

Environment (Wales) Act Forward Plan December 2019 – APPENDIX 1 - Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1: ACTION 12969. Environment Department to deliver an integrated and long term approach to the implementation of projects on the Llanelli Levels. Identify and work with partners and stakeholders e.g. Network Rail, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Wildlife Trust, local communities



Since 2016 **Carmarthenshire County Council**, in partnership with the **Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust** and **Natural Resources Wales** have created wetland features on unallocated and unused CCC land adjacent to WWT. The features – ponds, scrapes and in 2018, a 400+ m sinuous pond/ditch, have been created primarily for wildlife, with a specific focus on water voles. This previously open coastal grazing marsh was left over after link road construction and was scrubbing over. Water voles were known to use the habitats. New feeding signs were identified this year adjacent to the new ditch and the vegetation clearance provides additional valuable wetland habitat for a range of wildlife. The excavated material was used to create new bunds alongside the ponds/ditch in which the water voles can create burrows. It should improve local habitat connectivity and help with local flood storage and alleviation, which is a problem locally.

We have also worked with Highways colleagues locally to look at the source of local flooding issues and identified ditches/culverts to be cleared that have helped alleviate flooding and improved the habitat for water voles. We are also seeking to work through planning to secure the management funding of an area of compensatory wetland habitat created as a result of a planning application at Machynys. This extends the area of wetland habitat being managed by CCC or partners in the Llanelli area so that potentially ??? ha of land is being managed that contained water vole habitat.

Further work required: continue to engage with Network Rail to try and get the culverts under the railway cleared.

NRAP Objectives met:

- Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management.
- Increase resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation.

CASE STUDY 2: ACTION 13048. Prepare guidance on environmentally friendly land management for the larger Town and Community Councils covered by the Env Act duty re and grass cutting and biodiversity management of land under their control.

Can your green space be better - for people and wildlife?

Did you know that:

- Good quality green space can affect how people feel - it can increase physical recreation and enable children to interact with nature.*
- A study shows that everyday contact with nature is beneficial for healthy ageing in older people.*
- By taking action to benefit wildlife - pollinators or hedgehogs, birds or bats, you can also enhance areas so that they provide higher quality green space for local people.

• As Town and Community Councils you have been managing your own land for years and recently more parks and sports grounds have been leased to many of you from the County Council.

• As well as managing these sites as important sites for public recreation, there are opportunities within most parks to manage suitable areas for wildlife as well.

• For Town and Community Councils the Welsh Government's Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a duty upon them to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity when they carry out their functions, including when managing land.

• Managing areas for wildlife can provide opportunities for community groups, volunteers and schools to become involved, contributing to their health and well-being.

• The healthier Carmarthenshire's natural environments, with a variety of habitats and species, the more resilient it will become. The parks and public open space you manage can contribute to this.

• Changing the management of your green space does not need to cost extra money, in fact in some cases it may be possible to make a saving. Read on for some suggestions as to how you can do this.

Hedgerows & trees



Hedgerows are vitally important as they provide food and shelter to many species, including those that need particular help such as dormice and bank voles which use hedges to move around. They are also important habitats for nesting birds.

- Can you lay the hedge to improve the structure?
- Is there an opportunity to plant/restore a hedgerow - especially if it connects existing habitats?
- Manage your hedgerows in the winter months when the woody growth is dormant. All work during the bird nesting season (March to August) should be avoided.
- Allowing your hedges to grow for 2-3 years before cutting will provide a plentiful supply of berries for birds over the winter. Berries usually form on 2-year old wood, so aim to cut less than half your hedges each year.
- Can you plant more trees? If grassy areas are not regularly used then why not try something else - it could save money in the long run.
- If you have to fell a tree, replace it with two or a small group!

Grassland



*Research shows that abundance of both flowers and flower-visiting insects increases significantly with reduced mowing, helping pollinators.** Why not experiment and vary the mowing regime in different areas and see what works best for pollinators - and people!*

- The easiest thing you can do is identify and enhance existing areas that have the capacity to provide a food source and shelter for pollinators. This is often the most cost-effective way as well.
- Can you cut some areas less often and cut higher to allow more plants to flower? Grass will grow at a different rate depending on the weather during the growing season but why not delay your first cut until mid-April and then mow to every 5-8 weeks and see what happens? Use signs to explain why you are doing this. Setting the mower blade at a minimum of 50-60mm should allow low-growing species like daisies, clover and selfheal to flower. They can keep their heads below the mower or have time to spring up and flower again.
- Can you collect up the mowings? This will help encourage more flowering plants in the grass. If your mowing machine cannot collect then for smaller areas can local volunteers help rake it up and create a habitat pile or compost heap?

• Are there some areas of grassland where you can let the grass grow long and manage like a hay meadow? Here you would ideally cut the grass in late summer and remove the cut material, helping to make the grassland more flowery. Are there local contractors who could undertake this work or perhaps a local farmer could cut and bale it for the use of the hay?

• In some areas you might wish to sow seed mixes that benefit pollinators. Choose these areas carefully. It might be better to manage the habitat that is there already, to encourage the flowers that are already within it. Also choose your seed mix carefully - ensure that the seed or plants that you are introducing are native and preferably from a local source.



*<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2016/11/09/green-space-mental-wellbeing-and-sustainable-communities/>
**<http://nrc.sussex.ac.uk/53392/>

Bilingual guidance has been prepared and sent to Town and Community Councils (T&CCs) in Carmarthenshire to inform them of their duty under the Environment Act and guidance as to how they could consider this as part of the management of public open space. The Biodiversity Officer met with some of the larger councils who have extensive areas of land to manage to discuss management for biodiversity: Kidwelly, Carmarthen Town, Llanelli Town and Ammanford Town. The latter is working with the biodiversity officer to prepare a biodiversity policy for the town council. This could be used as a template for other T&CCs.

In addition NBGW, in partnership with CCC, hosted a session for T&CCs and others on how to manage green spaces for people and wildlife on 27th June 2019 at the Gardens. Representatives from NPT council T&CCs also attended. Over 50 people attended the workshop to find out how T&CCs can manage land for which they are responsible in ways that

- will be enjoyed by the public,
- promote biodiversity and nature conservation,
- are more sustainable in the long term,
- can often save money.

Examples of these approaches were seen in the gardens and through presentations (including Monmouthshire CC's *Nature isn't Neat* project and Burnley CC's *Go to the Park* project) the benefits they bring were evidenced.

Further work required: follow up to find out how/if practices have changed within T&CCs.

NRAP Objectives met:

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

CASE STUDY 3 ACTION 12977. In order to demonstrate that CCC is embedding its S6 duties into its ways of working in relation to the development or re-development of CCC owned/ managed sites, Property Design will monitor the inclusion of measures to enhance of biodiversity and the improve of ecological connectivity as features of both briefs for ecological survey work, and in project design briefs, as well as in projects for which planning permission is granted and in projects that are delivered on site.

Where CCC ecologists, at the concept stage, identify opportunities to deliver biodiversity enhancement and ecological connectivity as part of a CCC project on a particular site, the target is to ensure that 100% of such schemes deliver these benefits.



As part of our design process and commissioning work we require contractors and consultants to commission ecological surveys as appropriate to the developments being undertaken and include consultation with the in-house ecology team on biodiversity and ecological resilience. The appointment of a specific Ecologist post (which started in April 2019) now ensures the necessary ecological input and monitoring of CCC schemes. The job entails working with departments of the Council that are developing and implementing policies, plans and projects ensuring that the Council delivers its S6 Biodiversity Duty as set out in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, in a cost effective manner, and meets all other wildlife and policy requirements.

The ecologist is embedded within the engineers' section, working alongside them on a daily basis and also on site with the contractors delivering the projects. This has seen immediate benefits in the delivery of the Cross Hands Link Road Phase 1 and the planning and delivery of the second phase.

The range of work of the ecologist's post has already included providing ecological advice:

- for schemes out of the engineering department from small car parking, footpath, to large schemes such as Cross hands ESES. This includes providing and gaining NRW EPS licensing and producing ecological scope of works;
- to the Property team – one or two schemes to date providing advice to ecological consultants and in-house advice on bats;
- to the Flood Defence and Coastal Protection team on ecological consideration for their schemes, need for appropriate assessments;
- on management of sites and ecological surveys to inform that management.

Further work required: It is event already how much this post has helped with embedding the S6 duty with the council's work and to help support and inform officers of the requirements and duties.

NRAP Objectives met:

- Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels
- Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management.

CCASE STUDY 4: ACTIONS 13043/46/52/54/70 – Grassland Management

- We will review grass cutting undertaken by Grounds Maintenance to investigate efficiencies and benefits of biodiversity.
- Consider amendments to grass cutting on land around sheltered housing/old age homes, etc. as part of review of contract with housing to undertake this work
- Parc Howard. Work in collaboration with Friend's group/landscape officer/biodiversity officer to look at management of the park and review its management for biodiversity and generally improve horticulture here
- Produce a Pollinator Strategy for the Council to inform positive action for pollinators throughout the Council's work.
- Verge Cutting - Continue to implement policy, deliver annual tool box talk and make provision for late cut verge



The Council manages a grassland in a range of situations, e.g. verges, 'amenity' areas within settlements, grassland around public buildings and parks and open space. This is undertaken by a number of separate divisions within the council, who instruct CCC staff or external contractors.

Grass cutting involves the consideration of a range of sometimes conflicting objectives and collaboration on cutting regimes is not always straightforward – there is seldom a standard management prescription and annual varying weather conditions recommendations could change from year to year. There are a number of constraints: types of grassland habitat, lack of resources (officers on the ground, equipment), the slowness to change past practices and the issue of ‘tidiness’ favoured by some councillors, public and officers.

We have strived to work with Highways, Grounds Maintenance, Property and Leisure to consider the management of our grassland areas. We have now continued these discussions with (and sent guidance to) T&CCs, who are taking on management responsibilities for an increasing number of parks/areas of public open space. This ongoing and reflects the same issues above.

The Conservation Section contributed to a Task and Finish Group on *A Review of the maintenance and provision of highway hedgerows and verges* where biodiversity was a major consideration and from which the following recommendation was included:

‘That the County Council’s Environment Directorate should largely continue with its current provision for maintaining rural highway verges but considers adopting greater flexibility to:

a) facilitate further environmental enhancement for biodiversity, such as late or biennial cutting of selected areas, or other appropriate management provision’.

Our verges are cut once a year and we work with Highways who, whilst H&S is their priority, understand the importance of verges for biodiversity. They cannot cut and collect and the main cut usually starts in mid-June and can extend into late August.

We have produced guidance notes for the contractors which are passed to them as part of a toolbox talk each year.

We have a series of ‘late cut’ verges which have been identified over the years by the public as species rich. These are left until the end of the contractors beats. We will be reviewing these next year as now some of the verges, due to the late cut of heavily vegetated verge, might be deteriorating in species diversity. This is also impacted upon by salt from gritting, and agricultural runoff and atmospheric pollution.

The Council has also produced a *Strategic Plan for Pollinators*, which sets out the Council's commitment to contributing to the action being carried out across Wales to address the decline in pollinators. This has yet to be approved through the democratic process.

Actions within the pollinator plan have meant that in 2019 five areas of CCC-owned land within a number of divisions in the Environment department have had management plans written where grass cutting was relaxed between April and mid-July. This has highlighted the problems of working to change existing management and the results have been mixed, but the basis for future management and the need to establish new ways of working have been laid down.

Further work required: follow up meeting required to discuss the grassland management with the varied responsible divisions.

NRAP Objectives met:

- Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels
- Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management.

CASE STUDY 5 ACTION 13059. Having developed management plans for sites, use laminated bilingual signs to explain changes in grass cutting regimes, and other management changes to the public in an informative way. Develop prototype sign.



Further work required: seek funding to get more signs produced.

NRAP Objectives met:

- Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels
- Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management.