

St Nicholas with Bonvilston Community Council

Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 - Section 6

The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

Report December 2019

Introduction and Context

Our Mission is:

Enabling residents to participate in shaping our communities and proactively enhancing our distinctive rural communities for the benefit of the health and well-being of residents and future generations.

In April, 2019, the St Nicholas with Bonvilston Community Council considered the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and it was agreed to commit to voluntarily work towards the Welsh Government's Well-being Goals, as if we were a larger authority.

Sustainability Principals are imbedded at the heart of our Community Council Charter and this includes protecting, enhancing and providing new habitat for wildlife, and tackling all forms of pollution.

- Our decision-making process will involve the Five Ways of Working
- We will contribute to the Welsh Government's 7 well-being goals

We own a small amount of land in St Nicholas – none in Bonvilston. Some of this is adopted and managed by the Vale of Glamorgan Council, leaving just the Village Green around the War Memorial in the care of the Community Council.

New housing development has doubled the size of St Nicholas in the past 18 months, and a similar doubling in size of Bonvilston by new developments has begun in 2019. This has resulted in some environmental damage.

The Community Council has a precept of £10,565 in 2019/20, and a relatively low levy on Council Tax. On the electoral role (October 2019), there are 391 people in St Nicholas and 343 people in Bonvilston.

We have collated the information available on the environment of our community and this can be found in the supplementary information that accompanies this report.

Environment (Wales) Act, 2016, Section, Background Summary

- Section 6 under Part 1 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the S6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales¹
- The S6 duty 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.
- The emphasis of the S6 duty is that public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects as well as their day to day activities.

Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales

The Nature Recovery Action Plan gives us **6 objectives** for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity:

1. Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels
2. Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management
3. Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation
4. Tackle key pressures on species and habitats
5. Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring
6. Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

Other Relevant St Nicholas with Bonvilston Community Council Documents

1. Community Council Charter
2. Biodiversity Action Plan
3. Grant Making Policy
4. Sustainable Building Guidance
5. Hedging and Planting for Biodiversity Guidance
6. Supplementary S6 Information: Landscape
7. Supplementary S6 Information: Flora and Fauna

Actions Taken in 2019

In Policy

Future Generations Act

The St Nicholas with Bonvilston Community Council has voluntarily adopted all the requirements & goals of the Health and Well-being of Future Generation Act, and must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.

Wales' Well-being Goals

Goal	Description of the goal
A prosperous Wales	An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.
A resilient Wales	A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).
A healthier Wales	A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
A more equal Wales	A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).
A Wales of cohesive communities	Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
A globally responsible Wales	A globally responsible Wales. A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

This gives us a solid framework of governance and support for delivery.

Community Council Charter

The Community Council has adopted a [Charter](#) that has protecting and enhancing our environment at its heart.

Biodiversity Action Plan

The Community Council intends to implement a Biodiversity Action Plan for 2020 to 2025, to be reviewed, revised and extended every three years, December 2022, 2025, 2028, etc. so that the community council will also ways have a plan for between six and three years to ensure consistency and continuity.

In Planning

When carrying our duties in regards to planning, we are committed to raising concerns and insights on all applications. This includes raising matters related to the Well-being of Future Generations.

The choice of building materials and products, landscaping, choices of plants, and the protection, retention and creation of wildlife habitats needs to be considered within planning decisions. We will publish Sustainable Building Guidance to help inform the decision-making process.

The Community Council has successfully had the planting of a native hedge made a condition of a planning approval, and following an enforcement action against a developer, had a native beech hedge planted at the front of a development. The Community Council will publish a Hedging and Planting for Biodiversity Guidance. This will steer our responses to planning applications. It will also provide a source of information for consideration by residents and architects when considering what to plant within our community. Well considered planting of native species (or those that provide environmental benefits without becoming invasive) contributes to our biodiversity goals.

In Working with other Public Bodies

Unitary Authority Plans

The Community Councillors have, and will continue to raise issues around the environment when liaising with officers and members of the Vale of Glamorgan Council. This includes giving input to their Corporate Plan.

We will also contribute in our duties towards their Well-being Goals:

1. To enable people to get involved, participate in their local communities and shape local services.
2. To reduce poverty and tackle inequalities linked to deprivation.
3. To give children the best start in life.
4. To protect, enhance and value the environment.

Noise Pollution

The Community council is engaged with the Vale of Glamorgan Council over the excessive road noise issue blighting our community. Our community has been highlighted by the Welsh Government as being a priority for action to tackle road noise – for many years...

Enhancing Public and Private Spaces

The Community Council is engaged with the Vale of Glamorgan Council and its “Reshaping Services” initiative. This could result in the Community Council taking over the management of some public open spaces. We are also actively advocating better, more sustainable management of the Vale Council’s housing stock in our community, including the replacement of trees and hedges within the gardens.

Active Travel

The Community Council was represented at the Active Travel Wales Conference in 2019. A delegate from north Wales asked the speakers whether they thought that a trick had been missed by not specifying leisure cycling for investment within this act.

Early in 2018, the views of St Nicholas residents were canvassed on having a Community Path along the edge of fields, protected from the A48 by the existing hedge, linking our Community with the Downs, some 850 metres to the east of St Nicholas. 30 residents were motivated to write to the Community Council to express their support for a pathway segregated from the busy, unpleasant and dangerous A48 by the hedge. This would enable families with children to cycle for

leisure and provide infrastructure for other purposes like traveling to work or school. **If families are cycling from home for leisure, they are not driving to leisure destinations, reducing the unacceptable level of pollution from road transport that is harming biodiversity.**

A new primary school is being built within the community, and it is hoped by many residents that Active Travel infrastructure will accompany this development to the standards found in the Netherlands – and not elsewhere in Wales. Political vision and leadership are lacking. There is a disconnect between what active travel infrastructure people would like and value, and what we have imposed upon us.

The village of Bonvilston is incorrectly signposted with a speed limit of 40mph. The Vale Council assure us that this will be corrected (to 30mph) as soon as funds are available. The road also needs rebuilding. The present vehicle carriageway, is in excess of 9m wide, whilst the narrow footways are uncomfortable to use and unsuitable for mobility scooters, wheelchairs, etc.

It took considerable effort to have the Vale of Glamorgan Council excavate 950m of pathway to the west of Bonvilston (before & after photographs below). The pathway surface is in a poor condition due to the lack of maintenance over many years and roots entering the surface. However, the pathway can now be seen and this will encourage more people to walk this route for various purposes, rather than partake in a less sustainable activity.



The pathway also suffers from hedges obstructing it. Property owners have been engaged with, and we are working together to resolve this problem.

The Community Council will continue with its advocacy on Active Travel on behalf of residents.

In Managing our Public Spaces

The Community Council owns a very small amount of land in St Nicholas. Much of this land forms the Village Green and is the setting of the memorial to those lost in the World Wars. Considerate alterations to the green that will provide habitat & resource for wildlife are proposed for consideration in our Biodiversity Action Plan

Our Biodiversity Action Plan gives scope to our increasing the area of land we own and/or manage.

The planting of verges and encouragement of native wild flowers in place of short grass will be considered where appropriate.

Replacement of flowering cherry trees and berberis shrubs around Duffryn Close in St Nicholas that were removed some decades ago by the council at the time has been identified as an objective. There are also plans to plant wild daffodils on verges within the community.

The Community Council has expressed an interest in taking ownership of the Village Green at Bonvilston, off Maes-Y-Ffynon. This is currently blocked as the Vale of Glamorgan Council would like to build new housing units – even if this threatens the local newt population who inhabit a pond some 50m from the green. The Vale of Glamorgan Cabinet Member for Housing says that it's a purely financial matter and the council will maximise its financial returns above environmental concerns.

Orchards

There were once many orchard trees in this part of Wales. The remaining traditional orchards are threatened and are being lost. A site for a possible **Community Orchard** has been identified in Bonvilston, and the landowner has been approached.

In Gathering Evidence of the Biodiversity in our Community

We have carried out a desk-based study of our area and reached out to others for their information. The results of this work, to-date, can be found in the supplementary information published alongside this document.

What has been Negative on biodiversity 2016 to 2019

The development of 117 new dwellings on two sites in St Nicholas resulted in a loss of space and habitat for biodiversity. Not so much on the site developed, but weeks after the last hay was taken from the fields developed, a large field that had been fallow and left for wildlife for decades had its large, mature hedges cut, and large areas of bramble removed. It was ploughed and it's now used intensively for hay and grazing sheep. The field to the west of Well Lane, adjoining the village and primary school, had been home to considerable wildlife, including rabbits, foxes, badgers, and especially birds. This was a prime site for rewilding, with photographs showing that the field had not been intensively farmed for decades.

Bolston House, Bonvilston has been purchased by a developer for demolition and the construction of 17 new dwellings. The grounds had been home to the largest Traditional Orchard in the community marked on Welsh Government maps. On investigation, this orchard has been degraded since this map was created.

Despite being identified as a priority for action in tackling road noise, the area around the A48 continues to suffer greatly from road noise with little resurfacing to reduce the noise pollution taking place and no actions to reduce journeys in private vehicles.



The A4226 between Sycamore Cross and Barry has been upgraded and much of the old Five Mile Lane bypassed by new road. This reduced the pollution impacting on the hedge along the old road, but there are concerns related to the new road. The new road in our community has been built on an embankment and this maximises noise, particulate matter and light pollution coming from vehicles using the road. There was a lack of any meaningful engagement with the community in the construction of this road, which was subject to a Design and Build contract. Residents were even unaware of the wall of the Roman Villa had been removed to a yard until it was too late to object as the work had been completed.

The new road does not have Active Travel Infrastructure alongside or across it because our community was not included in the Active Travel Mapping. The Community Council has resolved to have our community added to the Active travel Maps as soon as possible – Lee Waters AM says that the maps can be expanded at any time, the Vale Council disagree.

The east-west connectivity for vulnerable travellers has been severed and made more difficult and dangerous. There are shared pavements at the northern and southern end of the new road that do not meet the minimum standards set out in the Active Travel Design Guide (because this is not a mapped Active Travel Route) and there is no segregated infrastructure in the middle section. This means that the Amelia Trust Farm cannot be reached by sustainable means by many people from Barry (just 2.6km away), the largest town in Wales.

There is no information available on the levels or spread of noise pollution from this road, nor how this will affect wildlife or farm animals.

External LED lighting is increasingly used in our community. The impact of electromagnetic waves (the form of energy we understand as light) is not fully understood, although it's known that moths and bats are particularly vulnerable to artificial light. The new LED lighting is a “digital light” and may flicker unlike a traditional bulb that “pulses” when the current alternates. How this affects the eyes and behaviours of non-humans is not understood. Information on the electromagnetic waves emitted by the LED's isn't widely available.

We have received reports of protected birds of prey found on the ground having been shot. This may be an unfortunate externality of the local pheasant shooting industry.

Biodiversity Action Plan

A Biodiversity Action Plan will be published in early 2020.

How have we done in relation to the Nature Recovery Action Plan objectives?

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

We have raised biodiversity in our responses on planning applications. We need to do more within the community and to encourage more local participation.

A new, fully accessible Community Council website will contain information on local biodiversity and ecosystems from mid-2020.

We have produced guidance on hedging and sustainable building choices.

Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management

The Community Council is opposing Vale of Glamorgan Council housing development at Bonvilston as this threatens the local newt population whose pond is some 50m away from the green, partially wooded site, and would remove mature trees. The site provides fantastic habitat for many species.

The Community Council has expressed an interest in taking ownership of this land to safeguard the wildlife habitat and the play space and exposure to nature that it offers children.

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

We own a very limited area of land on which to create new habitat. However, we are trying to restore the flowering cherry trees to Dyffryn Close in St Nicholas – each property once had a tree. We have engaged with the Vale of Glamorgan Council to plant suitable trees and replace missing sections of garden hedging at the properties they own – and we will encourage homeowners to do the same.

We intend to plant native wild daffodil bulbs on verges.

Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Excessive house building is putting pressure on local ecosystems. Thousands of properties are empty, the housing market is broken.

The Community Council has no power and little influence in these matters.

The Community Council will be an advocate for building sustainably, carefully choosing building materials and products that reduce the environmental impact and improve the quality of housing. This will include advocating for:

- repurposing existing buildings, or deconstruction, instead of demolition,
- construction to enable deconstruction,
- recyclable alternatives to PVC windows, doors, guttering's, soffits and fascia's,
- reducing the embodied energy in buildings and use of finite resources,
- hedges rather than fencing,
- reducing light pollution – darker skies,
- reducing noise pollution – fewer & slower moving vehicles on quieter surfaces.

Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring

The Community Council is gathering the available information on biodiversity for our area (see appendix) and will look to add to this in the future. We have a **Grant Making Policy** that makes money available to support groups wishing to study the biodiversity in our community.

Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

The Community Council has agreed a *Mission Statement* and *Charter* that imbeds protecting and enhancing our environment at the heart of everything we do.

This Community Council has been slow to comply with the Environment (Wales) Act, and to contribute to the actions of others, however we are putting in place policies and practices so that we will work better and achieve more in the future.

www.StNicholasBonvilston-cc.Wales