Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 - Section 6

The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

Report 2025

Flintshire County Council

Introduction and Context

Flintshire County Council is a local authority in North East Wales. Flintshire is 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. Over the decades, Flintshire has undergone significant transformation. The impact of development from agriculture, housing, industry and mineral extraction is significant, yet Flintshire still retains many areas that are of importance for wildlife, both urban and rural. 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 a Special Protected Area (SAC), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and RAMSAR wetland site of international importance.

The priorities for Flintshire as a county are set by the Council and its local public sector partners. We work together as a Public Services Board (PSB) combining our resources for the benefit of Flintshire

Flintshire County Councils' Biodiversity duty plan "Supporting Nature in Flintshire" was 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.

A public authority, in complying with the Section 6 duty, 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.

There are strong links between the Environment Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Complying with the Section 6 duty will help public authorities subject to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to maximise their contributions to the well-being goals.

"Supporting Nature in Flintshire" our biodiversity plan, outlines how, as an organisation, we are taking action to address our biodiversity duty. "Supporting Nature in Flintshire" is a stand-alone plan that links to actions in the Council Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Tree and Urban Woodland Plan, and Wellbeing Plan. The council's commitment to progressing the biodiversity plan is outlined throughout these documents. Delivering the plan will also support achievement of outputs across these areas. Performance against the plan is monitored by the Biodiversity Officer and reported through InPhase to senior managers, the Programme Board, as well as to the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee.

All actions in the plan are in line with the sustainable development principles, also known as the "5 ways of working" outlined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. All major threats to nature including climate change, over-exploitation, habitat loss, and invasive species can be addressed by living more sustainably which is why action for biodiversity and the wellbeing of future generations should go hand in hand. The 'Well-being Plan for Flintshire and Wrexham 2023-2028' identifies climate change and the nature emergency as the defining issue of our time. And states that "We have a real opportunity to work together to engage with our natural environment to build positive health outcomes, including improved physical and mental health, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic conditions."

Flintshire's Biodiversity Team collaborates with Conwy, Denbighshire and Wrexham and the Local Nature Partnership Project Officer to support the Local Nature Partnership (Bionet). This partnership works

closely with national biodiversity initiatives and regional policies including Natural Resources Wales' Area statements.

Like other local authorities, Flintshire County Council are under extended and continued financial pressure. It is essential that environmental initiatives are viewed holistically for the multiple benefits they provide, embraced as an opportunity to improve county wide well-being and contribute where possible towards financial resilience.

Highlights, Key Outcomes and Issues

Highlights

- **Our 20 key actions for nature are set out over 6 objectives. Of the 20 actions 55% are categorised as having "Some progress" with 45% as having "Good progress" and 0% having "No progress" for this reporting period, this compares favourably with 35% having "Good progress" in the 2019-2022 reporting period.**

Increased scale and scope of our changes in estate management has been a key highlight since 2022. We have put the right management in place for a number of our longstanding florally diverse verges. We have created new wildflower sites mainly through seeding and we have increased areas of reduced mow. This project was initiated originally in 2019 through direct member engagement with the Streetscene and has successfully grown as a result of this high level commitment, strong Streetscene/Biodiversity staff collaboration and regular and effective cross department communication. The project now uses a structured and thorough process for site creation, annual monitoring of all sites and a linked engagement programme. Since 2022 we have significantly increased our estate managed for wildflower diversity for the benefit of both local nature and our residents. Larger management equipment and effective cross department collaboration has supported the expansion of this important area of work.

Working across departments; Since 2022 we have worked with numerous other council departments. We have built up good links across numerous council departments This enables and encourages proactive and positive collaboration. Provided the increased biodiversity staffing continues we will have capacity and resources to continue to work across department, providing advice, both financial and staffing support to enable maximum benefit for nature and people.

Continued Integration with the Climate Change Strategy: The biodiversity and climate teams are small teams within the council with wide ranging work areas. Significant integration of biodiversity priorities within the climate change strategy is essential and has supported furthering action and helped shine a light on key internal action needed to support biodiversity. The land use project working with climate staff and valuation and estates is particularly relevant and has helped identify estate land which has opportunity for biodiversity or climate projects. (Also see Action 16)

Achieving Bee Friendly Status: In December 2023, Flintshire County Council submitted a Bee-Friendly Application to the Wales's Pollinator Taskforce administered by the Welsh Government. The National Bee-Friendly Accreditation Scheme, initiated by Friends of the Earth Cymru and the Welsh Government, aims to advocate for pollinator-friendly action across various sectors including communities, schools, universities, businesses, and places of worship. In January 2024 Flintshire County Council were awarded the Bee Friendly Award to become the fifth local authority in Wales to achieve the status. An award ceremony was held at Wepre Park on April 22nd 2024. During the award ceremony, presentations were delivered by Sarah Slater (Flintshire Biodiversity Officer), Carolyn Thomas (Senedd Member), and Kathleen Carroll (Welsh Government). Councillor Gladys Healey accepted the Bee-Friendly Award on behalf of Flintshire County Council. The Award is testament to successful cross department work which will benefit pollinators, a healthy environment and all the services it provides which are essential for our wellbeing. We will be providing the Taskforce with annual updates of our continued action to retain the status.

Key Enablers to Biodiversity Action

Additional biodiversity staff: Revenue grant funding received annually since 2022 through WG Local Places for Nature continues to allow the retention of Biodiversity front line staff. This has been welcomed and essential. Staff provide internal guidance, prepare and deliver grant funded projects, enable statutory action, survey and monitor sites and species and educate, publicise and promote around the environment. This additional capacity enables a proactive approach to biodiversity conservation in Flintshire.

Continuation of Local Places for Nature grant funding: The Local Places for Nature programme continues to significantly support action for biodiversity across public areas managed by the Local Authority. It has facilitated the increased scale and scope of our work to move away from a reliance on chemical pesticides and investment in machinery to support new approaches in management reducing the risk associated with these changes and facilitating behaviour transformation. It continues to provide revenue grant opportunities to allow for increased staff capacity, albeit on a short term basis, which has been essential to effectively address the nature crisis, deliver grant funded projects and take a proactive approach to local nature conservation.

Senior manager and County Councillor support: Monitoring of 380 Welsh species since 1994 shows that, on average, their numbers have fallen by 20%. This makes it clear that historical approaches have had a negative impact on nature and, consequently, on the systems we rely on for our wellbeing. To maintain and enhance biodiversity, as required by the Section 6 duty, we will need to implement change. Delivering change in established practices and processes can be challenging, making high-level support and understanding essential. At Flintshire County Council, we have benefitted from this; support from both senior managers and elected county councillors is key to enabling continued and impactful biodiversity action.

Statutory duty; Understanding and awareness of the duty is increasing internally and externally and across other public bodies in Flintshire. With local authorities under increasing financial pressure going forward the statutory nature of the duty will be key to continued action.

Notable or Continuing Negative Impacts, and Any Barriers to Action

Many of the issues or barriers faced in the last reporting round remain unchanged.

Status quo bias and undervaluing of natural assets: The tendency to prefer existing conditions over change is a major barrier to action. People frequently express concerns about the lifetime costs of natural assets, perceived risks, ongoing maintenance requirements, and potential conflicts with other priorities. This is particularly challenging in an organisation which has significant budgetary pressures and is subject to public scrutiny. As a result, existing practices and processes are often overvalued, while the significant costs of inaction and the wide range of benefits that environmental action can deliver are undervalued or overlooked.

Longer term and inconspicuous nature of biodiversity benefit: Enhancement projects with positive impact on biodiversity are not always visually obvious and immediately impactful. For example: Areas of reduced mow under the correct management will improve diversity gradually over time without significant increase in colour and aesthetic appeal for the general public. All the environmental benefit for nature and people including, the creation of pollinator forage and shelter, increased water absorption, pollution absorption, increased carbon capture can go unnoticed and unappreciated.

Public attitudes: Public attitudes toward nature often exhibit a supportive stance in principle but a reluctance in practice when natural asset enhancements are proposed nearby. While individuals may strongly endorse environmental protection and biodiversity improvement in general, they may resist such initiatives in their immediate vicinity due to concerns about perceived inconvenience, disruption, or changes to local landscapes. This pattern reflects a “not-in-my-backyard” tendency, where broad support for nature does not always translate into acceptance of local implementation.

Short term grant funding: Whilst the increase in grant funding available for biodiversity projects has been welcomed, the short term timeframes are not fit for the purpose of delivering long term biodiversity

impact or projects which are required to go through complex preparatory and delivery processes. Revenue funding supports short term grant funded positions which do not promote staff consistency or retention of skills and experience.

Statutory duty: There is a raft of legislation local authorities must comply with. Evidence suggests that penalties can drive compliance. It is possible that the lack of penalties associated with the Section 6 Biodiversity duty are complicit with lowering its priority across local authorities with significantly challenged budgets and staff resource.

Action Report

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

Action 1. Engage key departments across the Council to support implementation of the Section 6 duty

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Since 2022 there has been good progress in engaging key departments across the Council. Work has expanded with our Streetscene Department (Also see Action 13). We have worked closely with our Enterprise and Regeneration Department to support urban green infrastructure projects, the inclusion of Green Infrastructure Audits within Place-making Plans was instrumental in driving urban green infrastructure work. We work with the Energy Unit and Flood Teams regularly in relation to energy sites, natural flood management and wetland creation projects. We are working with our Housing and Valuation and Estates Departments to deliver biodiversity and climate action on our land assets and have regular and ongoing communication and joint working with the Climate Team, attending various climate working groups to support delivery of the Climate Change Strategy. We are working with our Education Department and Play Development Team delivering Flintshire Eco Champions primary school programme and accompanying this with school grounds biodiversity enhancement. We have also improved our work with our Estates team, allowing us to asses some land holdings which have potential for biodiversity or climate enhancement. This had led to a number of projects including, leaky dam, natural flood management projects. These strong links across teams and departments allow for real joined up working, combining of resources and funding and the development of collaborative funding bids which enables improved outcomes across departments and for our communities in Flintshire.

Figure 1. Key cross department work areas

Department/Team	Actions / Interventions
Housing	Natural flood management, Support for non-Glyphosate weed control
Valuation & Estates	Estate climate and nature opportunity
Education	School grounds enhancement, Flintshire Eco Champions
Enterprise & Regeneration	Roundabout sponsorship, Place-making Plan Green Infrastructure Audits, Urban Green Infrastructure
Streetscene	Wildflower sites, Grass cutting, Tree planting, Pesticide reduction, Cemeteries enhancement, Engagement
Flood	Natural Flood Management, Urban Sustainable Urban Drainage, Wetland creation
Energy	Tree planting, Flintshire Eco Champions, Management at renewable energy sites
Climate Change	Education & Engagement, Land use, Tree planting
Development control & Minerals	Ecological response and advice on planning applications, large scale strategic projects and minerals sites

[1] Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales

Gwella	Play area biodiversity enhancement

Action 2 Assess existing Council plans and policies for impact on biodiversity and influence where possible

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Biodiversity action features significantly within the Climate Change Strategy and work within the strategy involves the review of plans and policies to assess environmental impact and opportunities, this work is ongoing. The strategy can be viewed here. The Biodiversity Team attend a number of the Climate Change Strategy officer forums. Within these forums there is ongoing work to consider scope and possible impact of various internal policies on the environment, seeking opportunities to review and amend where a positive change can be made. Council plans are subject to the integrated impact assessment process which considers biodiversity and environmental impact, guidance documents and staff contacts accompany the assessment forms to provide additional guidance if needed by project managers.

The capital business case application process now includes consideration of climate and nature impact and requires input from biodiversity staff to assess potential impact and suggest measures to promote biodiversity benefit. This allows for key early engagement involvement and biodiversity recommendations to be incorporated into capital plans. The Town Centre Green Infrastructure Working Group, formed in this reporting period as a result of collaborative work with the Enterprise and Regeneration Department also provides a cross department forum which allows early identification of project opportunity for biodiversity benefit.

Action 3. Ensure high level consideration of duty in Council documents

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Biodiversity and natural environment staff provide regular comment and input into higher level plans.

Implementation of the duty no longer specifically features in the Council Plan which focusses on carbon reduction, however monitoring of the Council Plan does include performance indicator measures of Section 6 duty delivery. Delivery of Section 6 also features in the Climate Change Strategy, in addition to the Departmental Service Plan. You can view the full Council Plan here.

Figure 2. Green Priority Council Plan 23-28



Action 4. Ensure that environmental impact is considered through the procurement process

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

The Council has a strong methodology established through our own TOMs (Themes, Outcomes & Measures) framework which uses social, economic and environmental factors within procurement operations. The required social value element within the procurement process now provides an opportunity for environmental considerations and has successfully been implemented for biodiversity benefit and consistency and ensure social, economic and environmental factors are not compromised.

Additional environmental impacts and opportunities within the procurement process are being considered further through a specific officer group implementing the Climate Change Strategy. This work is ongoing.

Action 5. Continue to work in partnership to coordinate the regional nature partnership (Bionet)

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

The Local Nature Partnerships Cymru project ended in 2022 which had helped develop the Local Nature Partnership (LNP/Bionet), maximise its effectiveness and support collaborative conservation action across North East Wales. The project funded staff time to develop joint projects including species monitoring, conservation through spatial data use and collection and promotion/publicity activities for nature recovery including the creation of a partnership website.

In 2022 the addition of grant funded biodiversity staff in local authorities across the region allowed continued progress in terms of collaboration including; species and habitat monitoring, spatial data collection, publicity and events (social media content, annual conference, Bionet awards and resource development). From 2023 North East Wales Local Authorities collaborated to grant fund a regional Local Nature Partnership Project Officer post which has been in place since. The LNP/Bionet Project Officer works across the region and leads coordination of the partnership, facilitates collaborative projects, develop the nature recovery action plan further and actively explore grant funding.

We have since developed our awards, annual conference, web resources, social media presence and events much further and have developed quarterly habitat focussed meetings engaging new partners in the process. The Local Nature Partnership regularly engages new partners and facilitates new collaborative projects across the region.

Action 6. Continue to develop and deliver projects with partner organisations

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

This is a dynamic area of action with regularly changing grant funding opportunities and a varied range of possible project partners. We regularly have multiple projects with a variety of partner organisations. Supporting and developing these mutually beneficial partnerships is vital for successful local action for nature. We work closely with our neighbouring local authorities and many conservation organisations. A wide range of our regional partnership projects are displayed on the Bionet nature partnership website here.

Since 2022, our Small Grant for Nature scheme set up using Local Places for Nature grant funding provided opportunities to work in partnership across Flintshire supporting local groups to take action for nature. We worked with 17 different local groups, schools, charities, churches and friends of groups. Most commonly, the funding provided items for successful applicants such as bird boxes, bat boxes, bug/bee hotels, as well as wildflower seed, plants and bulbs. But it also supported volunteer workshops and plants for young people with special educational needs. Due to the success of the Small Nature Grant we are planning to run a second round of a similar grant in 2026 for local community groups keen to act for nature.

Partner organisations we've collaborated with since 2022 include: North Wales Wildlife Trust (Planting for pollinators, Seed recovery project) Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (Habitat management and

creation). And a range of local Town and Community Councils, Community and conservation groups (habitat creation, events, training).

Action 7. Continue to develop and deliver internal communication and training

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

We have made progress developing our internal communication and training. The Biodiversity Team works closely across departments. We attend regular collaborative meetings working closely with specific staff from Streetscene, Enterprise and Regeneration, Energy and Climate change and Flood.

Training and demonstrations in specific systems and machinery have been provided to Streetscene and Countryside staff including non-chemical weed control, various cut and collect machinery and electric grounds management equipment.

We hosted an Urban Green Infrastructure Seminar for staff in March 2025 coordinated by the Biodiversity and Regeneration Teams. The seminar highlighted local case studies and best practice for introducing urban green infrastructure promoting biodiversity within design and development and was well received by staff.

County Councillors and staff have attended a number of additional biodiversity events including our bee friendly award presentation event, wildflower briefing and workshop.

An E-Learning Module has been developed and added to our online learning resources accessible to all staff and County Councillors.

We recognise there is still more we can do to support internal communication and are in the process of updating and improving our webpages and increasing the information and resources we share with staff and councillors.

Action 8. Continue our role in educating residents and future generations about the importance of our natural environment

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Raising awareness and improving understanding remained a priority through this reporting period. Educating residents and future generations about the importance of nature is undertaken in a variety of ways.

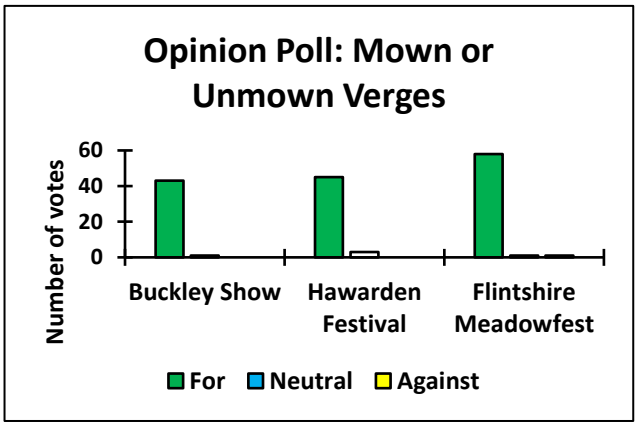
We host a wide range of activities and events with our countryside service and conservation partners. Over the reporting period this has included bat walks and talks, pollinator events, woodland and tree days, meadow events, plant walks, bird walks, school visits and talks and more. The Biodiversity Team have significantly increased the number of events hosted and attended by staff, in 2022 we hosted 3 events in 2024 and 2025 we hosted 12 and 13 events respectively, excluding school visits and volunteer events. Events are capacity and resource heavy but can also be invaluable to engage new audiences. We are always working to improve our events, in preparation for 2026 we have created an event feedback form which will enable evidenced feedback and help improve attendee satisfaction.

In 2024 we initiated a wildflower roadshow taking information about our estate management and the machinery we are using to events across the county. The wildflower roadshow was initially proposed as a collaborative project between the Streetscene Team who manage green spaces and verges across Flintshire and the Biodiversity Team. The roadshow provided an opportunity for both departments to attend significant public events across Flintshire with the combined aim of raising awareness of wildflowers and the importance of wilder verges and including nature in our green spaces. The wildflower roadshow engaged a wide variety of new audiences. Rotating to new events ensured that we could speak to the public from different areas of Flintshire. It is important to gain insights and opinions from across the county, to understand and respond to wide ranging views. We visited events at Flint, Connahs Quay, Buckley, Caerwys and Hawarden each which had thousands of attendees, we actively spoke to hundreds of residents (2024(383) 2025(403)). We undertook an informal opinion poll asking people if they were supportive of longer unmown areas. The general opinion was positive regarding wildflower areas across most of the events. We found widespread lack of understanding regarding the management

aspect of wildflower sites. We are planning to continue the roadshow in 2026, using all our learning from 2024/25 to maximise the impact and conversations we can have with Flintshire residents.

Figure 4: Photos from our Wildflower Roadshow 24/25 and results of the 2025 informal opinion poll taken during conversations with event attendees.







We have put in place a social media schedule which shares content across three key platforms, corporate Flintshire County Council Facebook page, our Countryside and Coast platforms and the Local Nature Partnership social media. This has enabled a regular and seasonal and timely social media presence which supports more engagement.

We have also recently improved our press release process working with corporate communications.

We have installed identification posts at wildflower areas with additional QR codes at appropriate sites, this links to the nature partnership website and provides site specific information for the public includes when and how the site was created, when it was monitored last, what species you are likely to see and which pollinators this benefits. In line with this visibility for the public we have also identified key vehicles with the Bee Friendly logo to highlight the conservation work they are supporting to the public.

Following an initial trial of Flintshire Eco Champions in 2022, we were able to re-fresh and relaunch the project in 2024/5. Benefitting from improved internal links we were able to bring Flintshire Eco Champion delivery in house working with our Play Development Team. Eco Champions is a 5-week, play-based learning programme designed for Year 6 pupils, with the aim of equipping them with knowledge, skills, and motivation to act as responsible guardians of their environment. Delivered by Flintshire Play Development on behalf of the Flintshire Biodiversity Team, the programme supports schools in embedding environmental awareness and sustainability into the curriculum through active, hands-on experiences. The project provides schools with a useful springboard for initiating or enhancing their own carbon and biodiversity work, contributing to whole-school development plans around sustainability and eco-literacy. Since its launch, Eco Champions has reached **567** children across **20** sessions in the school year, and demand continues to grow. The success of the programme is also a testament to the strength of interdepartmental collaboration. The programme also aligns with schools' work on eco-committees, outdoor learning, and developing the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales- especially in supporting children to become ethical, informed citizens who show commitment to the sustainability of the planet.

The Biodiversity Team have created a range of leaflets and resources providing information on various areas of our work, leaflets on our wildflower management and the importance of trees, these have been circulated to all libraries across the county to ensure information is accessible for the public. We have also created resources through Flintshire Eco Champions and Wales Climate Week which are available for nature education in schools.

We want to make these resources even more available alongside other information about our work and are in the process of updating and refreshing our nature webpages which will provide a place for all biodiversity information.

Action 9. Continue to provide and expand our environmental volunteering opportunities

We have been able to involve volunteers in project delivery through tree planting events and seed harvesting, growing on, small nature grants and invasive species control.

We have also been able to re-establish some of our volunteer species monitoring programmes but there is still work to do in expanding this. Through the nature partnership website we highlight project volunteering opportunities with our conservation partners and we promote volunteering opportunities through the nature partnership social media platforms.

Internal corporate volunteering opportunities are being considered within the Climate Change Strategy work programme, this work is ongoing.

Objective 1: Supporting Nature in Flintshire stated:

Where we need to be:

- *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.*

Objective 1: 2025 Reporting comment

- *Consideration of the impact Flintshire work has on biodiversity and of the opportunities for biodiversity enhancement has improved across departments since 2022, however there are still missed opportunities, often due to project time constraints or lack of communication. Building on improved cross department links we will be working to minimise this going forward.*
- *There is still a significant work to do in educating our communities, dispelling myths and promoting the value of nature to avoid it being taken for granted and undervalued..*

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

Action 10. Publish a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan for North East Wales

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

The Local Nature Partnership (Bionet) has outlined the first three priority habitats for our area on the nature partnership website with short, medium and long term targets. This document will evolve online and provide evidence of change and guidance for regional conservation project priorities. It can be viewed here.

In addition the Partnership has created online resources providing numerous project case studies which are supporting project delivery.

The Local Nature Partnership now hosts broad habitat focused meetings throughout the year to allow action monitoring and facilitate habitat focused action and collects project information from partners providing an important overview of action across the region.

Objective 2: Supporting Nature in Flintshire stated:

Where we need to be:

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

Objective 2: 2025 Reporting comment

- *We are working to the broad targets in the Regional Nature Recovery Plan. While this helps to guide action, there is a need to develop the plan further and record meaningful progress towards the plan targets.*
- *A range of additional action is undertaken by the County Ecologist through planning consultation, protected habitat and species licencing and ecological mitigation and compliance which protects Sect 7 habitats and species. Our ranger services are also actively involved in the management of numerous designated sites which are managed for conservation. We have initiated additional surveys and monitoring at some of our these sites targeting specific protected species and plan to develop and formalise this additional surveying going forward.*

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

Action 11. Green our Council estate and improve accessible green spaces for wildlife and people

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

There is growing evidence of the importance of semi natural urban habitat for biodiversity, providing stepping stones and natural links through our urban environment. Grant funding has enabled good progress to increase wildflower areas and tree planting across our Council estate between 2022 and 2025.

Our tree planting programme has continued seasonally since 2022, in the last reporting period between 2019 and 2022 we had planted 10758 trees, this reporting period the figure to date is 11866, with additional planting planned later in 2025. Our tree planting programme has developed significantly since 2022 with improved monitoring and maintenance of newly planted trees to maximise success rate and cross department work to facilitate urban tree planting including large standard tree planting in innovative tree pits, providing biodiversity and aesthetic benefit to urban settings. (Also see Action 15)

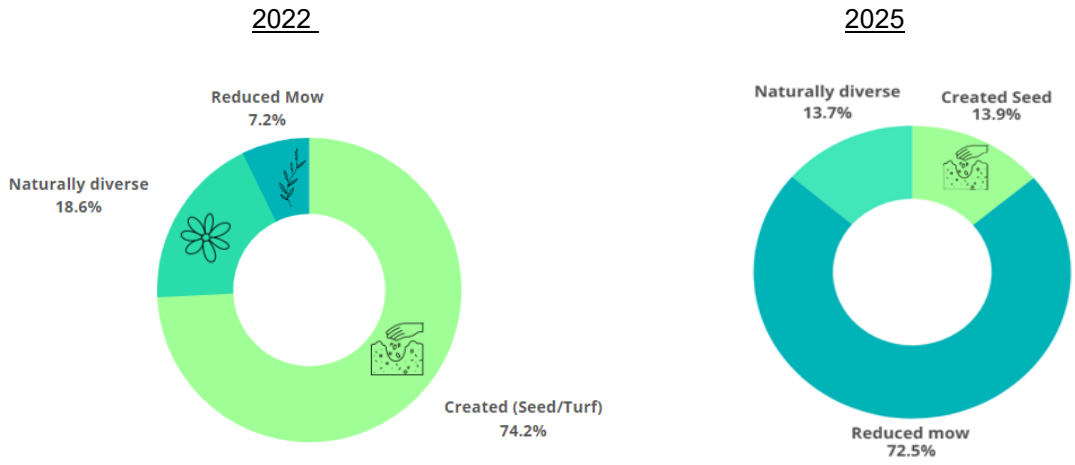
Our shift from conventional mown management benefits both nature and carbon emissions/sequestration while helping to improve local urban conditions through increased absorption of pollution, reducing surface water flooding, providing noise and visual barriers, increasing the value of properties and providing shade and urban cooling.

In 2022 we reported that we had a total 11.8Ha of our estate in management for wildflower diversity, this has significantly increased to 48Ha in 2025. The benefit of these changes will go beyond biodiversity benefit and will help support environmental resilience in a changing climate with increased weather extremes including retaining increased water in both storm and drought conditions. (Also see Action 13)

Flintshire County Council have significantly improved our accessible green spaces for wildlife and people by a committed move away from use of the herbicide Glyphosate which is both environmentally harmful and poses risks to human health. We are one of the leading local authorities in Wales to commit to minimising its use, investing Local Places for Nature grant funding in a range of alternative weed control methods including hot foam, heat and mechanical control. We are still improving and developing this area of work to improve impact and area prioritising, the work will continue to feature in our future biodiversity action alongside increased engagement to support understanding.

These important and hugely impactful changes have been made possible by effective cross department working and ongoing support from senior managers and county councillors.

Figure 5. Shows a comparison of the types of different wildflower sites we were managing in 2022 and 2025, scope to increase reduced mow sites highlighted in the previous reporting round has been realised with an increase from 7% to 72% reduced mow. This is beneficial because it supports the gradual increase of diversity through management and supports local wildflower seed.



We are also committed to improving wetland habitats across our estate in line with targets in the Local Nature Partnership Nature Recovery Action Plan. We have an ongoing programme of wetland and pond works, restoring and creating a number of ponds each year with grant funding. Sites include accessible green spaces, schools and country parks. Where sites are in school grounds we accompany the works with a pre-work educational visit to the school to highlight the importance of wetland and pond habitats to learners and return following the pond works to run pond dipping workshops with our conservation partners Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust. This ensures the pond is valued, understood and engages future generations in the biodiversity in their school grounds.

In 2025 we have worked in collaboration with our Housing and Flood Departments to implement 2 natural flood management projects on our estate in Mold and Greenfield, these project have potential to help reduce flood risk in areas with historical flood issues and benefit biodiversity through the enhancement of wetland habitat. We aim to continue this cross department work area in the future.

Action 12. Achieve Bee friendly status

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

We were awarded Bee friendly status in January 2024. For our work for pollinators across the categories of Food, Four star accommodation, Freedom from pesticides and Fun.

In December 2023, Flintshire County Council submitted a Bee-Friendly Application to the Wales's Pollinator Taskforce administered by the Welsh Government. The National Bee-Friendly Accreditation Scheme, initiated by Friends of the Earth Cymru and the Welsh Government, aims to advocate for pollinator-friendly action across various sectors including communities, schools, universities, businesses, and places of worship. In January 2024 Flintshire County Council were awarded the Bee Friendly Award to become the fifth local authority in Wales to achieve the status. An award ceremony was held at Wepre Park on April 22nd 2024. During the award ceremony, presentations were delivered by Sarah Slater (Flintshire Biodiversity Officer), Carolyn Thomas (Senedd Member), and Kathleen Carroll (Welsh Government). Councillor Gladys Healey accepted the Bee-Friendly Award on behalf of Flintshire County Council. The Award is testament to successful cross department work which will benefit pollinators, a healthy environment and all the services it provides which are essential for our wellbeing. We will be providing the Taskforce with annual updates of our continued action to retain the status.

Figure 6. The Bee Friendly Award ceremony at Wepre Park, 22nd April 2024



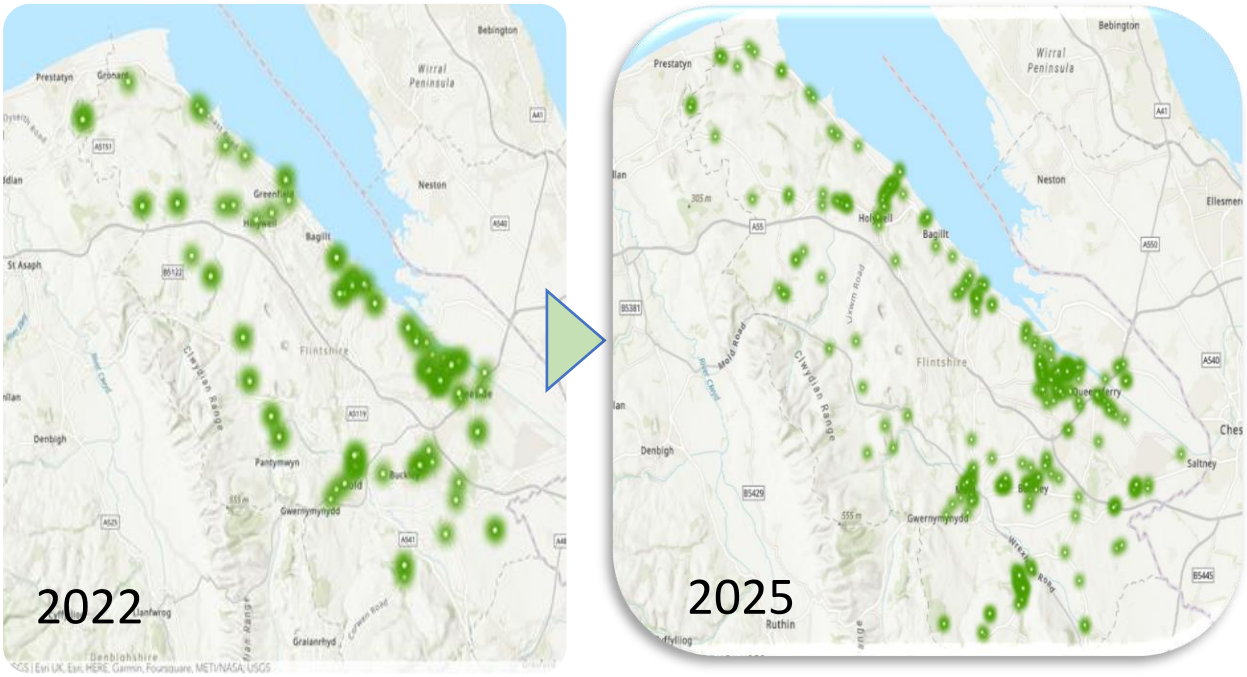
As a result of our ongoing positive work in this area the Pollinator Taskforce for Wales have asked Flintshire County Council to provide a case study highlighting our action, the case study will be available to view on the Wales Pollinator Taskforce webpages later in 2025.

Action 13. Progress our cross department Wildflower Campaign

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Work with Streetscene has been positive enabling an increase in estate area being managed for wildflower diversity from 11.8Ha in 2022 to 48Ha in 2025.

Figure 7. Below demonstrates the increase in sites managed for wildflower diversity across the County between 2022 and 2025



We now have 159 Wildflower sites in active management (this equates to 48 Ha) with a further 82 proposed and going through consideration process.

We have also included and are expanding sites at burial grounds, contaminated land sites, active travel routes and play areas within this project. Grant funding has been instrumental in the installation and/or ongoing management of these sites with investment in required machinery to support the change in management.

The majority of our sites will not require annual re-creation as we have focussed on the creation of perennial meadows through improved management or seeding but for the small number of urban sites where we will need annual re-seeding, to generate income to support this work we have now included wildflower habitat maintenance in our roundabout sponsorship scheme.

We have been working in partnership with the North Wales Wildlife Trust using WG Local Places for Nature funding to protect local seed. Flintshire County Council have identified local wildflower seed donor and receptor sites, invested in seed harvesting machinery and successfully started harvesting local wildflower seed. This seed has been introduced to sites across Flintshire including our council estate. Flintshire County Council are committed to growing this successful partnership and increasing the scope and scale of the project over the coming years to provide a supply of local provenance seed for use across Flintshire.

Action 14. Progress our "Mapping to support nature recovery" project

No Progress | Some Progress | **Good Progress**

We started using ArcGIS mapping for internal biodiversity projects in the previous reporting round working collaboratively with Denbighshire County Council initially to target and evidence conservation action. We have continued and expanded our use of the mapping system building in house expertise in the Biodiversity Team.

The mapping system allows much greater functionality and efficiency in the field and has proved invaluable in mapping and recording project progress.

We now have all our biodiversity action mapped and use the mapping system and its associated software for monitoring wildflower sites and trees and for fieldworkers to suggest sites for biodiversity enhancement. Maps and data are also shared across departments to work efficiently. Going forward we want to maximise engagement benefit from the system and will be aiming to use the Story map function in particular for promoting our action for nature in Flintshire.

Action 15.Continue to implement the FCC urban tree and woodland strategy

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

The expansion of tree cover enhances biodiversity and greenspaces, creates valuable foraging and nesting opportunities for our wildlife and provide many other benefits including provision of clean air, ground stabilisation, water and pollution absorption and shade.

A winter programme of tree planting has been undertaken since the launch of the Urban Tree and Woodland Plan in 2018 which sets out a target of 18% urban canopy cover by 2033 . Our planting has continued between 2022 and 2025. Although there is no internal tree planting budget the Access and Natural Environment Department have successfully obtained grant funding to continue an annual winter tree planting programme.

Since 2022 we have developed a thorough site assessment process, established scheduled tree ordering and delivery which works across departments collaborating with other teams involved in tree planting, we have set up a tree planting process for more complex urban situations planting in hardstanding with the use of innovative tree pits. We have a comprehensive monitoring programme for all new planting, monitoring health and undertaking establishment works to maximise tree success rates. We also record all tree planting, monitoring, species and link with climate change colleagues to measure carbon benefit.

Despite our progress, we face significant challenges to increase our urban canopy cover. We have ongoing work dealing with the impact of Ash Dieback disease which is affecting a large proportion of our Ash trees and is widespread across the County. We have put in place a recovery process, replanting alternative species where Ash are lost but the loss of large numbers of mature trees is highly detrimental to biodiversity..

We also face growing challenges identifying suitable landholdings which are appropriate for larger scale tree planting. Despite this we have increased our tree planting numbers since the last reporting round and they are set to increase further this year with additional tree planting planned for later in 2025.

Tree planting projects directly deliver themes within the NRW Area Statement including; Develop and improve urban and rural green infrastructure (and specifically increase urban tree canopy) and Increasing woodland cover for social, environmental and economic benefits for North East Wales. They also address medium and longer term targets set out in the Nature Recovery Plan targets; To Increase the extent of native broadleaf and mixed woodland and trees under favourable management and Increase native broadleaf and mixed woodland, canopy cover, connectivity and resilience in North East Wales, while contributing towards resilient ecological networks.

Objective 3: Supporting Nature in Flintshire stated:

Where we need to be:

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

Objective 3: 2025 Reporting comment

- The increase in our estate management for wildflower diversity is a positive step for local biodiversity. Going forward we will be exploring the best survey methods to evidence impact beyond our botanical surveys, primarily considering pollinator species.
- Identifying appropriate land for biodiversity benefit has become more challenging, work to date has focussed on smaller urban green spaces. The land use work with climate and estates staff has highlighted some small opportunities for action but this land availability is likely to be a significant challenge going forward. There will be a need to consider the longer term benefits of retaining land for conservation purposes and potentially land purchase to allow both the climate and biodiversity action needed.

NRAP Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Action 16. Continue to work with key departments to reduce the impact of climate change

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Flintshire County Council has a published Climate Change Strategy available to view here.

Biodiversity staff and members of the Access and Natural Environment Department were fully involved in the development of the strategy and are now represented on the various officer forums for plan delivery.

Biodiversity targets feature heavily in the Strategy. A key land use ambition within the strategy is to increase carbon absorption and maintain biodiversity within our land assets. Areas of work covered in the strategy include; Increase the proportion of council land managed for biodiversity, Undertake a study identifying land for habitat restoration and tree planting schemes within land assets to mitigate climate change and enhance biodiversity, Audit the amount of herbicide and pesticide use on Council land assets, Increase proportion of Council land with reduced mowing, Support the increase of tree canopy cover across the county in line with the Urban Tree and Woodland Plan, Assess impacts of Ash Dieback and tree planting within Flintshire assets on canopy cover and net carbon sequestration, Increase area

with reduced mowing regimes to enhance biodiversity and increase carbon storage, Strengthen the monitoring of sustainable drainage systems (SUDs) installation and quality in new developments.

As outlined in many of the action updates within this report, work is ongoing across all of these areas and biodiversity staff are actively involved in the delivery of actions within the strategy which will deliver for both climate change and biodiversity which are inherently interlinked.

The many areas of work outlined throughout this report will support enhance and deliver for the Climate Change Strategy in addition to the Section 6 duty.

Action 17. Promote and enable greener development

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Our Ecologist works to enable greener development across the Council and ensure that important species and habitats are protected. The Ecologist is an internal consultee on developments which may impact on local biodiversity and works closely with statutory external consultees including Natural Resources Wales to implement national and local planning policy. Since 2022 there have been a number of updates and revisions to planning policy including stronger policies on biodiversity, ecosystems resilience, trees and woodlands, and green infrastructure. A Green Infrastructure Statement is now required with all planning applications. Developers must explain how green infrastructure is being incorporated into the proposal. Planning Policy Wales sets out a “step-wise” approach for net biodiversity benefit: proposals must show they maintain or enhance biodiversity, not just mitigate damage.

The Ecologist has standard protected habitat and species methodologies in place to ensure consistent and appropriate process is applied to ensure ecological compliance.

In March 2025 the Biodiversity and Enterprise and Regeneration Teams hosted an Urban Green Infrastructure Seminar with attendees from our Planning Department to help highlight opportunity, best practice case studies and ambition for greener development.

We are in the process of developing improved Nature and Planning guidance which will be available on our website later in 2025.

Action 18. Work in partnership to limit the impact of INNs on local biodiversity

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Non-native species impact and control is an increasing area of work.

Biodiversity staff work in partnership across the authority particularly with Streetscene, Rights of Way, Housing and Customer services to provide advice and guidance with regard to invasive species as appropriate. Where invasive species are identified on Flintshire County Council land we will work with departments to undertake the appropriate control which is often long term treatment.

We now map Invasive Non Native species highlighted across our estate, to keep a register of known sites, species and the management in place where known.

The majority of additional invasive non-native control work relies on volunteer involvement and events, Through collaboration with the North Wales Wildlife Trust we undertake volunteer Himalayan balsam control events.

Objective 4 Supporting Nature in Flintshire stated:

Where we need to be:

- *Climate action is led, coordinated and supported by a cross departmental group*
- *Improved levels of nature consideration and inclusion across all new development*
- *We are involved in effective partnership work to minimise the impact of invasive species*

Objective 4: 2025 Reporting comment

- Since 2022 we have continued to have a close working relationship with climate staff and support delivery of the Climate Change Strategy, it will be essential to have continued widespread and high level ambition and support to ensure successful implementation of the strategy and the associated biodiversity actions.

  While we have had historical, long term and effective partnerships to control Invasive Non Native Species (INNS), this is an area which is challenging to fund, we have worked effectively through this reporting period with the North Wales Wildlife Trust who have had a funded project however funding and staff are uncertain going forward which will impact on the action which can be taken for Invasive species locally.

NRAP Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring

Action 19. Monitor and evaluate action

No Progress | Some Progress | Good Progress

Action to date has been recorded through internal plan reporting and grant funding reports.

We also monitor biodiversity on the ground. Flintshire County Council is part of the North East Wales Great Crested Newt monitoring program, monitoring 104 ponds for their populations of Great Crested Newt annually working in partnership with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Natural Resources Wales.

Since 2022 we have continued to develop our use of mapping platforms and key performance to monitor and evaluate action.

There is also a requirement to report on actions in the Council Plan through the internal system InPhase And through the Climate Change Strategy groups.

For Objective 5 Supporting Nature in Flintshire stated:

Where we need to be:

- *We will have a platform where we can share appropriate environmental data across the Local Nature Partnership (LNP)*
- *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*

Objective 5: 2025 Reporting comment

- The LNP/Bionet website provides habitat mapping which helps to provide a regional picture of important habitats and action being taken, there have been challenges to obtain and include data from partner organisations and this is something it would be beneficial to develop going forward.
- Increased capacity within the Flintshire Biodiversity Team has allowed for increased project evaluation and monitoring. We now monitor assets created, particularly wildflower sites and tree planting but we also monitor our work against key performance indicators and have the capacity to evaluate project success and learning, completing project case studies and project reports which are invaluable to guide future work areas.
- Most recently we have be able to start innovative photographic monitoring with use of a drone, we're excited to use this to evidence project impact and habitat change over seasons and time.

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

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



Since 2022 annual grant funding has provided capacity to comply with the Section 6 duty. While this is not a long term solution it provides a short term structure for effective delivery of commitments in Flintshire.

Since 2022 Welsh Government grant funding has provided additional revenue funding to fund 3 biodiversity staff on short term temporary contracts. The key role for these positions is delivering local nature projects under the Local Places for Nature funding plan which focusses on improving the biodiversity value of our public realm but the staffing has provided significant capacity to fulfil our statutory duty and enable proactive action for nature locally, assessing and developing key estate projects, undertaking survey and monitoring, publicity and promotion and events. We have also benefited from the addition of a Biodiversity Apprentice which will continue until September 2026.

Grant revenue also contributes towards a Local Nature Partnership Project Officer who is able to lead on regional conservation collaboration and Local Nature Partnership Coordination.

Although the increase in capacity has been undoubtedly positive and essential to fulfil our statutory duty. There is a significant risk relying on grant funding to provide sufficient biodiversity capacity and there are many challenges associated with short term temporary staffing arrangements.

Objective 6 Supporting Nature in Flintshire stated:

Where we need to be:

- *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.*

Objective 6: 2025 Reporting comment

- Whilst we have successfully recruited 3 additional biodiversity members of staff and temporarily have a Biodiversity Apprentice, these positions are grant funded and or fixed short term.
- The recruitment of a regional nature partnership has significantly supported the continued coordination of the LNP/Bionet. The post is currently funded by combined local authority grant funding. It is hoped that this regional collaboration will continue.

Review of Section 6 Duty

Update and review of the FCC Section 6 plan has been undertaken alongside this reporting. Our refreshed Section 6 Plan will be published following the 2025 reporting and formal approval from Flintshire County Council. .