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Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 – Section 6
The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty Report
MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL



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This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

1. Introduction & Context

- The [Natural Resources Wales / State of Natural Resources Report 2025](#) (SoNaRR, 2025) published by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) demonstrates continuing biodiversity loss in Wales. The report states that the value of natural resources and ecosystems is not afforded appropriate consideration in various decision-making processes. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 offers an opportunity to address these issues and take a more integrated approach to better manage our natural resources.
- The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (Section 6, Subsection 1) introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the S6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of their functions in relation to Wales.
- The S6 duty – as a public authority MTCBC must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity wherever possible within the proper exercise of their functions and in doing so, seek to promote the resilience of ecosystems.
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) is an organisation that:
 - owns or occupies office buildings
 - owns, occupies or manages land and its own buildings and grounds
 - owns or manages land beyond its own grounds
 - has functions connected with the above that are directly connected to biodiversity and/or land management
- MTCBC has a legal duty under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and has published a [Statement of Wellbeing](#), is a statutory member of the [Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board \(CTM PSB\)](#) and has published a [Focus on the Future Plan](#).
- The MTCBC Policy and Planning teams include a Specialist Advisor Ecologist (the post provides a planning ecology and policy function for MTCBC).
- The Biodiversity Team has expanded and now comprises a Biodiversity Officer, a Green Infrastructure Officer, two Local Places for Nature Officers and a Public Engagement Officer.
- There is an aim to embed corporate policies, objectives, performance indicators across departments. Reporting S6 activities, using data from all departments is co-ordinated by the Ecologist. See *AIM: Embed biodiversity through engagement and awareness raising to support effective decision-making at every level* in the Action Report section below (page 5) for further details.
- Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity is also included, or is due to be included, in other MTCBC plans and documents:
 - [MERTHYR TYDFIL NATURE RECOVERY ACTION PLAN 2025-2030](#).
 - [MERTHYR TYDFIL OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2016](#).
 - METHOD STATEMENT PROTECTION OF WILDLIFE SPECIES AND HABITATS IN RELATION TO ASH DIEBACK MANAGEMENT 2021.
 - [FOCUS ON THE FUTURE. Well-being in our Community 2017-2022](#).
 - [FIRST REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2016-2031](#).
 - [CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-2038](#).
 - [CORPORATE WELLBEING PLAN](#).

2. Highlights, Key Outcomes & Issues

- All departments are now engaged in contributing to the Council's S6 duty.
- The *Integrated Impact Assessment* (IIA) is a document used at the outset of any Council proposals, initiatives or projects to help shape the activity and must accompany all reports to Council/Cabinet¹. The IIA now includes a section on the Section 6 duty. As such, the Maintenance and Enhancement of Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems is considered as part of every decision made by the Cabinet and Full Council.
- The previous Section 6 report highlighted 14 sites that had been chosen within MTCBC as priority Biodiversity sites (see Case study 1), meaning a fundamental shift away from intensive grassland management and towards a management regime aimed at increasing biodiversity. The last reporting period saw >200 species of flora and >50 species of fauna recorded following the adoption of the new grassland management regime. The previous grassland regime would not have allowed these species of flora to grow and flower and therefore attract and sustain the species of fauna.
Within this reporting period (2023-2025), a further 9 sites were chosen making a new total of 23 priority Biodiversity sites. NB there are also 3 extra possible sites being trialled and considered for inclusion.
- Awareness of the Section 6 duty has led to inclusion of the principles of the duty being proposed to be included in upcoming wide-ranging MTCBC plans, for example, the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-2038 and the Corporate Wellbeing Plan.
- Although grant funding has enabled progress against the Section 6 duty, reliance on short-term external funding remains a significant and ongoing risk. Most of the activity and staff capacity is grant funded, with no certainty of continuation. This creates challenges in long-term planning, continuity of delivery, and retention of skilled staff, and limits the Council's ability to embed biodiversity action as core business.

¹ The IIA is an internal document, but is available upon request. Please contact Equalities@merthyr.gov.uk for a copy.

3. Action Report

AIM: EMBED BIODIVERSITY THROUGH ENGAGEMENT AND AWARENESS RAISING TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING AT EVERY LEVEL

- Biodiversity is already embedded within higher-level decision-making. Examples include:
 - Within policy - the adoption of the First Replacement Local Development Plan 2016-2031.
 - Within the Council's planning system (see also *AIM: Safeguard species (and habitats) and improve their management*, pages 7-10). In support of this, the most recent Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12, February 2024) describes the planning system as having a key role to play in reversing the decline in biodiversity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems (in line with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016). Planning Policy Wales 12 (2024) is supplemented by Technical Advice Note (TAN) 5 - Nature Conservation and Planning 2009.
 - Within the Council's 'Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). This has been produced in line with its duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The IIA must be used at the outset of any significant changes, policy changes, budget reductions, service changes etc to help shape the activity from its inception and must accompany reports to Council/Cabinet. Section 7 of the IIA deals with 'Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems. As such, the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems duty is considered as part of every decision made by the Cabinet and Full Council.
 - Consideration of Biodiversity and the Merthyr Tydfil Nature Recovery Action Plan form part the Council's new service self-evaluation and service planning process and templates.
 - When maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity and the Merthyr Tydfil Nature Recovery Action Plan actions are included in service plans, they will fit into the Council's annual delivery plan and be monitored quarterly. Further consideration will be given as the service self-evaluation and service plans are developed in 2025/26.
- Other examples of upcoming initiatives include:
 - The replacement Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-2038 includes specific actions and references, not only, to the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, but also to a range of other wildlife-related legislation and both national and local planning policy.
 - Biodiversity and the Merthyr Tydfil Nature Recovery Action Plan are considered within the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Plan (2023-2028).
- In addition:
 - Council Officers in departments across the Council have been contacted on an annual basis to raise awareness of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and explain the S6 duty. This includes an annual informative e-mail from the Council's Legal Department. Where required, advice has been provided to help link the functions of departments with biodiversity and to devise actions that will contribute to its maintenance and enhancement.
 - Departments have produced details and evidence of the actions they have taken since the Act came into effect in 2016 at various points since the first Section 6 Plan was published (January 2020).

- Several sessions and workshops have been held for Cabinet and Councillors providing training regarding the Maintenance and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Resilience of Ecosystems.

Planning

- The planning process, in line with Planning Policy Wales Edition 12 (published in February 2024), has a key role to play in helping MTCBC to reverse the decline in biodiversity and increase the resilience of ecosystems within the County Borough.
- The presence of a protected species and habitats under, for example:
 - European legislation (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended)
 - UK legislation (Wildlife and Countryside Act – WACA – 1981, as amended)
 - Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016

is a material consideration when a planning authority is evaluating a development proposal which, if undertaken, would be likely to result in disturbance or harm to the species or its habitat. The aim is to ensure that the range and population of the species is sustained.

- Developers will be required to undertake all relevant protected species ecological survey work on development sites. This will inform appropriate mitigation and compensation measures where protected species and / or habitats are impacted.
- Planning Policy Wales 12 introduced significant updates to Chapter 6 (*Distinctive and Natural Places*) aimed at addressing the nature emergency (long term and chronic decline of biodiversity and habitat loss) and enhancing ecology through the planning system. The key improvements are summarized below:

- **Integrating Green Infrastructure and Development**

1. A Green Infrastructure Statement (GIS) should be submitted with all planning applications, will be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed and will describe how Green Infrastructure has been incorporated into the proposal.
2. Examples of Green Infrastructure include the introduction of or improvement in landscaping (wildflower meadows, hedgerows, tree planting, pond habitat), green walls + roofs, grass verges, sustainable drainage, gardens, species rich meadows, woodlands and strengthening of connections between areas of biodiversity value are all examples of individual design measures that can have wider cumulative benefits, particularly in relation to biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems.
3. The GIS must demonstrate that the step-wise approach has been followed.

- **Net Benefit for Biodiversity + the Step-wise approach**

Planning authorities can ensure a Net Benefit for Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience is secured via use of the step-wise approach.

NB pre-application surveys, research and data searches by developers will be required to establish an onsite baseline state of:

- biodiversity; *and*

- ecosystem resilience (taking into account the site’s contribution to resilient ecological networks by using the DECCA (Diversity Extent Connectivity Condition Adaptability) framework)

THE STEP-WISE APPROACH

Step 1	Avoid: reasonable alternative sites that would result in less harm, no harm or a benefit to biodiversity must be fully considered.
Step 2	Minimise: maintain the largest possible area of existing habitat supporting biodiversity and functioning ecosystems; minimise development size; assure appropriate orientation; retain ecological connectivity.
Step 3	Mitigate / Restore: instigate measures to mitigate impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems; restore damaged habitats and disturbed species in excess of like-for-like.
Step 4	Compensate (onsite): where there is unavoidable damage to biodiversity and ecosystems, compensation measures must be provided (onsite in the first instance). Compensate (offsite): this is a last resort and should take the form of habitat restoration, habitat creation, or provision of long-term management agreements to enhance existing habitats and deliver a net benefit for biodiversity.
Step 5	Long-term management: each stage of the step-wise approach must be accompanied by a long-term management plan
Step 6	Refuse: where the adverse effect on biodiversity and ecosystem resilience clearly outweighs other material considerations, the application should be refused.

All development must deliver a [*proportionate*] net benefit for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience from the baseline state.

○ **Protection of Designated Sites**

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – development in a SSSI which is not necessary for the management of the site (limited to activities needed to meet its conservation objectives) must be avoided.

There is a presumption against all other forms of development in a SSSI as a matter of principle.

- Spatial Approach – planning authorities should consider opportunities to restore networks of habitats to a healthy condition. Taking a spatial approach which, for example, identifies buffer zones around designated sites or stepping stones to improve connectivity between them will strengthen the ability of these sites to perform their role at the heart of resilient ecological networks and encourage nature recovery on a larger scale.

○ **Trees, Woodland + Hedgerows**

Planning authorities must protect trees, woodland and hedgerows where they have ecological value.

- Permanent removal of trees, woodland and hedgerows will only be permitted where this would achieve significant and clearly defined public benefits.

- The step-wise approach must be followed and where loss is unavoidable developers will be required to provide compensatory planting. Replacement planting will be:
 - at a ratio equivalent to the quality, environmental and ecological importance of the tree(s) lost (preferably onsite or immediately adjacent to the site) and;
 - at a minimum ratio of 3 trees of a similar type and compensatory size planted for every 1 lost.
- Where an area of woodland is proposed to be lost as part of a development, the planting rate must be at a minimum of 1600 trees per hectare for broadleaved and 2500 trees per hectare for conifers

Designated sites

- Important areas of nature conservation value have been statutorily designated within the County Borough. The statutory designation of a site does not necessarily prevent development; however, the proposals must be assessed to ensure the impacts on its designated features are fully understood. Development will be refused where there are adverse impacts on the features for which a site has been designated.
- Statutorily designated sites will be protected from damage and deterioration with their important features conserved and enhanced through appropriate management.
- SSSIs are of national importance. WACA 1981 (as amended) places a duty on public bodies (including planning authorities) to further the conservation and enhancement of a SSSI's designated features. There is a presumption against development likely to damage a SSSI. MTCBC will give notice to NRW should any proposed development be likely to damage the designated features of a SSSI and will take account of the advice provided. There are three SSSIs found within MTCBC - Cwm Glo a Glyndryys, Cwm Taf Fechan Woodlands and Mynyddoedd Llangynidr a Llangatwg, Cefn Yr Ystrad a Chomin Merthyr.
- Non-statutory designated sites carry less weight than statutory designated sites, however, they can make an important contribution to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems. Prior to authorising development likely to damage a local wildlife designation, the Planning Department of MTCBC will consult the Council's Ecologist. Assessments will consider protected species and / or habitats on the Section 7 lists. Where a proposed scheme will have no impacts on the features of a non-statutorily designated site, development is not precluded.
- There are currently 64 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and one Local Nature Reserve (LNR) within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough.

Other

- Land management undertaken by landowners and leaseholders can be positively influenced by the provision of support and advice and through joint working with voluntary sector. In so doing, MTCBC can improve ecosystem resilience within the County Borough.

Example 1

Taf Fechan Local Nature Reserve: The Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales leases and manages Taf Fechan LNR in the north of the County Borough. There is a management programme (2025-2030) drawn up by the Wildlife Trust to inform management of the reserve. This is in draft form at present.

Example 2

Grazing Licences: in 2021, a new clause was added to licence agreements designed to help protect biodiversity (for example, ensuring correct stocking densities to avoid overgrazing, animals being removed in wet conditions to avoid poaching and destruction of the sward, no use of artificial fertilisers or herbicides, dung removal, no chain harrowing during vulnerable times for ground-nesting birds).

- Sites within local authority ownership, for example, prior to being released are consulted on internally within Council departments and with Councillors to identify and manage wellbeing, community use, flood risk management, minimising the impacts of pollutants, biodiversity enhancement, ecological connectivity and ecosystem resilience.
- In addition, on sites within local authority ownership, MTCBC seek to enhance the capacity of natural resources to provide essential ecosystem services, for example, water management, climate regulation, pollution mitigation, wellbeing enhancement and environmental enhancement.
- Case study 1 concerns changing the grass cutting regime on specific sites owned by MTCBC with the aim of increasing biodiversity – see Case Study 1 below.

Case Study 1

BIODIVERSITY SITES

In 2020, five areas of grassland totalling 2.44ha were chosen as priority biodiversity areas, meaning a fundamental shift away from intensive grassland management and towards a management regime aimed at increasing biodiversity. NB previously, these sites were cut multiple times each year without removal of the arisings. The change in management saw a reduction in the number of cuts down to just one cut each year, crucially with arisings removed.

In 2020, funding was secured by the MTCBC Countryside Team from The National Heritage Fund and Welsh Government's new grant programme 'Local Places for Nature'. The funding was used to purchase a tractor-mounted cut-and-collect machine (Amazone Smartcut 2100).

In 2021, the five sites were cut just once with the arisings collected. Information boards have been placed at each of the five sites explaining the reasons for the change in management.

Again in 2021, a further nine smaller biodiversity sites, totalling 1.13ha, were chosen to expand the scheme. Each of the smaller sites was given a specially commissioned 'bee' sign to demarcate them as biodiversity areas. These nine sites were also cut only once in 2021: they were strimmed, with arisings manually raked off. MTCBC took receipt of a smaller cut & collect machine in early 2022 (funding again from The National Heritage Fund and Welsh Government's new grant programme 'Local Places for Nature'), which will be capable of dealing with these smaller sites going forward.

Ecological surveys of all 14 sites were undertaken by the LPA Ecologist in 2021 to form baseline data and to inform the management of each site.

Main headlines

- >200 species of flora and >50 species of fauna were recorded
- The previous intensive management regime would not have allowed these species of flora to grow and flower and therefore attract and sustain the species of fauna.

NB this already represented a success on these sites with biodiversity clearly shown to have been enhanced. Based on this baseline survey work, some initial management prescriptions were passed on to the Parks Department for implementation. Moving forwards, the baseline data will be used to show improvements in biodiversity taking place and to adjust the new grassland management regime as appropriate on a site-by-site basis.

During this reporting period (2023-2025), a further 9 sites were chosen making a new total of 23 priority Biodiversity sites. NB there are also 3 extra possible sites being trialled and considered for inclusion.

So, the total area with a new management regime for biodiversity has increased by c.60% between 2021 and 2025 (see Table overleaf).

Year	2020	2021	2023-2025	TOTAL
Biodiversity Area Dimensions (hectares)	2.44	1.13	2.15	5.72

Moving forward, the aim is to expand the change in grassland management into more areas across the County Borough.

- Case study 2 concerns the installation of pond habitat benefitting both local wildlife (valuable habitat creation) and residents (flood alleviation and access to nature).

Case Study 2

PARC TAF BARGOED

The site lies within Parc Taf Bargoed, a Green Flag park in Treharris, in the south of Merthyr Tydfil. The site comprised an area of wetland habitat made up of a mosaic of semi-improved neutral grassland with marshy grassland characteristics, and a small area of ephemeral / short perennial vegetation.

A project was established (funded by The Challenge Fund), as a Sustainable Drainage System (*SuDS*) scheme, to alleviate flooding on a street adjacent to the wetland habitat. The area suffered from intense flooding in wet periods throughout the year due to runoff and the topography of the site. The idea was to create a series of catchment ponds and redirect water into the river, which runs perpendicular to the site.

Topographical surveys and ecological assessments were initially undertaken to inform the design criteria:

- Optimise the functionality of the ponds in terms of flood alleviation.
- Create ecologically rich habitat features.
- Provide accessibility to residents and the wider public.

Three ponds were created. These were concrete lined to ensure longevity but planted with a range of native freshwater species providing essential habitat needed to support local wildlife, for example, invertebrates, amphibians, birds, bats etc.

An elevated boardwalk was installed on a circular route. This was designed to allow residents and the wider public access to, and interaction with, different habitat types around the site.



Figure 1: part of the elevated boardwalk.

Two large dry-stone walls were erected on site, and a welcoming entrance feature was constructed from steel. The materials used are locally common and provide a nod to Merthyr’s farming and industrial heritage.

Trees were planted around the perimeter of the site to provide resources and cover onsite, but also to serve as stepping stone habitat linking the site with the wider landscape.

A ‘bat and swift’ tower was erected by Lester Hartmann to provide roosting opportunities close to the park’s valuable foraging habitat. Lester is a specialist in designing, building and installing habitat towers – based in Hathersage, Derbyshire.

A bug hotel was also installed for the benefit of local invertebrate populations, but also to provide educational opportunities (observation and monitoring) for nearby school groups.

- Case study 3 describes the installation of coir rolls (providing habitat / alleviating silt build-up / providing aeration).

Case study 3

CYFARTHFA PARK LAKE

Summertime algal blooms have become an issue within Cyfathfa Park Lake in recent years. Merthyr Tydfil Council Biodiversity Team in liaison with Merthyr Anglers Association, agreed that a possible way to limit the amount of algal bloom would be installation of coir rolls.



Coir rolls are biodegradable, fibrous coconut husk rolls used primarily for bank stabilization, habitat creation, and water quality improvement in aquatic ecosystems. Their installation is simple and rapid, and while their main role is structural and ecological—preventing erosion, supporting native vegetation, and providing wildlife habitat—their installation can also indirectly mitigate algal blooms by:

- Reducing nutrient inflow: Vegetation in coir rolls absorbs excess nitrogen and phosphorus, limiting the nutrients available for algae.
- Shading shallow water margins: Plants growing through coir rolls provide canopy cover, reducing light penetration that algae need for photosynthesis.
- Improving water mixing and bank stabilization: Stabilised banks reduce sediment resuspension, which can otherwise release nutrients into the water column.

As well as helping to tackle the algal bloom issue, the coir rolls have other advantages:

- Provision of a substrate for habitat and resources for invertebrates, amphibians, wildfowl, other birds etc to use.
- Reduction in silt build-up (acting as biodegradable barriers that slow water flow, trap suspended sediments and support the rapid establishment of vegetation).
- Improvement in water quality. Their filamentous and porous structure allows water to permeate through the roll, resulting in localised turbulence and micro-currents. This movement enhances the exchange of gases, allowing oxygen from the atmosphere to mix more effectively with the water, which is essential for the health of both plants and aquatic animals.
- Provision of a natural, aesthetically pleasing feature for park users.

The coir rolls were secured using hammered-in stakes and large, linear structures were created by tying together separate rolls at their ends.

- Case study 4 describes a mini wetland/nature reserve on a waterlogged and therefore unusable area of land (*created in Trelewis Park within the previous reporting period*) plus further improvements undertaken in the current reporting period.

Case study 4

TRELEWIS WETLAND (*undertaken prior to 2022 with further improvements carried out in 2023*)

Summary: the project created a mini nature reserve, wetland / bog with bird hides, walkways extended access and usage of an under-utilised piece of land in Trelewis Park that formerly contained disused play equipment and was too wet to use. Baseline data for species will be used to help measure the number of species attracted because of the development. The site will be a 'hot spot for nature' and convert an area of waterlogged, seepage and clay ground to an area that attenuates water as marsh, open water thereby diversifying the current landscape value of the open space.



During summer 2023 the Biodiversity Team monitored and assessed the wetland area (above) to gauge its use by wildlife, its effectiveness in terms of holding water and to provide improvements to both where required.

Species such as the great diving beetle, palmate newt, common toad and common frogs were all shown to be present demonstrating the success of the newly created habitat.

Channels in the habitat around the existing pond had been created by the flow of rushing water overtopping the pond, and water leeching down onto the football ground below, causing damage to the pitch.

With the assistance of volunteers and members of the Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership, the Biodiversity Team undertook the following actions for improvement:

- The existing pond was further excavated to create different depths using the channels in the habitat referred to above.
- The excavated clay and mud material was then used to create an embankment that would not only hold water but also provide a substrate for ground nesting invertebrates. Nesting holes were created in the bare bank by poking holes 100mm deep and 4-8mm in diameter.
- Two new ponds were created – one approximately 5m x 2m and the second 1.5m x 1.5m to complement the existing pond*.

**Multiple ponds are better than a single large pond as they provide a more diverse ecosystem with different water chemistry, nutrient loads, plant communities and microhabitats allowing for a more complex food web and attracting a wider range of species.*



Monitoring will continue over the winter period to further assess the pond installations in terms of trapping water and preventing it from leeching down on to the football ground below which is causing damage to the pitch.

- Case study 5 describes ecological and structural improvements to The Incline.

Case study 5

THE INCLINE



The site is an area of green space in Merthyr Tydfil known locally as “*The Incline*”. Before works commenced, the habitat mainly comprised semi-improved grassland with mature trees and patches of scrub. Plant species recorded included broad-leaved dock, ribwort plantain, common nettle and bramble. NB Japanese knotweed was also noted. Biodiversity on the site was relatively low, meaning there were opportunities for enhancement.

The main initial issues with the site were:

Access. Despite being a large open space connecting two different areas of the town, there was no formal pathway installed. And although desire lines had been formed due to foot traffic

through the site, the lack of a formal pathway made it difficult to walk through, especially in wet weather conditions, discouraging use by residents.

Fly-tipping. The site was regularly used for unauthorised dumping of rubbish, again discouraging use by residents.

To empower residents to access, make use of and take “ownership” of the site, designated, formal footpaths were created providing a circular route and linking to four different access points. This allowed residents easy and convenient access to the site and improving inclusivity.

In addition to the construction of the footpaths, other features were introduced to create an aesthetically pleasing and welcoming space. The main entrance of the site was fitted with bespoke gates. The Biodiversity Team



commissioned a specialist in the creation of bespoke architectural and ornamental metalwork - Ironart of Bath (<https://www.ironart.co.uk/bespoke/sculpture/merthyr-tydfil-meadow-gates/>)

Painted steel gates were created, which incorporated natural features found onsite and beyond, such as butterflies, flowers and the shape of the mountain ridge in the distance. The gates were well-received by residents using the site, with many remarking on their beauty and how they added to the appeal of the site.

Habitat creation and enhancement of biodiversity was at the forefront of the project. For example, trees were planted, wildflowers introduced, ponds/wetland created in addition to a change in the management of the grassland habitat to encourage biodiversity. Several trees were planted alongside the new onsite footpaths, forming habitat corridors and opportunities, for example, for nesting birds, invertebrates etc. An

orchard was established in the western of the site that will provide opportunities for wildlife, if managed in a way that supports biodiversity. Fruit trees reach “old age” faster than many other tree species – for example a 50-year-old apple tree can have the same features as a 300-year-old oak: hollow trunks, rot holes, dead or decaying wood – benefitting saproxylic invertebrates, as well as birds, bats etc. Fruit trees blossom early in the year, providing important food sources for pollinators at the end of winter/start of spring. The deliberate spacing between trees in an orchard also lets more sunlight in, which benefits, for example, flying insects, like butterflies, that need the sun’s warmth to power flight muscles. NB traditional orchards are habitats of principal importance under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The wetland habitat was established to provide further opportunities for reptile, amphibian, bird and mammal populations to use the site, the importance of freshwater habitats cannot be underestimated



when considering biodiversity. The construction of two large ponds in the west of the site has created new onsite habitats, improved biodiversity and provided opportunities for residents to get close to nature. Additionally, working closely with engineers, the ponds have been designed as part of a Sustainable Drainage System (*SuDS*) scheme to help alleviate flooding onsite.

Another introduced feature has combined biodiversity with art. The Biodiversity Team commissioned Will Nash, an artist and sculptor based in Lewes, East Sussex to design and create *The Tricerahedron* (from the Greek words for 'three' and 'horn,' - a six-cell structure that, when expanded, can form a sphere). The piece was constructed from weathering steel, which rusts under the influence of the weather, creating a protective layer. The six cells are packed with pre-drilled logs to form a solid external surface, with gaps designed as refuge and nesting habitats for a wide range of invertebrates.

The sculpture is not only visually striking but is also multifunctional, enhancing the landscape, emphasising local identity, attracting people, educating, entertaining, and informing.

The impressive and imposing structure has an internal curving surface serving as a seat for residents/visitors to rest and admire the view. For these reasons *The Tricerahedron* was installed centrally within the site to create a unique focal point.

Additional semi-circular seating was also constructed on site using blockwork clad in stone cladding and decorated with a bespoke piece of artwork.

Community artist Andy O’Rourke was commissioned to work with the local children of Troedyrhiw Community Primary School to produce a mosaic mural. Each part of the mosaic has an imprint of vegetation taken from site and the piece incorporates species identified during ecological survey of the site into the design.



Natural play equipment has been installed at the site, designed to integrate the beauty of nature into a children's play areas. The play equipment takes the form of wooden sculptures of animals and insects which children can enjoy and interact with. A large bug hotel has also been installed at the top of the site. Local children are being encouraged fill the hotel with natural materials (e.g., twigs, leaves, pinecones), design compartments within the hotel to attract different insects and check-in regularly to monitor any new residents and learn about their behaviour. The site has been transformed into a place where local children can exercise and have fun outdoors, whilst learning about wildlife and the natural world.



The Biodiversity Team liaised with Lester Hartmann, a specialist in designing, building and installing habitat towers – based in Hathersage, Derbyshire, who was commissioned to design, build and install a bat tower for the site which would be fixed with ground screws to provide enough stability to cope with the windy conditions present on this open site. The completed design is not only functional (the tower can accommodate up to 1000 bats of different species), but also visually attractive.

In conclusion, the site – previously a coal tip and then a hot spot for fly-tipping – has been transformed and improved to benefit, not only nature and biodiversity, but also residents and visitors. Spending time in nature has been shown to significantly enhance people's mental health by reducing stress, improving mood, fostering emotional well-being and supports physical health.

The Incline, once forgotten and neglected, now transformed into a multi-functional ecosystem. There are, for example, new footpaths which act as active travel routes, new trees and habitat to improve air quality and benefit wildlife, bespoke seating and benches throughout the site and the beautiful vista of the wider landscape. All of this adds up to a functional active green space which provides a wealth of benefits for everything and everyone using the site. The Incline should serve as a benchmark for what can be achieved with forgotten spaces and how the public can change habits – once a little used area blighted by fly tipping – now loved and protected by the people who use it.

- Case study 6 describes a habitat creation project for the stag beetle.

Case study 6

STAG BEETLE HABITAT PROJECT

The stag beetle is extremely rare in Wales with a restricted distribution. Stag beetles are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are included as a species of principal importance on Schedule 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. There are no current records of stag beetle in Merthyr Tydfil.

A Stag Beetle Habitat Project has therefore been conducted throughout the County Borough. This consisted of identifying broadleaved woodland sites and creating log pyramids (stumperies) – these are made as follows:

- Bury several logs upright in the soil, approximately 500mm deep.
- Logs should be broadleaved (not conifer) and approximately at least as thick as an adult's arm.
- Ensure there is space between the logs so that the beetles can access all parts of the log.
- Ensure the space between the logs is filled with soil (female stage beetles lay their eggs in the soil next to rotting wood)
- Site the log pyramids in dappled shade as this is best to prevent the logs drying out.



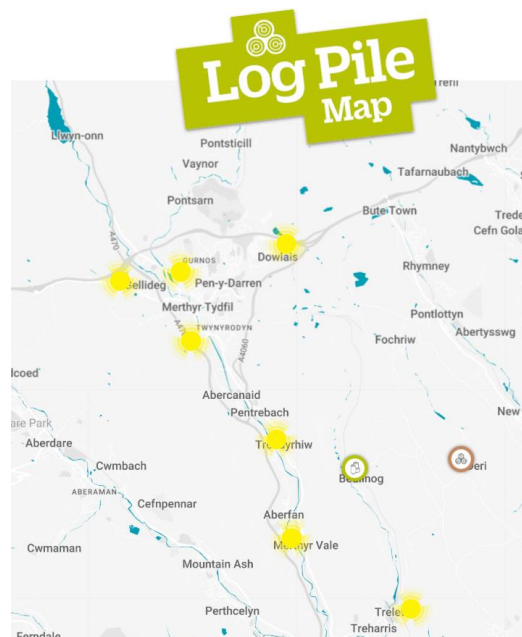
25 Stumperies

Stag beetle larvae require rotting wood (particularly decaying tree roots and stumps) to develop over 3-6 years before emerging as adults. Adults live only a few weeks in summer, primarily to mate. Local landscapes with mature trees and dead wood are essential for the survival of the species.

It is hoped that creating more of these areas can help to re-establish a population in the County Borough.

The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) has created a mapping resource to record habitat created for the stag beetle (log pyramids, log piles and retained stumps) plus stage beetle sightings (The Log Pile Map - <https://stagbeetles.ptes.org/#log-pile-map>).

Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership undertook the challenge of creating x25 log pyramids throughout the County Borough in November 2023 to support the stag beetle. A fantastic effort was made to create and record the log pyramids on the PTES Log Pile Map. Merthyr Tydfil now has records for x27 log pyramids and x2 retained stumps.



- Case study 7 describes a County Borough-wide tree project.

Case study 7

MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH TREE PLANTING PROJECT

Natural Resources 'Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities' study

This study has a chapter dedicated to Merthyr Tydfil:

<https://cdn.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/682942/merthyr-tydfil-tcwtc3-technical-annex.pdf>

The study is from 2013/2014 but includes a range of interesting and useful statistics. For example, in 2013, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's mean canopy cover stood at 20.3%. In addition, Ward by Ward data showed high wooded Wards (e.g., Treharris 4 – 36.0% canopy cover) and low wooded Wards (e.g., Penydarren 2 – 5.4%). There was a concern within the study over the loss of large long-lived trees that were perhaps not being replaced effectively.

Although the data is relatively old, it is still useful and can be used for comparative purposes.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is currently undertaking a review of tree cover right across the Borough and identifying suitable areas where tree planting (to include hedgerows) could feasibly take place.

There is a cross-departmental working group involving a range of departments and disciplines, for example, Property & Estates, Housing & Regeneration, Physical Regeneration; Community Regeneration; Policy & Implementation; Planning & Countryside; Planning; Parks; Tree health; Biodiversity; Ecology; Geographical Information Systems.

Trees must only be planted in suitable areas and not be detrimental to other important habitat types.

Amongst the best types of sites for tree planting would be 'grey' areas (e.g., hardstanding or vacant/derelict land) or improved fields where there is no biodiversity or very low biodiversity in the first instance. Tree-planting on upland sites close to river catchments where there are agricultural fields/low biodiversity areas should be considered for flood resilience/prevention purposes.

Where sites are suitable for tree-planting, native species of local (if not Welsh) provenance must be used – choosing the right species or mix of species for the sites in question.

In addition to tree planting, an emphasis has also been placed on management and protection of the current tree stock in MTCB, which is just as important.

The project has widened more recently to begin to consider any site where ecological improvement (not limited to tree planting) could be made, perhaps with a view to providing off-site compensation for development where on-site compensation has been ruled out.

DOWLAIS HIGH STREET GREEN GATEWAY (*project completed in 2023*)



Summary: New green space created in public domain from existing tarmacadam in the carriageway enhancing aesthetic, pollinator opportunities and resilience reducing flooding, creating rain gardens. Envelope includes adjacent verges and roundabouts.

Funding for the project has been secured by the MTCBC Countryside Team from the Welsh Government Local Places for Nature Challenge Fund.

The aims of the project are as follows:

- **Creation of floral diversity on embankments and roundabouts:** the existing embankments and roundabouts remain low in floral diversity. The proposals will significantly improve the grassland species, enable the planting of flowering, fruiting and berry trees and shrubs as a food resource for birds and small mammals.
- **Increase in the numbers of street trees:** following location of service utilities within the existing carriageway, street trees will be planted at specific available locations within the central carriageway, where previously there has only been hard surfacing. Tree species will be selected clones of native species chosen for their regular form and suitability to prevent conflict with road users.
- **Improved connectivity and habitat along highway:** as cover to trees planted in the central reservation, ground cover species will be selected from native species to form a low maintenance ground level green space. Species will be selected for their visual characteristics and colour and form, making use also of native grasses and sedges that will be able to accommodate fluctuations in temperature and ground moisture levels.
- **Increase in net green areas to advantage pollinator friendly species:** in total the proposals will increase the net area of pollinator friendly species. These species will be flowering native herbs as

the majority of this increase, although trees and shrubs will also be selected that provide a wider range of nectar sources.

- **Improved air quality and water management:** air quality, noise pollution and flooding are all threat to the local environment. Trees and shrubs will trap airborne particulates, remove carbon dioxide and nitrogen through fixation, reduce noise levels through planting in the central reservation, water quality will be improved through partial filtration and slowing down the rate of run off through the creation of a retro fit Sustainable Urban Drainage system through the installation of rain gardens. Adaptability to wet and dry condition will create a range of habitat conditions for invertebrates.
- **Restoring civic pride:** as an approach to Dowlais from the south west and as an interface with Penydarren the proposals will lift the visual appearance and appeal of the area as a whole. Investment and improvements to green infrastructure are now more widely recognised as an important response to the changing climate and offer a beacon of hope and positivity to the communities this proposals will affect. The scheme will also serve as catalyst for future initiatives to raise the quality of the local environment.

- Examples of smaller work tasks are shown in Box 1 below.

Box 1

February/March 2024

- **Trelewis Park:** working with volunteers to increase biodiversity & appeal to public by installing Magnifying posts, creating a new scrape, scrub clearance in the woodland area & planting of native Apple trees.
- **Treharris Park:** working with volunteers to remove invasive species, e.g., cherry laurel, & creating new scrapes for water to flow into the stream, decreasing the effect of erosion on the current stream due to flooding.
- **Afon Taf:** planted a hedgerow with students from Afon Taf High School - involved using equipment such as spades, forks & rakes to clear away ground cover before preparing the area for planting.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** event run with Merthyr & Districts Naturalists Society and hosted at the bothy, with pupils from Pantysgallog Primary School visiting for a bird ID walk through the woods and construction of bird feeders.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** bird box installation day with volunteers from Glamorgan Bird Club. Bird boxes were erected in wooded areas and mapped for future monitoring.
- **Cae Mari Dwn:** working with Keep Wales Tidy and students at Cyfarthfa High School to plant native trees.
- **Troedyrhiw Park:** worked with volunteers to clear away dead plant material from flower beds along with clearing of rubbish & keeping pathways clean & presented well for the public to enjoy.
- **Trefechan:** wildflower seed sowed on roadside verge & banking near the Taff trail.
- **Ty Gurnos Care Home:** cleared x4 flower beds of weeds, turned the soil & planted a range of herbs & wildflower seed to provide visual stimuli & enhance the wellbeing of individuals using the facility.
- **Penywern Ponds:** attended an activity day with volunteers for. Activities included: pleaching of trees to form a fence line and installing a hedgehog house.
NB video results from the deployment of a wildlife camera to monitor an area of vegetation near the onsite culvert showed a range of wildlife to be present, notably, footage of water vole was verified by The Mammal Society (our partner organisation). First recorded sighting of water vole in Merthyr Tydfil since 2009.
- **Proffihopper Training:** training attended by members of the Parks Department. NB a Proffihopper is a high-performance, self-propelled flail mower designed for professional green space management, capable of mowing, mulching, scarifying, and collecting debris in one operation.

April/May 2024

- **Ty Gurnos House Care Home:** insect house was installed for the benefit of the residents.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** planting of a hedge (yew & hornbeam) replacing an old boundary wall providing an ecological diverse natural barrier.
- **Ynysfach Allotments:** assistance provided with installation of a bug hotel & creation of a wildlife pond.

- **Trelewis Park:** completed works (hedgerows strengthened with the introduction of hornbeam specimens, wooden snake sculpture installed, new play equipment added). Local users have commented on “how much nicer it was than before”. Future installations/creations (totem poles and play statues such as Dragonflies & Butterflies, new scrapes, bat and bird boxes).
- **The Incline:** completed works (monument installed, paths and orchard created, gates installed & painted by Iron Art). Future works (site visit to remove surplus wood left at site).
- **Aberfan Park:** attended & helped create a bug hotel with students & staff of Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug school.
- **Glamorgan Bird Club:** attended workshop on how to monitor bird boxes in the area, assisted with erection of Pied flycatcher boxes at Taf Fechan Nature Reserve.
- **Nant Llwynog Park:** x5 “Pride of the Valleys” apple trees donated to plant at the park.
- **Penywern Pond:** dead hedge created, benches installed, trail camera moved to better capture footage of water vole, x2 animal totem poles erected featuring a ‘fox’ & a ‘woodpecker’ - both animals observed onsite.
- **Treharris Park:** bat boxes installed, native fern species planted, riparian features created.
- **Taff Bargoed:** reseeded green roof shelter with native wildflower mix, trail camera erected due to potential otter tracks on the Reed island.
- **Bedlinog Primary School:** advice given on how to utilise grey areas and turn them green and planting of a hedge. Nature activity days were discussed but not yet organised.
- **Taf Fechan Nature Reserve:** plans in place to visit site and with help from Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC-Trust) to undertake great crested newt survey work & with help from Glamorgan Bird Club to carry out pied flycatcher surveys. Also, plans to erect trail cameras to monitor a badger sett.
- **Ynysfach allotments:** – advice provided. Discussed the possibility of returning to create a permanent pond feature in the allotments.
- **Craigfargoed Cemetery:** help and advice provided to the Friends of Craigfargoed Cemetery Group on creating a more welcoming space. Advice also given regarding to scrub control and creating wildflower edges.

June 2024

- **Penywern Ponds:** removal of common broom - 50 bags of broom collected and stockpiled for future Halloween “Broom Making” event.
- **Treharris Park:** continued management with volunteers - began clearing away cherry laurel from the banks & creating new riparian areas, along with creating habitat piles.
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** added compost to and reseeded roof of shelter, set up reptile mats in the area to survey in the future, with hopes of finding adder.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** set out reptile mats to survey the area for signs of adder to help to determine distribution throughout the borough.
- **Prince Charles Hospital:** notified that previous work damaged again & revisited site to rebuild and complete the stone wall at PCH. Area cleared of debris.
- **Troedyrhiw Park:** working with volunteers to clear away dead plant material from flower beds along with clearing of rubbish and keeping pathways clean and well-presented well for the public to enjoy.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** installed x3 benches alongside the path, worked with volunteers to cut & reshape the willow hide and started on a willow dome structure.
- **Ty Gurnos Care Home:** bird box for installation

July 2024

- **Nature week – Nant Llwynog Park:** dawn chorus event, circular walk through the park. Birdsong identified - song thrush, wren, wood pigeon, jackdaw, blue tit, great tit.
- **Nature week – Cyfarthfa Junior School:** Cyfarthfa Juniors invited to attend a Tree Identification Day, which consisted of a guided walk throughout the park, touching on subjects such as history, agriculture, biodiversity and the different species of trees that are present in the park.
- **Bat night – Taf Bargoed Park:** bat detecting night held for residents.
- **Bedlinog Primary School:** stumpery creation event for students and parents
- **Penywern Ponds:** – completion of common broom removal. Some of the previously stockpiled broom was used to reinforce the fencing and creating a new feature in the landscape.
- **Abercanaid River Walk:** supplied and installed waymarker posts alongside new path.

- **The Incline:** supplied and installed bug hotel at the Incline in hopes of residents and children of the area to engage and fill the bug hotel up with sticks, acorns, pinecones & other natural features as a resource for the local invertebrate population.

August 2024

- **Treharris Park:** continued tackling invasive species through controlled management, utilising volunteers and Wildlife Trust expertise to develop a plan going for management of Himalayan Balsam, Himalayan Knotweed, Japanese Knotweed & other invasives.
- **Taf Fechan Nature Reserve:** – installed pied flycatcher boxes (x10 in total) with the help of Fledgemore Nest Recording Group. Continued monitoring to be undertaken throughout the year.
- **Trelewis Community Centre:** community event day held in partnership with Merthyr Valley Homes, covering a wide range of activities including mini bug hotel creation, flower printing on bookmarks, yogurt pots bird feeder.
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** range of activities hosted by MTBP involving bird feeder, bug hotel and bookmark stamp marking with natural flora found on the site.

September 2024

- **Taf Bargoed Park:** event day for residents held by MTBP in conjunction with South East Wales Rivers Trust (SEWRT) for an accredited kick sampling course open to the public.
- **Penywern Ponds:** pleached hedge completed, coir roll installed at edges of pond to help improve biodiversity and aquatic life in the area. Volunteers turned up to help with installation of coir rolls along with a general litter pick at the end of the day.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** with help from volunteers, a coir roll was installed on the edges of the pond to help improve biodiversity and aquatic life. Litter pick undertaken.
- **Troedyrhiw Park:** – Will Nash, an artist and sculptor based in Lewes, East Sussex was approached by Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership (MTBP) to design and install solitary bee towers within four wildflower beds. This will be both aesthetically pleasing and provide a sustainable and unique habitat feature.
- **Prince Charles Hospital (PCH):** Tilbury Douglas (infrastructure, engineering and fit-out company currently working on the expansion and refurbishment of PCH) approached Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership asking for assistance on World Clean-up Day. Bags, litter pickers and a team of volunteers were provided for a litter pick.
- **Taf Fechan Nature Reserve:** MTBP hosted a Fungi Foray Walk with expert mycologist Emma Williams leading with the assistance of geologist Ben Evans to give us detailed explanation on why, how and where you may expect to find fungi growing in the reserve.

October 2024

- **Trelewis Wetland:** x2 (ephemeral) ponds were created with a volunteer group to help tackle excess run-off of water with excess material used to form a bung along the edge creating a further habitat feature.
- **Cyfarthfa Outdoor Learning Area:** Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership and its volunteer group (clearance of vegetation from an old circular stone wall and bramble bashing/scrub clearance of vegetation).
- **Troedyrhiw Park:** MTBP planted more bulbs (daffodils and crocus) alongside the existing path.
- **Dowlais High Street:** MTBP undertook scrub removal & strimming of the central reservation to allow planting of salt and drought tolerant plants.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** MTBP created new habitat features within the main pond by adding stone edging which will provide invertebrates and amphibians places to breed, lay eggs, hide & forage in safety.
- **Treharris Park:** MTBP planted c.2000 crocus bulbs in the western Spring bank.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** path leading back into the woodland cleared to make it accessible for the public allowing increased use of the wetland area. In addition, x3 bird boxes were erected in the woodland to encourage smaller nesting birds.
- **Cwm Blacks / Penywern Ponds / Dowlais Top / Cyfarthfa (old golf course):** planting of devil's bit scabious (larval food plant of the marsh fritillary butterfly). Four areas selected around the Borough to encourage reestablishment this protected species.

- **Gelligaer and Merthyr Common:** a week's training event led by South Wales Drystone Wall Association – c.10m of dry-stone wall was built, restoring habitat of benefit to wildlife in the area (e.g., birds, reptiles, amphibians etc).
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** "Glow in the Park" event hosted by Ben Evans. Attendees were provided with UV torches and followed a dedicated path to follow through the woodland, to search for plants, insects, fungi and lichens.
- **Craigfargoed Cemetery:** planting undertaken by Friends of Craigfargoed Cemetery Group.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** Halloween "Broom Making" event open to the public providing the opportunity to make 'witches brooms' from common broom (collected from Penywern Ponds and stockpiled earlier in the year).

November 2024

- **Borough Wide:** widespread planting of marsh violets (larval foodplant of dark green fritillary, pearl-bordered fritillary and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies) in five different areas in the Borough.
- **Aberfan Park:** return visit to help complete the creation of a bug hotel with students & staff of Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug school.
- **Craigfargoed Cemetery:** erection of bird nesting boxes and bat boxes provided through the Local Places for Nature (LNP) fund. In addition, x3 "Pride of the Valleys" apple trees (local variety of apple) were planted.
- **Sixty-Sixty Coaches:** contact was made with a local Merthyr Tydfil coach travel company. One of the Local Places for Nature objectives is to acquire partners and to provide help and advice. In this case, suggestions for and implementation of a habitat management and species enhancement project to be undertaken on land owned by the company.
- **Treharris Park:** planting undertaken by MTBP and volunteers, improving the spring bank by planting tulips.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** –MTBP created rocky areas, providing habitats, nesting & hiding spots for aquatic species. The willow sculpture at the bottom of the hill was pruned back into shape, ready for spring.

December 2024

- **Borough Wide:** MTBP began the stag beetle pyramid challenge project. The aim - complete 25 stumperies throughout the Borough to help support the declining population of stag beetles.
- **Sixty-Sixty Coaches:** MTBP continued the partnership, providing a hedgehog house, bat box and bird box.
- **Rocky Road:** efforts undertaken to open a glade through part of the woodland edge. Glades are transitional zones, where light meets shade and grassland meets woodland and help to support a range of wildlife including, for example, plants, butterflies and other invertebrates.
- **Craigfargoed Cemetery:** further plants and apple trees provided to the Friends of Craigfargoed Cemetery Group.
- **Edward Street:** c.80m of mixed hedging including holly, beech, yew and dog rose were planted alongside Edward Street. This multifunctional natural barrier will block wind, create habitat and provide year-round food sources.
- **St John's Church, Dowlais:** installation of a mixed hedge (yew, holly and bird cherry) providing habitat and food sources for local wildlife.

January 2025

- **Edward Street:** planted c.40 Dame's violet plants (larval foodplant of the orange tip butterfly).
- **Pant Estate:** installed x12 semi-mature trees (x6 silver birch and x6 field maple) to create a linear habitat feature and connect two discrete areas for the benefit of local wildlife. There will also be benefits for the local residents in terms of providing a wind block and improving the area's green space – helping both mental and physical health.
- **Penywern Ponds:** erection of a house martin tower to encourage nesting house martin and swifts. The tower can accommodate x72 swift nests, has x36 house martin cups and x8 bat roosting compartments. In addition, c.15m of damaged hedge was infilled using blackthorn specimens.
- **Kestrel Project:** kestrel boxes erected in 5 locations around the Borough and mapped using What3Words.
- **Aberfan:** purchase of hedgehog houses for placement around the Borough in dense vegetation to support this under pressure native species.

February 2025

- **Dowlais Stables:** Merthyr Housing Association were provided with a large bug hotel and x3 bird feeders to use within the grounds. Suggestion made for a possible hedge along the back wall.
- **Merthyr Valley Homes (MVH):** hosted a community day alongside MVH where the community took part in planting spring bulbs on the hill near the community centre.
- **River Taff, Abercanaid:** kick sampling session hosted alongside SEWRT and The Riverfly Partnership to assess the quality of water and invertebrate populations.
- **Penywern Ponds:** Louise Wilson (Conservation K9 Consultancy) with the assistance her conservation detection dog Rex searched alongside the culvert for the presence of water vole.
- **Aberfan Park:** created a bug hotel using old tyres found dumped on the side of the road.
- **Trelewis Community Centre:** bulbs planted with MVH outside the community centre; this event was led by MTBP and MVH to help aid pollinators & increase biodiversity in the area.
- **Giant's Bite, north of Quaker's Yard:** x 15 reptile mats deployed to monitor the area for reptiles – results to be shared with ARC-Trust.
- **Dowlais Central Reservation:** strimmed all remaining grass areas to allow our drought and salt tolerant plants to thrive.

March 2025

- **St. Illtyd's Church, Dowlais:** stumpery created - continuing the work of providing stag beetle habitat in the Borough.
- **Aberfan Park:** continued creation of a willow weave fence to add an interesting feature to the site and a natural barrier/entrance to the compost bins.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** continued to add stone to the large pond, creating more pooling & egg laying areas for amphibians and invertebrates to utilise. Continued surveying for amphibians (frog spawn recorded).
- **Georgetown Villas:** approached by Merthyr Housing Association for advice on how to develop their grey area to benefit the users of the communal home and how to increase pollinators. A 2m x 1m planter was provided, filled with compost and sown with wildflower seeds for the benefit of pollinators and residents.

April 2025

- **Borough wide:** MTBP and MT Parks Department continued their grassland management by undertaking the first cut & collect of the season. x16 grassland sites throughout the Borough directly benefit from the cut & collect method.
- **Penywern Ponds:** Salix (company that designs, builds and supplies nature-based solutions for rivers and wetlands) assisted with preparations for floating islands by installing plug plants into the coir roll structure. The coir rolls were attached together to form floating islands with secure fencing added around the edges to protect vegetation from being eaten by birds.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** "Scavenger Hunt" event - to connect local children with the natural world and inspire curiosity through outdoor learning, a nature-based scavenger hunt was hosted at the scenic stone circle in Cyfarthfa Park. The event was designed to encourage exploration, observation, and hands-on engagement with nature, making it both educational & fun. Participants were invited to find and collect (or observe and record, depending on the item) six nature-themed items.
- **Aberfan Park:** x2 large planters installed and sown with wildflower seed to help pollinators thrive in this area. Grass cut using a SCAG mower and arisings removed by volunteer group to reduce nutrients and facilitate the growth of wildflowers.
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** kick sampling session and identification workshop hosted by Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Team & South East Wales Rivers Trust, encouraging members of the public to take a closer look at what lives in & uses our freshwater habitats

May 2025

- **Treharris Park:** volunteers assisted with annual weeding and maintenance of the flower borders along with very light hedge cutting (carefully checking first for active bird nests).
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** “Hoverfly” event hosted by Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Team with guest speakers and tutors Graham Watkeys & Andrew McGleish who led a walk around the lake searching for hoverflies and explaining lifecycle and importance of these great pollinators.
- **The Incline:** Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Team hosted a litter pick event.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** – planted x150 flag iris specimens and x75 rush species specimens at the three ponds.
- **Bedlinog:** – planted wildflower seed along a newly created path.

June 2025

- **Penywern Ponds:** re-aligned the floating islands which were drifting in-shore.
- **The Incline:** began filling in the bug hotel with sticks, logs and other materials (such as cardboard) to provide a haven for invertebrates.
- **Prince Charles Hospital:** attended site with the intension of rebuilding the wall for the third time, unfortunately there was no stone left to use. Graffiti cleaned from notice boards.
- **Giant’s Bite:** reptile mat check found x4 slow worms present on site.
- **Treharris Park:** bracken bashing and INNS management undertaken with the volunteers.
- **Teddington’s Field:** Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales assisted with onsite INNS.
- **Gurnos:** helped local group (Compass Community Group) manage their green areas - strimming a metre cut alongside pathways, leaving wildflowers grow elsewhere, trimming back of ornamental grasses to keep under control along with removal of green waste from site.
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** swift and bat tower erected to encourage these species into the area.
- **The Incline:** undertook path restoration and renewed the woodchip surrounding the benches.

August 2024

- **Troedyrhiw Park:** continued maintenance of the park area including cutting back of vegetation.
- **Dowlais Central Reservation:** began managing vegetation.
- **Treharris Park:** helped create new path.
- **Aberfan Park:** formed a bee bank out of the waste spoil & turf from Treharris Park to create a new pollinator site.
- **The Incline:** undertook a litter pick Installation of newt structure near the ponds with Chris Oakey, this will serve as additional seating and shelter for users of the park.
- **Aberbargoed Grassland:** attended training with Butterfly Conservation to learn about marsh fritillary butterfly larval webs and develop a better understanding on how to survey for them in our own grassland in Merthyr.
- **Giant’s Bite:** reptile surveys complete - reptile mats collected.
- **Abercanaid Riverside:** a new totem pole was constructed depicting a hedgehog for children to enjoy & get closer with nature on their doorstep.
- **Treharris Park:** helped the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) team create a new woodchip path leading to another route through the site.
- **Aberfan Park:** created a wildflower bund out of the turf and soil removed from Treharris Park.

September 2025

- **Bryngolau:** installed a kestrel box to assist Kestrel population in the southern territory of the valley. Installed a hedgehog box to help the population in the southern area of the ward. Carried out a partial invertebrate sweep netting, primarily to see how grassland sites are doing at the end of the season.
- **The Incline:** installed x2 bird boxes suitable for smaller bird species. Installed x2 curved benches inside the shelter for sitting to observe wildlife at the ponds.
- **Teddington’s Field:** undertook a litter pick to remove waste from site & collate data. Recorded the litter pick on the Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) website.
- **Aberfan Park:** a “Bug Sweep Net” event was held for the local school, Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** “Riverwatch” event hosted in partnership with The Riverfly Partnership.
- **Prince Charles Hospital:** “Litter Pick” events were hosted before and after the final grass collecting.

- **Cefn Coed Cemetery:** installation of x2 kestrel boxes.
- **Penywern Ponds:** solitary bee hotel installed; x2 bee towers installed; repairs undertaken of dead hedge using stockpiled common broom.
- **Goat Mill Road:** litter pick carried out.
- **The Incline:** newt willow structure installed; solitary bee hotel installed.
- **Cwm Blacks:** scrub clearance; solitary bee hotel installed.
- **Abercanaid Riverside:** installation of hedgehog totem pole and sail play equipment.
- **Aberfan Park:** created new path through site.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** renewed willow structure/hide; bat tower erected, x2 bee posts installed; solitary bee post installed; grass cut and collection.

October 2025

- **Taf Bargoed Park:** hosted "Bat Night" open event for members of the public.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** "Creepy Crawly" event for members of the public.
- **Kepak (Pengarnddu):** bat box and bird box installed.
- **Taf Fechan Nature Reserve:** cleaned pied flycatcher nest boxes ready for use next year.
- **The Incline:** x2 willow sculptures of freshwater snails have been installed.
- **Aberfan Park:** bee hotel installed.
- **Trelewis Park:** bee hotel installed.
- **Rocky Park:** bee hotel installed.
- **Treharris Park:** bee hotel installed.
- **Chapel Row:** x3 wooden bee posts.
- **Cwm Blacks:** grass cutting and removal of arisings.
- **Rocky Park:** scrub clearance.
- **Trelewis Wetland:** cutting back willow with volunteers.
- **Treharris Park:** stumpery created - continuing the work of providing stag beetle habitat in the Borough.
- **Treharris Park:** apple press event.
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** hosted "Bat Night" open event for members of the public.

November 2025

- **Troedyrhiw Park:** work continued into the autumn months, starting with the de-vegetation of the flower beds.
- **Cwm Blacks:** Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Team undertook a mass litter pick, targeting all the areas we manage which have been targeted by fly tipping.
- **Dowlais Central Reservation:** litter pick undertaken on the busy Dowlais central reservation. Waste removed from site & collate data. Recorded the litter pick on the Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) website.
- **Cwm Blacks:** continuing the stag beetle project with a new partnership developed – PTES (People's Trust for Endangered Species).
- **Dowlais Church:** during a litter pick it was evident that the onsite reservation was becoming an excellent nursery for sapling trees such as willow, elm and birch - x5 willows were translocated to another site in Dowlais to help reinstate a hedge.
- **Rocky Park:** habitat pile constructed to supports insects, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals, boosting biodiversity; installation of stone piles, creating refuges, basking and over-wintering sites (hibernacula) for reptiles and amphibians; installation of hedgehog box.
- **Teddington's Field:** kestrel box installed; stumpery created - continuing the work of providing stag beetle habitat in the Borough.
- **Penywern Ponds:** x1 kestrel box installed.
- **Cyfarthfa Park:** Christmas wreath event held.
- **The Incline:** litter pick undertaken.
- **Rocky Park:** bee post installed; x2 bat boxes installed; x3 bird boxes installed; x1 bug hotel installed; stumpery for stag beetles installed; developed sustainable bridge - bug hotel created by using sticks and leaves to fill out the space between the handrail and the bridge; installation of totem poles (hedgehog and woodpecker).
- **Taf Bargoed Park:** educational ponds: vegetation clearance and material used to construct x2 habitat piles.

December 2025

- **Taff Trail:** met onsite with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to discuss improvements to be made on the canal.

- On sites not under local authority ownership, and where development is proposed for these sites, the planning process will play a role in helping MTCBC to reverse the decline in biodiversity and increase the resilience of ecosystems.
- Overall, MTCBC has played, and will continue to play, a strategic and pivotal role in supporting and contributing to large-scale landscape projects. This is essential for optimising the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity within ecosystems across the County Borough and therefore improving ecosystem resilience. Thus far, advancements have been achieved through the allocation of Local Places for Nature Programme and The Challenge Fund aimed at habitat restoration and community engagement initiatives in collaboration with voluntary sector organisations (e.g., The Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales, Keep Wales Tidy, South East Wales Rivers Trust, Butterfly Conservation, South Wales Trunk Road Agent).
- MTCBC is also currently overseeing the strategic management of priority public Open Spaces, via MTCBC Open Spaces Strategy, Priority Open Space Management Planning and through developing a Green Infrastructure Plan.
- Many of the above actions have been developed, promoted and encouraged through the Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership (MTBP). The role of MTBP in continuing to bring together key organisations and provide direction for the Local Authority in delivery of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 will continue to be essential for successful outcomes.

Area Statements

- The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 made it a duty for Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to produce 'Area Statements'. The statements will cover a total of seven areas in Wales:
 - Marine
 - Mid-Wales
 - North East Wales
 - North West Wales
 - South East Wales
 - **South Wales Central**
 - South West Wales
- Merthyr Tydfil, along with Rhondda Cynon Taf, Bridgend and Cardiff make up the **South Wales Central** area. This area includes:
 - The moorland fringes of the Brecon Beacons National Park
 - The South Wales valleys of the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf
 - The gentle lowlands of Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan
 - The cliffs of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast
 - Cardiff capital of Wales

- In April 2022, the ecosystem profiles for the **South Wales Central** area were published by NRW. The following are relevant to MTCB:

Ecosystem Profile	Summary of top priorities	Examples of actions for MTCB
Freshwater	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build resilience throughout river catchments – restoring natural processes from the headwaters to the river mouth. 2. Focus on the urban environment, restore physically modified watercourses, replicate natural processes and nature-based solutions for improved water quality and quantity. 3. The freshwater environment is valued and considered on a catchment scale in decision making. Impacts on water are better considered through decision making and opportunities for water to be integrated and built into design and regeneration. 4. Education and engagement with communities and individuals to better understand and value the water environment, to be preventative and restorative in their individual actions. 	<p>See, for example, Case Studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 (PARC TAF BARGOED); ○ 3 (CYFARTHFA PARK LAKE); ○ 4 (TRELEWIS WETLAND); and ○ Box 1
Grassland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enable appropriate grassland management to improve condition 2. Create resilient ecological networks to extend, connect and buffer grassland sites 3. Connect people with grasslands through those in urban areas, road verges and engagement about the benefits of grasslands. 	<p>See Case Study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 (BIODIVERSITY SITES); and ○ Box 1
Peatlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protect and restore peatlands in South Central and their hydrological integrity, to support ecosystem function, restoration success and wider habitat connectivity. 2. Map and prioritise peatland habitats for restoration as part of the South Central Area landscape. 3. Adequately fund and embed peatland restoration and management into land 	<p>According to the Geology of Britain map viewer, there are limited examples of peatland that occur within the south of MTCB. Further investigation is required to inform any actions that would meet the priorities of the ecosystem profiles.</p>

	management planning. Facilitate long term management of peatlands, to maximise the benefits possible from a resilient peatland ecosystem and to mitigate against pressures such as wildfire and nitrogen deposition.	
The Valleys	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain habitat extent through appropriate protection and reduction of pressures. 2. Create Resilient Ecological Networks to build extent and connectivity. 3. Further understand the natural processes of this ecosystem, through understanding species diversity and habitat dynamics, to maintain and improve condition. 	<p>Ffridd is a habitat type existing throughout Wales & found between the managed lowlands & the uplands (altitudes between 100m-450m). It is an extremely diverse & complex mosaic of habitats consisting of heath, bracken, acid grassland, woodland, coal spoil and rhôs pasture. Ffridd runs for mile upon mile along the main valleys of the County Borough and is therefore important for ecological connectivity. It can support a wide range of species: birds such as tree pipits, yellowhammers & ring ouzels; butterflies such as pearl-bordered fritillary & dark green fritillary; vascular plants such as globeflower & wood bitter-vetch. Ffridd plays an important role in connecting habitats & increasing the resilience of ecosystems in terms of disturbance and change.</p> <p>Example Y Graig SINC – is one example of ffridd habitat in Merthyr, however, it has become dominated by bracken. Paths have been created through the bracken habitat using a ‘bracken bruiser’ (supplied & operated by South Wales Fire & Rescue Service) in order to open up the habitat to encourage bilberry & other heathland species.</p>
Urban	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a network of accessible high-quality Green Infrastructure following best practice and aligned to the local Green Infrastructure Assessment, supporting nature. 2. Create resilience to environmental hazards such as poor air quality, extreme heat, noise pollution, water quality, water quantity, and adaptation to climate change. 	<p>See, for example, Case studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 (BIODIVERSITY SITES) ○ 2 (PARC TAF BARGOED) ○ 4 (TRELEWIS WETLAND) ○ 8 (DOWLAIS HIGH STREET GREEN GATEWAY); ○ Box 1

Woodlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus on enhancing and restoring our irreplaceable Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland. 2. Allow natural colonisation and appropriate planting in and around existing semi-natural woodlands to enhance and buffer woodland patches and enhance connectivity. 3. Preserving existing large trees and woodland, encouraging woodland regeneration and colonisation (essential for building ecosystem resilience and storing and capturing carbon). 	<p style="text-align: center;">See Case Study: 7 (MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH TREE PLANTING PROJECT)</p>
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Green Infrastructure (GI) Assessment and Strategy

- The process of assessing the GI network within MTCB is ongoing and will be used to inform the development of a GI assessment and strategy to include an interactive map of the current state of GI in MTCB. This can then be used by all relevant departments (e.g., Planning, Engineering, Highways, Parks) as a resource for advice and decision-making.
- As part of this, MTCBC has accessed all available up-to-date data sources to include as much of the area of the County Borough as possible. For example, the National Tree Map data (2016) is included as an ArcGIS layer. This alone demonstrates an excellent amount of tree cover in urban areas across the County Borough.
- A draft GI interactive map has been developed and includes the following ArcGIS layers:
 1. Trees
 - Tree cover (Urban and Rural)
 - Tree Preservation Orders (TPO)
 - Ancient woodland
 2. Grassland
 - Natural and semi-natural
 - Agricultural
 - Amenity
 3. Water
 - Rivers, Lakes and Ponds
 - Streams, Ditches and Culverts
 4. Designated sites
 - Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI)
 - Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
 - Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
 - Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS)
 - Wildlife Trust Reserves (WTR)
 5. Non-natural
 - Industrial Spoil Tips
 - Regeneration Sites
 - Structures

- Roads
- 6. Accessibility
 - Main Trails
 - Active Travel Routes
 - Rights of Way
- 7. Environmental Health
- 8. Terrestrial Phase 1 Habitat Survey
- 9. LandMap
 - Cultural Landscape
 - Visual Sensory
 - Landscape Habitats
 - Geological Landscape
- 10. Land Cover 2021 (Carbon)
- 11. Light Pollution (to be added)
- 12. Peatland (to be added)

- This is envisioned to be a live document that can be dynamically updated as and when new data becomes available.
- The next stage will be identifying priorities. The following draft priorities have been produced as they align with the MTCBC Wellbeing Objectives).

An Aspirational Merthyr Tydfil, focused on Learning

Improving innovation and education:

- Innovation in alternative technologies related to ecology, biodiversity, and climate change
- Education related to the natural world/ecology (schools, higher education, residents)
- Conservation opportunities / management of local open spaces

A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil

Improving health outcomes:

- Pollution (air, water, noise, light)
- Availability of natural spaces capable of supporting physical and mental wellbeing
- Active travel routes

A Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil

Improving safety:

- Tip Safety
- Flooding
- Lighting
- Climate change

Improving prosperity:

- Higher house prices linked with urban green spaces
- Nature-based tourism (landscape + habitats)

A Clean and Green Merthyr Tydfil

Improving cleanliness:

- Litter
- Fly tipping

Improving green spaces:

- Pollution (air, water, noise, light)
- Species + habitats (including soil) protection, improvement, connectivity
- Ecosystems resilience
- Climate change resilience

- This process will continue, with the aim of producing a Green Infrastructure Strategy for MTCB.
- Again, this is envisioned to be a live resource that can be dynamically updated as and when new data becomes available.

GI and the Planning System

- The planning process, in line with Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12), has a key role to play in helping MTCBC to protect and enhance green infrastructure features and networks. The built environment will be enhanced by embedding green infrastructure into development at an early stage. This should include, for example:
 - choosing the correct site in the first instance;
 - avoidance of unnecessary habitat damage/removal;
 - careful, appropriate and creative development scheme design
 - effective mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures.
- The requirements of and opportunities presented by a particular site will dictate the specific measures used to protect and enhance GI features and networks. Examples of the types of measures that could be used include landscaping, green roofs, tree planting, and SuDS schemes.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

- Traditionally, drainage systems are designed to remove surface rainwater as quickly as possible. Predominantly, water is directed into public sewers placing a significant burden on wastewater treatment works and during extreme storm events water will discharge through overflows, into watercourses and may result in flooding and pollution. An increase of impermeable surfaces in urban environments increases the volume of water flowing into sewers, further increasing flood and pollution risk. MTCBC has a total area of 58km² contained within Flood Risk Areas and the financial cost associated with flooding can be substantial.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are designed to mimic natural drainage by retaining and filtering surface water and preventing the public sewer from becoming overwhelmed during storm events. Examples of SuDS can include green roofs, permeable paving and rain gardens.
- Since 7th January 2019, all new developments of more than a single dwelling house or where the construction footprint is 100m² or more has required Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) for surface water (according to Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010).
- These systems must be approved by MTCBC acting in its role as a SuDS Approval Body (SAB) prior to the commencement of construction.

- As a result of this, new opportunities to create biologically diverse water management have arisen. Good SuDS design can create shelter, food, foraging and breeding opportunities for a range of species and contribute to an increase in biodiversity within MTCB.
- The LPA Ecologist is consulted, where SuDS schemes can directly improve biodiversity where planting is used. For example, wet basins/ponds, naturalised swales, rain gardens etc

AIM: TACKLE KEY PRESSURES ON SPECIES, HABITATS AND ECOSYSTEMS

- There are numerous examples of under pressure species and habitats within the County Borough. This is predominantly due to loss of habitat / loss of habitat connectivity because of the impacts of development on greenfield sites including both local and nationally protected nature conservation sites, climate change, invasive species, the misuse of land including fly-tipping.
- To alleviate these pressures a suite of actions has been, or will be, implemented including the following:
 - As mentioned previously, the planning process plays a major role in helping MTCBC, reverse the decline in biodiversity, increase the resilience of ecosystems and prevent or reduce impacts of development on protected nature conservations sites within MTCBC (see further details under *AIM: Safeguard species (and habitats) and improve their management – pages 7-10*). This will also have a positive influence on climate change, for example by removing CO₂ from the atmosphere through tree and habitat planting on development sites.
 - A contribution on tackling pressures on species and habitats in MTCB has also been made through the actions as outlined in *AIM: Protect, restore and effectively manage ecosystems to build their resilience (pages 11-37)*, for example in the following case studies:
 1. BIODIVERSITY SITES
 2. PARC TAF BARGOED
 3. CARFARTHFA PARK LAKE
 4. TRELEWIS WETLAND
- Improvements in re-use, recycling and waste management processes. Examples include recycling of in-house ICT Department equipment and a range of resident campaigns and competitions (e.g., battery recycling competition, Christmas card recycling, electrical device recycling campaign).
- Pro-active and strategic management of invasive species on MTCBC land as undertaken by the Parks department.
- The Parks department has also, where possible reduced the use of pesticides and herbicides.
- Enforcement regarding land misuse. Examples include unauthorised development and fly-tipping.
- Increasing the use of and participation in the outdoors by residents, for example friends of groups in local Parks set up by the Countryside Team. A total of 137 volunteers attended a range sites on Tuesdays/Thursdays in 2025. See Box 1 for details of volunteer activities.
- Raising awareness within the Council and with the public, promoting and implementing actions to reduce key pressures.
- The Welsh Government have an ambition for the public sector to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 in response to climate change. MTCBC are supporting this ambition by carrying out a number of Decarbonisation initiatives and projects that reduce the Carbon Emissions of its operations and impacts on Climate Change. Examples include:
 - Installation of Energy Efficiency measures in 32 council buildings via the Welsh Government REFIT Cymru framework.
 - Front line services now have several electric vehicles in operation, and MTCBC's Fleet strategy aims to support a transition to an all-electric fleet by 2030.
 - The Biodiversity Team within the Council have committed to planting 1000s of trees in open spaces throughout the County Borough. Trees as well as, e.g., shrub species, grassland, etc

naturally absorb carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, hence preservation of land is vital in the decarbonisation process.

- The Property Services Team are actively investigating the feasibility of building Net Zero Primary and Secondary Schools.
- Solar PV installed in Recycling Depots to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions.
- Changes will be made with the aim of restoring habitats to a more natural and resilient state. This will focus on, but not be limited to, the safeguarding of Section 7 species and habitats. To achieve this objective MTCBC requires a better understanding of the specific pressures and how MTCBC can collaborate across services to deliver multiple benefits to the habitats and / or species involved; a major contribution to this aim will be achieved by developing an MTCBC Green Infrastructure Plan (for further details see – ‘Green Infrastructure Assessment and Strategy’).

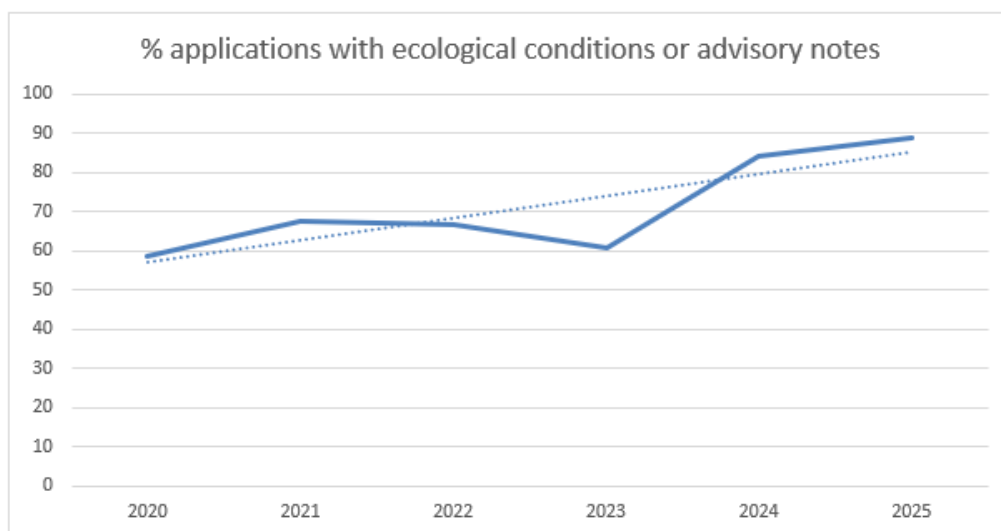
AIM: IMPROVE OUR EVIDENCE AND MONITORING

- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has relatively good baseline data for species and habitats. The data is subject to regular updates. Close relationships with all levels of educational institutions and voluntary sector organisations will help to maintain up to date information. The following examples of local evidence will be expanded and re-visited:

- Service Level Agreement with the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) provides up to date data records for protected species and protected sites in MTCBC. The information is accessed via Aderyn - a Local Environmental Records Centres (LERC) Wales system, developed and maintained by the Biodiversity Information Service (BIS). This SLA has been renewed every year since 2019 and is an essential element used daily to inform planning applications and other non-planning related projects across the Borough.

NB the percentage of planning applications with either ecological conditions or advisory notes in MTCB shows a clear upward trend since 2020.

Year	% applications with ecological conditions or advisory notes
2020	58.59
2021	67.74
2022	66.66
2023	60.94
2024	84.21
2025	88.88



Access to biodiversity data records is a key contributory element to protecting Merthyr's biodiversity in this way.

- Habitat surveys for MTCB's 64 SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) sites (2007/8 & 2015/16). Funding for updated surveys of a limited number of SINC sites was found and a total of 14 sites were visited and re-surveyed in 2024/2025.
- The remaining 50 SINC sites require an update and the cost of commissioning a specialist ecological consultancy to undertake this further work is currently being explored.

- All Council-led projects across the Borough now require relevant ecological survey work to be undertaken by independent consultants. These surveys inform mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures to be undertaken.
- Merthyr Tydfil Pond Survey 1999.
- Merthyr Tydfil Hedgerow Survey 1999.
- Coed Merthyr Woodland Strategy 1998.
- Taf Fechan Local Nature Reserve: Management Plan - the 2025-2030 'Cwm Taf Fechan Nature Reserve Five-year Management Programme' (document produced by the South and West Wales Wildlife Trust) has been written and implementation of the management programme will be overseen by the Reserves Officer.
- A Grassland Management Strategy is currently being formulated, which will hopefully be published some time in 2026.
- Ffos-y-Fran: Great Crested Newt Monitoring 2005-2015. NB in 2022: liaison facilitated between management at Ffos-y-Fran (Merthyr (South Wales) Ltd) and some licensed GCN ecologists looking to provide experience to ecologists looking to gain their own GCN licences. The ponds at Ffos y Fran including those within the central ecological area that have records of GCN are proposed to be used for the surveys/training. This will be undertaken in the 2023 season. The data has been agreed to be shared both with Merthyr (South Wales) Ltd and with MTCBC for our biodiversity records.
- Reptile surveys:
 - Nant Yr Odyn Tip (2026)
 - Abercanaid Tip (2026)
 - Giant's Bite (2026)
- Turkey Oak survey:
 - Taf Fechan Wildlife Trust Reserve (2026)
- Improving people's understanding of the natural world (e.g., species, habitats, biodiversity and ecosystems) can bring about behavioural change and encourage positive actions. This can be achieved through environmental education focussing on, for example, the statutory education sector, community education, outdoor activities and leisure services. Education and training can also be provided for staff from other service functions/departments to help them to meet their obligations under the S6 duty.
- Education in schools can also bring about behavioural change and encourage positive actions in younger residents. Relevant school actions include:
 - 100 Learners in Year 9 engaged in a range of workshops with Bute Energy and CWIC. They also utilised the 'Have a Go' equipment to support skills development. Learners engaged in a Green Skills Showcase, where they were able to explore future opportunities in green skills and gain some knowledge and understanding of the future green jobs. Additionally, learners were able to meet employers committed to building a sustainable Wales.
 - Forest Schools training has been established with two schools leading.
 - 26 practitioners trained at Level 3.
 - The programme utilises the outdoor learning environment to foster the development of both wellbeing and learning skills. Learners engage in developing an understanding of the world around them and using it in a sustainable way.

- Ysgol Santes Tudful were asked by the Schools Inspectorate to provide a case study on its work in relation to providing highly effective experiences for pupils to develop skills outdoors
- Community Focused Schools (CFS) Capital Funding has been utilised to support several school physical environments, including outdoor spaces. Two CFS officers have been trained at Level 4 to support delivery of Forest Schools and other outdoor learning-based approaches across Merthyr Tydfil Schools.

- The [MERTHYR TYDFIL NATURE RECOVERY ACTION PLAN 2025-2030](#) – due to be completed in 2026 includes the following MTCBC High Level Statement:
 - *‘Throughout our operations we will (where possible) seek to maintain and enhance the diversity of our natural environment to make it resilient and able to support the social, economic, health and well-being of local communities, both for enjoyment and for its own inherent value’.*
- Merthyr Tydfil has a Councillor who is the ‘Biodiversity and Open Spaces Champion’ for the Council.
- Support for the delivery of actions ensuring the S6 duty is met across all areas of the Council is provided by the LPA Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer.
- In-house ecological expertise is provided by a Specialist Advisor Ecologist in liaison with both Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Government (WG) officers where necessary and appropriate.
- Further expertise regarding biodiversity is provided by the Council’s Biodiversity Officer and their team.
- A work experience programme has created three placements in Neighbourhood Services e.g. cemeteries.
- Volunteer participation for the benefit of biodiversity is encouraged and supported by the Countryside Team in projects across MTCB.
- This document represents a standalone report fulfilling the requirement of Welsh Government to provide an update of the Council’s S6 duty every three years.
- MTCBC has continued to support biodiversity action through funding and/or partnerships, for example through:
 - The Merthyr Tydfil Biodiversity Partnership (MTBP) is chaired by MTCBC’s Biodiversity Officer and supported by MTCBC. The MTBP that includes a wide range of partners:
 - Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
 - Welsh Government (WG)
 - The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales
 - South East Wales Rivers Trust (SEWRT)
 - Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC)
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
 - Other local groups, e.g.,
 - Glamorgan Bird Club
 - Merthyr Tydfil Angling Alliance (MTAA)
 - Friends of Nant Llwynog Park
- MTCBC has, for example, provided funding and other support to the following:
 - Glamorgan Bird Club – support in relation to bird box erection in a range of areas around the County Borough. Plus, support of bird-related training days.
 - Merthyr Valley Homes – support regarding a range of events.
 - Merthyr Naturalists – provision plants and habitat boxes.
 - South East Wales Rivers Trust – provision of bird/bat boxes, coir rolls, floating islands, sculptures, signage, insect towers.
- Examples of work facilitated via the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF):

- Chapel Row, Park: installation of pathways, seating, play areas, sculptures, bee towers. Plus, creation of orchards and planting, including trees.
- Maple Crescent, Trefechan: installation of seating, sculpture, play areas. Plus, creation of orchards and planting of trees.
- Bronheulog Terrace, Troedyrhiw: installation of pathways, seating, sculpture, signage, shelter with green roof, wetland scrapes. Plus, creation of orchards and vegetable growing beds and planting of trees.

4. Review of the S6 duty

- This document represents the second review of the duty since the 2019 report. Following the publishing of the S6 report, MTCBC will have met its duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 for the period 2022-2025. Ongoing and further actions will be required to meet the duty moving forward towards the next reporting deadline in 2028.