

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 20 December 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Environment and Regeneration
Report Title:	Nature Emergency – Delivering the Council’s Action Plan
Purpose of Report:	To make Cabinet aware of progress being made to develop the Council’s response to the declaration of the Nature Emergency and its relationship with the Project Zero, Climate Change Challenge Plan.
Report Owner:	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration
Responsible Officer:	Rob Thomas, Managing Director
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Due to the corporate nature of this report, no specific Ward Member consultation has been undertaken. Officer consultation: Legal (Committee Reports) Operational Manager Accountancy Finance Support Manager
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for decision by Cabinet
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report details the proposed governance arrangements for dealing with the declared Nature Emergency. • As part of these governance arrangements a Local Nature Action team has been established to take forward the actions necessary to address the emergency and feed into the Climate Change Challenge Plan and an initial project plan has been developed. • The team of senior officers has met and considered the challenges and associated steps necessary and will report back to the Project Zero Board, chaired by the Managing Director. • It is agreed that the Biodiversity Forward Plan agreed by Cabinet in September 2019, along with the related Nature Recovery Action Plan will form the basis of the Council’s response to the emergency and will support and enhance the work of the Local Nature Partnership in working with the local community. 	

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approves the governance arrangements to deal with the Nature Emergency.
2. That Cabinet endorses the use of the Biodiversity Forward Plan as the basis of the Council's response to the Nature Emergency
[https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/ Committee%20Reports/Cabinet /2019/19-09-09/Biodiversity-Forward-Plan-Part-2.pdf](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2019/19-09-09/Biodiversity-Forward-Plan-Part-2.pdf)
3. That Cabinet considers the way forward for responding to the Nature Emergency as proposed by the Project Board as described in the body of this report.
4. That Cabinet notes that the Project Board will ensure alignment with activities undertaken as part of the response to Project Zero.
5. That Cabinet refers this report to Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for their consideration.
6. That this report is distributed to all elected Members and all clerks of Town and Community Councils for their information.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To enable Cabinet to consider and approve the governance arrangements.
2. To enable Cabinet to consider and approve the Biodiversity Forward Plan as forming the basis of the response.
3. To enable Cabinet to consider and approve the way forward proposed by the Board.
4. To confirm and ensure that the work on climate change and the nature emergency will be aligned.
5. To enable the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to consider how Project Zero is being taken forward.
6. To update all elected Members and Town and Community Councils on the arrangements to deliver the response to the declared Nature Emergency.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on the 29th July 2019 Council resolved (minute 209 refers):

- (1) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council join with Welsh Government and other Councils across the UK in declaring a global 'climate emergency' in response to the findings of the IPCC report.
- (2) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council reduce its own carbon emissions to net zero before the Welsh Government target of 2030 and support the implementation of the Welsh Government's new Low Carbon Delivery Plan, to help achieve the Welsh Government's ambition for the public sector in Wales to be carbon neutral.
- (3) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council make representations to the Welsh and UK Governments, as appropriate, to provide the necessary powers, resources and technical support to Local Authorities in Wales to help them successfully meet the 2030 target.
- (4) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council continue to work with partners across the region to develop and implement best practice methods that can deliver carbon reductions and help limit global warming.
- (5) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council work with local stakeholders including Councillors, residents, young people, businesses, and other relevant parties to develop a strategy in line with a target of net zero emissions by 2030 and explore ways to maximise local benefits of these actions in other sectors such as employment, health, agriculture, transport and the economy.

1.2 Project Zero is the Council's response to the climate emergency. It brings together work already being undertaken and policies, strategies and plans already in place. It sets out the challenges we face and proposed activities to meet these challenges. It recognises the importance of working as a team across the Vale and that everyone has a role to play and a responsibility to think about our legacy for future generations.

1.3 At the Council meeting on the 26th July 2021 Council approved the Climate Change Challenge Plan (minute 296). The Plan details eighteen challenges framed around the need to demonstrate strong leadership, fulfil our responsibility to current and future generations and to make a difference now.

1.4 The Challenge Plan reflects commitments in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-25 which sets out the Council's four Well-being Objectives and how they will be delivered. The Corporate Plan includes a commitment to work to reduce the organisation's carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 and to encourage others to follow the Council's lead as part of minimising the negative impact of our activities on the environment. The Corporate Plan is supported each year by an Annual Delivery Plan (ADP). The ADP for 2021-22 includes a number of activities that will contribute to work to tackle climate change and work has already begun to draft the ADP 22-23 ensuring it encompasses the commitments in the Climate Change Challenge Plan as a key area of focus for all of the Council's service areas.

1.5 At the same Council meeting in July a motion was passed resolving to declare a Nature Emergency (Minute 289 refers) as follows:

- 1) Declare a nature emergency, in response to the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and National Biodiversity Network (NBN) reports and in recognition of the inextricable link between climate change and the loss of biodiversity.
- 2) Place biodiversity alongside climate change at the heart of decision making in the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- 3) Welcome Welsh Government's support for the Convention on Biological Diversity post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
- 4) Engage with the anticipated Global Biodiversity Framework with clear goals and targets, following the convention in October, with an aim of achieving no net loss of biodiversity.
- 5) Make representations to the Welsh and UK Governments, as appropriate, to provide the necessary powers, resources and technical support to local authorities in Wales to help them successfully achieve this aim.
- 6) Continue to work with partners across the county, region and nationally to develop and implement best practice methods that can protect Wales' biodiversity.
- 7) Work with local stakeholders including Councillors, residents, young people, businesses and other relevant parties, to develop a strategy aligned with Project Zero with a target of no net loss of biodiversity that will also explore ways to maximise the local benefits of these actions in other sectors such as employment, health, agriculture, transport and the economy.

1.6 At Cabinet on 9th September 2019 the Biodiversity Forward Plan, Part 2 was agreed and sought to:

- Influence how Council manages and improves natural resources to ensure that biodiversity and sustainability are considered in all service areas and are core themes in service delivery, becoming an integral part of the decision-making processes throughout the Council.
- The actions in the Biodiversity Forward Plan, will be reported on every three years in accordance with statutory requirements, and reviewed and updated at the end of each 3-year reporting period. Each service area will have responsibility for delivery and monitoring of the forward plan.
- Each action will address at least one of our identified objectives (taken from the Nature Recovery Action Plan) and will be assessed against the 5 ways of working. The plan will be linked to and aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan and Service Plans.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Nature Emergency

- 2.1** The declaration of the Nature Emergency and the production of the Biodiversity Forward Plan should ensure that how Council manages and improves natural resources to ensure that biodiversity and sustainability are considered in all service areas and are core themes in service delivery, becoming an integral part of the decision-making processes throughout the Council. The specific actions required to achieve the aims and give milestones and targets are set out in the forward plan and will be reported on regularly and reviewed and updated at the end of each 3-year reporting period.
- 2.2** External funding streams will be sought by each service area where appropriate to help implement biodiversity enhancement and conservation benefits in line with the Biodiversity Forward Plan.
- 2.3** An effective response to both the nature and climate emergency requires a co-ordinated and integrated approach across the Council and robust arrangements for working in partnership with the community and a range of organisations, including the Public Services Board, Town and Community Councils, community organisations and the private sector
- 2.4** In connection with the above, a report was presented to Cabinet on 25th October, 2021 (minute C706 refers) detailing Project Zero – delivering the climate change challenge plan.
- 2.5** The approved Challenge Plan contains 18 challenges reflecting the importance of community leadership, influencing, and supporting others to make changes and changing how we work.
- 2.6** The Challenge Plan also emphasises that the Council has a range of plans, policies, and strategies already in place that detail how particular services will be developed and delivered. This includes the Biodiversity Forward Plan and existing community work such as the Local Nature Partnership.

Nature Emergency Governance & Delivery Arrangements

- 2.7** In the same way that Governance arrangements have been developed to ensure the effective delivery of Project Zero, it is necessary to ensure that the Nature Emergency is similarly managed.
- 2.8** Success will require us to challenge how we work with the community and our partners and how we empower the community to take projects and ideas forward.
- 2.9** We will need to consider how we use our nature resources, our people and our assets and plan for the long term. This includes working through the Local

Nature Partnership and considering how we use and develop Council assets. This includes working with colleagues in Country Parks, Neighbourhood Services, schools, the Council estate, and housing teams as well as communities and local stakeholders including Community and Town Councils, residents, businesses, and landowners, to target no net loss of biodiversity and encourage a recovery in areas where there has been a loss.

- 2.10** An officer team has been established to provide operational oversight for the delivery of our response to the nature emergency including senior officers from relevant departments across the Council and this will be expanded as we move forward to ensure that all areas are included. A key member of this officer team will be the Council's Ecologist.
- 2.11** The Biodiversity Forward Plan will form the basis of our response and the challenges and actions identified in the action plan will continue to be monitored by the senior officer team and outcomes against this plan will be reported directly to the project Zero Board.
- 2.12** Effective engagement across the Council and with partners will remain critical to the success of our response to the nature emergency and at the first meeting of the action team, members discussed how they would be taking forward their areas of responsibility and any areas that were not represented.
- 2.13** The importance of aligning work with the nature emergency was also discussed and work will be undertaken to map what positive activities are already underway and where there are gaps.

Developing our Baseline and Measuring Progress

- 2.14** Progress made in our response to the emergency through the Forward plan will be reported to Cabinet and the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee will have a role in scrutinising progress in meeting the challenges to tackle the emergency.
- 2.15** As in the case of the draft Climate Change Challenge Plan, it will be important to know if we have met our targets. Using existing, relevant indicators as a starting point, a suite of indicators will be developed to demonstrate progress and the difference we are making. This will be supported by the review of the Local Development Plan and an assessment of previously allocated sites of importance nature conservation (SiNCs) and how these have performed and a review of all the 360 SiNCs is underway as part of the LDP process.

Ongoing Engagement

- 2.16** The Local Nature Partnership as constituted in the Vale of Glamorgan includes 84 organisations and groups including a number of community based groups.

Through the current Local Places for Nature Grant (which was due to come to an end in March 2022) we have engaged a wide cross section of groups in applying for and delivering fully funded projects. Groups applying have included schools, allotments, and youth groups.

- 2.17** A three county Meadows Group has been established with Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot Local Nature Partnerships, engaging landowners large and small in sharing experience of managing meadows for wildlife and learning techniques.
- 2.18** Natural Resources Wales and the Council are looking at nature networks and in particular connecting habitats for wildlife and for people. This ties in with the work being undertaken around green infrastructure and tree strategies and with the review of the LDP, especially in urban and peri-urban areas.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about sustainable development. The Act sets out a 'sustainable development principle' which specifies that the public bodies listed in the Act must act in a manner which seeks to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In meeting their sustainability duty, each body must set objectives that highlight the work the body will undertake to contribute to meeting the seven Well-being Goals for Wales.
- 3.2** The activities set out in this report will contribute to the national well-being goals and help ensure we have a resilient Wales the five ways of working will be embedded throughout the response to the nature emergency as we will be working collaboratively with other partners. It is recognised that this is a long-term project, but that action needs to be taken now. Involvement of the community in order for them to shape our response and to understand the nature emergency will be fundamental to us making a difference through our activities and we will be integrating work on this agenda across the Council ensuring this is seen as the responsibility of all Directorates and staff.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The response to the Nature emergency encompasses a wide range of activity and while this can be delivered from existing resources and the funding set aside in the Project Zero reserve which currently stands at £500k, it is likely the demand for this work will grow. It is hoped that the future funding for the Local Nature Partnership for the next twelve months has been secured from Welsh Government, and we will continue to seek additional funding including grant funding to support our activities such as the Local Nature Partnership.

Employment

- 4.2** While there are no specific employment implications arising as a direct result of this report, it should be noted that as demand for biodiversity and ecology support grows, this situation may change.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** There are no direct legal implications arising from the activities detailed within this report, but activities undertaken in response to the climate change emergency will be consistent with duties under the Environment Act and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

5. Background Papers

Council Notice of Motion 29 July 2019 - Minute 209

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Council/2019/19-07-29/Minutes.pdf

Cabinet Report 23 March 2020 Minute C280 - Responding to the Climate Emergency

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2020/20-03-23/Minutes.pdf

Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan April 2020

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/achieving_our_vision/Corporate-Plan.aspx

Cabinet Report 2nd November 2020 Minute C357 - Developing a Climate Change Action Plan

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2020/20-11-02/Minutes.pdf

Cabinet Report 25 January 2021 Minute C451 – Vale Public Services Board Climate Emergency Charter

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2021/21-01-25/Minutes.pdf

Cabinet Report 22 March 2021 Minute C526 – Project Zero - Draft Climate Change Challenge Plan

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2021/21-03-22/Minutes-of-21-03-22.pdf

Welsh Government - Welsh Sector net zero reporting guide 24th May 2021.

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-05/welsh-public-sector-net-zero-reporting-guide_1.pdf

Council Minutes 26th July 2021 (289 and 296) - Notice of Motion – Declaration of Nature Emergency and Project Zero – Draft Climate Change Challenge Plan

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Council/2021/21-07-26/Minutes.pdf

Cabinet Report on 9th September 2019 the Biodiversity Forward Plan.

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2019/19-09-09/Minutes.pdf