

# Nature in Carmarthenshire

*...our approach for local action 2020 – 2030*

## PART 3

Implementing national action locally  
– a partnership plan for nature recovery

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*Partneriaeth Natur*  
SIR GÂR • CARMARTHENSIRE  
*Nature Partnership*



**Part 3** considers the priority areas for action within the county for the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership. These reflect the objectives of the Welsh Nature Recovery Action Plan [1] and the opportunities identified within the South West Area Statement [2].



Derek Moore

### 3.1 Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan

The Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) was launched by the Wales Biodiversity Strategy Board in 2015, members of which represent both land and sea managers, Natural Resources Wales, the environmental third sector (neither public nor private organisations), local authorities, national parks, Wales Biodiversity Partnership and Welsh Government. It is a plan for everyone in Wales.

It aims to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss in Wales by:

- putting nature at the heart of our decision-making,
- increasing the resilience of our natural environment,
- taking specific action for habitats and species.

The NRAP sets out how Wales will deliver the commitments of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's

Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the associated biodiversity targets [34, 35] in Wales. The NRAP (**which is currently under review**) identifies action that can be delivered in the short term and sets a course to deliver longer-term commitments beyond 2020. The actions will be kept under regular review. A set of indicators will also be developed to measure the progress of the NRAP against objectives.

The NRAP links to and complements The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment Act (Wales) 2016, two important pieces of legislation that public bodies such as the council, community councils, health boards, etc. have to follow (see Appendix 1)

Within the NRAP objectives have been identified to address the issues that are driving the decline in biodiversity, and to support recovery.

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

**In Carmarthenshire, a framework for helping nature is one of the mechanisms by which these national objectives can be delivered locally.**

### 3.2 Nature Recovery in Carmarthenshire... identifying challenges and opportunities

When producing any plan it is important to explore what any partnership can reasonably achieve and where the challenges and opportunities are. This will influence the structure of any plan, guide realistic local objective setting and help focus where the most effective action can take place.

It must not be forgotten that much good work has been carried out by partners for years, and continues to be carried out, alone and through joint working, and that this already contributes to the national objectives.

In developing a new plan we must consider **why**, despite much work, investment and effort, there have been continuing declines of many species and habitats across Wales. Whilst the plan should be ambitious, it must be realistic about what action the Partnership can reasonably deliver. There are challenges / constraints to undertaking action along with opportunities, which should not be overlooked.

### 3.3 Challenges

- **Land ownership and sphere of influence of the partners** – where can we realistically work? How big a sphere of influence do we have in order successfully deliver larger-scale projects. In general, most partners manage scattered holdings and have limited influence on some of the larger tracts of land (e.g. Tywi Valley) where large-scale changes could be made outside protected sites.
- **Ongoing resource constraints** - this influences partners' ability to undertake action, not just project

work, but the everyday running of some of the partner organisations. When some partner organisations have to spend significant amounts of time to find core costs, scope to seek grants or contribute to novel projects is significantly constrained.

- **Continued loss of ecological expertise in Wales**, and lack of 'future experts', which will impact on any future success. For example, NRW are increasingly constrained in their important role to provide ecological advice to other organisations.
- **Implementation of legislation** - Despite the enhanced environmental legislation, it still appears to be a challenge to implement/integrate this by all who have a responsibility to do so, e.g. within public bodies, agriculture, forestry, marine and development. This might be related to a lack of resources and conflicting priorities, but this cannot deflect from the requirement to do so.
- **Navigating/interpreting** the range of emerging and extensive national

policy, strategies, legislation and guidance (along with all the associated acronyms) - these can be dense to read and off-putting to use. The challenge is to interpret these using straightforward language, especially as there is a focus on 'place-based solutions' which must be delivered by a range of organisations, who may well not be familiar with the above.

- There are continued and increasing impacts from **climate change** – any climate change policies need to be integrated with policies for biodiversity. A climate emergency is a biodiversity emergency. Climate change mitigations can exacerbate the biodiversity crisis so there is always a need for them to be considered together.
- **Brexit** - The departure from the European Union could present some very real challenges (and opportunities) for nature conservation and land management within the county in the face of a challenging economic environment, at a time when biodiversity continues to decline.
- The **challenge to galvanise action** amongst those who work outside conservation but who can help make an impact, e.g. business, tourism, industry. The challenge that many partners are considering is how to inform, inspire and provide the tools to change working culture and practices and the resources it takes to do this. There is nothing better than people on the ground available to talk to.
- The challenge of **effectively communicating biodiversity issues** to a range of people and the skills and time that requires. We must use clear language and well thought out arguments or 'story telling' and



where necessary be engaging, to ensure we are listened to.

- Partners need to be able to **access all relevant biodiversity data and evidence**, to use on local projects and to develop local nature recovery plans. There is a lot of information out there, but it needs to be drawn together at an appropriate scale to be made available for all. Voluntary contributors of large sets of data (e.g. county recorders), whose data often significantly contributes to mapping and priority setting, should have support to be able to support and map the data they collect.
- The **nature of grant funding** (it is competitive, but organisations are often expected to collaborate) can compromise potential good outcomes as the element of competition can inhibit useful discussions between organisations. In addition, grants often only last 3 years and are often focused around ‘innovation’. This means that many excellent initiatives have to be ended because they cannot receive ongoing support. This includes some critical long-term monitoring programmes.
- Much important work is undertaken **by volunteers** and we rely on a lot of good will that they remain involved. There appears to be an increased expectation of what they can deliver on the ground for us. In addition, supporting volunteers and their varied needs (often by NGOs) – even getting them on to site – comes at a cost for those organisations supervising them.
- The **Covid-19** pandemic is having, and will have, inevitable consequences on biodiversity and conservation. Stress on



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governments and economies caused by the pandemic (internationally, nationally and locally) will likely reduce the resources available to turn around trends in biodiversity loss and climate change. Whilst there have been some improvements, e.g. in air quality and noise pollution, it is likely that these will be short term.

There is an opportunity however to use this to emphasise the links between healthy, resilient ecosystems and human well-being with the hope that it will motivate efforts to address biodiversity loss with future biodiversity frameworks being more transformational and co-operative.

However, there are always opportunities...

### 3.4 Opportunities

- A previous focus on protected sites has perhaps allowed significant losses of biodiversity outside the network of designated sites, within in the wider countryside [35]. The network of protected sites outside the national network of habitats

must be considered as integral to the future success of any nature recovery. The partners can contribute to this via the management of their own, often non-designated sites, and through engagement through groups such as the Carmarthenshire Meadows Group. However, it has to be acknowledged that **agriculture has the biggest potential to create resilient networks with the landscape.**

- The **shared local objectives** of the plan will help us to target time and resources to develop and deliver projects at the appropriate scale to maximise nature recovery, in turn supporting healthy, functioning ecosystems and the associated multiple benefits. The plan provides a framework so that relevant organisations can come together to plan and look at options and understand who is delivering what and where in the county. We can continue to share knowledge, training opportunities, etc. and share examples of successes and best practice working well (and not so well!). This is a fundamental function out of which good ideas grow.

- Some partners manage large areas of land and/or have wider functions. The partnership provides **opportunities for partners to work together** sharing experience/expertise over wider areas. We can also look to work (more) with new partners, e.g. Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water, South Wales Trunk Roads Agency, Network Rail, farming unions when the opportunity arises.
- We can **contribute to the evidence** of the range of benefits of effective habitat management (e.g. peat bog conservation could help mitigate climate change, store water and help the associated habitats and species) and identify various 'nature-based solutions' (see Appendix 1 - Natural Resources Policy) which have multiple benefits, e.g. local flood defence and building ecosystem resilience. NB. We will need to explore what these **nature-based solutions** could be in a Carmarthenshire context, so we can understand more about the opportunities they may present.
- As WG determines what Wales' new (post-Brexit) land management schemes will look like, there is a real opportunity for the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership to help (in terms of local delivery) guide the new payment schemes and the farm advisory network with **local advice and guidance**.
- The Nature Partnership is in a good place to look at **developing resilient ecological networks**, linking up protected sites with other sites/habitats within the landscape, influencing action, **setting priorities** and looking at **local projects** that might do this. We can work beyond agri-environment schemes with smaller interested landowners and look to develop networks using involved targeted habitat restoration and the development of projects at a variety of scales. However, we need to be clear about what these networks will deliver and what they will look like and, importantly, what we need to do to develop them. WWBIC could provide the baseline and the CNP could 'join the dots' particularly with respect to connectivity. This will help inform the priorities and project development where we see gaps and could help with planning by informing ecological issues in planning applications.
- To **inspire/provide guidance** to the increasing number of community-led/business/tourism-led projects in the county. We could develop an online 'hub' to provide information for people.
- The plan can link with the South West Area Statement [2] and Public Service Boards, **to maximise opportunities and priority setting** and to be guided by the information in the State of Natural Resources Report [19].
- To continue to be **opportunistic and innovative** in the way we work, not necessarily constrained or defined by the process-driven environment in which we are asked to function.
- Using our experience/knowledge to **galvanise action amongst those who work outside conservation** but who can help make an impact, e.g. public, schools, business, tourism. We can work together to decide how to inform, inspire and provide the tools/information to encourage positive action. We could look to draw in expertise from these sectors where some positive action has already been

taken.

- The plan can **help inform/support funding applications** so that any project can demonstrate that it meets local objectives for nature recovery through reference to the plan and how the organisation applying are part of a partnership that all buy in to these principles.
- The local plan, because of the way it is structured, can support decision making and can be much more **responsive to new information or change** in legislation/policy/research.

### 3.5 Taking action locally

The Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership have discussed the six national NRAP objectives. The statements that follow are based on outcomes from a partnership workshop and subsequent consultation. They can undoubtedly be added to. It should be noted that they refer to the functions of the Nature Partnership as a whole and that the public bodies within the partnership have a duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to consider biodiversity which should guide them when they deliver all their functions. **These will be used to develop action locally.**





H. Foster



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## OBJECTIVE 1

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

It is essential that the importance of biodiversity, its critical role in the functioning of our ecosystems, and therefore the links to our well-being, is understood and acted upon by all decision makers. The partners in the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership (CNP) have worked, and will continue to seek opportunities, to engage (individually and in partnership) with the public, schools, businesses, colleagues and land owners in the county to raise awareness about Carmarthenshire's biodiversity, its importance and the need to consider it in all decision making. It is a fundamental role of many of the partners.

The CNP considers that this objective could be achieved in Carmarthenshire when:

- clear, simple, consistent messages are used so that all understand the importance of biodiversity and the natural environment and why we need to conserve and enhance it, including the links to climate emergency.
- all are empowered to take action or challenge decisions on sound, accessible ecological information.
- biodiversity is integrated into curricula at all levels and is taught looking at local habitats and species so that we empower/inform/excite young people about our natural environment through primary, secondary and tertiary education (linking to outdoor learning and Eco-schools).
- for public bodies - that biodiversity is embedded as part of decision making at all levels.

... and will focus on local action that will contribute to achieving this.

## OBJECTIVE 2

### Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management

For many partners in the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership safeguarding species and habitats of principal importance and improving their management is a fundamental part of their purpose, as well as encouraging others to do so. For others this is also carried out through their statutory responsibilities.

The CNP considers that this objective could be achieved in Carmarthenshire when:

- there is clear knowledge about what our priorities for species and habitat action are in Carmarthenshire, based on good-quality information, identified priority areas for action and their role in building resilient ecological networks at the landscape scale.
- a wider range of people / organisations / landowners / communities have been engaged with to undertake action – and that they understand that all can take positive action.
- there are more designated sites and better management of those already protected (and enforcement action undertaken when required).
- that statutory decision makers fully consider Section 7 species and habitats of principal importance as part of their decision making.
- agriculture and conservation work in partnership and not in opposition and there are better targeted and appropriately flexible agri-environment schemes incorporating local knowledge and more on-the-ground expertise to support landowners.
- there are more opportunities for collaboration between partners and others on long-term funded projects, working across boundaries (landowners and counties).

... and will focus on local action that will contribute to achieving this.



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## OBJECTIVE 3

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

Many of the partners in the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership have sought/continue to seek opportunities to increase ecosystem resilience within Carmarthenshire's natural environment through their work, either via direct management/creation projects or identifying opportunities via survey, data collection, raising awareness and decision making.

The CNP considers that this objective could be achieved in Carmarthenshire when:

- land managers/decision makers understand the importance of resilience (connectivity, diversity, extent, condition) and how it can be achieved – small and large scale, urban and rural – through clear shared guidelines so that we have sustainable long-term management of sites/habitats.
- there is adequate local information on where habitat connectivity would be most effective and what these connections could/should be – via priority mapping to inform potential restoration/creation opportunities.
- this information is available and understandable to all to encourage action at all levels so that a wider range of people/organisations/land managers are engaged to undertake action – this would include better managed public land (green infrastructure), effective agri-environment schemes and engineering work being designed to work with the nature and take advantage of natural features/processes.
- that statutory decision makers fully consider resilience as part of their decision making.
- that any local climate change plans include information on biodiversity and ecosystem resilience in the context of climate change.

... and will focus on local action that will contribute to achieving this.



## OBJECTIVE 4

### Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

The key pressures on species and habitats are now much better understood as drivers of change in Wales: development, certain land management practices, climate change, pollution, INNS, etc. All partners are dealing with these in some way through their work, whether it be impacts on specific species or habitats they manage/monitor/record.

The CNP considers that this objective could be achieved in Carmarthenshire when:

- we have an assessment of the key pressures in Carmarthenshire, their location and priority – to feed into and inform project development.
- there are funded projects to address identified local pressures with capacity for monitoring and follow up.
- the legislation in place is implemented fully to tackle pressures on biodiversity, e.g. pollution, INNS.
- we have moved towards farming/forestry/development practices that are sustainable.
- we have gained a better understanding of 'nature-based solutions' and how they can be used.
- we have more knowledge about the extent and effective management of INNS.
- we have resilient ecosystems (see previous objectives).
- there is effective local action on future proofing against impacts of climate change.

... and will focus on local action that will contribute to achieving this.



B. Langridge

## OBJECTIVE 5

### Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring

For all partners in the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership working to improve the evidence on which they base their work is a priority. This could be for species or habitat management, understanding the pressures upon habitats/species and the action required to help conserve them, along with monitoring the results of action. This information is needed to help with decision making and to help with raising awareness and a functioning local record centre is essential for this.

The CNP considers that this objective could be achieved in Carmarthenshire when:

- there are fully funded functioning sustainable Local Record Centres, who receive all the biological data in the

county (including the Carmarthenshire data from national surveys) and can act as a 'hub' for sharing data/reports/experience locally.

- we have invested in knowledge and skills to ensure that adequate surveys are undertaken by suitably qualified people – education and training.
- the public/schools/communities are motivated to record and send in records and are engaged through meaningful local citizen science projects or through taking part in national surveys.
- that decisions are evidence-based at all levels and based on good-quality data.
- the evidence gaps in Carmarthenshire are understood and addressed.
- there are better links between universities and local partnerships to build on existing collaborative working.
- we have developed local indicators that can be easily monitored and are consistent, where possible, with national indicators.
- we have consistent reporting mechanisms so that data from projects can be shared and that they are clear, reasonable and provide useful ecological information to inform future work.
- based, on the above we can produce an accurate State of Nature Report for Carmarthenshire using traffic light system based on best evidence and expert opinion.

... and will focus on local action that will contribute to achieving this.





## OBJECTIVE 6

### Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

The Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership (formerly Biodiversity Partnership) has been in existence for over 20 years and has worked together to share experience and expertise, undertaken partnership projects and been a forum for discussing the ever changing world of national policy, strategy and legislation. The Partnership has worked with the Wales Biodiversity Partnership to influence policy and legislation within Wales.

The CNP is a 'knowledge network' and 'Nature Hub', with extensive know-how, experience, connections, capacity, continuity and common purpose. The CNP is in a good position to work at a smaller scale, to take local action as

individual organisations or to inform/participate in large-scale partner projects within the area. In addition, the CNP can assess local biodiversity priorities for action and provide/promote information to the public.

The CNP considers that this objective could be achieved in Carmarthenshire when:

- We have developed a NRP for Carmarthenshire that reflects our local distinctiveness and maximises the opportunities in the Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan.
- We have an Area Statement that reflects identified local issues and links effectively with the CNP.
- That NGO partners are sustained in the long term to continue to undertake work in the county.
- Local land managers can link with local experts (CNP) to make better decisions.
- NRW can effectively deliver the range their functions and support others to take action and share information.
- That there is an Environment commissioner for Wales to challenge public bodies at the top about their Environment Act duty – like the WFG Act commissioner.
- That funding is sustainable and innovative funding mechanisms are explored which bring in new partners.

... and will focus on local action that will contribute to achieving this.

Welsh Government is looking at action under two areas with underlying themes to guide action:

- **Action for Places** – targeted spatial action to deliver benefits for biodiversity, species and habitats and to avoid negative impacts.  
Theme: maintaining and enhancing resilient ecological networks.
- **Action for People** – transformative change to influence behaviour and take investment decisions to ensure we maintain and enhance biodiversity.  
Themes: knowledge and knowledge transfer, realising new investment and funding, upskilling for delivery and mainstreaming and reporting our progress.

These will inform future action within the Carmarthenshire Nature Recovery Plan which will be developed by the partnership.

### 3.6 Reporting

Currently a simple annual report is produced showing the range of action undertaken by the partners each year on the ground. These are sent to WG and placed on the biodiversity pages of the Council website.

Future reporting will be amended to follow WG guidelines but will likely still require an annual report capturing local action by the partners and possibly using a traffic light system.

This will be developed as information/guidance is received but will continue to be placed on the council website.