

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

24 APRIL 2018

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS RESILIENCE FORWARD PLAN, 2018-2022

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for the Bridgend County Borough Council Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan, 2018-2022, and the implementation of resulting actions.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1. This report supports the following corporate priorities:
- Supporting a successful local economy
 - Helping people to be more self-reliant
 - Smarter use of resources

3. Background

- 3.1 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a new duty on public authorities, including local Councils to: enhance biodiversity; increase resilience of ecosystems; move from reactive approaches to preserve biodiversity towards proactive intervention to enhance biodiversity; and to publish and review a Biodiversity Plan which is to be reviewed every three years.
- 3.2 The approach required by the legislation is for public bodies to approach this plan using a set of core principles- called *sustainable management of natural resources* (SMNR) which include: adaptive planning; spatial collaboration; public participation; understanding evidence, risk and uncertainty; focusing on the benefits and intrinsic value of natural resources; short medium and long term and preventative ecosystem planning.
- 3.3 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has invested in a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2014) and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG 19) which provide an excellent evidence base for the local 'state' of ecosystems and biodiversity. This also provides guidance to partners, developers and Council staff on the need to develop Green Infrastructure within the Borough. These are used to guide development within the development planning process.
- 3.4 To date, a wide variety of support has been offered through a small team in the Communities Directorate on biodiversity and ecosystems to support BCBC's compliance with previous legislation. This ranged from development advice, Local Nature Reserve Management and engagement of volunteer groups. This team provides detailed expert advice to all of BCBC's services, works in partnership with multi-sector and multi- agency Bridgend Biodiversity Partnership and provides

advice on strategic approaches to biodiversity, including liaison with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Public Service Board (PSB).

- 3.5 This current activity provides examples of SMNR in practice. However, the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and in particular the enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the section 6 duty) requires public authorities to take a more strategic and proactive approach to biodiversity and ecosystem planning.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

- 4.1 The enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the Section 6 duty) – a legal requirement from the Environment Act (Wales) Act 2016 - requires that public authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems.
- 4.2 To comply with the duty BCBC is tasked to do a number of things:
- embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems in business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day to day activities.
 - prepare and publish a plan setting out what they propose to do to maintain and enhance biodiversity, and promote ecosystems resilience.
 - have regard to a wide range of evidence and policy produced by Welsh Government, the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) the Nature Recovery Plan for Wales, Natural Resources Policy, Section 7 list of important habitats and species and the forthcoming Area Statements being produced by NRW.
 - report on what the public authority has done to comply with the duty by the end of 2019 and then every three years after this date.
- 4.3 Appendix 1 constitutes a Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan, 2018-2022, for BCBC to comply with this Duty and is intended to meet all of the above requirements. As such, it provides an enhanced organisational approach to Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience (BER) within the context of a wider delivery system for BER outcomes in the Borough.
- 4.4. Part of this wider delivery system includes the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2014) produced in conjunction with Bridgend Biodiversity Partnership and Environment Systems Ltd. This provides a detailed overview and assessment of Bridgend's biodiversity and ecosystems services including detail on:
- why biodiversity and ecosystems matter to environmental, social and cultural well-being
 - an overview of key habitats and species in the Borough and the services they provide to support well-being
 - detailed ecosystems service maps and plans for 15 areas and 5 towns across the Borough including risks and recommendations for enhanced approaches to BER
- 4.5 BCBC has a number of key traditional roles to deliver BER for the Borough, these include: management of physical assets within the property portfolio; management of designated sites such as national and local nature reserves; through development control and local development planning; through infrastructural

investment; in the approach to delivering services such as parks, schools or highways maintenance; through partnership work with the Public Services Board and other partners; through regional collaboration; and in working directly with communities to enhance local environmental assets and volunteering.

4.6 The development of the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan, 2018-2022, has involved:

- a compliance review of BCBC in relation to the Environment Act in late 2017. This focused on corporate approaches, including detailed discussions with key service areas and corporate staff resulting in recommendations on BCBCs strategic approach to the Act
- engagement with NRW and Bridgend Biodiversity Partnership on the role of the BCBC Biodiversity Forward Plan and delivery of BER outcomes
- discussions with the BCBC Local Development Plan team on pending changes to Planning Policy Wales, the LDP process in Bridgend up to 2021 and regional spatial planning.
- discussions with the Bridgend Public Service Board support team and material from a separately commissioned workshop with the PSB in February 2018 focusing on delivery of PSB objectives.
- discussions with REACH – the Rural Development Plan team for the Borough on plans for utilising EU funding on BER outputs between 2018 and 2020.

4.7 The Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan, 2018-2022, contains a range of actions which seek to deliver an enhanced approach to BER in the following categories:

- EMBED – BCBC activities which aim to ensure BER is considered in the way that it operates, delivers services and makes decisions.
- SAFEGUARD AND IMPROVE – BCBC activities which aim to safeguard and improve management of important species and habitats
- RESTORE AND CREATE – BCBC activities which aim to restore degraded habitats or habitat creation.
- TACKLE KEY PRESSURES – BCBC activities which aim to tackle key pressures on habitats and species.
- EVIDENCE BASE – BCBC activities which aim to improve BCBCs evidence base on BER
- GOVERNANCE – BCBC activities which aim to contribute to the way in which BER is managed at the highest level in the Council and its partnerships and the systems for doing this.
- COMMUNITY - activities which aim to inform the communities understanding of BER and /or engage them in management which supports it.

4.8 The following framework will support The Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Forward Plan, 2018-2022:

- implementation of the Biodiversity Forward Plan will be overseen by BCBC's Corporate Management Board and be part of the Corporate Planning approach and its future revisions.
- a lead member from the Cabinet as Biodiversity Champion will act as an advocate for Plan implementation
- implementation may be reviewed by Scrutiny Committee as considered appropriate

- the Corporate Director (Communities) will be responsible for corporate working to facilitate Plan implementation
- Service Managers will be responsible for incorporating the Plan's commitments into their business plans to ensure they are acted upon and sufficiently resourced. Support will be provided by the Economy and Natural Resources team to develop capacity to deliver this.
- Actions as outlined will be dependent on core resources in the Economy and Natural Resources team being retained at current levels and external grants being secured.
- Performance Management will focus on whether each of the commitments made in this Plan has been progressed in 2019 and in 2022 and produce monitoring reports at these stages.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

- 5.1. This report will support compliance with the legal requirements of the Environment (Wales) Act, 2016.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1. Screening has highlighted that no issues arise as a result of this report.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The Economy and Natural Resources team will take on the lead role of coordinating and supporting the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Plan, 2018-2022. The team will also lead on a number of the actions within the action plan working closely with other council departments and external partners.

- 7.2. The action plan identifies the timeframe over which it is intended actions will be delivered. It also highlights the resourcing requirements and indicates whether these are dependent on core resources or external grants. Where there is indication of a role for core and external resources it highlights that whilst a level of delivery will occur with current, core resources it will be enhanced if external resources are available.

- 7.3. The report has demonstrated a new legal duty on the Council in relation to Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience which can be met via a combination of current level of core and grant funded resources. Any changes to either of these funding streams would have to be assessed when/if they arise to ensure the legislation is not breached.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. Approve the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Plan, 2018-2022.
- 8.3. Authorise the Corporate Director, Communities to implement the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Plan, 2018-2022, attached as appendix 1.

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Background documents:

Cabinet Report, Environment (Wales) Act 2016 – New Duties and Responsibilities, 29th November 2016