has been created at Mynydd Newydd Playing Fields in Penlan through the planting of 4000 native trees in collaboration with Trees for Cities. This planting will improve biodiversity and woodland connectivity, help to reduce flooding, provide shelter from the wind and improve air quality
52. The friends of the Ganges Field in Townhill have been supported to plant nearly 1000 native trees to create woodland habitat and improve woodland connectivity.
53. The Friends of Morryston Park have been helped to undertake a community tree planting project, and over 200 native trees have been planted in Brynmelyn Park
54. The Council has provided space in Clyne Gardens to accommodate a new native tree nursery run by Coeden Fach - a local tree nursery charity to develop a source of local provenance trees

City Centre Tree Planting

55. A green artery is being created through Swansea City Centre with several green, tree-lined spaces integrated within development plans for the city. The redevelopment of the Kingsway has seen the planting of the first of 170 new trees. They include alder, birch, cherry, lime, maples and flowering pears. Other city centre tree planting projects, such as the Boulevard and Westway, have seen the Council introduce significantly more street trees and other green areas than were previously present. This has created an attractive street scene and will encourage greater biodiversity.

Tree Planting on Housing Estates

56. A programme of green space improvements have been carried out within Council housing estates to help meet the Welsh Government's Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) that requires all social landlords to improve the external environment of their housing stock to an acceptable level by December 2020. Wherever possible native species and biodiversity enhancements have been incorporated. In Penlan, 144 semi-mature trees standing 10 to 12 feet tall have been planted alongside residential streets together with wildflower planting on roadside verges.

Hedgerow Hub

57. The Gower Hedgerow Hub, running since August 2018, works with landowners and partner organisations to celebrate, raise awareness and carry out management of hedgerows across Gower and Swansea. The project provides training, volunteer opportunities, advice and funding support to landowners, as well as public walks and crafts sessions. To date, 18 training sessions, 33 volunteer days and 8 public events have been delivered, and over 3000m of hedgerow has been improved by volunteers, contractors, and landowners. There has been a growth in appreciation of, and interest in, this key habitat as a result of the project.

Wildflower Planting

58. The Council's Parks service have continued their popular programme of wildflower planting, resulted in displays at over 180 locations. Seeds including medieval carpet, candy, pixie, honey bee, pastel and express summer are among the wild flower seed mixtures planted on roundabouts, roadside verges, parks and at prominent landmarks.
59. Locations benefitting from wild flowers have included Mumbles Road, Fabian Way, Ravenhill Park, Carmarthen Road, Dyfatty Interchange, Brynmill Park, Parc Llewellyn, Brynmelyn Park, Mayhill Washing Ponds, and land at Ysgubor Fach and Llangyfelach as well as outside the Council's Guildhall offices. For each of the last three years 37,000 square metres of wildflowers were sown - equivalent to about seven football pitches.
60. The Council has also worked in partnership with the Friends of the Botanical Gardens, who are selling the wildflower seeds during their plant sale events.

School grounds

61. The 'Our Nature Our Future' project funded by NRW has enabled landscape design plans to be drawn up for 20 primary schools showing how they could improve their school grounds for biodiversity.

OBJECTIVE 4

Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for Central Swansea

62. The Council's Nature Conservation Team working in partnership with NRW and Green Infrastructure Consultancy has drafted a Green Infrastructure Strategy to guide development within the Swansea Central Regeneration Area. The Strategy will

create, connect and improve areas of green space making the city more biodiverse and resilient to the impacts of climate change. Key aims are improving the multi-functionality, ecological resilience and connectivity of urban green spaces; helping to improve the health and well-being of both people and wildlife; and also improving prosperity by encouraging visitors to stay longer and enjoy the city centre.

GI Stakeholder Consultation:

63. The vision and strategy of the draft Swansea Central GI Strategy was informed by the voices of city centre residents and users, including those of the next generation. Several stakeholder involvement events and public consultation activities were held with partners in the public, private and third sector.

Green Space Factor Toolkit:

64. In collaboration with NRW and Green Infrastructure Consultancy a Green Space Factor Toolkit has been produced which will help developers maximise the quality of their scheme's green impact, for example, by designing-in green walls and green roofs. The tool is designed to measure permeability so can also be used to help schemes meet new statutory SuDS standards.

Council Tree Strategy

65. A tree strategy is being prepared setting out how trees on Council owned land will be managed and maintained. The aim of the tree policy will be to maintain and expand tree cover; raise awareness of the value of trees, ensure risks from trees are adequately managed, conserve trees of value and encourage the planting of more trees woodlands and hedgerows. The strategy will also ensure that the Council meets its biodiversity duties in respect of trees.
66. In addition to the compliance expected of Council services, the strategy will also seek to raise awareness of the rights and responsibilities of the public, encouraging "ownership" of the planting and management of trees. The tree strategy aligns with the Local Development Plan policy to protect trees and encourage planting. This explicitly includes the planting of trees and the creation of linkages between existing habitats and in the creation of 'Place', especially where new neighbourhoods are developed.

Enforcement

67. The Council has worked to improve enforcement procedures against wildlife crime and for illegal felling/felling of trees subject to a Tree Protection Order. It has also lobbied for greater penalties for illegal felling of trees. It has successfully prosecuted a major housebuilder and tree contractor for illegal felling of a protected tree and ancient woodland achieving fines totalling over £400,000.

Ash Die Back

68. Thousands of trees are likely to be felled within the County over the next few years due to Ash Dieback. This means the planting of new trees has become increasingly important. Plans are being prepared to replace lost ash trees with other native species.

Management of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS)

69. The Council has carried out actions to control INNS including Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Himalayan Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Rhododendron, Laurel, Hottentot Fig, Holm Oak, Portuguese Bay, Himalayan Honeysuckle, and Cotoneaster. Sites treated have included Rhododendron in Clyne Valley Country Park, Holm Oak at Pwlldu Bay, Cotoneaster at Port Eynon dunes/Mumbles Hill, Himalayan Balsam at Fairwood Common and Cilibion.
- A programme of Knotweed control is also being rolled out in support of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards programme at Penlan, Bonymaen/Pentrechwyth, and Port Tennant/St Thomas
 - The mapping of areas affected by INNS is being undertaken for the whole county.
 - Planning applications are screened for the presence of knotweed and other INNS and where appropriate planning conditions relating to the control of Knotweed and other INNS are imposed.
 - Collaborative working has taken place with all land holding or land managing departments to treat INNS on Council owned land
 - Guidance has been delivered to the public and advice is provided to landowners in various formats to raise awareness of the problem to help control the spread of INNS
 - New webpages on Japanese Knotweed have been set up on the Council's website.
 - The Council's Commercial Services Team have supported the marketing, promotion and sale of a service that tackles invasive species, i.e. the Japanese knotweed treatment service provided by Parks Service.
 - Natural control trials for knotweed and Himalayan balsam have been undertaken at various locations in Swansea in collaboration with Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) following a rigorous site selection criteria.

OBJECTIVE 5

Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring

Planning Consultations

70. The Council's Planning Ecologist has monitored planning applications submitted and provided ecological advice and comments to try to ensure no biodiversity loss.
71. Advice has also been provided at the pre- application stage.

Biodiversity Data

72. A Service Level Agreement has been established with the South East Wales Biodiversity Record Centre (SEWBREC) for the past 2 years to enable access to Aderyn and to provide biodiversity information in relation to planning applications received. In addition SEWBREC have undertaken a review of SINC sites to record those that have already been lost to development. They have also provided a list of priority habitats and species known to be present in Swansea and Gower.

GI and Biodiversity Mapping

73. The Council has undertaken a collaborative project with NRW, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend Councils and Public Health Wales to map existing green infrastructure and ecosystem resources and identify priority areas for improvement.
74. A process of developing GI and biodiversity maps at a ward level to identify opportunities for enhancement has also begun.

Tree Register

75. The Council has 900 woodlands that contain an estimated 250,000 trees and 38,000 individual trees, mapped and surveyed in Parks, Schools, Cemeteries, and Housing Land & Highways.
76. Tree planting on Council land is now a performance indicator (since April 2019). In addition to providing a register of tree loss/gain on Council owned land, future work involves the mapping of suitable areas for tree planting on Council owned land and the setting of annual targets for planting.
77. A survey of Ancient Woodlands on Gower was undertaken as a collaborative project between the Nature Conservation Team and County Archives.

Asset Review

78. A scheme of work is currently planned to review all Council assets in terms of biodiversity.
79. Actions include:
 - A biodiversity audit of all Council owned SINC's,
 - A biodiversity audit of land identified for disposal
 - A review of grazing agreements

Ecological Surveys

80. A number of ecological surveys have been commissioned to inform, management proposals, plans and projects on Council owned land.
81. These include Phase 1 survey, breeding birds and reptiles at Felindre; and otters, water vole, ponds and watercourses surveys at Swansea Vale.
82. In summer 2017, the Nature Conservation Team supported a Bioblitz at the RSPCA's Llys Nini wildlife site.
83. Detailed environmental impact assessments are undertaken by Corporate Property in respect of all sites sold by the Council. Where ecological or environmental issues are identified relevant mitigation and or compensation works are incorporated into any final scheme.

Species Monitoring

84. Annual monitoring of selected species is being undertaken by the Nature Conservation Team. This includes:
 - INNS - Hottentot Fig on three Gower AONB sites
 - Spartina in Swansea Bay SSSI

- Sand martin tubes on River Tawe embankment
 - Barn owls throughout the County area
 - Otters - annual NRW fixed point surveys at Clyne and River Tawe corridor
 - Survey of greater horseshoe bats at Duvant tunnel hibernation site
 - Vegetation monitoring within newly created dunes on Swansea Bay
85. As a member of the Relevant Authority Group for Carmarthen Bay & Estuaries European Marine Site (CBEEMS), the Council is supporting two NRW research projects:
- The effect of sheep grazing of saltmarsh for commercial shellfisheries in Burry Inlet.
 - The Impact of Non-licensed Activities, particularly bait collection and removal of living resources on site features, for example, within Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SAC.

OBJECTIVE 6

Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

Governance

86. As outlined under Objective 1, a Corporate Biodiversity Working Group has been established to coordinate, implement, monitor and review the Council's new corporate priority for Natural Resources and Biodiversity, and the Council's Section 6 Action Plan, and to ensure that biodiversity is embedded across the Council. This builds on the substantial work already undertaken across the organisation and will enable all Council Services to be increasingly ambitious in the way they engage with natural resources in future.
87. Monitoring of progress in delivering the Section 6 Duty will be reported through the Council's business planning processes, and scrutinised by the new Biodiversity Scrutiny Panel.
88. The Council's Biodiversity Champion and Biodiversity Cabinet Members are actively engaged in promoting and supporting the delivery of the Biodiversity Duty, as well as a number of other ward councillors who fund biodiversity projects from their community budgets.

Staffing and Resources

89. The Council has a small Nature Conservation Team who currently lead on co-ordinating and reporting on the Section 6 Plan. There is no dedicated Section 6 or Biodiversity Officer at present. It is expected that staff in other service areas will become more involved as the Corporate Working Group evolves.
90. Most of the activities detailed in this report have been delivered by the Council's Strategic Planning and Natural Environment Service, but other Service areas have played a key role, notably Parks, Regeneration, Housing and Highways. Some Service areas are beginning to work collaboratively to identify pilot initiatives which benefit biodiversity, and have started to consider biodiversity opportunities each year as an integral part of delivery of capital investment priorities.

91. Apart from funding for core staff, there is no dedicated Council budget for biodiversity, so most of the initiatives undertaken are reliant on obtaining external funding, (which by its nature makes it difficult to commit to long term projects or retain grant funded project staff). Significant sums of external grant aid have been secured over the last 3 years, including grants from Welsh Government, NRW, Heritage Lottery, Landfill, and the RDP

Volunteering

92. The Council has increased capacity to meet its Biodiversity Duty by involving and supporting the local community and volunteers to identify and deliver initiatives that maintain and enhance the natural environment as outlined below:

Swansea Wildlife Volunteers

93. With grant, funding from Welsh Government and NRW the Council has developed and supported a strong volunteer base to help with practical wildlife site management and enhancement works. A temporary volunteer co-ordinator post has been created to develop and co-ordinate a programme of practical conservation tasks and training workshops for volunteers, and a volunteer database has been established. As well as delivering biodiversity benefits, this project has enabled participants to gain skills and confidence.
94. Funding has also been accessed to launch a Gower Hedgerow Hub. This initiative is training volunteers in skills that will help sustain the vitality of Gower's hedgerows for years to come.

Supporting Community Engagement

95. The Parks and Nature Conservation Teams have helped to establish and support numerous Friends of Parks and Friends of Wildlife Sites groups to assist with the management of Council owned parks, semi natural open spaces and wildlife sites. Commercial Services have worked with Parks to generate new income and thus safeguard green assets. Many of the groups have been successful with grants as they are able to apply for funding that the Council is unable to access.
96. A memorandum of understanding has been produced in partnership with the groups, which will assist with future funding applications. This has recently been updated to ensure that biodiversity is taken into account when the Friends are planning management and improvement works or events in parks.
97. There are currently nearly 30 active Friends of Parks groups currently being supported. The Nature Conservation Team are working with and supporting Friends groups at a number of wildlife sites, including Mayhill Washing Lake, Kilvey Community Woodland, Rosehill Quarry, Swansea Vale, Penllegare Valley Woods, Llys Nini, Bishop's Wood LNR and Mumbles Hill LNR.
98. The Team also provides advice and support to the Swansea Community Greenspace project and has helped several site based projects and helped to develop a web-based toolkit for groups and individuals who want to set up get involved in a community green space project. <http://swanseacommunitygreenspaces.weebly.com/>

Partnership Working

99. Swansea Council has a strong track record of partnership and collaborative working within the environment sector and over the past 3 years has continued to play an important role in supporting the work of the following key environmental/ partnerships:

- Swansea Environmental Forum (SEF)
- Swansea Local Nature Partnership
- PSB 'Working with Nature' Task Group
- Gower AONB Partnership
- Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales
- Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Site RAG
- Forest School Swansea Neath Port Talbot
- Coed Cymru
- Wales Biodiversity Partnership

D. Concluding remarks

100. This report shows that since 2016 Swansea Council has made significant steps towards implementing plans, projects and initiatives to ensure that the Council meets its Section 6 Biodiversity Duty and deliver against each of the 6 objectives of the Nature Recovery Action Plan. Much good work was already being done, but the strengthened legal and policy framework has helped to ensure that greater priority is given to the natural environment and biodiversity across the breadth of Council Services.
101. At the heart of this progress was embedding the natural environment and biodiversity into the PSB's Swansea Well Being Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan. In addition the biodiversity Scrutiny inquiry and its recommendations has had a significant impact in terms of raising awareness of the Duty and highlighting areas for improvement.
102. There is a growing awareness of the importance of biodiversity across the authority and an increasing willingness in some areas to take biodiversity into account and try to achieve biodiversity gain when delivering services, but there is still a great deal to be done .
103. The lack of financial and staff resources to provide specialist advice and support and deliver on all identified and future actions was recognised by the Scrutiny committee, as was the need for culture change within and outside the organisation to address conflicting priorities and identified barriers
104. Long term solutions to build capacity will need to be identified over the next reporting period and set out in the Council's action plan if we are to make the changes needed to meet the challenging and urgent targets for biodiversity recovery and tackling climate change.
105. The newly formed Corporate Biodiversity Working Group will be key to addressing these issues and continuing the progress on embedding Section 6 across all Council services, as well as working more collaboratively and effectively with our partners to address the challenges we face.