

Supporting Nature in Flintshire

Our plan to maintain and enhance biodiversity under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016

January 2020 - December 2023

CYNGOR Sir y Fflint Flintshire COUNTY COUNCIL

Foreword

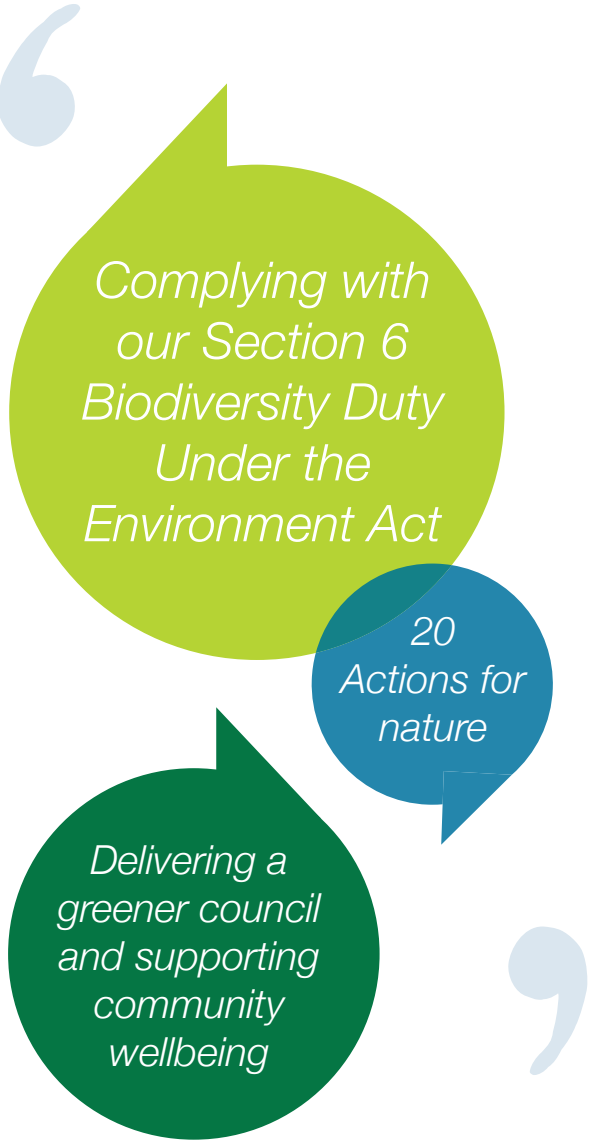
Nature is in deep crisis, 2020 marks the year our nation has failed to meet almost all of the international biodiversity commitments which were set 10 years ago. The continual downward spiral in the health of our natural world demonstrates the need to change the way we live and make business decisions. The wellbeing of future generations will depend on our action now.

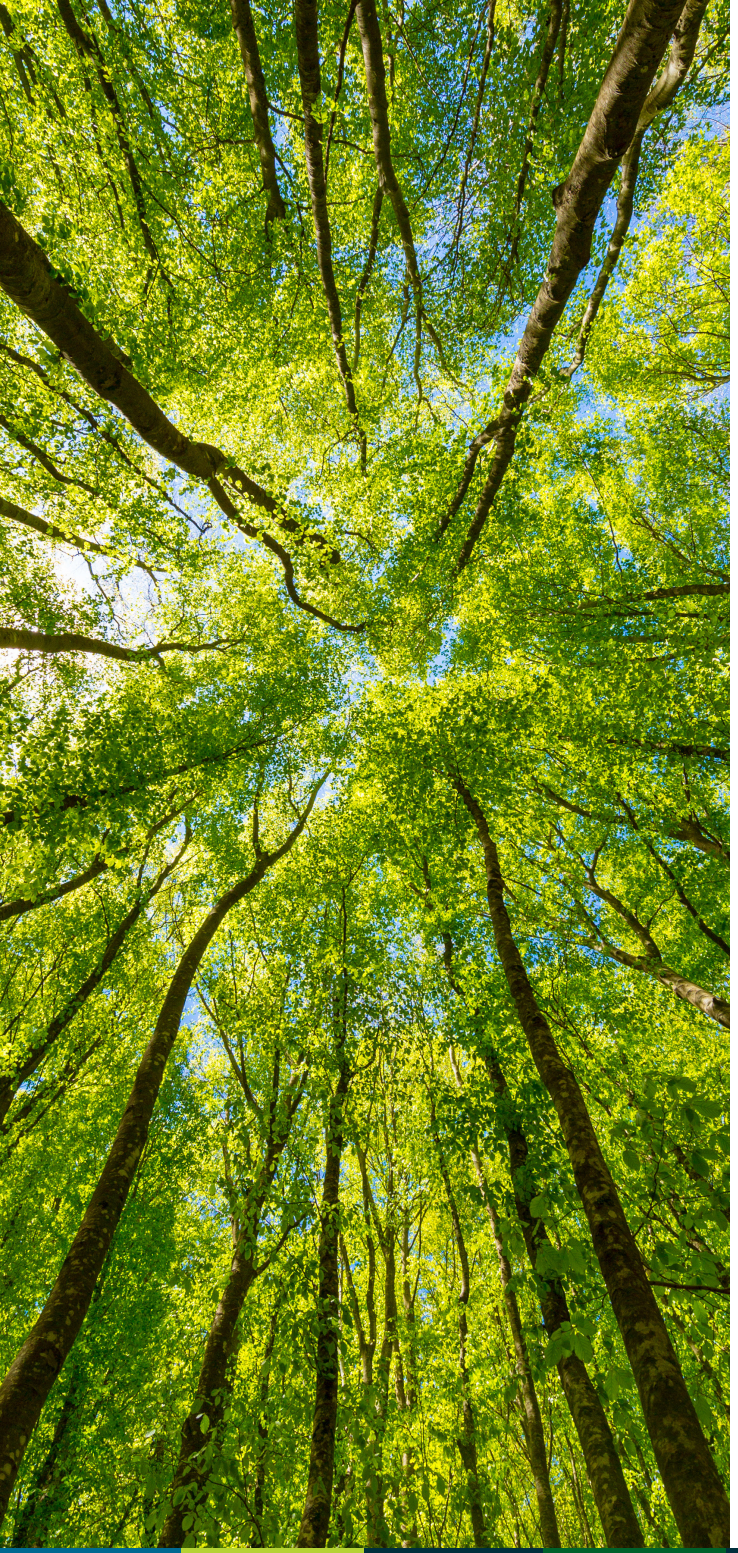
At Flintshire County Council serving our community is central. We know that our communities want first class local services and we want to ensure that our environment is protected and enhanced while we carry out these functions. We understand how important the health of our environment is and how closely it is linked with the wellbeing and happiness of our communities.

The Covid-19 crisis has put many public services under huge pressure but it has also highlighted to many the value of our natural world, we have all had to find new ways of working and many of these are positive for our environment and will be adopted permanently as we emerge from the crisis.

We understand at Flintshire County Council that we are in a key position and moment when we can lead the way in nature recovery and support understanding and action across our communities.

Councilor Carolyn Thomas
Deputy Leader Flintshire County Council





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Between 2002 and 2008 less than half of our most important SPECIES IN WALES were considered stable or increasing

Summary

Nature is our planet's life support system and consequently essential for human survival. Our natural environment provides our food, water, air, building materials, medicines and landscape. Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth and biodiversity loss continues as a direct result of human impacts, through habitat loss and degradation, over exploitation, pollution, climate change and invasive non-native species.

Welsh Government recognise all the benefits that are provided by plants, animals microorganisms and the places where they live and are aiming to reverse the decline of biodiversity in Wales with a ground breaking new framework of legislation.

As a Local Authority we have a duty to function sustainably and lead by example to protect and enhance our natural environment. Flintshire County Council have many areas of responsibility which can impact on the natural environment and we have the authority to ensure we function in a way which ensures the protection and recovery of nature. This way of working goes hand in hand with effective action against climate change.

To meet the challenge of reversing the decline in biodiversity it is essential that we act now and ensure as a local authority we meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Wales did not meet the 2010 biodiversity targets

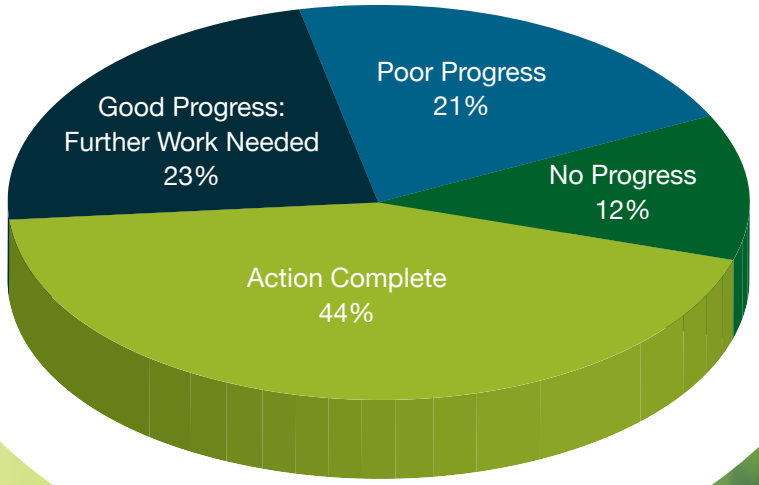
Globally we will fail to deliver the 2020 targets

2016-19 Biodiversity Section 6

Plan progress report: Dec 2019

Supporting Nature in Flintshire is our second plan for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Flintshire. We made good progress in 67% of the target areas under our 2016-2019 plan and are progressing our work in 2020 in a stronger position having continued to secure a number of grants for action for nature and to increase our Biodiversity Officer position to full time. Flintshire have been instrumental in ensuring the continuation of the Regional Nature Partnership (Bionet) which will be an essential tool in the development of a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan, in implementing targets from the National Nature Recovery Action plan, priorities from the Area Statements and wellbeing objectives.

Our plan is ambitious. It will involve working across council departments, driving change which will have multiple benefits and promoting new ways of thinking and working. There will be particular links with the Carbon reduction program and the emerging priority area of climate change.





Why do we need a plan?



Supporting Nature in Flintshire has been produced in response to the enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The Act requires that Public Authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems.

To comply with the Section 6 duty, a Public Authority must have regard to:

- The Section 7 list of habitats and species of principle importance for Wales
- The State of Nature Report published by Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
- Any Area Statement which covers all or part of the area in which the authority exercises its functions, once these are produced

  and
- Must prepare and publish a Sect. 6 delivery plan and report on plan progress every 3 years

Supporting Nature in Flintshire outlines how, as an organisation, we plan to address our biodiversity duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

There are strong links between the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

All major threats to nature including; climate change, over-exploitation, habitat loss, pollution, land management and invasive species can be addressed by living more sustainably which is at the heart of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Complying with the Section 6 duty will help us maximise our contributions to the Well-being goals and will also support delivery of other key plans and policies. Linked national, regional and local legislation, plans and policies are outlined below.

National	Regional	Local
Well-being of future generations (Wales) Act 2015	Area Statements	Council Plan 2020 -2023
Environment (Wales) Act 2016	Nature Recovery Action Plan	Well-Being Plan
Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales		Carbon Reduction Programme
Climate Emergency Declaration		Urban Tree & Woodland Plan
Action Plan for Pollinators		Environment & Sustainability Policy

Why do we need to support nature in Flintshire?

Flintshire is a county of contrasts. Set between the rural counties to the west and the more developed areas of Cheshire and Merseyside, land use varies from intensive industrial development along the Dee estuary through to remote and wild areas on the Clwydian range. The moorland, coast and woodland are important to all who live, work and visit the County.

The Clwydian Range, designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, lies in the west of Flintshire, here Coniferous forests are prominent and although areas are managed for agriculture, much of it is still covered by a mosaic of heath, heather and gorse. Our only areas of deep peat in the county are in the Clwydian range. Peatland habitats can play an important role in water management, slowing down flood waters and naturally reducing flood-risk downstream. By slowly releasing water during dry periods, peatland helps to reduce the impact of droughts on water supplies and on river and stream flows.

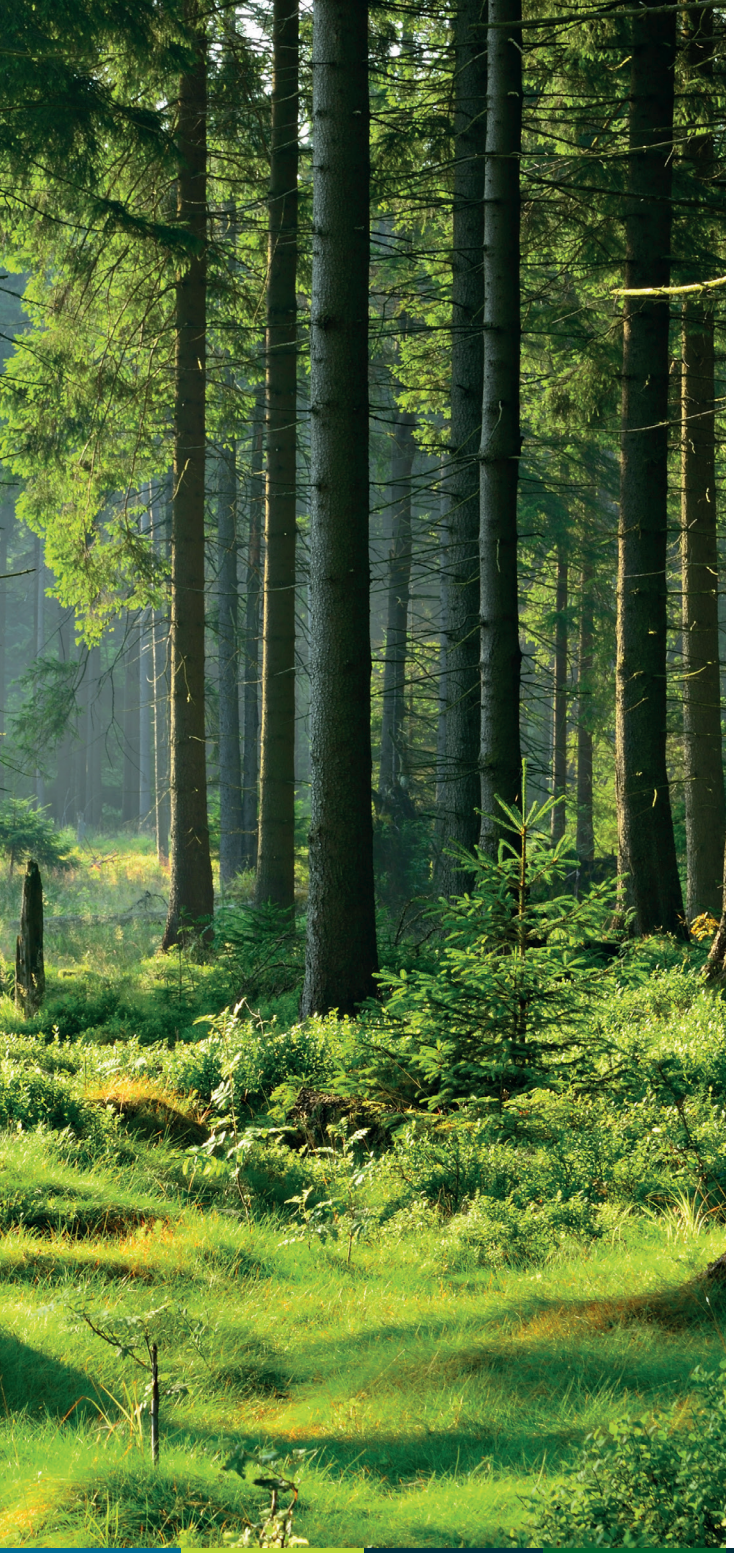
Nature is being lost across the whole of Wales and Flintshire is no exception. Over the decades, Flintshire has undergone significant transformation.

Impacts are evident on our Dormouse population where average positive survey records across our sites has reduced by 94% indicating a population which has plummeted. Another small mammal the water vole is the UKs fastest declining mammal and in Flintshire is now only found in specific pockets of suitable habitat.

The widespread loss of natural habitats through development, agriculture, housing, infrastructure, industry and mineral extraction is significant and there are new threats including pests and diseases such as Ash Dieback which is likely to greatly impact on the Ash trees across the County.

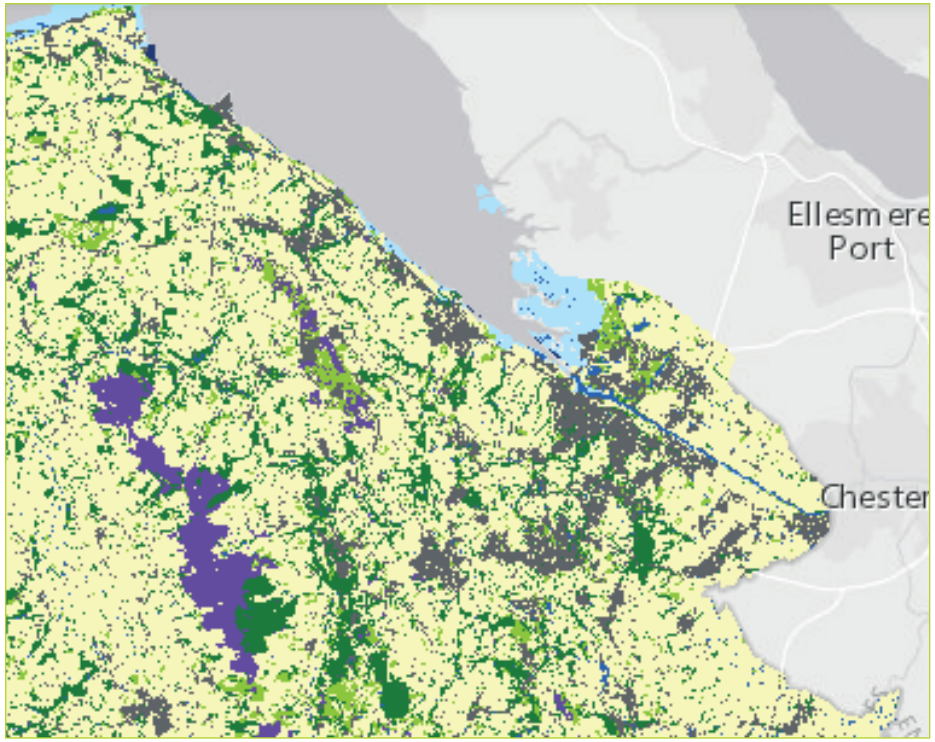
Despite this Flintshire does still retain many places that are of importance for wildlife in urban and rural areas and there is now more evidence than ever, that these natural places are also incredibly important for human well-being.

> *The Well-being Plan for Flintshire reports "that people living, working and visiting Flintshire, place a high value on the natural environment and want to use it more for their own wellbeing"*



Nature in Flintshire

The broad distribution of habitats in Flintshire is shown in the map below.



Legend

- Woodlands
- Mountains, moorland, heath
- Seminatural grassland
- Enclosed farmland
- Coastal margins
- Open water, wetlands & floodplains
- Urban / Not habitat
- Marine (estuaries)

Natural Resources Wales
https://envsys-ltd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f8741b82f4974486ae3ad0ddd8285692



ARC

Award winning mitigation at a development site in Buckley has increased the Great Crested Newt Population on site by over 1000%

Grassland and Commons

Many of the commons within Flintshire are important for wildlife. The Halkyn Common Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was formed over glacial deposits and 350 million year old limestone, creating a unique habitat and the largest resource of Calaminarian grassland in Wales. Nationally uncommon species such as the lead-tolerant spring sandwort are abundant as a result of the long history of metalliferous mining in the area.

The commons in the more urban areas also provide important diverse habitats. The network of ponds, wetland and scrub areas on Lower Common, Buckley are particularly important as breeding sites for frogs and newts and form part of the Deeside and Buckley Newt Sites SAC.

Flintshire is one of the key counties in Wales for the Great crested newt, they will often favor rural farm ponds, old quarries and derelict land in urban settings.

Woodlands and Trees

Woodlands cover 8.8% of the county, well below the Wales average of 14%. It is characterised by small blocks of farm woodland and some rural estates, as well as larger forest blocks, such as Nercwys and Moel Famau in the south of the county. Woodland forms an important habitat component in the wider countryside and within protected sites. For example Alyn Valley Woods SAC which follows the river Alyn from Loggerheads to Rhydymwyn is designated for its broadleaved woodland on limestone and wet alder woodland. Much of the Deeside and Buckley newt sites SAC is woodland which is important terrestrial habitat for Newts and Wepre Woods in Connahs Quay is designated for the sessile oak woodland present.

In 2018 we launched our Urban tree and woodland plan, the plan sets a target of achieving an urban canopy cover of 18% by 2033, an increase from the current 14.5%, the seventh lowest in Wales. It's a 15 year plan which sets out an integrated approach to planting on all types of council land.

Tree planting and natural regeneration (where appropriate) will be an important part of creating resilient ecological networks. It is essential that "The right tree in the right place" policy is followed when planning tree planting. This will prevent any loss of other important habitats (such as wetland or grassland) and will ensure that the trees provide maximum benefit into the future.

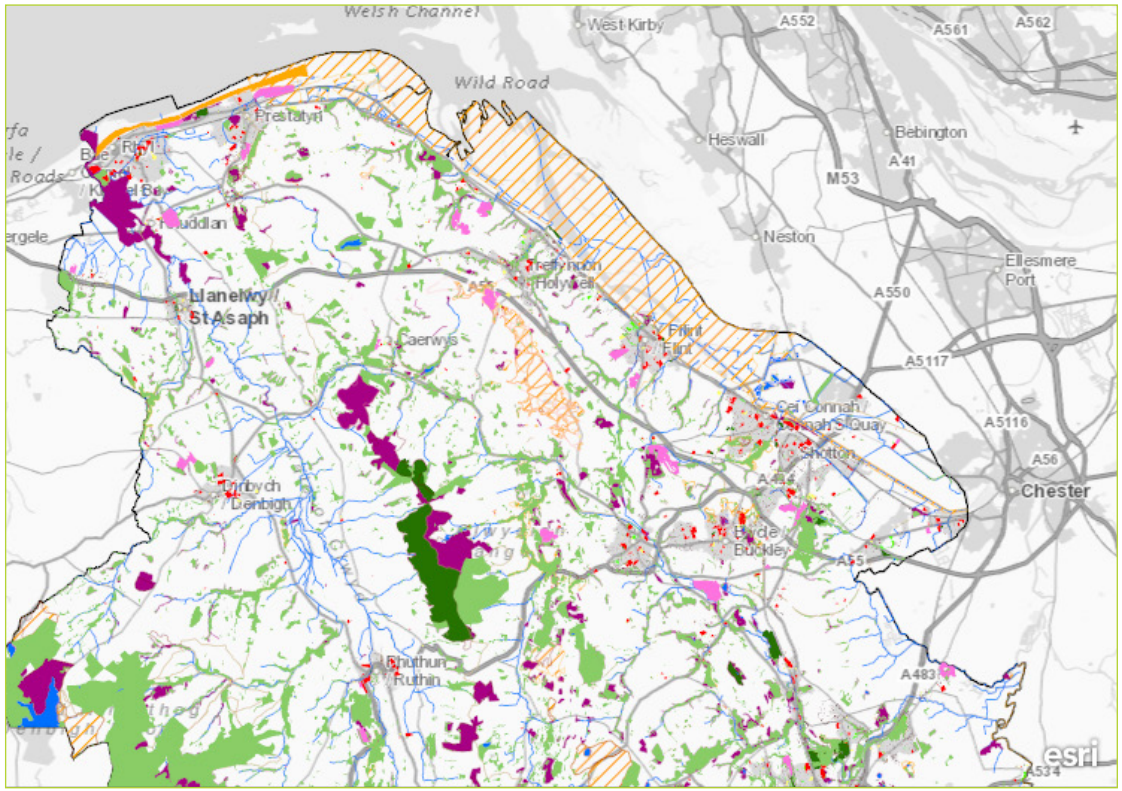


In the year 2019/2020 we planted over 6000 trees

Rural and Urban Green Infrastructure

There are many undesignated sites and scattered fragments of habitats which have nature conservation value and are essential for nature. This forms our green infrastructure. It includes streams and small pockets of wet woodlands, old hedgerows, acting as corridors for wildlife in otherwise species-poor fields; ancient woodlands hosting hundreds of species including bluebells. Combined these habitats provide for our more common and rare species such as Sand Lizards, Natterjack toads, Bats, Dormice, Otter, Great Crested Newts and thousands of wading birds on the Dee Estuary.

Most urban areas within the County incorporate informal 'green space' which is important for wildlife and recreation. Many of these are the legacy of old industrial or mineral workings which have developed natural flora and are the home for numerous insect species. Greenfield Valley, Holywell and Wepre Park, Connah's Quay are particularly valuable 'wild spaces'. The map to the right shows the different types of urban green infrastructure across Flintshire.



- Golf Course
- Sports & Recreation Areas

Green Assets - Food Space

- Allotments

Green Assets - Civic Space

- Cemetery

Green Assets - Blue Space

- Lakes, Reservoirs, Ponds

Green Assets - Green Space

- Coastal
- Access Land
- Amenity Green Space
- Commons



We have 23 nationally protected sites (SSSIs) in Flintshire Crested Newt Population on site by over 1000%

The last review of sssi in flintshire highlighted that 68% were in unfavourable condition

Protected Sites

Flintshire contains a high number of international, national and local nature conservation designations.

The saltmarsh, sand dune and mudflat habitats of the Dee Estuary are not only important in their own right, but host internationally important populations of wildfowl and waders and are designated internationally as Special Protected Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and RAMSAR wetland site of international importance. Other internationally designated sites include the Alyn Valley Woods SAC, Deeside and Buckley Newt Sites SAC and Halkyn Mountain SAC.

In total the County hosts over 23 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and over 300 locally designated wildlife sites.

These contain sensitive habitats including coastal and floodplain grazing marsh (5% of the welsh resource), Lowland Calcareous grassland (17% of the welsh resource), Saltmarsh (12% of the welsh resource) heathland, reedbeds, calaminarian grassland, ponds and coastal sand dunes .

How will we measure progress?

Progress against the plan will be formally reported to Welsh Government after every three year period with a report published on our website. This is dictated by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Due to the cross cutting and integrated nature of the plan and the fact that the plan will deliver objectives for a number of Council areas, action under this plan will be measured and reported through a number of additional methods.

Regular progress reports will be received by the Flintshire County Council Environment working group. Actions will be reported quarterly through the Welsh Government funded Local Nature Partnership Cymru project. Flintshire County Council also sit on the Welsh Government Section 6 Task and Finish Group so action will be reported directly to Welsh Government at these meetings. Action will also contribute to the quarterly Council Plan reporting and reporting for the Well-being objectives.

Action will be measured by the outcomes produced, production of documents, the mapping of environmental assets or the mapping of change. Electronic survey methods and attendance and feedback from events and activities will also be used where appropriate.



Action to support nature in Flintshire

Actions in this plan are structured under the Welsh Governments National Nature Recovery Action Plan objectives, this is in line with guidance from Welsh Government.

All actions are in line with the sustainable development principles also known as the “5 ways of working” outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

- Long term
- Prevention
- Integration
- Collaboration
- Involvement

There will often be some overlap between the actions and objectives of various national and local plans and we work to ensure that these work streams complement each other.

Some of the actions in Supporting Nature in Flintshire, do directly link to the Council Plan and Wellbeing objectives. Where actions directly deliver for these plans it is indicated by the symbols below. Additionally much of our work is grant funded and can be a legal requirement but where specific actions in this plan are statutory or grant funded (For part of the plan duration) it is also highlighted.

ST Statutory
CP Council Plan
WB Well-being Plan
GF Grant Funded



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

Current challenges:

Corporate change is needed to alter the impact of our actions on the natural world, ensuring the value of our natural world is recognised and understood will help initiate this change. As a public body we have the ability to influence how our own estate is managed, our residents understanding of the issue and our own processes and policies.

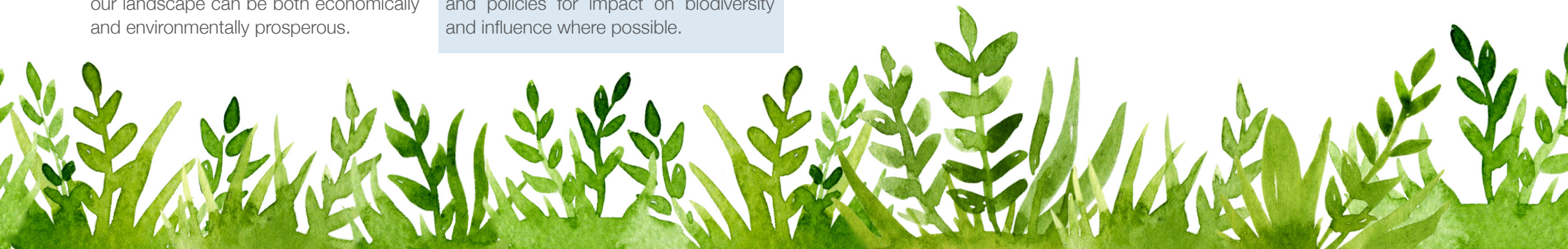
In Flintshire the large businesses and industrial areas highlight the need for private companies to also be performing sustainably and fully engaged in conservation objectives. There are many good examples of links between businesses and conservation work in Flintshire. These partnerships need to be built on and promoted. It is essential that biodiversity is considered and incorporated into design and discussions at an early stage to ensure our landscape can be both economically and environmentally prosperous.

Where we need to be in 2023:

- Considering the impact of decisions on the natural environment across all departments as standard and ensuring that decisions seek to promote and enhance nature wherever possible.
- Coordinating an influential and effective Regional Nature Partnership and creating opportunities for partnership working.
- Our staff understand the impact they can make on the natural world and are confident to suggest change to support continual improvements towards a sustainability.
- Supporting and promoting a strong understanding of the importance of nature across our communities.

Action 1 Engage key departments across the Council to support implementation of the Section 6 duty.
Action 2 Assess existing Council plans and policies for impact on biodiversity and influence where possible.
Action 3 Promote high level consideration of duty in Council documents.
Action 4 Ensure that environmental impact is considered through the procurement process.
Action 5 Continue to work in partnership to coordinate the regional nature partnership (Bionet) **GF**.
Action 6 Continue to develop and deliver projects with partner organisations and businesses.
Action 7 Continue to develop and deliver internal communication and training.
Action 8 Continue our role in educating residents and future generations about the importance of our natural environment.
Action 9 Continue to provide and expand our environmental volunteering opportunities **WB**.

Over 2500 people attended our environmental events in 2019



Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principle importance and improve their management

Current challenges:

Since 1970 in the UK 41% of species have decreased. In Wales we have seen changes where wildlife is found: 30% is found in fewer places. Across the whole of Wales protected areas are generally small and fragmented and are therefore vulnerable to management changes and the influence of surrounding land use. The last review 68% of SSSIs were in unfavourable condition and 71% of assessed habitat features are judged to be in unfavourable condition.

There are strong development pressures around important habitats in Flintshire and key European Great Crested Newt sites. The future of the species in Flintshire will be dependent on maintaining habitat connections through the developing landscape this is also vital for retaining a landscape and ecosystems which will be resilient in a changing climate.

Where we need to be in 2023:

- Have an effective, innovative and collaborative Nature Recovery Action Plan

Action 10 Publish a Nature Recovery Action Plan to inform and guide action for species and habitats of principle importance across Flintshire **GF**



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

Current challenges:

There are numerous issues which may undermine the resilience of our ecosystems; pressure from development for industry, housing and infrastructure, lack of available land that owners are willing to leave wild/enhance for nature. The spread of invasive non native species. Social pressures such as off-road motorcycling and anti- social behaviour including littering and fly tipping all place additional pressure on our ecosystems and their ability to cope with change.

Restoring, expanding and improving the condition of our natural habitats, as well as incorporating natural space into our new development is the key to making them more resilient and able to deliver a wider range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

Where we need to be in 2023:

- Have a greener more biodiverse council estate which is well used and appreciated by residents.
- Using accessible and efficient mapping technologies to inform action and evidence change

Action 11 Green our Council estate and improve accessible green spaces for wildlife and people **CP** **WB**
Action 12 Achieve Bee friendly status **CP**
Action 13 Progress our cross department Wildflower campaign **CP**
Action 14 Progress our “Mapping to support nature recovery” project **GF**
Action 15 Continue to implement the FCC Urban tree and woodland strategy **CP**



Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Current challenges:

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity. Impacts are already being seen across our species. Migratory birds are arriving and laying eggs earlier for example swallows are arriving 15 days earlier today than they did in the 1960s. The availability of sand eels has reduced which are a key food source for our sea birds. On average 10-12 new non native species become established in the UK each year and up to 20% of these can have serious adverse impacts. Pests and diseases also threaten our native species, The disease Ash dieback continued intensification of land management and urbanisation also have a dramatic impact on our nature.

Where we need to be in 2023:

- Climate action is led, coordinated and supported by a cross departmental group
- Improved levels of nature consideration and inclusion across all new development
- We have implemented planned ash dieback action and where possible minimised negative impacts on local nature
- We are involved in effective partnership work to minimise the impact of invasive species

Action 16 Continue to work with key departments to reduce the impact of climate change **CP** **WB**
Action 17 Promote and enable greener development **WB**
Action 18 Work in partnership to limit the impact of INNs and pests and diseases on local biodiversity



Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring

Current challenges:

Our data on local regional and national species and habitats is limited and we do not have the capacity, time or resources to undertake complete habitat and species audits. Data is poorly shared between organisations which leads in inefficient working and missed opportunities. We need to focus on halting the decline of nature and we need to improve local action through effective monitoring and evidencing of project action.

Where we need to be in 2023:

- We will have a platform where we can share appropriate environmental data across the regional nature partnership.
- We will be able to evidence change and understand what the best action is and where and when to undertake it to focus resources we have.
- We will be using a spatial nature recovery action plan to inform action

Action 19 Monitor and evaluate action **ST**



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

Current challenges:

Like many other public bodies we have work to do in raising the profile of the environment across our depts. We recognise that work is needed to embed environmental consideration and we will look to incorporate the environment across Local Authority policy and documents to allow consistency and clarity on our commitments to nature recovery.

Where we need to be in 2023:

- Have a strong and effective local and regional network which has well-coordinated and effective communication with national forums.
- We need a local structure which is effective, stable and supports our commitment to continued action to halt nature loss and creates a workplace where environmental consideration and nature based solutions are mainstream.

Action 20 Ensure sufficient capacity and resources to comply with the duty



References

- State of Nature Report 2019 https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/
- Flintshire County Council Council Plan https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Council-and-Democracy/Council-Plan.aspx
- Flintshire County Council Well-being Plan https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Council-and-Democracy/Council-Plan.aspx
- Flintshire County Council Urban tree and woodland Plan https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/PDFFiles/Countryside--Coast/Tree/Urban-Tree-and-Woodland-Plan.pdf
- North East Wales Green Infrastructure map: Cofnod 2018: Not published
- Broad habitat mapping: Natural Resources Wales https://envsys-ltd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f8741b82f4974486ae3ad0ddd8285692
- Welsh habitat targets disaggregation report CCW 2007

Further Information

- For the full text of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/3/contents/enacted
- For guidance documents see: https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Environment-Wales-Act
- For the full text of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents/enacted
- For guidance documents see: https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/
- For further information on the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Section 6 duty: https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Section-6
- For further information about the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Section 7 Habitats and Species of principle importance for conservation: https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Environment-Wales-Act
- Find the Regional Nature Partnership (Bionet) on social media at https://www.facebook.com/NEWBioNet/ and https://twitter.com/newbionet

