

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	20 th December 2019
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Service Area	Planning and Countryside
Committee Date	13 th January 2020

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Nature Recovery Action Plan (2019 – 2024)

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Merthyr Tydfil Nature Recovery Action Plan (MTNRAP) 2019-2024 document prepared by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC), replaces the previous Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Action Plan (MTBAP) 2014-2019, and represents the S6 plan for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough (MTCB), in accordance with Welsh Government Guidance: *Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1: Guidance for Section 6 – The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty*.
- 1.2 The document sets out the legislative context as it relates to the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The Act states all public authorities are required, when undertaking their functions in Wales, to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity wherever possible within the proper exercise of their functions. In doing so, public authorities must also seek to promote the resilience of ecosystems.
- 1.3 The status of biodiversity within the County Borough is described within the document in the context of its important habitats, its protected sites and the incidence of European protected species.
- 1.4 The MTNRAP explores the six objectives found within the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales in the context of MTCB.
- 1.5 Other areas addressed in the report include Green Infrastructure Assessment and Strategy, The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) and Area Statements [to be produced by Natural Resources Wales (NRW)].

1.6 The Appendices detail actions taken and proposed to be undertaken by MTCBC in relation to Priority Habitats (Appendix I), Priority Species (Appendix II) and those actions to be undertaken by individual departments.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the scrutiny committee notes the contents of this document.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 The Environment (Wales) Act came into force in 2016. Public authorities are required to prepare and publish a plan showing how the S6 duty will be fulfilled (the S6 plan). This MTNRAP document prepared by MTCBC, not only replaces the previous Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Action Plan (MTBAP) 2014-2019, but also represents the S6 plan for MTCB, in accordance with Welsh Government Guidance: *Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1: Guidance for Section 6 – The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty*.

3.2 The MTNRAP, in line with this guidance, sets out the measures undertaken by MTCBC to comply with the S6 duty and is due to be published by the end of 2019. Every three years after this date, an update to the MTNRAP (S6 plan) will need to be published, with the next document available by the end of 2022.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 Prior to 2016, the previous biodiversity duty (under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006) required local authorities and government departments to *have regard to* the purposes of conserving biodiversity.

4.2 From 2014-2019, the MTBAP was in place in MTCB, which set out actions that would conserve biodiversity.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

5.1 The EWA 2016 replaces and strengthens (in Wales) the previous biodiversity duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006, Whereas previously, MTCB was required to 'have regard to the purposes of conserving biodiversity', it now is required to 'seek to **maintain and enhance biodiversity** wherever possible within the proper exercise of their functions. In doing so, public authorities must also seek to promote the resilience of ecosystems.'

5.2 The MTNRAP 2019-2024 replaces the MTBAP 2014-2019. The MTNRAP also represents the S6 plan and sets out the actions taken and to be taken moving forward.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 By fulfilling the actions as set out in the MTNRAP / S6 plan, MTCB will have contributed to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity within the County Borough and in doing so promote the resilience of its ecosystems.
- 6.2 The document should not be definitive in the sense that we should be attempting, not only to undertake those actions documented, but also to go above and beyond them wherever possible.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 All actions/objectives as set out within the MTNRAP / S6 plan must be followed up on a bi-monthly basis with progress documented. Any assistance required to fulfil these objectives will be offered and provided by the Countryside Team within the Planning Department.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 Please see the table below which sets out the Wellbeing Objectives to which the contents of the report relate. The table explains how the issues in the report contribute to the Wellbeing Objectives.

Well-being Objectives	Does your proposal have a positive or negative impact on the Council's Well-being Objectives? Please place an X in the relevant box			Why have you come to this decision? Please provide an explanation	What actions have been/will be taken to better contribute to positive impacts and/or mitigate any negative impacts?
	Positive	Negative	N/A		
<p><u>Best Start to Life</u> Children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals.</p>	X			<p>The trend for children spending less and less time in natural surroundings, threatens the development of environmentally aware attitudes and behaviour and can have negative effects on health. Many of the actions within the MTNRAP, include outdoor events that involve children (e.g., nature/biodiversity events, tree planting etc). Positive outcomes from these</p>	<p>The actions detailed within the MTNRAP include those already undertaken and those still to be carried out moving forward.</p> <p>The MTNRAP is designed to be a dynamic document and will be updated as and when required.</p> <p>The document will be therefore be amended to include additional</p>

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	Positive	Negative	N/A		
				<p>types of actions include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provision of education and the gaining of knowledge about the natural world ○ Health benefits from being outdoors. Accessing natural spaces provides direct health benefits, for example, opportunities for physical activity, reduction of developmental disorders and improved mental health. 	actions that will continue to contribute to the positive impacts the document will bring about.
<p><u>Working Life</u> People feel supported to develop the skills required to meet the needs of businesses with a developing, safe infrastructure making Merthyr Tydfil an attractive destination.</p>	X			An overall improvement and increase in the attractiveness/ aesthetics of habitat and environment within the County Borough is likely to increase inward investment and draw people into Merthyr to both live and work. Events that in some way promote biodiversity have the potential to attract both residents and visitors from outside the area and offer skills development opportunities.	See above
<p><u>Environmental Well-being</u> Communities protect, enhance</p>	X			There is a wealth of research that demonstrates that a healthy natural	See above

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	Positive	Negative	N/A		
and promote our environment and countryside.				<p>environment can provide many benefits (for people and wildlife). Biodiversity and resilient ecosystems across the County Borough (including areas in and around towns and urban spaces) provide ecosystem benefits and services that support the health of residents, including, for example, reducing the risk of flooding, filtering polluted air, and providing a reliable supply of clean drinking water. Examples of these benefits and services include helping to reduce the prevalence of infectious diseases and respiratory disorders, and assisting with adaptation to climate change. Accessible natural spaces also provide other, more direct health benefits, for example, opportunities for physical activity, reduction of developmental disorders and improved mental health. In theory, nature provides cost savings for health services by improving the health of the population.</p>	

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	Positive	Negative	N/A		
				The Merthyr Tydfil Nature Recovery Action Plan (MTNRAP) describes the special habitats and species (both the natural environment and urban environment) found within the County Borough and then details actions designed to protect / recover them. The Section 6 Plan sets out actions that will be taken to maintain and enhance biodiversity and create resilient ecosystems. Not only do the actions attempt to protect the natural assets of Merthyr Tydfil, they try to involve residents and communities of Merthyr to achieve these aims through direct action, which will potentially provide new skills and offer educational opportunities.	
<u>Living Well</u> People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they feel safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.	X			See previous section (Environmental Well-being), which demonstrates how the MTNRAP will promote healthy behavior and potentially increase levels of physical activity and promote good emotional well-being and	See above

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	Positive	Negative	N/A		
				improvements to mental health.	

Sources of evidence to support the above:

<http://www.primarycareservices.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/1150/CMO%20Report%202014-15.Eng.pdf>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4808994/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969718349751>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1618866717307628>

JUDITH JONES
CHIEF OFFICER PLANNING AND
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR'S NAME
PORTFOLIO TITLE

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Merthyr Tydfil Nature Recovery Action Plan – Section 6 Plan	December 2019	Supplied with Scrutiny Report
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		