



**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL**  
**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**  
**COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COMMITTEE SUMMONS**

C Hanagan  
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council  
The Pavilions  
Cambrian Park  
Clydach Vale, CF40 2XX

Meeting Contact: Hannah Williams - Council Business Unit (07385401954)

**YOU ARE SUMMONED** to a virtual meeting of **CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB COMMITTEE** to be held on **TUESDAY, 6TH DECEMBER, 2022** at **3.00 PM**.

Non Committee Members and Members of the public may request the facility to address the Committee at their meetings on the business listed although facilitation of this request is at the discretion of the Chair. It is kindly asked that such notification is made to Democratic Services by Friday, 2 December 2022 on the contact details listed above, including stipulating whether the address will be in Welsh or English.

**AGENDA**

**Page  
No's**

**1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

**Note:**

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest; and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they **must** notify the Chairman when they leave.

**2. MINUTES**

To approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2022.

**3. HYDRO ELECTRIC GENERATION AT TREFOREST WEIR**

To receive the report of the Director of Corporate Estates, which provides an overview of feasibility work completed for the development of a low-head Hydro Electric Scheme at Treforest Weir on the River Taff, Treforest, Pontypridd. This report is based on a preliminary feasibility report produced by a specialist company that reviews the hydropower options at Treforest Weir.

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**4. HYDRO ELECTRIC GENERATION AT DARE VALLEY COUNTRY PARK**

To receive the report of the Director of Corporate Estates which provides an overview of feasibility work completed for the development of a high-head Hydro Electric Generation Scheme at Dare Valley Country Park. This report is based on a feasibility study produced by a specialist company that reviewed the viability of a previously considered scheme.

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**5. UPDATE REPORT ON THE CARBON FOOTPRINT PROJECT AND WELSH PUBLIC SECTOR NET ZERO CARBON REPORT FOR 2021-2022**

To receive the report of the Director of Corporate Estates which provides an update to the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee with regards to the Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Reporting Scheme and Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's submission under that regime for the Financial Year 2021/22.

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**6. RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

To receive the report of the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication which provides the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee with the feedback and comments of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee following its pre-scrutiny of the Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

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**7. THE COUNCIL'S S6 BIODIVERSITY DUTY: THREE YEAR REPORT TO WELSH GOVERNMENT 2020-2022**

To receive the report of the Director of Prosperity and Development, which provides the Sub-Committee with an update on the progress in developing and implementing the Council's S.6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan; and seeks approval to submit the Action Plan to Welsh Government and to publicise it on the Council's website as required by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

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## **8. URGENT BUSINESS**

To consider any items which the Chair by reason of special circumstances is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

### **Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication**

#### **Circulation:-**

The Chair and Vice-Chair:

(County Borough Councillor C Leyshon and County Borough Councillor A Crimmings respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor R Lewis, Councillor M Norris and Councillor J Barton

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## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee held on Monday, 3 October 2022 at 10.00 am

### **County Borough Councillors - Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)

Councillor A Crimmings    Councillor M Norris  
Councillor J Barton

### **Officers in attendance:-**

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive  
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development  
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates  
Ms L Lawson, Performance Manager  
Ms E Dean, Environment Planner  
Mr A Roberts, Head of Energy & Carbon Reduction  
Mr J Atkins, Graduate Officer  
Ms E Brown, Graduate Officer  
Mr D Carter, Graduate Officer  
Ms F Edwards, Graduate Officer  
Mr L Marengi, Graduate Officer

#### **1 Welcome and Apology**

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee and an apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor R. Lewis.

#### **2 Declaration of Interest**

The Director of Frontline Services declared the following interest in respect of Item 7 – Corporate Estates Energy Update: 'The report includes an update in relation to Amgen Cymru, for which I am a Director. As the report is for information purposes only, I will not need to leave the meeting'.

#### **3 Minutes**

The Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 as an accurate reflection.

#### **4 Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee Arrangements**

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication presented the report which informed Members of the new function of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee, following changes to the Leader's Scheme of Delegation at the Council's twenty-seventh Annual General Meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

The key amendments included the Committee's new function as a Sub-Committee, its Terms of Reference, Membership, and the appointment of the Council's Climate Change Champion. The Director noted that, in addition to the above-mentioned changes to the Leader's Scheme of Delegation, the AGM also put in place a Scrutiny function for Climate Change, namely the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity was pleased to note the changes to the Sub-Committee, noting that climate priorities had been embedded into the work across the Local Authority.

The Climate Change Champion spoke positive of the report and emphasised the importance of partnership work with local community groups, which would strengthen the work of the Council.

The Chair thanked the Director for the report and the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the content of the report.

#### **5 Future Work Programme**

The Service Director of Democratic Services provided the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee with the proposed list of matters requiring consideration during the 2022-23 Municipal Year. The Service Director explained that the work programme would inform the work of the newly established Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee; and would allow Members of the public and community groups the opportunity to register their interest to speak at future Sub-Committee meetings on specific matters of interest.

The Climate Change Champion emphasised the need for the Council to be proactive in respect of local community groups, as opposed to there being an expectation for individuals to contact and attend the Sub-Committee meetings.

The Chair thanked the Director for the report and Members **RESOLVED:**

1. To approve the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee Work Programme for the 2022-23 Municipal Year

#### **6 Climate Change Carbon Footprint Dashboard**

The Council's Performance Manager and team of Graduate Officers provided the Sub-Committee with a detailed demonstration of the Carbon Footprint Dashboard project. The officers spoke of the importance of the Council understanding and reducing its footprint to contribute to Welsh Government's Net Zero target.

Members were reminded that the Council had been calculating its Carbon Footprint for the past two years, but the aim of the Dashboard project was to

make accurate data more transparent and accessible, to raise awareness of the footprint and to inform conversation about the actions needed to reduce specific emissions within the Local Authority.

It was noted that although there was scope for further development, the Data Dashboard was ready to be tested as an operational tool, and that external organisations had expressed an interest in its progress to date.

The Chair recognised that developing the dashboard was challenging and timely and took the opportunity to extend her thanks to the Graduate Officers for their hard work in developing such a beneficial tool.

The Climate Change Champion recognised that the Dashboard would be a useful tool for the Council but questioned whether it would be suitable for members of the public. The Performance Manager explained that at the current point in time, the Dashboard was for internal use but, resources permitted, could be further developed to include the footprint of the wider County Borough.

The Climate Change Champion commented that she would welcome an informal meeting with the officers to discuss her queries in terms of specific definitions.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity took the opportunity to congratulate the Graduate Officers for the work undertaken and commented that it was a huge leap from the position the Council were in just two years ago.

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure also thanked the Graduate Officers for the presentation. The Cabinet Member commented that the dashboard gives reassurance to the Council that progress was being made, whilst highlighting the areas which require additional work.

The Chief Executive extended his gratitude to the Graduate Officers and to the Performance Manager for co-ordinating an excellent piece of work, which was sector leading in Welsh Local Government. The Chief Executive stated that establishing the Dashboard allows Managers to review, challenge and act upon data to improve the Council's Carbon Footprint, when they hadn't been able to do so before. An example used was the ability to compare school buildings and decipher whether action can be undertaken to reduce both energy costs and emissions.

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contributions.

## **7 Proposed Solar Farm**

The Director of Corporate Estates provided the Sub-Committee with an update on the work underway in the development of a 'Land Based Solar Farm', to be located on Council owned land located at Coed Ely, on an 84-acre 'terraced' former colliery site, near Tonyrefail. The facility will, when constructed, be an asset owned by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

The Director described the project as a 6MW Solar Farm, with a 1MW private wire to a local site. Due to the signing of a Non-Disclosure Agreement, the Director was unable to name the partner of the local site. The Director explained that the project had the potential to 'offset' over 1,500 tonnes of carbon per-annum and approaching 54,000 tonnes over the expected 35yr 'minimum' lifecycle of the project.

The Director drew Members' attention to Section 5.2 of the report, which detailed the positive progress of the project to date, despite uncertainty within the energy market.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity thanked the officers for the work undertaken. The Cabinet Member noted the fluctuating market but commented that the proposed project was viable and would contribute to the Local Authority's carbon targets.

The Chair reiterated the Cabinet Member's comments and the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the content of the report as part of the ongoing work in response to climate change ambitions and agreed to the further progress of the project proposals, in line with the contents of the report; and
2. To receive further report(s) to provide updates on progress as/when deemed appropriate.

## **8 Corporate Estates Energy Update**

The Director of Corporate Estates and the Head of Energy and Carbon Reduction provided the Sub-Committee with an update in respect of the work underway on the development of the following renewable energy projects and Climate Change Corporate Governance work:

- Solar farm installation;
- Geo-Thermal Technology;
- Amgen Developments;
- Wind Power Aspirations;
- Hydro Electricity Prospects;
- Carbon Reduction Programme;
- Climate Change Working Group (CCWG);
- Carbon Footprint Working Group;
- Electric Vehicle Charging & Transportation Working Group;
- Natures Assets Working Group;
- Community Activity, Comms and Engagement; and
- Built Assets & Construction Working Group.

The Director also advised that at the meeting of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Members considered the Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy Implementation Plan and provided an update in respect of the key comments made.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity spoke positive of the report and the many projects and developments underway, which contribute to the reduction of the Council's Carbon Footprint. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that there were restraints with the grid itself, which had halted the Council's progress, but hoped that there would be a solution for more capacity soon. The Cabinet Member went on to inform the Sub-Committee of his discussions with the Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council in respect of the Mine-Water energy project. The Cabinet Member advised that there were



talks of Welsh Government and Bridgend County Borough Council establishing a toolkit of support and lessons learned for Local Authorities.

The Chair thanked the officers for the detailed update and the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the contents of the update report as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee; and
2. To receive further reports during 2022 and 2023, providing updates on progress within key areas.

## **9 'Action for Nature': The Local Nature Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf**

The Director of Prosperity and Development updated the Sub-Committee on the progress of the 'Action for Nature' plan by the RCT Local Nature Partnership.

The Director explained that the first RCT plan 'Action for Nature' was published in 2000, which set out actions for all the national 'priority' habitats and species found in RCT, plus actions for habitats and species considered locally to be important. Following a review in 2018 and a three-year funding bid by the Wales Biodiversity Partnership to Welsh Government for financial support for LBAP partnerships, the Local Nature Plan was updated and changed from a document to a [website](#).

The Director explained that the 'Action for Nature' provides the Council with a very useful, up to date resource relating to biodiversity action and information, based on the expertise and evidence collated by the RCT Local Nature Partnership.

The Climate Change Champion commented that the Local Nature Partnership is vital for the Local Authority and for the well-being of the communities. The Member spoke of the importance of all areas of the Council working in partnership, referencing the planning department in particular, due its decisions having a huge impact on the climate change agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity commented that the website was a fantastic tool and all encompassing. The Cabinet Member also wished to place on record, his thanks to Elizabeth Dean for her work.

The Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the completion of the 'Action for Nature' website by the RCT Local Nature Partnership.

## **10 Peatlands in RCT**

The Director of Prosperity and Development updated the Sub-Committee on works relating to peatlands in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

The Director drew Members' attention to Section 5 of the report, which detailed the work undertaken by officers to gain an understanding of the peatbogs within RCT, from both local and national research. The Director explained that throughout the UK and in RCT, peatlands in the worst condition were emitting the most carbon, and even partial restoration can reduce the emissions. It was

explained that peatland condition is typically improved by raising the water-table and making them wetter.

The Director informed Members of the National Peatland Action Plan, delivered by NRW, which is a 5 year plan of peatland restoration in Wales and a recently launched a grant scheme for 22/23 to enable grant recipients to develop costed restoration projects from September 2022 until April 2023. Members learned that an application to NRW was submitted on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2022 for a peatland restoration planning project at Cwmparc with a total project cost of £23,866.25.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity, again, wished to place on record, his thanks to Elizabeth Dean and Richard Wistow for their work. The Cabinet Member agreed with the Director that the peatbogs were a huge store which the Council were not currently making use of and spoke positive of the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure requested a site visit to the peatlands in RCT to gain a better understanding, to which the Chair agreed would be organised in due course with an invitation extended to all Sub-Committee Members.

The Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the progress reported, and endorse the proposed central objective for peatland management and the direction for future work.

**This meeting closed at 11.16 am**

**COUNCILLOR C LEYSHON  
CHAIR.**



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE**

**6<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

#### **HYDRO ELECTRIC GENERATION AT TREFOREST WEIR**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE ESTATES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE & CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Author(s): David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates and Anthony Roberts, Head of Energy & Carbon Reduction.**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of feasibility work completed for the development of a low-head Hydro Electric Scheme at Treforest Weir on the River Taff, Treforest, Pontypridd. This report is based on a preliminary feasibility report produced by a specialist company that reviews the hydropower options at Treforest Weir.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1. Note the contents of this report as part of the works agenda of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee and agree a way forward.
- 2.2. Agree further expenditure in the development of the proposals, as detailed in section 10.3, to undertake further design studies to assess full potential and develop detailed project proposals.
- 2.3. Consent to receive further progress reports, at appropriate intervals, in the development of the proposals.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Agreeing to take this project forward to the next stage has the potential to make a positive contribution towards the Council's efforts to increase its renewable energy generation across its estate, and in turn, offset our Carbon Footprint in contribution towards achieving our carbon reduction targets.

### **4. PROJECT BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The content of this report provides supporting information for the development of a hydroelectric scheme at Treforest Weir, which was requested by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, at a meeting in 2021.
- 4.2 In RCT's Corporate Plan 2020-24, 'Making A Difference', the Council acknowledged that delivering on our Climate Change commitment is our greatest challenge. In our plan we committed to delivering priorities, all of which will contribute to and benefit from tackling climate change.
- 4.3 Officers have previously reported on the ongoing work to investigate the potential for the development of renewable energy utilising hydroelectric power. These are projects which would be developed by the Council and as such would both contribute to the increase in the renewable energy provision and carbon reduction in the area, thus contributing positively to the Climate Change Agenda.
- 4.4 To achieve the target of net zero, the Council must invest in the development of clean energy generation projects that enable the Council to decarbonize its assets across its estate. In the development of a carbon neutral building energy model(s), solutions may be duplicated to form part of the Net Zero strategy, and with grid constraints becoming an issue in the region, the generation of renewable energy, in this case utilizing hydro power, will assist with introducing potential innovation opportunities across the County Borough.
- 4.5 TLS Renewable Consulting Ltd have produced a preliminary feasibility report, on behalf of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. The brief was to review the potential for installing a 'low-head' hydroelectric generating system at Treforest Weir on the River Taff, making use of the fall in height at the former industrial feeder weir. The exercise is essentially an update of work previously undertaken by Mann Power Consulting Ltd in 2011, which explored using twin Archimedean hydropower screws.
- 4.6 Treforest Weir lies approximately 100m south of the footbridge over the River Taff in the centre of Treforest (see Appendix 'A'). The weir is circa ~50m long, a curved sharp-crested structure with a drop of around 3m between the upper and lower water levels (see Appendix 'B'). The potential scheme is considered a "low-head" hydropower system, where the usable fall in height is no more than 3 meters.

## **5. CURRENT PROJECT SITUATION**

5.1 The TLS report details introductory information on:

- Hydrological assessment
- Cost/benefit analysis estimates
- Turbine technology review
- Site location
- Licensing and Planning including NRW licensing and permitting, abstraction license, fish pass approval, works-in-river consent/ flood risk and planning permission.
- Environmental considerations
- Electricity Connection
- Operational Costs
- Income
- Note on Grant Funding
- Recommendations

5.2 In summary, the report estimates that a hydroelectric, in these circumstances, would produce a max power output of around 400 kW. This would result in an annual saving of 395 tonnes of Carbon dioxide and could generate a total annual income in the region of £250k (if exported to the grid). It is expected that the simple payback period (based on export only) will be under 20 years, representing a fair return on investment in today's market, however the exact payback period is yet to be established and will depend on how, when and where we are able use, the energy generated.

## **6. PROJECT FORWARD PLANNING**

6.1 Looking forward, a topographical survey of key areas, and a formal civil engineering survey, will be required, together with an assessment of electrical output infrastructure costings. These future inputs will be required to produce accurate project elemental costings, which will formulate a detailed budget (the costs presented in the preliminary feasibility report are high level only and merely establish initial viability data, to take to the next stage).

6.2 In addition to the above, further investigation and appraisal will be needed to determine the best option for use of the energy generated, including an assessment into the viability of an array of possible private wire arrangements within the vicinity of the site, as an addition to or as an alternative to, an export arrangement to the National Grid.

6.3 Further work will also be required to confirm and update the original estimates and assumptions in the preliminary feasibility report, when set in the context of the additional information above.

6.4 A timeline will need to be established to allow for the process of obtaining a license from NRW (refer to Section 10), approval from CADW and to assess a realistic timeline in procuring all the necessary equipment, in today's market conditions.

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

7.1 This report is for the purpose of providing an update and consequently an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

## **8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 This report is for the purpose of providing an update and consequently a Welsh Language Impact Assessment is not required, however a copy can be made available in Welsh if requested.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 There are no consultation requirements at present with regards to this supporting report. However, should the project proceed to the next phase of development, appropriate consultations will take place as part of the necessary planning approval process.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 10.1. To consider the development of a hydroelectric scheme at Treforest Weir in greater detail, an in-depth design and cost study will have to be undertaken. by a specialist company, which would include a design study and a cost benefit analysis.
- 10.2. Further investigative works will need to be undertaken, as referred to and listed in section 6 above.
- 10.3. The total budget likely to be required to take the project to the next stage, will be in the region of £40,000, and this level of expenditure can be covered from within existing budgets for such works.
- 10.4. Should the project progress to the detailed design stage then there will be further funding issues to consider at that stage, regarding the appointment of specialist advisers/designers. At present we would estimate the cost of these further requirements to be in the region of £65,000, however this will need to be assessed and reviewed at the appropriate time/stage of proceedings, once other studies above have been completed.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) regulates many aspects of environmental protection and is particularly involved in the protection of inland waters. NRW recognises that hydropower proposals will need to be considered by several NRW teams and will require several different permits. While these may have statutory deadlines, NRW now expects most of the discussion process to take place within a pre-application period which is subject to no formal time limit. Once the formal application is submitted, there is a statutory period of up to 4 months for determining this, though this limit is often extended or exceeded in complex cases.
- 11.2 The site is a series of Grade II listed\* buildings, and as these structures are of 'special interest' every effort must be made to preserve them. Changes to listed buildings are managed through listed building consent, which is part of the planning system. Listing is not a preservation order, but it is intended to help manage change and protect the buildings, the settings and features from unsympathetic works that could damage its special interest.

**12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL- BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 12.1. All actions that may arise resulting from the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee report, will take full regard to the seven National Wellbeing Goals.

**13. CONCLUSION**

- 13.1. This report provides an overview of the preliminary feasibility review of hydropower options at Treforest Weir. It is recommended that the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee approve the necessary funding to enable the Council to appoint industry specialists, to assist its Officers to move forward with the additional investigations required to help develop this proposal into a full and viable project.

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**Contact Officers:                      David Powell              01443 424144    and**

**Anthony Roberts    01443 281146**

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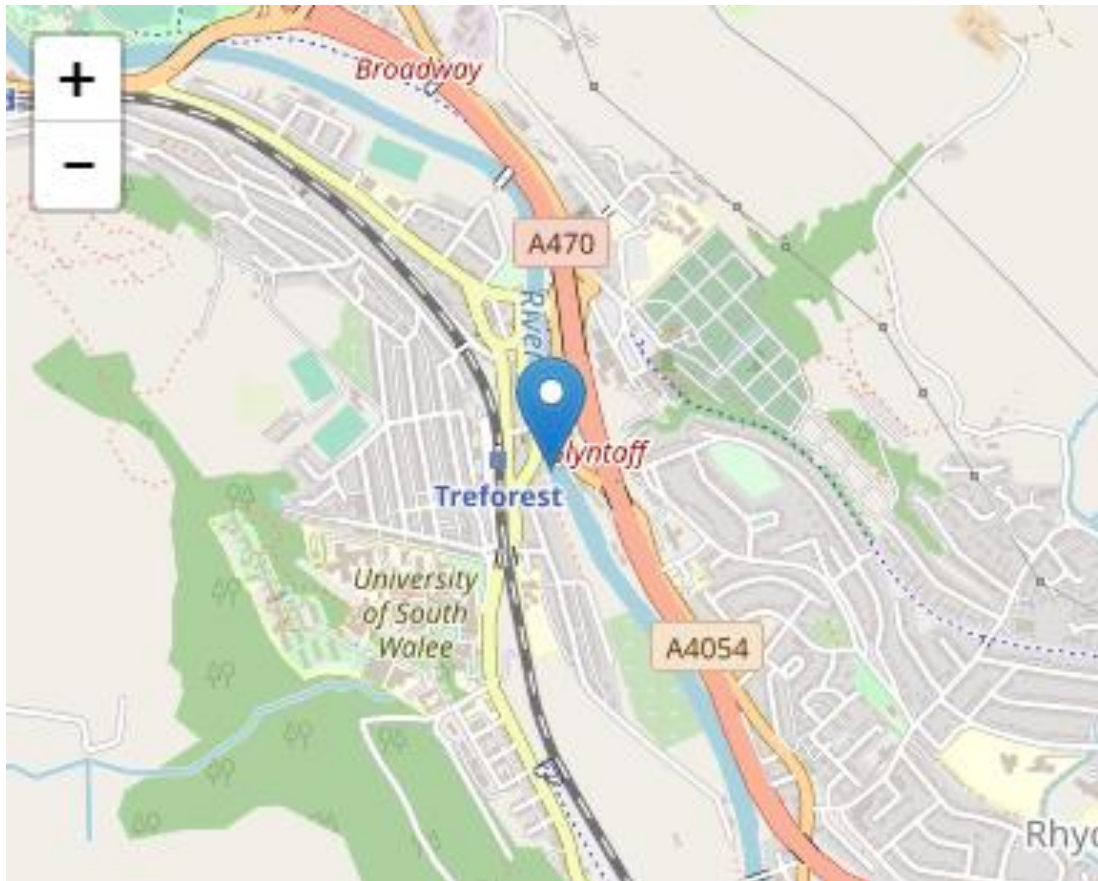
**Appendices to follow on next page:**

**Appendix A   -   Fig' 01 - Location of Weir**

**Appendix B   -   Fig' 02 - Illustration as it stands**

**Appendix A**

Fig' 01 – Location of Weir



**Appendix B**

Fig' 02 – Illustration as it stands







## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE**

**6<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

#### **HYDRO ELECTRIC GENERATION AT DARE VALLEY COUNTRY PARK**

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#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of feasibility work completed for the development of a high-head Hydro Electric Generation Scheme at Dare Valley Country Park. This report is based on a feasibility study produced by a specialist company that reviewed the viability of a previously considered scheme.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1. Note the contents of this report as part of the works agenda of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee and agree a way forward.
- 2.2. Agree further expenditure in the development of these proposals, as detailed within section 10.2, to undertake further design studies which assess the full potential of the project and to help develop detailed project proposals.
- 2.3. Consent to receive further progress reports, at appropriate intervals, in the development of the proposals.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. Agreeing to take this project forward to the next stage has the potential to make a positive contribution towards the Council's efforts to increase its renewable energy generation and contributing towards achieving our ambitious carbon reduction targets.

#### **4. PROJECT BACKGROUND**

- 4.1. The content of this report provides supporting information for the development of a hydroelectric scheme at Dare Valley Country Park, an outline of which was first presented to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in March 2022.
- 4.2. In RCT's Corporate Plan 2020-24, 'Making A Difference', the Council acknowledged that delivering on our Climate Change commitment is our greatest challenge. In our plan we committed to delivering priorities, all of which will contribute to and benefit from tackling climate change.
- 4.3. Officers have previously given an overview on the ongoing work to investigate the potential for the development of renewable energy utilizing hydroelectric power. These are projects which could be developed by the Council and as such would both contribute to the increase in the renewable energy provision and carbon reduction in the area, thus contributing positively to the Climate Change Agenda.
- 4.4. To achieve the target of net zero, the Council must invest in the development of clean energy generation projects that enable the Council to decarbonize assets across its estate. With grid constraints becoming an issue for RCT and for Wales, the generation of renewable energy utilizing hydro power 'on site', behind the meter, will assist with introducing potential innovative opportunities across the County Borough.
- 4.5. In late 2021, The Green Valleys (TGV), a Community Interest Company, produced a feasibility report on behalf of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to assess the potential development of a hydroelectric scheme at Dare Valley Country Park, Aberdare. The site was first assessed in 2014 for feasibility, however, the proposal did not meet the criteria for further advancement at that time. Given the urgency of the current Climate Change agenda and the increasing cost of energy, particularly during 2022, there is now a greater need to implement renewable energy projects.
- 4.6. Dare Valley Country Park is a public park, comprising of 200 acres of woodlands, pasture, and moorland mountainside. The landholding consists of two large ponds to the northwest of the visitor's centre. The project proposal is to install an intake on the existing weir at the upper pond (see Appendices). The powerhouse would be situated on the northwest corner of the lower pond and house the turbine, generator, and control system. Water would be returned to the lower pond from the powerhouse (see Appendix 'A').

#### **5. CURRENT PROJECT DETAILS**

- 5.1. The Feasibility Report, produced on behalf of RCTCBC to assess the potential for the development of a high-head hydroelectric scheme at Dare Valley Country Park, provides preliminary information on the hydrological and geographical assessment, development technology, associated project costs and overall project benefits that could be realized, if the project is delivered. The original 2014 report proposed two options for consideration, at different locations at the site, however, based on the more favourable return, this report concentrates only on the implementation of the preferred option, as detailed within the report.

- 5.2. The outline proposals are that a generator is installed and supplied with water from an intake located 400m away from the generator. The intake would utilise the existing weir wall (see Appendices) and would require a prefabricated steel intake box to be constructed with only minor amendments to the existing impoundment.
- 5.3. The report estimates that a typical hydroelectric scheme, in these particular circumstances, will produce a peak power output of 38.3 kW and an average output of 19 kW. This would give an estimated annual Electrical Power Output of 167,879 kWh and would produce a saving of 84 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide per annum. Assuming a 50/50 split between export potential and behind the meter usage, is estimated that over 20 years the project will generate almost £900,000 (based at 6p/kWh export and 15p/kWh intake) and will provide a financial payback period of under 10 years, however further assessment will be needed as the market conditions change (as explained herein).
- 5.4. Further investigation and appraisal will be needed to determine the best option for use of the energy generated, including an assessment into the viability of a private wire arrangement, where all the energy will be used on site. Export options at times of low on-site base load will also be explored.

## **6. PROJECT FORWARD PLAN AND TIMESCALES**

- 6.1. Further detailed survey work is required to confirm the estimates and theories of the options put forward in the feasibility study/report. Additional investigation is also needed into methods of procuring the necessary equipment, should the scheme eventually go ahead. It is recommended that an internal Project Manager (PM) be appointed to oversee further development.
- 6.2. Supplementary studies are required to assess the feasibility of using the electricity generated from the proposed hydropower scheme, on-site, possibly at the Dare Valley Country Park Hotel complex. It is anticipated that this may be feasible via a private wire arrangement, and it is requested that the service of specialists be appointed to further investigate this potential.
- 6.3. Such a report would assess the energy consumption of the Dare Valley Country Park Hotel and all adjacent facilities, which are RCT owned assets on the site. This would help to determine the suitability of such a private wire arrangement, together with the second option of an export arrangement, whereby any unused energy generated could be sold to the National Grid.
- 6.4. As this stage, the report has been informed by the 'high-level' feasibility study, with indicative budget assumptions used, however, should the further assessment now recommended take place, greater clarity will then be provided on the expected project costs.
- 6.5. The essential procedure of obtaining an abstraction license will need to be assessed and the timeline for such a process confirmed (*see section 10*).
- 6.6. Discussions have taken place with colleagues, in other parts of the Council, regarding flood mitigation proposals that may need to take place around the proposed hydro works. Collaboration between service areas will be needed to ensure that works are neither duplicated or contradictory in nature, particularly in relation to the redesign of the weir and the bespoke outlet that will be needed to feed the hydro works.

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 7.1 This report is for the purpose of providing an update and consequently an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

## **8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 This report is for the purpose of providing an update and consequently a Welsh Language Impact Assessment is not required, however a copy can be made available in Welsh if requested.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 There are no consultation requirements at present with regards to this supporting report. However, should the project proceed to the next phases of development, appropriate consultations will take place as part of the necessary planning approval process.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 10.1. To consider the development of a hydroelectric scheme at Dare Valley Country Park in greater detail, an in-depth design and cost study, by a specialist company would be needed together with specialist environmental studies.
- 10.2. The total budget likely to be required to take the project to the next stage will be in the region of £35,000, and this level of expenditure can be covered from within existing budgets for such works.
- 10.3. At the final quarter of f/y 2021/22, the estimated total budget costs of delivering such a project were in the region of £390,000 (excl' VAT), however, the overall budget figure will need to be reassessed and updated upon the appointment of a Project Manager, and then further refined at each stage of the process.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) regulates many aspects of environmental protection and is particularly involved in the protection of inland waters. The Council recognises that hydropower proposals will need to be considered by several NRW teams and will require several different permits and/or licenses. It is thought that the project could secure a Level 3 Abstraction License, which will be crucial to delivering a cost-effective scheme.
- 11.2. Planning permission is required for any hydropower development and is controlled by RCTCBC. Due to the limited potential impact of this scheme, it is anticipated that the necessary planning permissions will be forthcoming.
- 11.3. Due to the ecological impact, it is recommended that a Tree Survey and Stage 1 Full Habitat Assessment is conducted, to inform the submission of the Planning Application.



## Appendix 'A' ~ Site Orientation

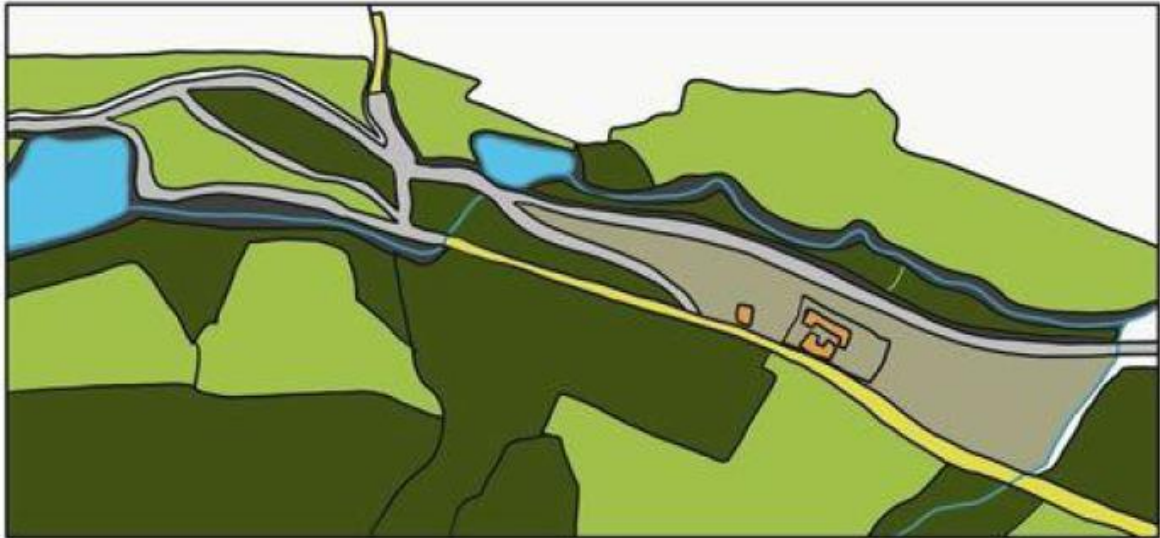


Figure 1: Map illustrating the main watercourse features on site. The best hydropower resource is between the two lakes (blue) with the grid connection taking place at the hotel/visitor centre (orange)

## Appendix 'B' ~ Impoundment at the Upper Lake (Existing)



Figure 2: Existing Impoundment on the Upper Lake.

## Appendix 'C' ~ Typical Impoundment of a Hydro Scheme (Example)



Fig 3 shows another hydro scheme of a similar nature

## Appendix 'D' ~ Revised Impoundment at the Upper Lake (Example Only)

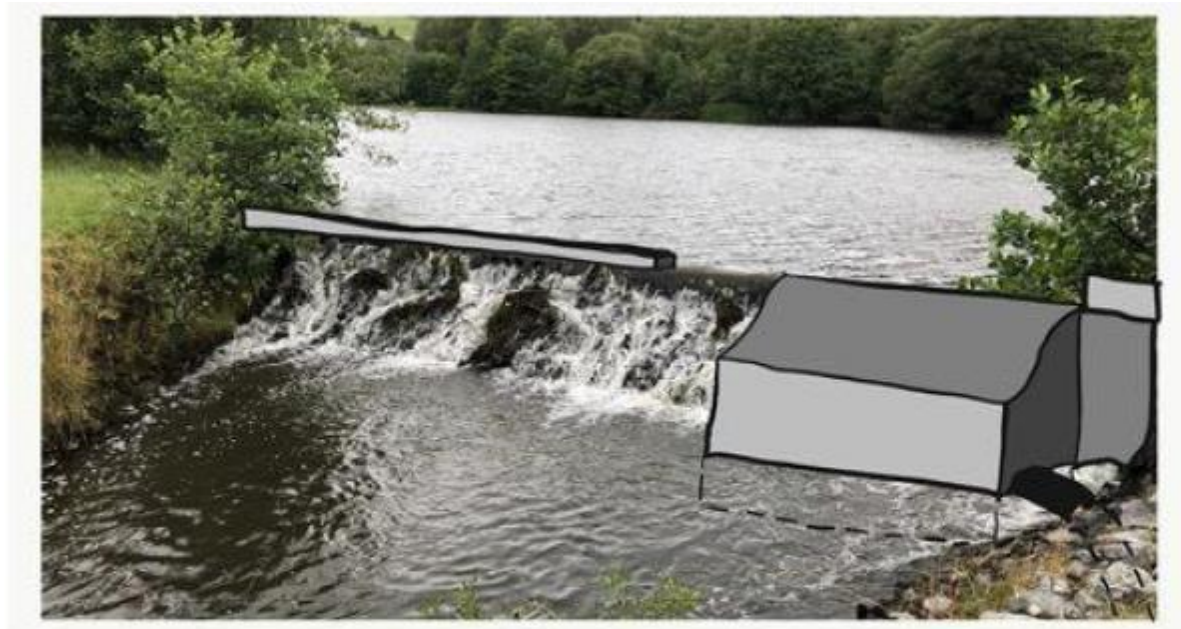


Figure 5: Recommended Intake Location. Outline Intake Design Sketch utilizing existing weir wall, prefabricated steel intake box and only minor amendments to the existing impoundment (adhering to the prospective NRW Requirements for 70/30% flow split and Q95 Hands Off Flow).

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## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE

6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022

## UPDATE REPORT ON THE CARBON FOOTPRINT PROJECT & WELSH PUBLIC SECTOR NET ZERO CARBON REPORT FOR 2021/22

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE ESTATES IN DISCUSSION WITH  
THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE & CORPORATE SERVICES

**Author(s):** David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates &  
Anthony Roberts, Head of Energy & Carbon Reduction.

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update to the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee with regards to the Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Reporting Scheme and Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's submission under that regime for the Financial Year 2021/22.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report as part of the ongoing work under the remit of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee.
- 2.2 Agree to publish the data on the Councils Carbon Footprint Dashboard.
- 2.3 Receive further reports providing additional updates on progress as / when deemed appropriate.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 This report provides background information and an update on the current situation regarding the Carbon Footprint of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and its related activities, whilst noting ongoing development in the Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Reporting process.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 In 2017, the Welsh Government set the ambition of achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. Subsequently in March 2019, the Welsh Government published 'Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales' (which includes Policy 20: Support the public sector to baseline, monitor and report progress towards carbon neutrality). This mirrors Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's own commitment to be organisationally Carbon Neutral by 2030.
- 4.2 In May 2021, the Welsh Government introduced the Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Carbon (NZC) reporting scheme. This scheme encompasses over 60 public sector organisations including all Welsh Unitary Authorities, Health Boards and Trusts, National Park Authorities, Welsh Universities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and various other public sector bodies.
- 4.3 Although launched in May 2021, participants were required to submit carbon emissions data for both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years and now for subsequent years going forward.
- 4.4 The Carbon Reporting process and the plans for the creation of a future Corporate Decarbonisation Plan, for Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's activities, will provide a clear path and defined timescales to achieving the Council's carbon reduction targets by 2030.

#### **5. RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CARBON EMISSIONS 2021/22**

- 5.1 The Council's Carbon Emissions for 2021/22 were submitted to the Welsh Government by the 9th of September 2022 deadline. The NZC Emissions for 2021/22 were 120,907.4 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>.
- 5.2 From the 2021/22 year onward, the Welsh Government has introduced three additional carbon emission reporting requirements namely:
  - Staff Business Travel
  - Staff Commuting
  - Home Working

Whilst Staff Business travel related emissions is relatively straight forward to calculate using data from the Envoy Expenses system, the calculation of emissions related to Staff Commuting and Staff Home Working was more challenging and will require more ongoing refinement for future submissions.

- 5.3 As a result of these changes, the Council's reported carbon emissions for 2021/22 increased when compared to the previous two years. A comparison of the carbon emissions for the first three years of the scheme are set out in Appendix 'A'.
- 5.4 A significant reduction in emissions can be seen in 2020/21 which is attributable to the cessation of several activities across various emission sources due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.5 Over the same three years, the production of Renewable Electricity Generation increased from 1,119,617 kW during 2019/20 to 1,139,889 kW during 2020/21 and 1,163,788 kW in 2021/22.

- 5.6 It should be noted that, under the current rules of the Welsh Government reporting scheme, renewable electricity generated by the Council's photovoltaic systems cannot be used to offset the Council's carbon emissions. Notwithstanding this restriction, most of the energy generated is/can be used 'behind the meter' thus reducing our intake from the National Grid, and then consequently our carbon emissions also.
- 5.7 Equally, although the Council purchases 100% of its electricity from renewable generated certified sources, the Council cannot currently use this to offset our carbon emissions, under current reporting rules.

## **6. ANALYSIS OF THE COUNCIL'S CARBON EMISSIONS.**

- 6.1 Due to the unique nature of the 2020/21 Financial Year and its effect on the Council's Carbon emissions, it was decided to use the 2019/20 Financial Year as the Baseline Year against which progress towards the Council's 2030 target could be assessed.
- 6.2 The introduction of the three new reporting requirements added 5,562.37 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> to the Council's total reported emissions for 2021/22. Without these additional elements, the Council's emissions would have reduced to 115,345 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>, some 1,198 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> lower than the Baseline Year. So, if given a like for like comparison, there would have been a reduction in carbon emissions compared against the Baseline.
- 6.3 The breakdown of the 2021/22 carbon emissions per Emission Categories as a percentage of total emissions illustrates that emissions related to the purchase of Goods and Services dominates the Council's emissions:
- Supply Chain (67%)
  - Natural Gas (12%)
  - Electricity (7%)
  - Fleet & Equipment (5%)
  - Business Travel, Commuting and Home Working (5%)
  - Waste (4%)
  - Other Fuels / Water (>0%)
- 6.4 There has been a slight rise in Natural Gas and Electricity related emissions in 2021/22 when compared to the baseline year. This could be due to several factors including improvements in consumption data provided by energy suppliers, so less reliance on estimated data or variations in weather conditions between the two years.
- 6.5 Waste related carbon emissions have also increased slightly during 2021/22. It should be noted that the waste emissions are not just derived from the waste generated by the Council's own activities but also includes domestic and commercial waste that is collected by the Council. This increase in emissions could be due in part to more employees' home working increasing levels of domestic waste production.
- 6.6 Fleet and Equipment related emissions for 2021/22 have increased substantially when compared with the baseline year. This is due to an improved methodology for data collection and analysis.

- 6.7 Water related carbon emissions have reduced significantly during 2021/22. This is due to the quality of water consumption data supplied to the Council by Dwr Cymru – Welsh Water (DC-WW). Unlike the natural gas and electricity consumption data which can be accessed directly by the Energy and Carbon Reduction Team on a daily / monthly basis, most water consumption data is supplied to the Council on an annual basis by DC-WW. Unfortunately, the billing system operated by DC-WW is not compatible with the energy management software used by most Public Sector organisations. Officers from the CLAW Energy Managers Network are in discussions with DC-WW to find a solution to this matter.
- 6.8 Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) is only used on two Council sites within Rhondda Cynon Taf, one of which has transitioned from using an obsolete, unreliable biomass heating system, to a new more reliable LPG system (during 2021) which has resulted in an increase in LPG related carbon emissions.
- 6.9 It is acknowledged that there is a requirement to continuously improve the data identification, collation, analysis, and reporting mechanisms to take on board changes to the Council's carbon reduction activities and service adaptations. It is the Council's aim to improve the quality and robustness of the data used to complete the Public Sector Net Zero carbon submissions and equally importantly, to help inform the discussions surrounding the transition to a Carbon Neutral authority by 2030.

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required with regards to this report.

## **8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no immediate Welsh Language requirements with regards to this report.

## **9. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 9.1 There are no consultation requirements at present with regards to this report.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 10.1 The costs associated with the calculation of our Carbon Footprint, including those related to the engagement of the Carbon Trust are all currently funded through the relevant cost centres so there are no further financial implications aligned to this report.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report

**12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 12.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update report relating to the progress of the Carbon Footprint project as it relates to the work of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee.

Any future actions that arise due to recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee, will be considered by the Council's Cabinet, and it will take full regard to the Seven National Wellbeing Goals.

**12. CONCLUSION**

- 12.1 This report provides an update to the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee with regards to the work underway in fully understanding the Carbon Footprint of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, it's activities and how it relates to the Welsh Government reporting requirements, alongside the wider carbon reduction commitments of the Council.

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**Contact Officers:                      David Powell                      01443 424144    and**

**Anthony Roberts    01443 281146**

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**Appendix 'A'**

Follows on the next page.

## Appendix 'A'

**Table 1: Rhondda Cynon Taf Council – Net Zero Carbon Emissions**

Emission Category	Tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> 2019/20 (Baseline Year)	Emission Category	Tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> 2020/21	% Change from Baseline Year	Emission Category	Tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> 2021/22	% Change from Baseline Year
Supply Chain	86,728.59	Supply Chain	82,205.83	-5.21%	Supply Chain	81,676.97	-5.82%
Natural Gas	13,590.39	Natural Gas	10,869.16	-20.02%	Natural Gas	14,346.60	5.56%
Electricity	7,775.94	Electricity	5,715.59	-26.50%	Electricity	8,271.97	6.38%
Waste	4,444.99	Waste	3,530.70	-20.57%	Waste	4,842.35	8.94%
Fleet & Equipment	3,750.39	Fleet & Equipment	3,420.78	-8.79%	Fleet & Equipment	6,007.51	60.18%
Water	243.51	Water	216.76	-10.99%	Water	112.01	-54.0%
Other Fuels (LPG)	9.38	Other Fuels (LPG)	48.78	420.04%	Other Fuels (LPG)	87.68	834.75%
					Staff Travel, and Home Working	5,562.37	N/A
<b>Total:</b>	<b>116,543.2</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>106,007.6</b>		<b>Total:</b>	<b>120,907.4</b>	



## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE

6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022

#### PRE-SCRUTINY OF THE RCT TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY

#### REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE & CORPORATE SERVICES

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the feedback and comments of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee following its pre-scrutiny of the Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the comments and observations of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, as detailed in paragraph 5 of the report; and,
- 2.2 Subject to any further comment by Cabinet Members, endorse the recommendations outlined within the Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy Report, as attached to this report at Appendix 1.

#### 3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need for Members to be aware of the comments and observations of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee prior to their consideration of the Council's Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

#### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Trees and Woodland – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy also sets the framework for the Council's commitment to the largest tree planting programme in a generation adopting the right tree, right place, right reason approach.

4.2 Cabinet considered the draft Strategy in June 2022 and agreed to extensive public consultation, the results of which are the subject of the report attached at appendix 2

## **5. PRE-SCRUTINY OF THE TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY REPORT.**

5.1 The Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee met on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022 to consider the Council's Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

5.2 At the meeting of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, Members welcomed the Council's Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy and praised the Council's hard work in this area.

5.3 Members considered that the following points within the report required further examination:

- Consideration on the spacing and planting of fruit trees in clusters to enhance growth, fruit yields and appearance of the trees within the environment and location;
- Whether the report should consider referencing legislation regarding dangerous trees as opposed to the policy referred to in the document. Members felt that the statutory legislation would supersede any local policy and should therefore be included;
- References within the report noting British Standard BS5837 should be checked to confirm that they refer to the updated BS5837 (2012) standard and not previous versions with the name 'BS5837' identifier; and,
- Consideration should also be given to guidance set out by other advisory bodies and relevant associations, such as the NHBC or Royal Botanical Gardens publication and reference materials.

5.4 In conclusion, Members commended the report and commented that the Council's ongoing work in this area would lay a solid foundation for supporting further work on the Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

## **6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

## **7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT**

7.1 The report contained within Appendix A has been presented to Scrutiny for pre scrutiny prior for consideration by Cabinet.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

8.1 Any financial implications are outlined within Appendix A of the report.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**



9.1 None directly related to this strategy but there will be additional staff, capital and revenue impacts as plans under the strategy area developed.

## **10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

10.1 The proposed Tree Strategy contributes to the Council's priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. Specifically, it contributes to 'People' by creating more natural communities that promote and maintain mental wellbeing and to 'Places' by getting the best out of our environment by looking after and investing in our greenspaces and specifically delivering natural carbon storage solutions across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses.

10.2 It also reflects the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Sustainable management is based on long-term considerations and is focused on preventative and precautionary action. The strategy aims to involve all the relevant stakeholders and to integrate tree activity into the wider operations of the Council. It will contribute specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility goals of the Act, but in the longer term it could have implications for all the goals.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

11.1 It is recognised that scrutiny is a vital component of good governance and improves Councils' decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness.

11.2 The undertaking of pre-scrutiny by the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee in this area will strength accountability and assist Cabinet Members in taking any future decisions on these matters.

### **Other Information:-**

#### ***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE**

**6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND  
COMMUNICATION**

Item: **PRE-SCRUTINY OF THE RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

**Background Papers**

Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee – 15<sup>th</sup> November  
2022.

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE**

**6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

**RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY & DEVELOPMENT IN  
DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE &  
CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Author: Simon Gale, Director of Prosperity and Development**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is for Members to consider the responses to the consultation on the draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (1) Consider the information contained within this report and the consultation report attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) Endorse the report and agree to adopt the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

**3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 Trees have featured prominently in climate change considerations in global, UK and Welsh policy. We are also recognising that trees, vegetation and soils have an important carbon storing role in the 'carbon cycle'.

3.2 A tree strategy is necessary to ensure that we value, promote and protect the significant extent of existing woodlands in Rhondda Cynon Taf (about a third of the County Borough), recognising the importance of our semi-natural woodland habitats and especially our ancient woodlands. It is also important that a strategy is in place that recognises the importance of protecting semi-natural habitats and undisturbed soils from inappropriate tree planting.

3.3 A tree strategy will also provide the foundation of the Council's ambition to deliver

RCT's largest tree planting programme in a generation and will promote the principles of 'right tree – right place'.

- 3.4 Finally a tree strategy will provide a robust framework for all tree related decisions and activity in RCT over the next 10 years.
- 3.5 The consultation exercise has identified a significant majority of support amongst respondents for the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Trees and Woodland – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy also sets the framework for the Council's commitment to the largest tree planting programme in a generation adopting the right tree, right place, right reason approach.
- 4.2 Cabinet considered the draft Strategy in June 2022 and agreed to extensive public consultation, the results of which are the subject of this report.

#### **5.0 RESPONSES TO THE DRAFT RCT TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The strategy was subject to an eight-week period of public consultation. The consultation utilised the Council's 'Let's Talk Trees' platform which provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement with the public and ran from the 1<sup>st</sup> September to 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022.
- 5.2 Social media and the Council's consultation webpage were utilised in order to communicate with the public and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Strategy. An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation and encourage participation on the Let's Talk site and the Snap XMP survey. We also continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods. A telephone consultation option was in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's contact centre. This option allows people to discuss their views or request consultation materials.
- 5.3 A total of 68 responses were received from residents in regard to the Council's Executive Summary and Draft Tree Strategy survey. 94% of residents agreed that the Council should focus on protecting and managing existing trees, especially the older and larger trees which store more carbon and provide the greatest climate mitigation benefits.
- 5.4 98.5% of respondents agreed that the Council should consider the long-term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies.

- 5.5 96.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should focus on tree planting in areas where people live and work especially where there are not many trees already.
- 5.6 Within the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy there are 6 overarching aims, these are:
- To protect, regenerate and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands.
  - To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
  - Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings.
  - Where urban tree cover is below 10% to plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree in the right place'.
  - To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain the valuable ecological and historic asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure, they do not compromise this heritage.
  - To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023 – 2033.
- 5.7 A high majority of respondents agreed with each of the overarching aims, with 100% agreeing with protecting, regenerating and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands.
- 5.8 In conclusion, despite a relatively low response rate, the feedback to the strategy has been overwhelmingly positive

## **6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/ SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 6.1 None as a direct result of this strategy.

## **7.0 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

## **8.0 CONSULTATION/ INVOLVEMENT**

- 8.1 As set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 1.

8.2 This report was also presented to the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022 in order for Scrutiny Members to pre-scrutinise the consultation responses to the draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

## **9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None directly related to this strategy but there will be additional staff, capital and revenue impacts as plans under the strategy area developed.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

10.1 The enhancement of trees, woodlands and hedgerows in the County Borough is directly related to the goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act. The Council also has specific responsibilities in terms of tree/public safety and Tree Preservation Orders.

## **11.0 LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

11.1 The proposed Tree Strategy contributes to the Council's priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. Specifically, it contributes to 'People' by creating more natural communities that promote and maintain mental wellbeing and to 'Places' by getting the best out of our environment by looking after and investing in our greenspaces and specifically delivering natural carbon storage solutions across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses. It also reflects the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Sustainable management is based on long-term considerations and is focused on preventative and precautionary action. The strategy aims to involve all the relevant stakeholders and to integrate tree activity into the wider operations of the Council. It will contribute specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility goals of the Act, but in the longer term it could have implications for all the goals

## **12.0 STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS**

12.1 Successful implementation of the Council's draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy will be of significant strategic importance.

## **13.0 CONCLUSION**

13.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (1) Consider the information contained within this report and the consultation report attached at Appendix 1.

- (2) Endorse the report and agree to adopt the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

*Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity*

**Contact Officer:** *Simon Gale 01443 281114*



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR A PRIVATE MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**28 NOVEMBER 2022**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY & DEVELOPMENT IN  
DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE &  
CORPORATE SERVICES**

Item: **RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

**Background Papers**

None.

**Contact Officer: Simon Gale 01443 281114**



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR A PRIVATE MEETING OF THE CABINET**  
**RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**  
**28 NOVEMBER 2022**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY & DEVELOPMENT IN  
DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE &  
CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Author: Simon Gale, Director of Prosperity and Development**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to consider the responses to the consultation on the draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (1) Consider the information contained within this report and the consultation report attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) Endorse the report and agree to adopt the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

**3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Trees have featured prominently in climate change considerations in global, UK and Welsh policy. We are also recognising that trees, vegetation and soils have an important carbon storing role in the 'carbon cycle'.
- 3.2 A tree strategy is necessary to ensure that we value, promote and protect the significant extent of existing woodlands in Rhondda Cynon Taf (about a third of the County Borough), recognising the importance of our semi-natural woodland habitats and especially our ancient woodlands. It is also important that a strategy is in place that recognises the importance of protecting semi-natural habitats and undisturbed soils from inappropriate tree planting.

- 3.3 A tree strategy will also provide the foundation of the Council's ambition to deliver RCT's largest tree planting programme in a generation and will promote the principles of 'right tree – right place'.
- 3.4 Finally a tree strategy will provide a robust framework for all tree related decisions and activity in RCT over the next 10 years.
- 3.5 The consultation exercise has identified a significant majority of support amongst respondents for the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Trees and Woodland – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy also sets the framework for the Council's commitment to the largest tree planting programme in a generation adopting the right tree, right place, right reason approach.
- 4.2 Cabinet considered the draft Strategy in June 2022 and agreed to extensive public consultation, the results of which are the subject of this report.

#### **5.0 RESPONSES TO THE DRAFT RCT TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The strategy was subject to an eight-week period of public consultation. The consultation utilised the Council's 'Let's Talk Trees' platform which provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement with the public and ran from the 1<sup>st</sup> September to 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022.
- 5.2 Social media and the Council's consultation webpage were utilised in order to communicate with the public and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Strategy. An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation and encourage participation on the Let's Talk site and the Snap XMP survey. We also continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods. A telephone consultation option was in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's contact centre. This option allows people to discuss their views or request consultation materials.
- 5.3 A total of 68 responses were received from residents in regard to the Council's Executive Summary and Draft Tree Strategy survey. 94% of residents agreed that the Council should focus on protecting and managing existing trees, especially the older and larger trees which store more carbon and provide the greatest climate mitigation benefits.

- 5.4 98.5% of respondents agreed that the Council should consider the long-term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies.
- 5.5 96.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should focus on tree planting in areas where people live and work especially where there are not many trees already.
- 5.6 Within the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy there are 6 overarching aims, these are:
- To protect, regenerate and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands.
  - To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
  - Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings.
  - Where urban tree cover is below 10% to plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree in the right place'.
  - To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain the valuable ecological and historic asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure, they do not compromise this heritage.
  - To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023 – 2033.
- 5.7 A high majority of respondents agreed with each of the overarching aims, with 100% agreeing with protecting, regenerating and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands.
- 5.8 In conclusion, despite a relatively low response rate, the feedback to the strategy has been overwhelmingly positive

## **6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/ SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 6.1 None as a direct result of this strategy.

## **7.0 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

## **8.0 CONSULTATION/ INVOLVEMENT**

8.1 As set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 1.

8.2 This report was also presented to the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022 in order for Scrutiny Members to pre-scrutinise the consultation responses to the draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

## **9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None directly related to this strategy but there will be additional staff, capital and revenue impacts as plans under the strategy area developed.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

10.1 The enhancement of trees, woodlands and hedgerows in the County Borough is directly related to the goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act. The Council also has specific responsibilities in terms of tree/public safety and Tree Preservation Orders.

## **11.0 LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

11.1 The proposed Tree Strategy contributes to the Council's priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. Specifically, it contributes to 'People' by creating more natural communities that promote and maintain mental wellbeing and to 'Places' by getting the best out of our environment by looking after and investing in our greenspaces and specifically delivering natural carbon storage solutions across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses. It also reflects the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Sustainable management is based on long-term considerations and is focused on preventative and precautionary action. The strategy aims to involve all the relevant stakeholders and to integrate tree activity into the wider operations of the Council. It will contribute specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility goals of the Act, but in the longer term it could have implications for all the goals

## **12.0 STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS**

12.1 Successful implementation of the Council's draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy will be of significant strategic importance.

## **13.0 CONCLUSION**

13.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (1) Consider the information contained within this report and the consultation report attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) Endorse the report and agree to adopt the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

*Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity*

**Contact Officer:** *Simon Gale 01443 281114*



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR A PRIVATE MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**28 NOVEMBER 2022**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY & DEVELOPMENT IN  
DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE &  
CORPORATE SERVICES**

Item: **RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY**

**Background Papers**

None.

**Contact Officer: Simon Gale 01443 281114**

**Dewch i  
siarad RhCT**  
**Let's talk  
RCT**



**DRAFT TREE AND WOODLAND  
STRATEGY 2022-32**

# Consultation Report

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

**November 2022**



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Let's Talk Trees project and the Snap Survey consultation carried out in 2022.
- The consultation was conducted in-house and ran for 8 weeks from the 1<sup>st</sup> September to the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022.
- The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders: online survey using Snap XMP and other engagement tools via the Let's Talk Trees website; social media posts and email invitations to take part. These are explained in Section 3 Methodology.
- A total of 68 responses were received from the Snap XMP survey, with 5 engaged visitors on the Let's Talk site (Celebrate Our Woodlands).
- 4 emails relating to the consultation were received, including responses from Friends of the Earth, Pontypridd (See appendix 1)
- 94% of respondents agreed that the Council is right to focus resources on protecting and managing existing trees, especially the older and larger trees which store the most carbon and provide the greatest climate mitigation benefits for residents.
- 98.5% of respondents agreed with the Council's draft tree strategy which proposes that the Council consider the long-term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies.
- 96.9% of respondents agreed that the strategy should focus on tree planting in areas where people live and work, especially where there are not many trees.
- 94% agreed with the 6 aims in the Executive Summary of the strategy document (1-6).
- 73.1% agreed with the 25-Point Action Plan as stated in the Executive Summary of the strategy document.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy 2022-32 Snap XMP Survey and the Let's Talk Trees consultation.
- 1.2 Section 2 outlines some brief background to the consultation process.
- 1.3 Section 3 details the methodology.
- 1.4 Section 4 provided the results from the consultation activities carried out on the Let's Talk Trees website.
- 1.5 Section 5 details the findings from the Snap XMP survey.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In November 2019 Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council (RCTCBC) established a Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group to address the climate emergency and subsequently the nature emergency, declared by Welsh Government. In November 2020 the Steering Group received a report on 'Natures' Assets' which set out the Council's natural environment priorities with regard to addressing the climate and nature crises.
- 2.2 As a Council we are committed to investing in our green spaces and to delivering natural carbon storage solutions such as those provided by trees, peat bogs, marshy grassland and other natural habitats across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses.
- 2.3 The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Trees and Woodland – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy also sets the framework for the Council's commitment to the largest tree planting programme in a generation adopting the right tree, right place, right reason approach.

- 2.4 The strategy looks at the next ten years specifically but with an eye on the longer-term of 50 plus years. The strategy was subject to an eight-week period of public consultation.
- 2.5 Consultation and public engagement on the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy 2022-32 is vital due to increases in biodiversity emergencies; it's vital to communicate Council Policies and to understand and address public concerns. A wide range of individuals and groups have important roles and interests in the County Borough's trees and RCT knows it cannot achieve the vision of this strategy alone. In developing and delivering this strategy the Council wants to bring people along with it. Working with Natural Resources Wales and other woodland managers in RCT will be an important part of this.

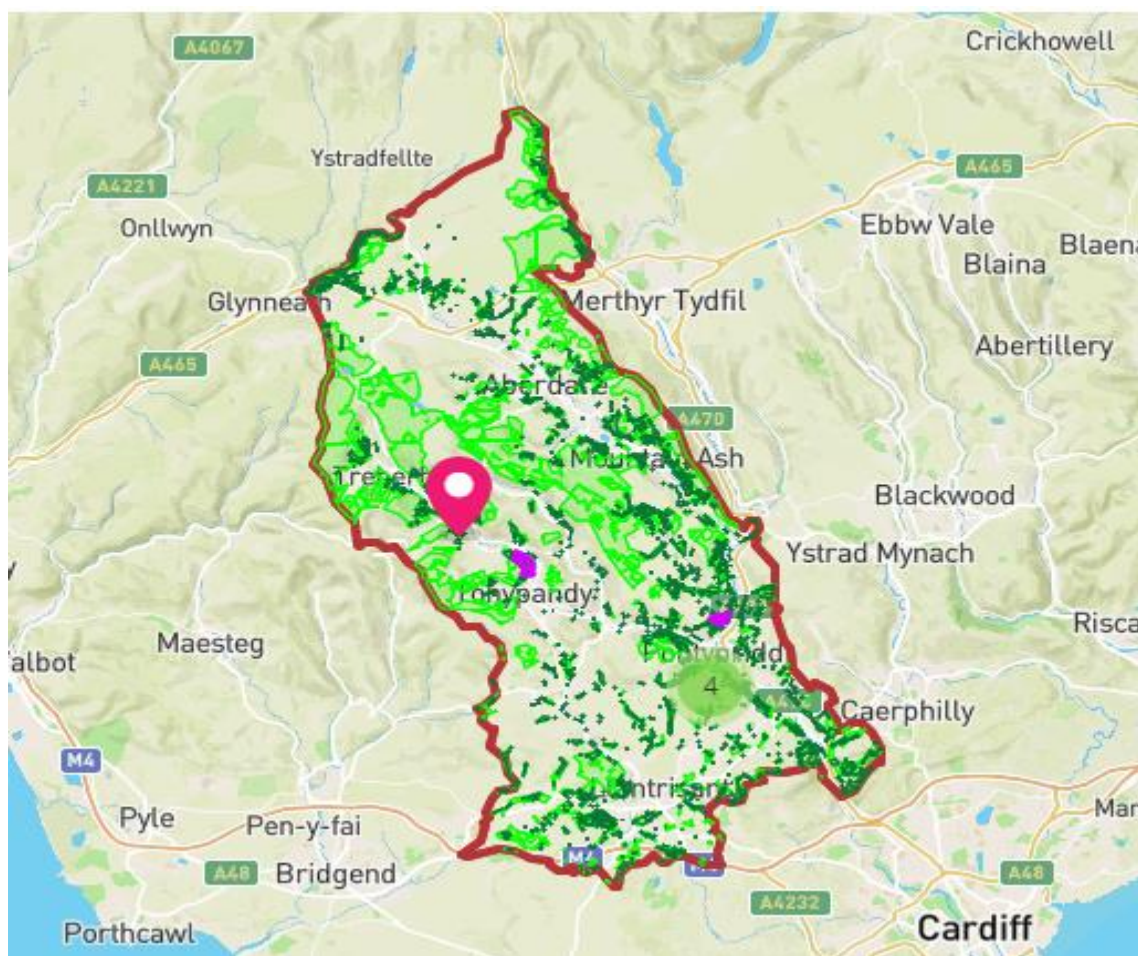
### **3 METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The Let's Talk Trees project was conducted in-house and ran from the 1<sup>st</sup> September to 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022. This section presents the results from the exercise run on the Let's Talk website. The report will be presented to Scrutiny and Cabinet to consider the feedback received.
- 3.2 The consultation approach used on the Let's Talk engagement platform provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement with the public. The Let's Talk Trees project provided key documents, and articles to provide further insight; in addition, an engagement map was used to allow respondents to drop a pin on their favourite woodland or trees area in RCT and to leave a comment telling us what they love about it.
- 3.3 A Snap XMP survey was launched and uploaded onto the Council's consultation webpage. The survey aimed to gain public feedback on the proposed Draft Trees and Woodland Strategy 2022-32.
- 3.4 Social media and the Council's consultation webpage were utilised in order to communicate with the public and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Strategy.
- 3.5 An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation and encourage participation on the Let's Talk site and the Snap XMP survey.
- 3.6 As with previous year's "digital by default approach" we continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods.

- A telephone consultation option was in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's contact centre. This option allows people to discuss their views or request consultation materials.
- Individual call backs are available on request.
- A consultation Freepost address was available for postal responses.

## **4 Let's Talk Trees**

- 4.1 The following section outlines the results from the Let's Talk Trees and Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy 2022-32 consultation published on the [Let's Talk Site](#). The site will remain live for the foreseeable future to continue the conversation on our trees and woodlands.
- 4.2 Visitors were able to engage on the Let's Talk Trees page by completing an interactive task which involved dropping a pin on a map of their favourite woodland or tree area in RCT and commenting what they loved most about it (as shown in figure 1). A total of 5 responses were received.

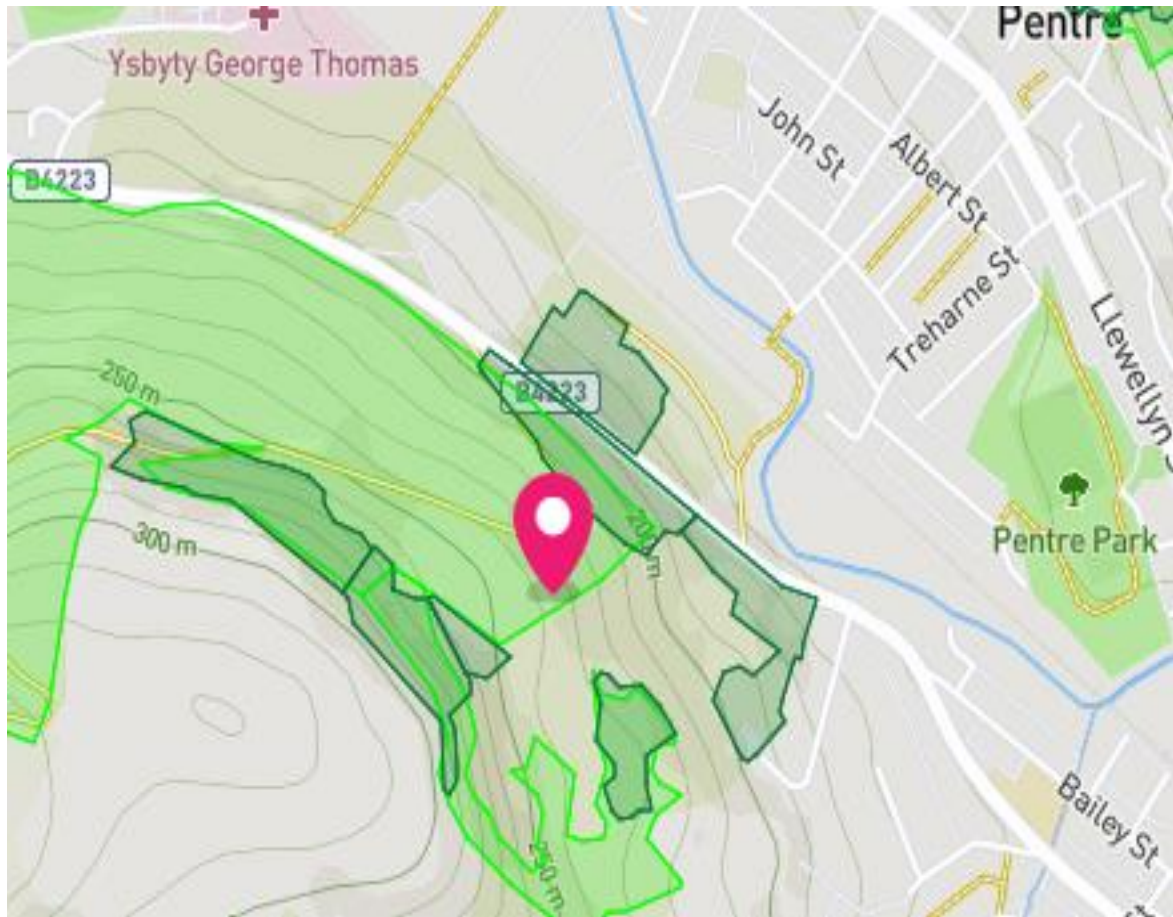


**Figure 1 – Map of respondent's 5 pin drops**

4.3 Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 provide a breakdown of each individual pin location.

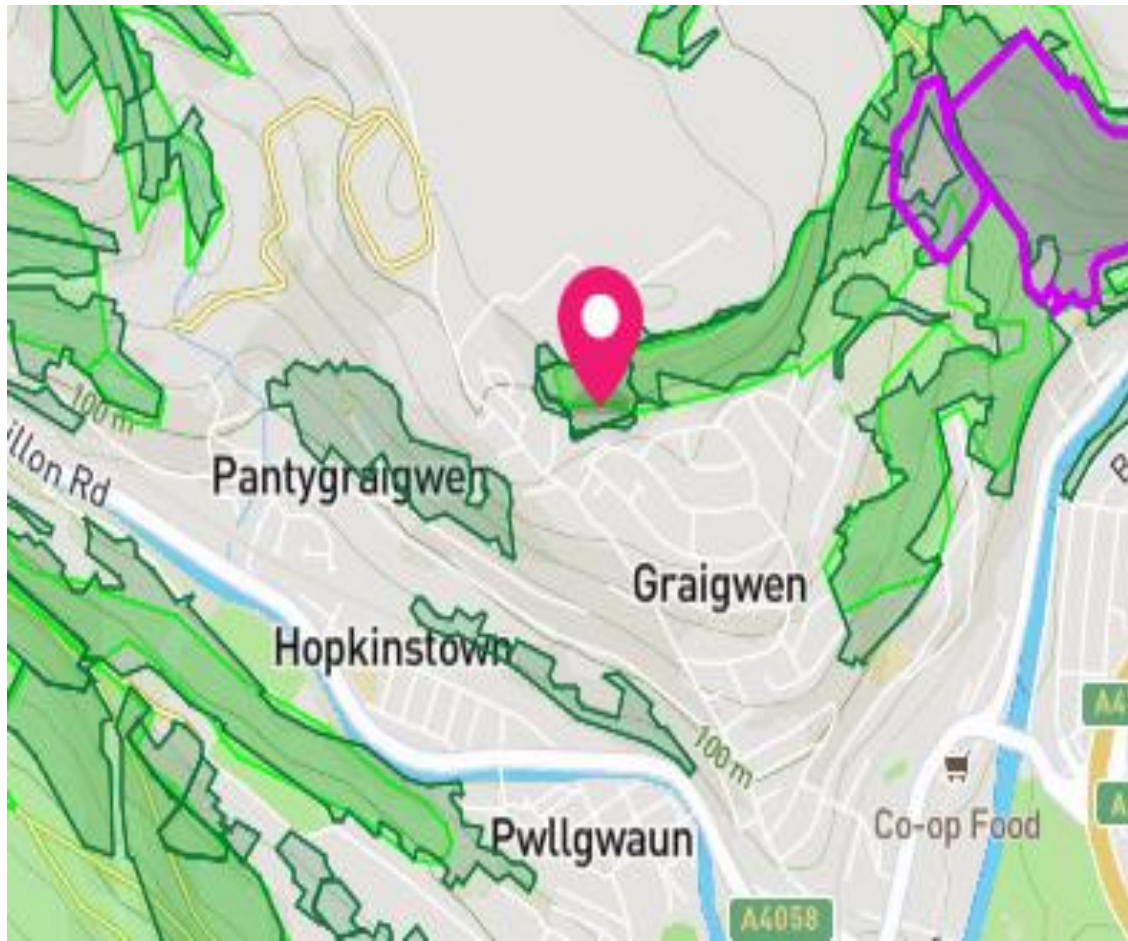
4.5 The comments included:

**Pin 1** – *“Reintroduction of the children’s park on the maindy would be great for children to enjoy the beautiful woodland. We go for walks there but it is very overgrown, and the paths are muddy.”*



*Figure 2 - Pin 1 location*

**Pin 2** - *“friends of graigwen community woods”*



**Figure 3** - pin 2 location

**Pin 3** - *“Lovely tree and wild bush coverage up Pontypridd common, perfect for dog walks and chatting with friendly residents”*



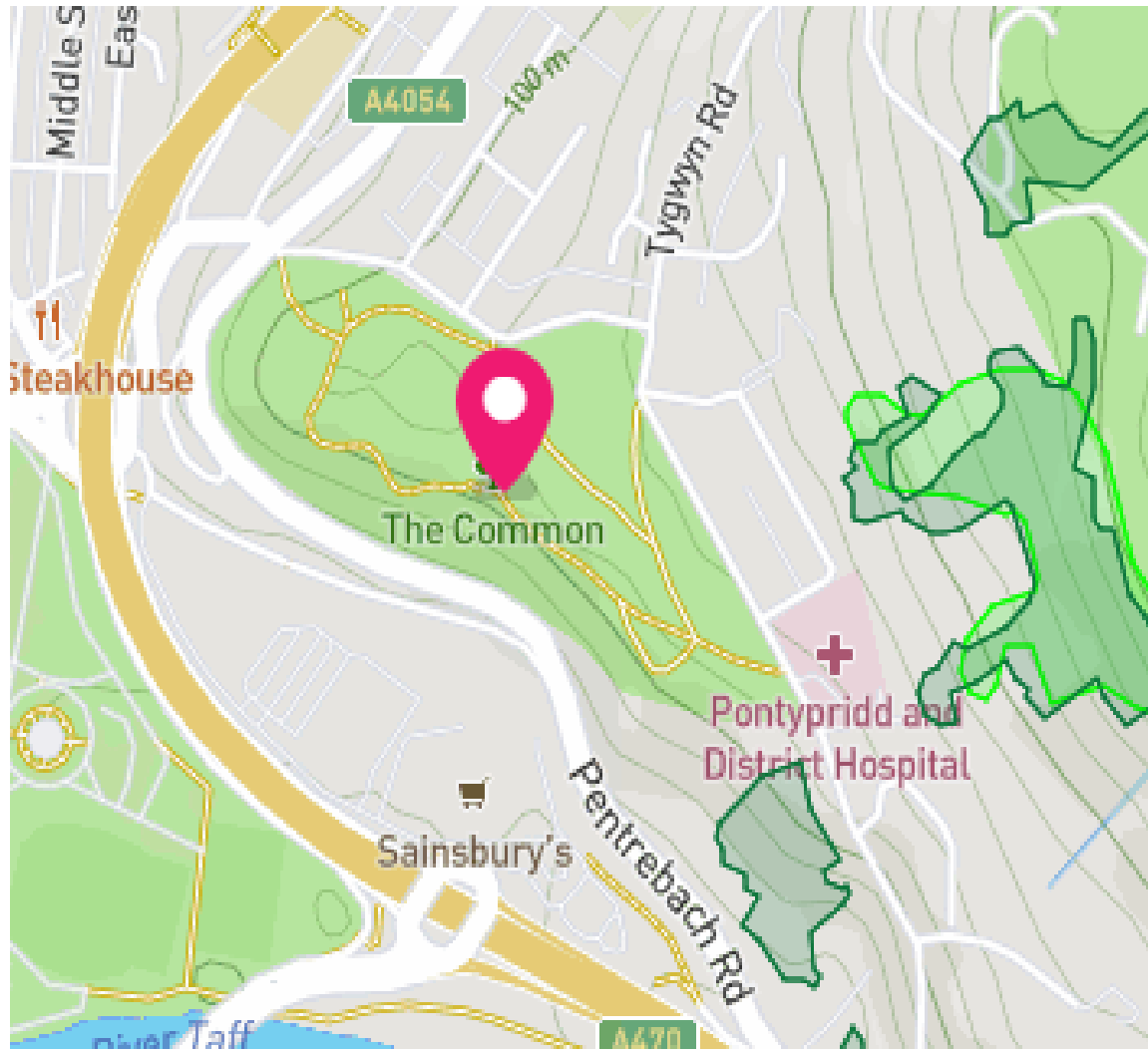
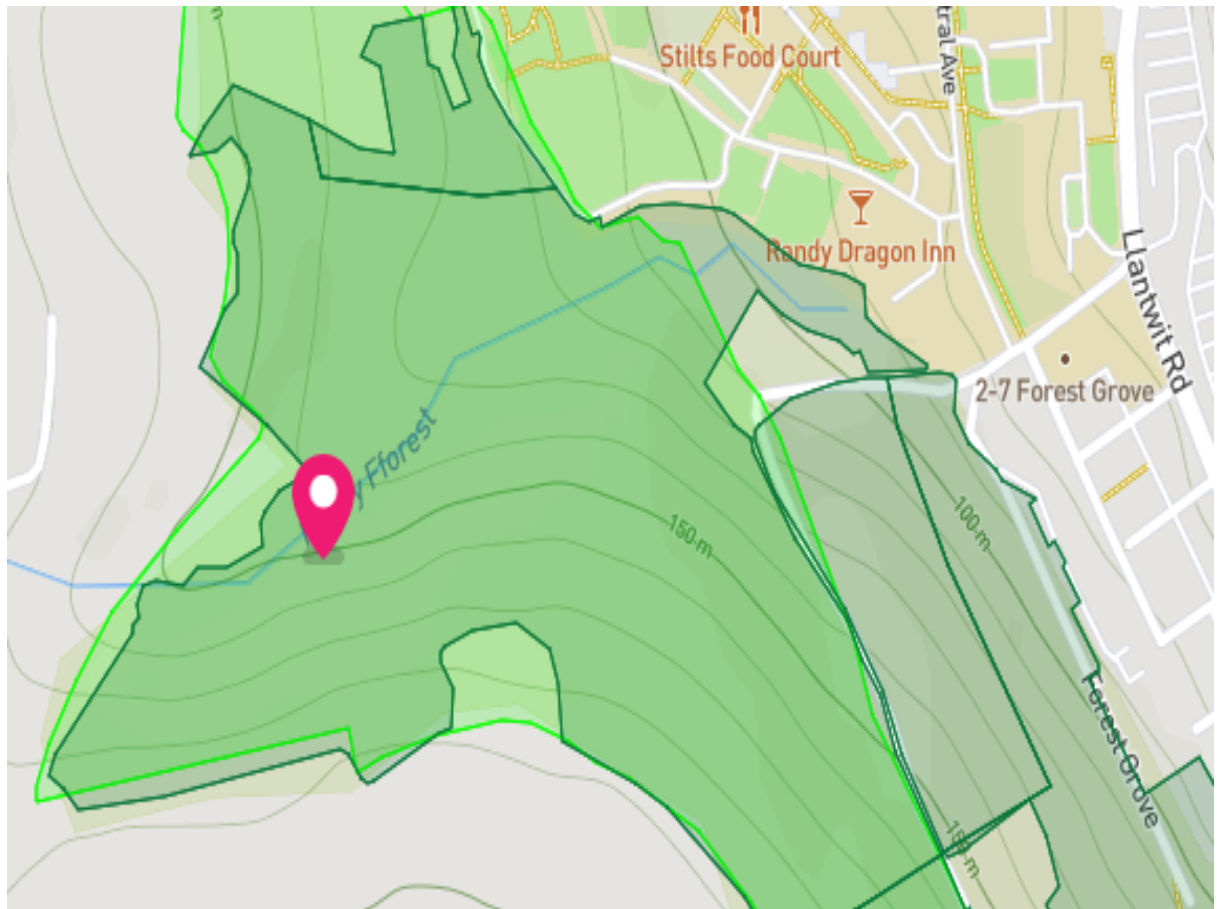


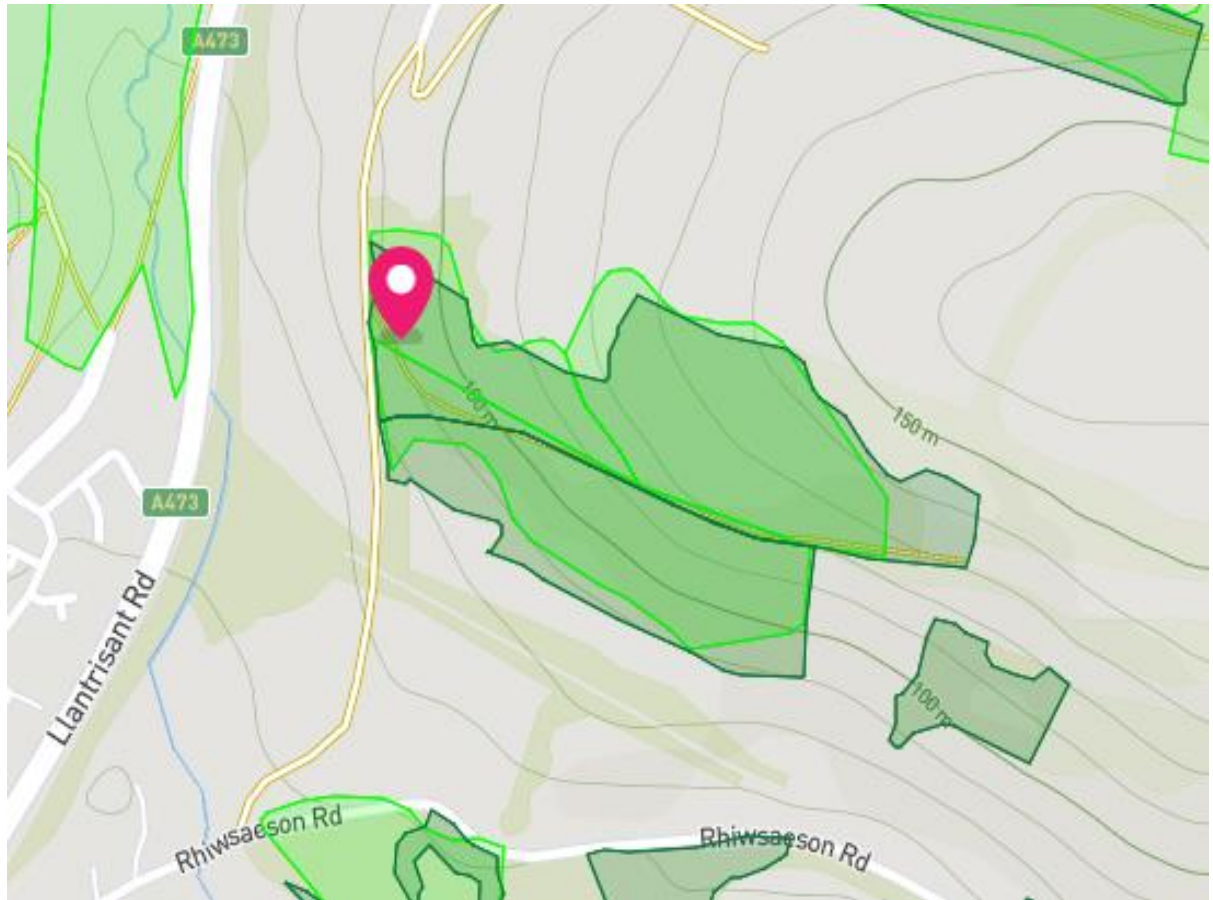
Figure 4 - Pin 3 location

**Pin 4** - *“Lovely unspoiled woodland, very peaceful and calming”*



**Figure 5 - Pin 4 location**

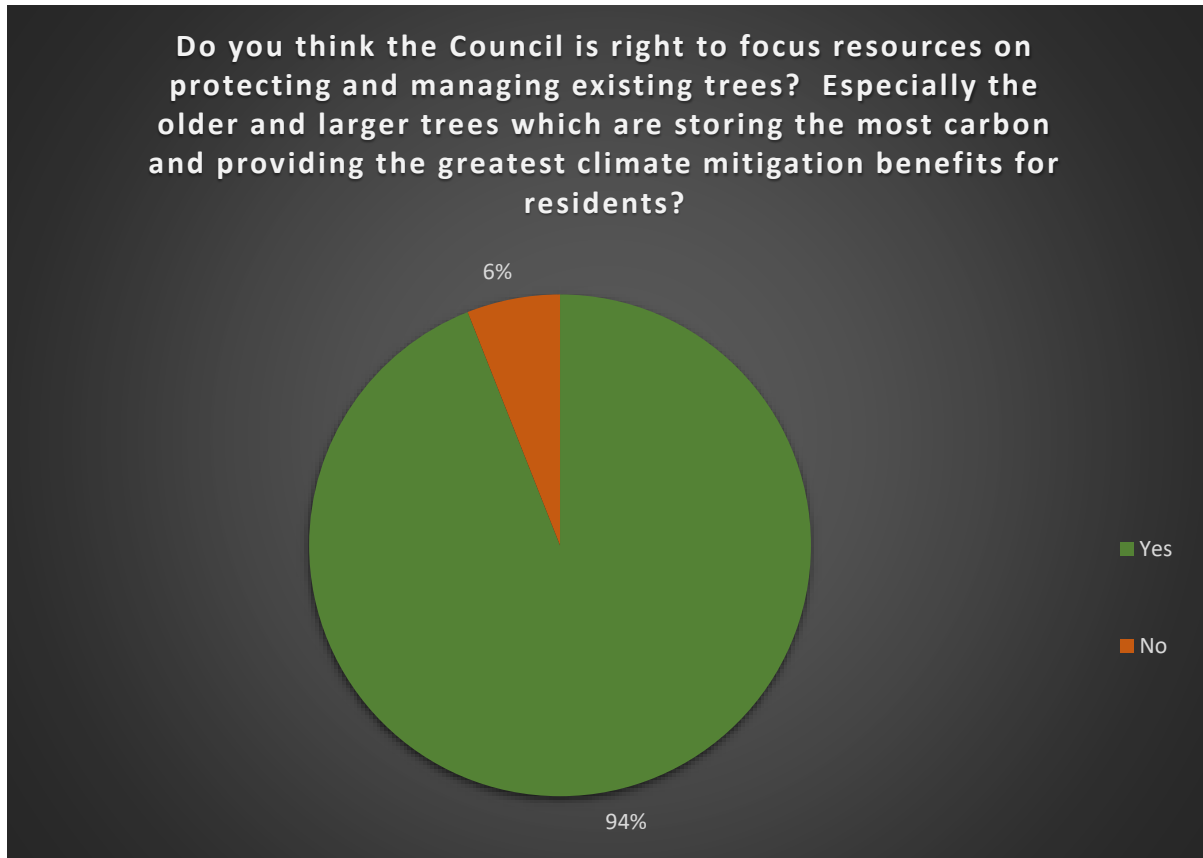
**Pin 5** - *“Lovely woodland with stunning native bluebells.”*



**Figure 6 - Pin 5 location**

## 5. DRAFT TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY SURVEY RESULTS

- 5.1 A total of 68 responses were received from residents in regard to the Councils Executive Summary and Draft Tree Strategy survey.
- 5.2 94% of residents agreed that the Council should focus on protecting and managing existing trees, especially the older and larger trees which store more carbon and provide the greatest climate mitigation benefits. Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents who said Yes and No.



**Figure 7 - Respondents agreement with Council's approach to focus on protecting and managing trees.**

Some of the comments for people who said "yes", included:

*"It is very important to protect and maintain our older larger mature trees. I definitely want to see those trees cared for. The council has been far too quick to cut down mature trees in the past – not adequately considering alternatives. I would like to see the council consult far more with local residents where the future of any tree is in question. I appreciate that tree maintenance has a cost, but every tree lost is deeply felt in the local community affected and that loss cannot be made good by planting young saplings"*

*“Yes - protecting what is most irreplaceable in what you already have is a sensible priority - large and old trees, especially veteran and ancient, ancient hedgerows and ancient woodlands whatever their condition.”*

*“Old growth is so important; you can't just replace them all with new young saplings and think that'll be fine. So, yes, support this approach.”*

*“As you say RCT is heavily populated with trees. The majority appear to manage themselves very well in areas were clumped and crowded together. Can RCT say that the budget is replacing new for old/dead trees as and when required? I understand that RCT have planted 10,000 trees at a cost of £50,000 which equates to 2.3 trees for every square mile. I think concentration should be a mix of both old and new but much more focus on reforesting whole areas with new trees to absorb carbon.”*

*“Long term planning for woodland essential. It takes many years for trees to mature, and we have lost woodland due to industry and war over a long period”*

5.3 Those who responded “No” provided some of the following comments:

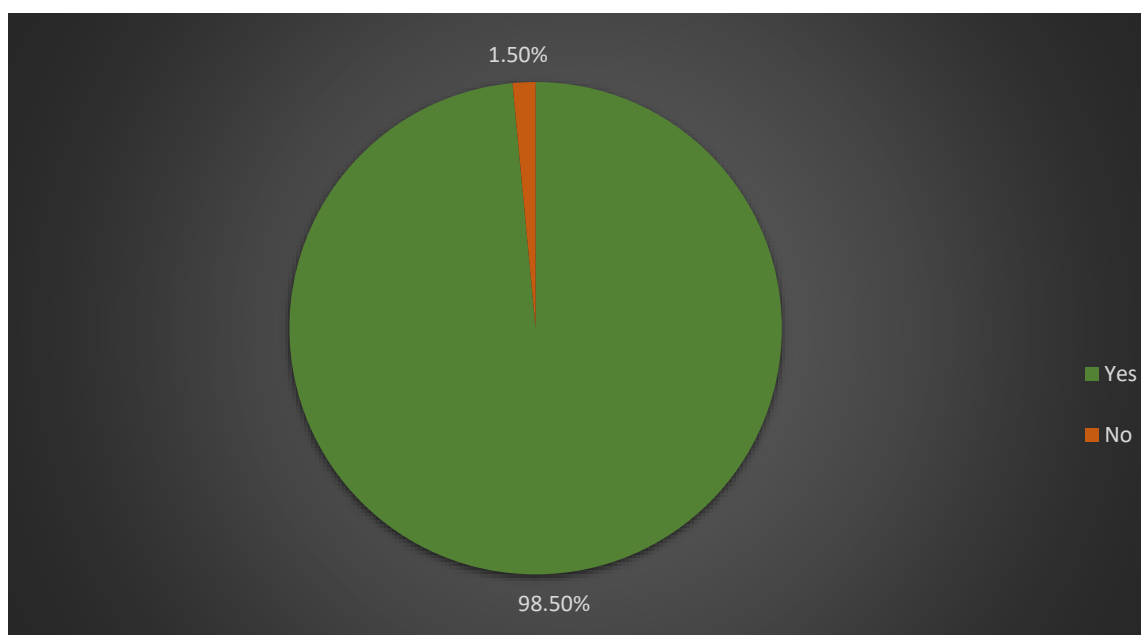
*“Lots of trees cut down unnecessarily”*

*“I think the woods have looked after themselves! Why interfere now”*

5.4 98.5% of respondents agreed that the Council should consider the long-term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies. Figure 8 shows the percentage of respondents who said Yes and No to the following question:

“Councils have a lot of responsibilities regarding trees, not only for the trees on Council land (like parks and schools), but also for roadside trees, trees on development sites and protected trees. The draft Strategy proposes that the Council should consider the long-term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies

Do you agree that the council should take this approach?”



**Figure 8 – Respondent’s agreement to the Councils long-term approach**

Some of the comments from the people who said “Yes”, included:

*“Despite the many benefits they deliver trees are often neglected, overlooked and undervalued because they just grow naturally.”*

*“Must act now for our future generations”*

*“Full lifetime eco services, and their monetary value of these trees services should always be considered with any planning application”*

*“Yes, roadside tree, trees on development sites and protected trees are extremely important, as well. They clean the air we breathe in our homes, as we walk and drive to and from work, the shops, etc. Just as importantly, roadside and other non-park-based trees add immensely to our mental health and sense of wellbeing. They are beautiful and beauty matters a great deal in our lives. A council employee said to me one day, “Oh, those trees are only goat willow. They’re weeds.” But weeds are just trees or plants someone objects to. Goat willow is a lovely, lively addition to the natural landscape. I hugely regret and deplore the council’s decision - on which no consultation was taken – to clear healthy trees along the river between Trallwn and Cilfynydd and erect fencing in their place. A very beautiful walk - much used and enjoyed by the public - has been completely ruined along that stretch. To specifically address your question - yes, the long-term benefits of these roadside and other non-park-based trees is vital to tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies. I heartily agree that the Council should protect them.”*

*“Absolutely, in particular we suggest trees and woodland cover is a means towards delivering health & well-being objectives and many other objectives Wrexham Council CEO Ian Bancroft will be speaking of their experience on this at the Wales Biodiversity Partnership conference on 5th October. Trees and woodland are an effective means to many ends as well as ends in themselves”*

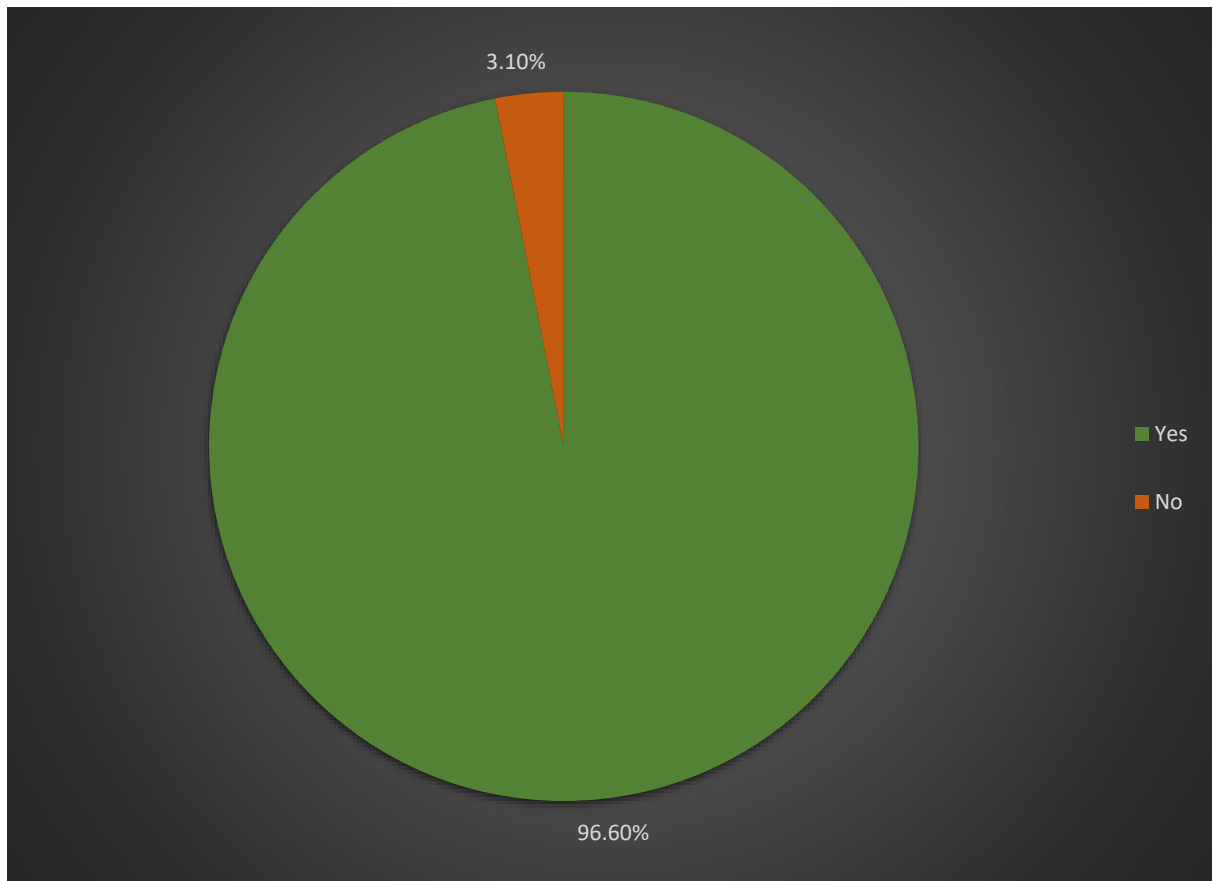
5.5 Those who responded “No” commented the following:

*“There’s too much interference from WG as it is”*

5.6 96.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should focus on tree planting in areas where people live and work especially where there are not many trees already. Figure 9 shows the percentage of respondents who said Yes and No to the following question:

“The draft Strategy suggests we should focus tree planting initiatives in the built-up areas. This would provide the greatest Climate, Nature and Well-being benefits for local people and businesses. Areas where there is less than 15% existing tree cover should be a priority.

Do you think the Council should focus tree planting in the areas where people live and work and especially where there are not many trees already?”



**Figure 9 – Respondent’s agreement with Tree Planting responses**

Those who responded “Yes” comments included:

*“The environment on the doorstep is the most important one to the people living there.”*

*“Trees in streets would reduce surface temperatures and allow some defence against flooding.”*

*“Tree equity is vital. Mapping planting opportunities with communities and private landowners. Mitigating the heat island effect, screening pollution, integrating with SuDs retrofit, retrofitting street trees utilising them as sleeping policemen to manage 20mph areas, to increase wellbeing inclusively.”*

*“Will improve the wellbeing of the community”*

*“Certainly, so long as young trees are not planted at the expense of maintaining existing trees. I’m aware that the Welsh Government has set tree planting targets and no targets on maintaining existing trees. We cannot let that factor distort policy. While I welcome tree planting schemes, our main focus has to be on protecting and maintaining existing trees.”*

5.7 The respondents who responded “No” commented the following:

*“No! As it is the WG are taking over farms to plant trees to the regret of proper farmers”*

*“I think the context and appropriateness of tree planting should be considered on a case-by-case basis”*

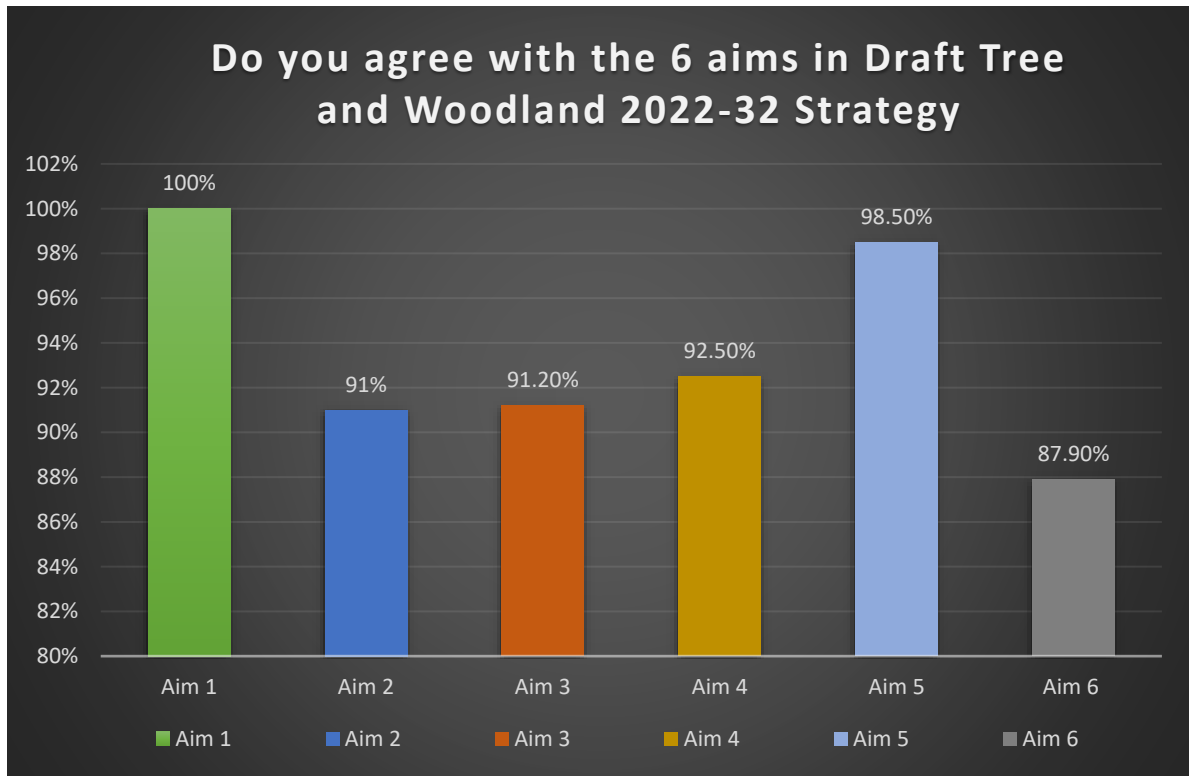
5.8 Within the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy there are 6 overarching aims, these are:

1. To protect, regenerate and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf’s existing trees and woodlands.
2. To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
3. Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings.
4. Where urban tree cover is below 10% to plant more trees on the principle of the ‘right tree in the right place’.
5. To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain the valuable ecological and historic asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure, they do not compromise this heritage.
6. To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023 – 2033.

5.9 Figure 10 shows respondents’ level of agreement with the 6 aims in the Strategy.

As shown in Figure 10, a high majority of respondents agreed with each of the overarching aims, with 100% agreeing with protecting, regenerating and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf’s existing trees and woodlands.



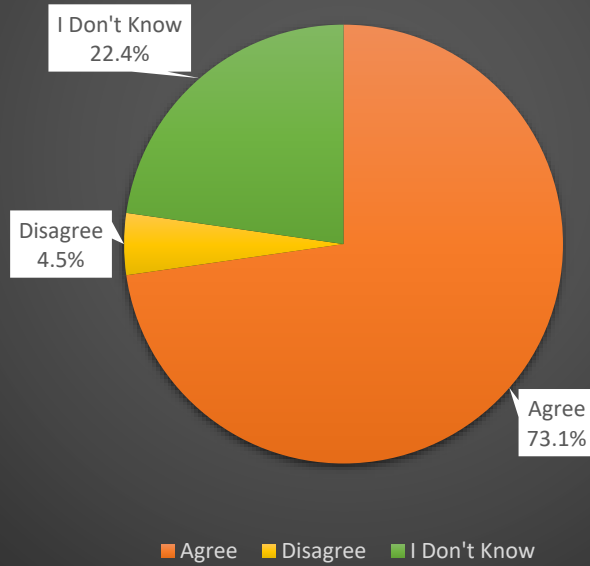


**Figure 10 – Agreement with the 6 aims of the strategy**

5.10 As part of the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy 2022-32 the Council has produced a [25-point Action Plan for 2022-23](#). Figure 11 shows that 73.1% of respondents agreed with the 25 Point action plan.

The draft Strategy has a 25 point Action Plan  
(see Executive Summary).

Do you agree with the 25 point Action Plan?



**Figure 11 – 25 Point Action Plan Results**

## **APPENDIX 1: RESPONSE FROM FRIENDS OF THE EARTH PONTYPRIDD**



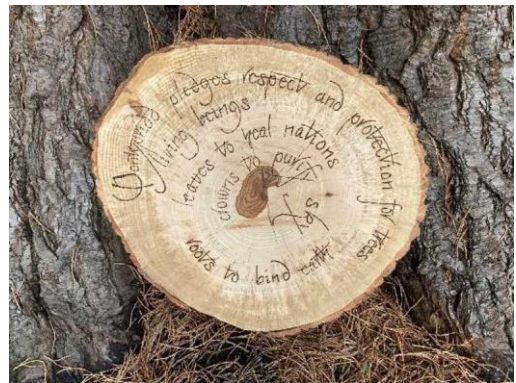
### **Friends of the Earth Pontypridd Response to RCT CBC Draft Tree Strategy: October 2022**

**'Pontypridd pledges respect and protection for trees, living beings, leaves to heal nations, crowns to purify skies, roots to bind earth.'**

Rights of the Trees developed during Pontypridd Green Week 2022

- 1. About a third of RCT is already wooded. This is very unusual for a heavily populated area. Even our towns have more trees than most towns in Wales.**

**Do you think the Council is right to focus resources on protecting and managing existing trees? Especially older and larger trees which are storing the most carbon and providing the greatest climate mitigation benefits for residents?**



Yes, we are happy that the Council aims to focus resources on protecting existing trees, especially older and larger trees. Friends of the Earth Pontypridd wrote to RCT CBC earlier this year, on behalf of our members, regarding care for established trees across RCT. Our members are extremely concerned about the protection of established trees and consider the scale of the tree felling that has taken place in the borough in recent years to be excessive.

In the Pontypridd area, for example we would point to the felling of trees in Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, alongside roads, rivers and railways and before the inspection of the White Bridge on Berw Road (despite written assurances that no tree felling would be needed there).

Residents of the Rhondda and Cynon Valleys have mentioned the same concerns. Looking forward, the decision RCT Councillors took on the Cynon Valley bypass will result in a road that passes through Tir Mawr a Dderi, Lwydcoed SSSI and impacting an area of Ancient Woodland which contains trees covered by a Tree Protection Order. We cannot allow developments of this kind to take the lives of ancient, protected trees within and around an sssl.

Too often planners and developers fail to consider the value of standing trees on development sites. The Local Development Plan must ensure that development plans on sites with standing trees are modified to incorporate the trees into the design of the site. It is not good enough to cut down standing trees and plant saplings in their place. Where

trees are incorporated in paved areas they must have access to structured soil. During construction of developments or maintenance work, extra steps must be taken to protect trees from damage.

Our tree monitors note with grave concern that many apparently healthy trees have been marked with an orange X for removal. We would like to see a holistic Tree Care Plan for RCT which includes care for all established trees. It will take very many years for newly planted trees to sequester significant levels of carbon and the science shows that a tree's carbon absorption rate accelerates as it ages.



As well as impacts on biodiversity, the natural landscape, carbon sequestration, air quality and oxygen generation, felling trees impacts on the ability of land to absorb the increased rainfall that we expect to see as a result of climate change. That means felling trees increases the likelihood of flooding.

Friends of the Earth Pontypridd want to see all options considered before any tree is cut down. Policy needs to shift, so that our local trees are seen as a natural resource that we need to preserve. During the pandemic, people have spent much more time close to home and they have come to value the local environment as never before. It's important that you listen to their concerns. Trees, in particular, greatly improve our quality of life.

Many of the trees that have been felled were loved and enjoyed by local people, bringing benefits to mental health and wellbeing and a close connection to nature. In certain instances, a tree may need to be felled, for example where the tree becomes storm damaged and is therefore a risk to public safety. Otherwise, the presumption should be that our mature trees will be cared for.

We want to see local people involved in and informed about decisions on tree felling (unless the tree poses an immediate risk to public safety).

- 2. Council's have lots of responsibilities regarding trees, not only for the trees on Council land (like parks & schools), but also for roadside trees, trees on development sites & protected trees. The draft strategy proposes that the Council should consider the long term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies.**

**Do you agree that the Council should take this approach?**

Yes, the long term benefits of trees and other natural habitats should be considered and these are not limited to the nature and climate emergencies. RCT CBC is yet to officially recognise and declare a Nature and Climate Emergency. This would be a first step in enacting the proposal outlined here. We would also recommend that RCT CBC adopt the principles outlined in the recent Friends of the Earth report on trees in the UK. <sup>1</sup>

There is a temptation to use tree-planting schemes and forested land to "offset" the ongoing failure to end dependence on fossil fuels. Yet carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels will remain in the atmosphere for hundreds or thousands of years, whereas carbon locked up in forests is less permanent due to losses from pests, fires, storms and human activities. In other words, you cannot offset fossil fuel emissions with tree planting. And attempting to do

so risks higher cumulative emissions and provides an excuse to further prolong the use of fossil fuels.

- 3. The draft strategy suggests we should focus tree planting initiatives in the built up areas. This would provide the greatest climate, nature & wellbeing benefits for local people and businesses. Areas where there is less than 15% tree cover would be a priority.**

**Do you think the Council should focus tree planting in the areas where people live and work and especially where there are not many trees already?**

Yes, it seems logical to prioritise areas of low tree cover but this must be undertaken following discussion with local people and businesses. It is essential to engage the community in tree planting initiatives, especially in built up areas to understand where the best locations for tree planting may be and any concerns residents may have. Engaging with the community is essential to gain buy-in and engender care for establishing trees. On new developments, the Woodland Trust recommend a target canopy cover of at least 20 per cent will be pursued through the retention of important trees, appropriate replacement of trees lost through development, ageing or disease on a 'two for one' basis and by new planting to support green infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a minimum of 20% cover could be considered for all built up areas, not least to support cooling during heatwaves.

A street tree planting programme offers opportunities to look at integrating other infrastructure at the same time for example Electric Vehicle Charging on streets. Where urban trees are planted in paved areas they must have access to structured soil and sufficient canopy space. Thought must be given about how any trees planted will be cared for, including watering in dry weather. This could be achieved through development of rainwater harvesting systems from nearby buildings to store water for use in times of drought.

- 3. Do you agree with the 6 aims in the draft strategy?**

### ***Protecting existing trees & woodland***

All new development should integrate important existing trees. Development which would result in the loss of ancient woodland, aged trees or veteran trees should not be permitted. For trees at risk, can RCT CBC provide a map of high risk trees in the borough and use it to begin a conversation with residents about the trees, the benefits they bring and the risks they pose? The purpose of having these proactive conversations is to prepare communities for necessary safety works and to highlight to the council instances of special value or opportunities to do work differently. In addition, we would like the strategy to include detail on how RCT CBC will protect existing trees and woodland on a global level through its supply chains and investments — see recommendations below on how this can be supported through Size of Wales Deforestation Free Procurement Toolkit.

### ***Encouraging natural regeneration or colonisation to increase tree cover***

We welcome the encouragement of natural regeneration but this approach cannot be relied upon for growing timber. The strategy needs to include detail on how RCT CBC will work with local landowners and the community to grow timber sustainability to reduce reliance on imports for construction and heating.

In terms of increasing woodland cover without affecting existing semi-natural habitats, is it possible for RCT CBC to pro-actively approach land-owners to see if they are prepared to

sell their land or enter into schemes that deliver woodlands for a range of benefits? Currently, engaging landowner to increase tree cover is not being done adequately.

### ***Increasing urban tree cover especially where below 15%***

It seems logical to prioritise areas of low tree cover but this must be undertaken following discussion with local people and businesses. It is essential to engage the community in tree planting initiatives, especially in built up areas to understand where the best locations for tree planting may be and any concerns residents may have. Engaging with the community is essential to gain buy-in and engender care for establishing trees. On new developments, the Woodland Trust recommend a target canopy cover of at least 20 per cent will be pursued through the retention of important trees, appropriate replacement of trees lost through development, ageing or disease on a 'two for one' basis and by new planting to support green infrastructure- <sup>3</sup> Perhaps a minimum of 20% cover could be considered for all built up areas, not least to support cooling during heatwaves.

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### **Looking after ancient hedges**

#### ***Providing a framework for decision making***

We would like to see a transparent framework for decision making that involves local people and proactively informs communities about decisions on tree felling and tree planting.

#### ***Forestry guidance on ash die back***

We are concerned by the numbers of seemingly healthy ash trees being felled across RCT. Forestry Commission guidance states that 'with the exception of felling for public safety or timber production, we advise a general presumption against felling living ash trees, whether infected or not. This is because there is good evidence that a small proportion will be able to tolerate *H.fraxineus* infection'. <sup>4</sup> Trees with a natural immunity to ash die back or able to recover from an infection will undoubtedly be important in helping the ash population to recover in future. This is why the widespread felling of entire ash trees over recent months is so concerning.

## **5. The draft tree strategy 25-point Action Plan**

### **Do you agree with the 25-point Action Plan?**

**Action 1: Create a cross-disciplinary working group.** We would like to see community representation in the monitoring of the action plan and the Cross-disciplinary working group. There are many different community groups with different areas of expertise that it would be good to bring into this working group.

**Action 11: Develop and adopt a Tree Risk Assessment Management tool for making decisions about tree felling, pollarding, pruning and coppicing.** Members of Friends of

the Earth Pontypridd would also like this to include detail on the use of Ecoplugs and in particular their impact on the health of neighbouring trees. As indicated previously, this could include a map of high risk trees to enable proactive conversations with local communities.

**Action14: Establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme.**

This action is key to successful delivery of the strategy and offers significant opportunity. Many people have a special relationship with trees, especially mature trees which act as landmarks or have heritage or cultural significance. As detailed elsewhere in this response, more needs to be done to engage local communities to foster a better understanding of trees and woodland, their importance to our wellbeing and how best to care for them. There is a significant opportunity to engage the community in seed saving initiatives, community tree nurseries, accessing land to support sustainable growing of timber, food, supporting biodiversity. This could be supported by organisations like Llais y Goedwig <sup>5</sup> and Coed Lle01 <sup>6</sup> for example.

**6. Any other further comments or suggestions regarding the draft tree and woodlands strategy, please write below:**

**Growing timber**

Less than 20% of wood consumed in the UK is homegrown, the rest is imported making the UK a major global importer of timber and wood products. Wood is used for a wide variety of purposes, from housebuilding to furniture-making to paper manufacture. RCT CBC can ensure it is helping to protect trees and rainforest on a global level through it's supply chains and investments for example by implementing recommendations in the Size of Wales Deforestation Free Procurement Toolkit. In addition, RCT can work with local landowners and the community to grow timber sustainability to reduce reliance on imports for construction and heating and to support agroforestry and biodiversity. There are excellent local examples of community woodland initiatives, for example Welcome to our Woodsy

We urgently need to grow more timber and deepen our woodland resources. While natural regeneration of trees is welcome, it cannot be relied upon to grow timber. Working with Natural Resources Wales to make best local use of the public forest estate is also an important action in this regard.

**Global impact**

At COP26, Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change made a commitment for Wales to become a deforestation free nation. To deliver on this commitment would require public bodies in Wales to do all they can, within their decision making ability and power, to eliminate imported deforestation from supply chains and investments. In practice, this means:

- Ensuring all public procurement is deforestation free.
- Ensuring that all investments, including pension funds do not contribute to deforestation overseas.
- Introducing sustainable food policies and practices that do not contribute to overseas deforestation (addressing the use of soy in animal feeds in particular). <sup>8</sup>

## Doughnut economics four lenses

In order to highlight some of the considerations needed for a more globally responsible tree strategy, we have used doughnut economics tools. Doughnut climate economics offers a vision of what it means for humanity to thrive in the 21st century and supports the mindset and ways of thinking needed to get us there. The Doughnut acts as a compass for human prosperity in the 21st century, with the aim of meeting the needs of all people within the means of the living planet.

The Doughnut consists of two concentric rings: a social foundation, to ensure that no one is left falling short on life's essentials, and an ecological ceiling, to ensure that humanity does not collectively overshoot the planetary boundaries<sup>9</sup> that protect Earth's life-supporting systems. Between these two sets of boundaries lies a doughnut-shaped space that is both ecologically safe and socially just: a space in which humanity can thrive. Unrolling the doughnut provides a framework for thinking about how to ensure the Tree Strategy delivers maximum benefits across each of the 4 lenses created. Doughnut economics four lens approach (see appendix) asks us to reflect on:



- a. How [the draft tree strategy] supports the wellbeing of the people that live [in RCT] so that we are all able to thrive? (local social foundation)
- b. How can [the draft tree strategy] be as generous as the wildland around us in supporting nature to thrive? (local ecological ceiling)
- c. How can [the draft tree strategy] respect the wellbeing of all people? (global social foundation)
- d. How can [the draft tree strategy] respect the health of the whole planet? (global ecological ceiling)





**Local ecological ceiling:**

*How can we best support trees in their generosity?*

Litter pick around them — trees need a clean environment Don't cut them down  
 Trees need clean soil, water & sun  
 Implement rainwater harvesting systems to water street trees during periods of drought.  
 Coppice as a way to store & use carbon  
 Use felled trees for biomass/ hugelkultur to grow food  
 More street trees to provide shade & lower temperatures  
 Trees along polluting roads, around schools and hospitals to clean the air  
 Forest gardens to maximise tree cover & food production  
 Support people to access woodland to develop a positive relationship with & respect for land and nature Pontypridd is a Nature Reserve and trees are wildlife sanctuaries PONTYPRIDD  
 Look after trees throughout their life-course both below NATURE RESERVE SANCTUARY and above ground.



**Global ecological ceiling:**

*How can we best protect trees in other parts of the world?*

Ensure the things we buy do not impact on trees in other parts of the world e.g. palm oil, beef, soy, cacao, coffee, timber, paper & pulp  
 Don't use palm oil products (they come from chopping down trees)  
 Commit to deforestation free supply chains following steps in the Deforestation Free Procurement toolkit<sup>10</sup> Only use FSC certified timber throughout supply chain  
 Examine the financial risks that deforestation presents to the investments of the Wales Pension  
 Partnership and explore the potential for engagement with or divestment from companies driving deforestation on the basis that this presents an investment risk to the pool.  
 Develop concrete, timebound and ambitious action plans and policies that commit to ensuring any investments are free from deforestation, conversion and social exploitation.  
 Grow more trees for timber locally - not least because we must reduce timber and timber products imported from countries that pose a high risk to global biodiversity Welsh timber imports use a land area two and a half times the size of An lese 1 1



**Local social foundation:**

*Trees are part of our community— what gifts do they offer us?*

Trees give us breathable air, shade  
Explore relationships with trees across different demographics including woodland access issues



Online mapping of trees — food/ heritage/ seed/ benefits to people/ nature/ climate Live data on felling & planting  
Balance tree planting with food growing & biodiversity  
Orchards & forest gardens  
Access to land for community to benefit from being able to grow timber, biochar, biomass, food  
Engage & empower the entire community to develop community seed saving initiatives, a community tree nursery  
Support skills & jobs — farming/ treecare/ nursery/ housing/ woodland skills Can RCT CBC provide a map of high risk trees in the borough and use it to begin a conversation with residents about the trees, the benefits they bring and the risks the pose?

**Global social foundation:**

*How can we help people in other parts of the world protect their trees?*

Hold corporations accountable, call them out.

Buy & source resources ethically e.g. Fair Trade Show people what happens when you don't look after trees in other places e.g. to indigenous communities who lose their homes, language & that we lose their protection of land & wildlife Celebrate the love, connection & knowledge of land, nature heritage by indigenous communities  
Ensure vulnerable countries and communities suffering the effects of climate change, nature loss and deforestation are supported to help them adapt and prosper as part of Wales' ambition to be a globally responsible nation through the Wales and Africa programme.



Support PONT-Mbale's tree planting projects in Uganda. <sup>12</sup>

Appendix  
Doughnut economics four lens

Four lenses  
Exploring interconnections



Here

World

ECOLOGICAL CEILING

How can Pontypridd be as generous as the wildland next door?

- Use our trees
- Reduce biodiversity
- Save carbon
- Use resources
- Reduce energy
- Regulate temperature
- Minimize plastic use
- Improve wellbeing

How can Pontypridd respect the health of the whole planet?

- Climate change
- Ocean acidification
- Chemical pollution
- Discharge of resources
- Resilient infrastructure
- Land conversion
- Biodiversity loss
- Air pollution
- Ozone layer depletion

- Food
- Water
- Health
- Education
- Housing
- Energy
- Connectivity
- Mobility
- Connectivity
- Culture
- Income and work
- Social equity
- Equality in diversity
- Political voice
- Peace and justice

How can all the people of Pontypridd thrive?

- Food
- Water
- Health
- Education
- Housing
- Energy
- Income and work
- Social equity
- Equality in diversity
- Networks
- Political voice
- Peace and justice

How can Pontypridd respect the wellbeing of all people?

Draw lines and use blue sticky notes to show interconnections.

SOCIAL FOUNDATION



- 
- <sup>1</sup><https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2022-06/Trees%20Report%Final%20220622.pdf>
  - <sup>2</sup> <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1762/10cal-authority-tree-strategies.pdf>
  - <sup>3</sup><https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1762/10cal-authority-tree-strategies.pdf>
  - <sup>4</sup><https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/ash-dieback-hymenoscyphus-fraxineus/>
  - <sup>5</sup><https://laisygoedwig.org.uk/>
  - <sup>6</sup><https://www.smallwoods.org.uk/en/coedlleol/>
  - <sup>7</sup><https://welcometoourwoods.org/>
  - <sup>8</sup>[https://cdn.sizeofwales.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/Eng\\_deforestation-free-nation\\_Final.pdf](https://cdn.sizeofwales.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/Eng_deforestation-free-nation_Final.pdf)
  - <sup>9</sup><https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>
  - <sup>10</sup><https://cdn.sizeofwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DFN Toolkit- Final 2021 Eng.pdf>
  - <sup>11</sup><https://pont-mbale.org.uk/what-we-do/environment/>
  - <sup>12</sup>[https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-11/wwf\\_risky\\_b\\_wales.pdf](https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-11/wwf_risky_b_wales.pdf)

# **DRAFT TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY**

**2022 - 2032**



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

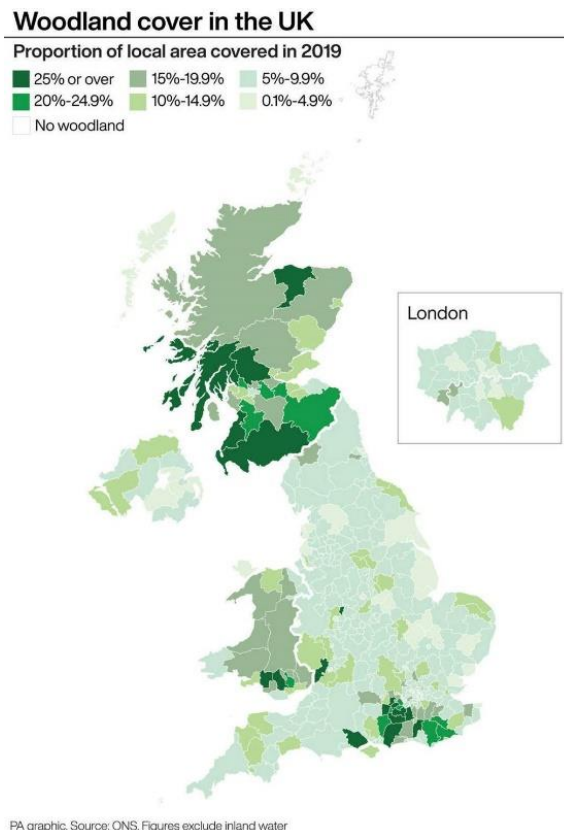


## Executive Summary

In November 2019 Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council (RCTCBC) established a Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group to address the climate emergency and subsequently the nature emergency, declared by Welsh Government. In November 2020 the Steering Group received a report on ‘Natures’ Assets’ which set out the Council’s natural environment priorities with regard to addressing the climate and nature crises.

Essentially, Rhondda Cynon Taf is putting Climate Change at the centre of what we do. As a Council we are committed to investing in our green spaces and to delivering natural carbon storage solutions such as those provided by trees, peat bogs, marshy grassland and other natural habitats across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses.

Rhondda Cynon Taff is one of the very few heavily wooded areas in the UK which also has a large population (see UK map below). The County Borough is about a third wooded and about a third urban, with a population of 241,873 (2020 est) and a population density of 570 persons per square km (2020 mid-year estimates from the ONS). Even within the main urban areas an average of 18.5% is tree covered.



The importance of this resource has been highlighted by the Climate and Nature Emergencies and this strategy will strengthen the Council’s commitment to managing

this resource and to maximise the benefits to local residents, to biodiversity, and to climate adaptation and mitigation.

Trees, hedgerows, and woodlands are an integral part of nature, supporting a wide range of insects, animals, birds and plant life. Looking after the trees, hedges and woodlands in our local environment is essential for the future health of nature and of people. Trees can improve the environmental quality of our urban areas, delivering physical, social and economic benefits as well as mitigating climate change, improving storm water management, air quality, biodiversity, visual amenity and more. In considering trees and planning for the future, we need a fundamental shift in attitude and perspective - to recognise trees as public assets, rather than just liabilities.

The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Urban Forest – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy looks at the next ten years specifically but with an eye on the longer-term of 50 plus years. To achieve our Climate and Nature ambitions, it must be integrated with wider environmental concerns to protect and manage all the important habitats in our urban areas and in the surrounding countryside. It must also be integrated with other Council policies such as the Revised Local Development Plan (RLDP), the Flood Risk Management Plan, Environmental Health and Community engagement.

The Strategy will be subject to an eight-week period of public consultation.

## Vision Statement

In the ten-year span of this strategy the Council will:

- Undertake the largest tree planting programme in a generation and implement a holistic approach to the RCT landscape which integrates consideration of landscape, culture, biodiversity, natural flood management, green infrastructure and carbon storage.
- We will adopt the principle of “the right tree for the right place” in order to ensure the most resilient tree population possible.
- Promote and value the significant extent of existing woodlands in Rhondda Cynon Taf (about a third of the County Borough), recognising the importance of our semi-natural woodland habitats and especially our ancient woodlands.
- Protect important semi-natural habitats and undisturbed soils from inappropriate tree planting.
- Recognise, quantify and monitor the contribution of natural regeneration to woodland expansion across RCT
- Work with Natural Resources Wales to maximise the benefits of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate to local residents and visitors.
- Commit to the management and maintenance of the existing extent of urban tree coverage.
- Work constructively with individuals and groups to deliver this vision.
- Aim to increase the urban tree canopy cover in those urban areas with less than 10% cover.
- Promote the benefits and value of urban trees within our communities.

### The Purpose of the Strategy

Providing a mechanism to improve the provision and care of trees and woodlands

Ensuring that decisions and activities undertaken in relation to trees are made in a structured and consistent way; and Monitoring the action plan(s) and policies for the care, management and enhancement of Rhondda Cynon Taf 's trees and woodlands.

### Overarching Aims of the Strategy

1. To protect, regenerate and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands
2. To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
3. Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings
4. Where urban tree cover is below 10% to plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree in the right place'
5. To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain the valuable ecological and historic asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure they do not compromise this heritage
6. To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023 - 2033

## Action Plan:

### Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council will:

1. Create a cross-disciplinary working group to: monitor the implementation of the strategy; develop an initial tree planting programme; ensure risks and benefits are addressed; operational and regulatory matters; integration with broader land management considerations (flood, biodiversity, carbon storage etc); and integration with policy (Revised Local Development Plan, Flood Risk Management Plan, Action for Nature, Air Quality, sales/leases etc.).
2. Support a condition survey of all the trees for which RCT has management responsibility to form a single data base.
3. Review the extent of woodland across the County Borough, including ancient woodland and naturally regenerating woodland. Establish how Council policy can assist in its protection and management, its relationship to other habitats of biodiversity value and the sustainable management of natural resources.
4. Review and monitor the extent and condition of woodland on Council owned land and in particular, monitor the area of naturally regenerating woodland on the Council's estate, with priority for the sites in excess of 10ha which feature in the Council's carbon calculation submissions to Welsh Government.
5. Ensure that new policies for the protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerows are embedded in the Revised Local Development Plan where

- appropriate and supported by evidence and integrated into the Green Infrastructure Assessment where appropriate.
6. Support a comprehensive review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas to reassess historical orders and potentially implement new orders to protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees.
  7. Review, strengthen, resource and consistently implement enforcement policies, to ensure protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
  8. Establish the overall value of Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees, to show what condition and size they are, and how much they benefit the environment and the ecosystem services they provide.
  9. Establish a cycle of tree risk assessment and update management and action plans.
  10. Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service areas on the value of trees, TPOs, and the tree strategy's vision and operational matters
  11. Develop and adopt a Tree Risk Assessment Management tool for making decisions about tree felling, pollarding, pruning and coppicing
  12. Develop an effective biosecurity policy to reduce the risk of introduced pests and diseases that may threaten native woodland cover as well as planted and new trees.
  13. Develop an effective strategy for ash-dieback, that deals with the risks, allows unaffected trees to be retained and addresses canopy cover.
  14. Establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme. Improve communication and understanding between the Council, Community Councils and residents relating to: local issues and concerns; tree strategy and detailed policy; the value of trees, woodlands and other natural habitats; and operational matters such essential works.
  15. Establish a working partnership with NRW private, community and charitable owners of land, businesses and local developers in the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands, contributing to maintaining and where appropriate increasing canopy cover across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
  16. Set objectives that clearly define what future success looks like and the specific benefits the urban forest is expected to deliver together with milestones for progress during the life of the strategy.
  17. Establish monitoring standards that can identify how much of the expected benefits of tree, woodland and hedgerow planting have been achieved.
  18. Ensure integration of the tree strategy objectives and outcomes with local biodiversity priorities and objectives to ensure complementary delivery of action.
  19. In urban settings develop opportunities to plant long-lived trees and hedgerows to support wildlife, provide Green Infrastructure services and public amenity value, with a focus on urban areas with tree cover below 10%.
  20. Outside settlement boundaries protect existing woodlands and rely primarily on natural woodland regeneration for woodland expansion.
  21. Create cross council working practices to implement and inform this Strategy, building an informed and expert work force that supports the care and management of trees and woodlands across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
  22. Monitor and review the Strategy, in partnership with the cross-disciplinary working group, every 3 years.
  23. Produce detailed policy and guidance notes to be followed by RCTCBC, contractors and other partners in following this strategy.

24. Where possible encourage plans for new building or development to make provision for retaining existing trees, space for natural regeneration and, where appropriate, increasing the canopy cover.
25. Support local tree nurseries to provide future tree stock with appropriate biosecurity, that will be climate resilient and offer appropriate planting for Rhondda Cynon Taf's environment and local biodiversity context. This will include schools, community groups and volunteers collecting seeds and cuttings of suitable trees and growing them on.

# **PART 1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

## Part 1: Introduction

Trees are vital for our environment and for humanity and, together with our soils and other vegetation, will be key in tackling climate change. Via photosynthesis trees capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood and other growth. This carbon is therefore sequestered, locked up out of the atmosphere. Rhondda Cynon Taf is putting Climate Change at the centre of what we do and this is therefore a key driver in the need for Rhondda Cynon Taf to develop this strategy and have a 'joined-up' vision for trees across the Borough.

Trees, soils and other vegetation are part of our natural 'armour' against climate change. Trees, hedgerows and woodlands are an integral part of nature, supporting a wide range of insects, animals, birds and plant life. Having trees, hedges and woodlands in our local environment is essential for the future health of nature and of people. Trees provide one of the most cost-effective ways to improve the environmental quality of our urban areas, delivering physical, social and economic well-being as well as mitigating climate change, improving storm water management, air quality, biodiversity and visual amenity to name but a few (Appendix 1).

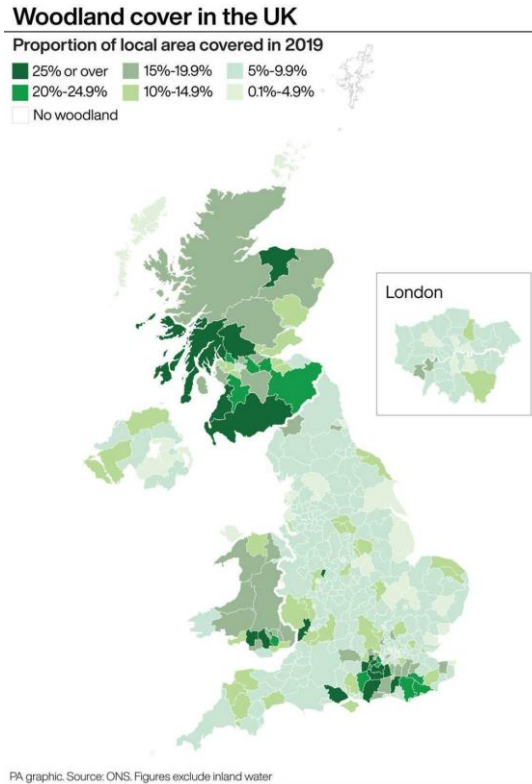
Trees matter to us all for a wide variety of reasons and in developing a Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf, focused on trees, hedgerows and woodlands, Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council will engage with the broad range of issues that inform our thinking about our environment and set out an effective programme of activity that will help all residents meet future climate and environmental challenges. In doing so a fundamental shift in attitude and perspective is required - to one that views and thinks about trees as public assets, rather than liabilities. A ten-year strategy is a starting point, and from the process of developing and implementing policies and plans based on protecting and expanding our tree cover, our strategy can grow, change and develop to meet future challenges.

### Why does Rhondda Cynon Taf need a Trees and Woodland Strategy?

Local authorities have significant responsibilities with regard to trees. In Rhondda Cynon Taf about a third of the area is wooded and there is an unusually high level of tree cover in our urban areas (av 18.5%), and on land owned or managed by the Council. This means that the Council is responsible for the management of an extensive tree stock.

Trees are a significant asset to the County Borough. Trees are of landscape significance and legislation relating to Tree Preservation Orders and the Hedgerow Regulations reflect this. Biodiversity considerations relating to trees have become more important and recently the role of trees and woodland as 'Green Infrastructure' has come to the fore.

The Strategy seeks to address these issues and to identify the costs and benefits of an investment in trees.



## Challenges and Opportunities in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The age of our tree stock is significant as most of our streets and parks were planted during Victorian or Edwardian times. This strategy recognises the value of this inheritance and seeks to prevent irregular tree planting programmes, poor maintenance, unnecessary felling of trees over which otherwise will have both short and longer term implications on our landscape.

The Urban Tree surveys by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) show a continuing decline in urban tree cover in RCT from 19% in 2009 to 18.5% in 2013. Unfortunately, this included 728 large, well established trees lost from our urban areas. “Overall Rhondda Cynon Taf lost 30 hectares (of urban trees) between 2009 and 2013 with 13 of the 16 towns showing canopy loss.” - (Town Tree Cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough ([cyfoethnaturiol.cymru](http://cyfoethnaturiol.cymru))).

Public open space, which accounts for 26% of our urban land hosts about 60% of our urban tree cover (Wales 53%), with private gardens only 14% (Wales 20%)

In a well-wooded County like RCT, retaining existing mature trees can be a challenge as they can come under pressure from much needed new development and infrastructure

Our climate is changing which has implications on how our trees, woodlands and wildlife react to it and the levels of management required. Drought, storms and floods present specific hazards but gradual changes in CO2 in the atmosphere, rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns will also have long term impacts. Globalisation increases the threat from pests and diseases and, although not new,



these are a growing concern. Currently ash dieback is a major challenge, as ash is a frequent roadside tree, but others have significant impact on our native tree stock (Dutch elm, Phytophthora, Chalara, processionary oak moth etc.).

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) has been updated to reflect the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Environment Act amongst other changes in legislation. New iterations of PPW have placed an important emphasis on sustainability and have embedded the concept of placemaking at the heart of decision making. PPW 11 also places a new focus on green infrastructure, its role in Placemaking and vital contribution to future living conditions.

PPW 11 includes the need to undertake Green Infrastructure Assessments (GIA) as part of the Revised Local Development Plan evidence base. The Revised LDP will need to carefully consider the role that green infrastructure will play within it, this includes the consideration of trees.

Successfully retaining existing trees and establishing new planting within housing can be difficult due to pressures to maximise developable space. The RLDP will need to address and balance the requirements for housing and other development with the impact on the local landscape, climate change and biodiversity amongst other things. The Council will also need to consider the long-term management of any green infrastructure provided by the developer and how its function can be assured for the lifetime of the development.

Sustainable drainage requirements, which are now mandatory for developments in RCT ([Sustainable Drainage - An Overview | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)), also have implications for the design and long-term management of developments and may also impact on existing trees.

Despite the many benefits offered by trees such as reduced pollution, shade, regulation of temperature, drainage etc, there are still some who regard trees as a nuisance not an asset. Dealing efficiently with cross departmental enquiries is a particular challenge. It is right and proper that public concerns are addressed, clear information provided and the scope for community involvement developed. This strategy will seek to ensure we have consistently applied policies relating to routine concerns such as leaf fall, television reception and tree safety. Positive communications about the benefits of trees and the contributions of citizens and businesses will also be critical to raise the profile of trees and woodland in RCT.

Trees cannot be considered in isolation. They form a major part of our green infrastructure and their operational management should complement other works carried out by the Council. This strategy seeks to ensure that the value of trees to the Council and the residents of RCT is set out clearly, from the well-established aesthetic and landscape benefits, to contributions to local air quality, water cycling and shade etc.

The strategy recognises that other habitats are also important, and conserving these also has benefits for residents, climate and nature. The strategy recognises the importance of our semi-natural biodiversity rich habitats (including woodlands) and the importance of undisturbed soils for carbon sequestration. The carbon stored in soils

greatly exceeds that stored in trees. World-wide soils store twice as much carbon as all vegetation including trees. (prof Peter Smith) It also recognises the on-going natural processes of native woodland regeneration and colonisation taking place across the County Borough. This will inform our plans for tree planting, which will typically be focused in urban areas, parks etc where it is of most benefit to people and causes least damage to undisturbed soils and our existing wildlife rich mosaic of semi-natural habitats.

Integrating consideration for trees and woodland with other aspects of Council land management such as drainage, air quality, carbon accounting and biodiversity will ensure that climate adaptation and mitigation measures achieve the greatest benefits for local people and the wider environment.

In addition to our already extensive tree coverage, there will still be opportunities for the planting of new trees and hedgerows. Our parks, school grounds, open spaces and towns can all benefit from the addition of new planting all within the mantra of right tree – right place for the right reason

### Rhondda Cynon Taf's Existing Tree Cover and Habitat

National Forest Inventory data from NRW shows that about a third of RCT is woodland. This is unusually high in the UK and Welsh context and brings particular responsibilities to the Council. NRW 2013 data on the tree canopy in selected urban areas, which include all trees, whether in gardens, fields, parks, woodland, urban spaces, along roads or streets, averages 18.5%. Again, as the Council is responsible for managing much of this urban woodland. More details regarding urban trees is given in Part 3.

As such, whilst the strategy seeks to facilitate the area's largest tree planting programme in a generation there will also be a major focus on actively protecting and increasing Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees, hedgerows and woodlands.

From a biodiversity perspective we need to ensure the native distribution of trees and woodlands in RCT is respected. RCT has a complex topography and geology and very particular and valuable natural and native distributions of tree and shrub species. Outside towns, the preservation of the natural distributions of species is a fundamental component of nature conservation. Local distinctiveness and variation across the County Borough is a key part of the extraordinary natural diversity in RCT.

Planting species that are not native to local area is a damaging activity. Introducing species can lead to gross and damaging impacts on valuable habitats and a de-valuing of biodiversity. It is the complexity of the mosaic of local habitats and species diversity that makes RCT so biodiverse and that needs to be recognised within the Tree Strategy.

Similarly, where hedgerows are a feature of the County Borough those are ancient artifacts, often dating back hundreds or thousands of years to the first farming activities. The species richness provides a clear and invaluable picture of historic and cultural land use continuity. Planting new 'species rich' hedgerows compromises this landscape asset and current RCT ecological advice for new hedges in countryside

locations is to require simple hazel or hawthorn hedgerows. Adding diversity into natural habitats is most effectively achieved through management.

Figure 2  
National Forest Inventory Woodland Coverage in RCT from [www.lle.gov.wales](http://www.lle.gov.wales)

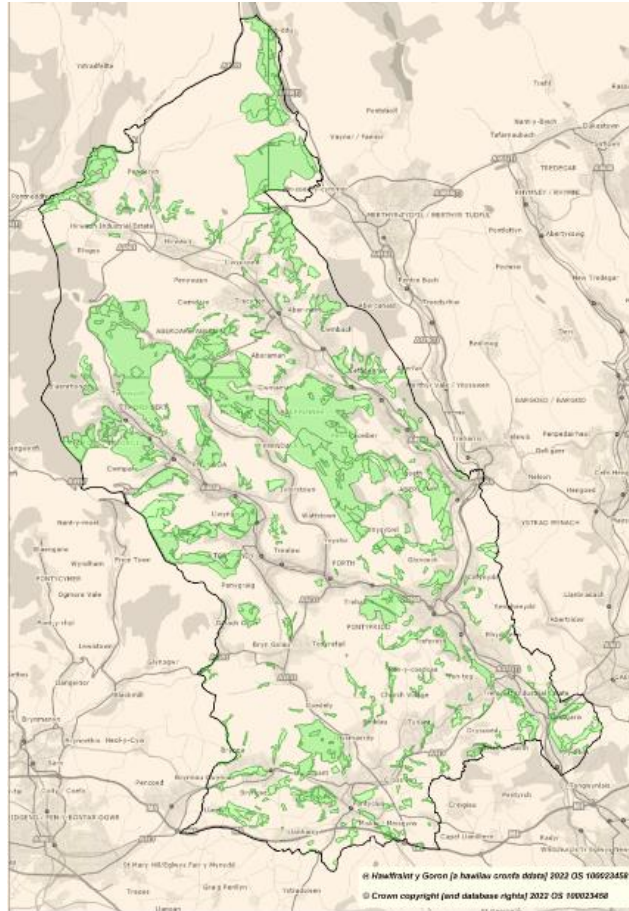
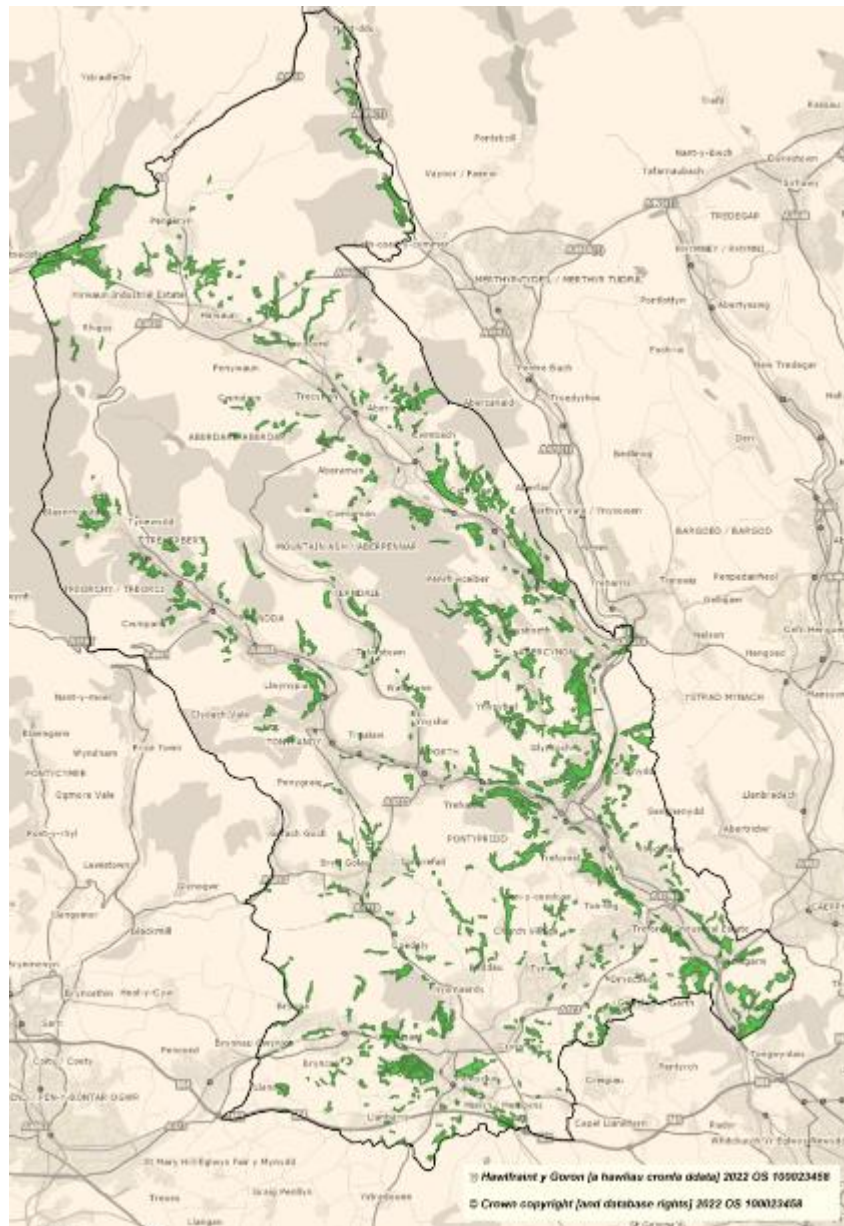


Figure 3  
Ancient Woodland Coverage in RCT from www.lle.gov.wales



### Scope of the Strategy and Vision Statement

Our overall vision is to deliver a Tree Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf which recognises the importance of the extensive existing woodlands in the County Borough and providing a robust framework for the delivery of new tree planting projects, our own operational responsibilities for trees and woodlands and embedding this activity within climate change and biodiversity considerations. The aim is to ensure we are not only looking after our trees and woodlands for now but also for future generations.

### Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to deliver the overarching **aims**, using the **general principles** to undertake the **key activities** the Council is responsible for by:

- Providing a mechanism to improve the provision and care of trees and woodlands.
- Ensuring that decisions and activities undertaken in relation to trees are made in a structured and consistent way; and
- Monitoring the action plan(s) and policies for the care, management and enhancement of Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees and woodlands.

The resulting Strategy Actions are listed below.

### Overarching Aims of the Strategy

1. To protect and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees, hedgerows and woodlands.
2. To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the main and most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
3. Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings
4. Where urban tree cover is below 10%, to plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree for the right place'
5. To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain that valuable ecological and historical asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure they do not compromise this heritage.
6. To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023-2033.

### General Principles

The following general principles will apply:

- Trees are viewed as an asset with multiple benefits
- All decisions and tree activity must have regard to current legislation and best practice
- Tree management should focus on tree health and seek to maximise benefits for current and future generations
- Tree planting must have regard for; existing soil and habitat, space to mature (below and above ground), future maintenance and management
- Tree works should be evidence-based and undertaken by suitably trained or qualified personnel

### Key Activities

The following are the key activities the Council should undertake:

- identifying the tree/woodland resource in RCT and the risk inspection regime
- Undertaking operational works as required by the risk inspection regime (including arrangements for out of hours)
- Administer the dangerous trees on private land requirements
- Operation of the Tree Preservation Order system in conjunction with Planning Services (including updating the GIS mapping, creation and removal of TPO, administration of applications to prune/fell etc. Observations of planning applications affecting TPO trees, TPO on Council owned land prior to sale/lease, enforcement)

- Operation of other tree related legislation such as the Hedgerow Regulations and the High Hedges (Anti-social Behaviour legislation)
- Strategic review of trees in Council management to include amenity, carbon storage, tree health, biodiversity value and other benefits in addition to the risks identified above.
- Undertaking operational works as required on the Council estate
- Long-term planning for replacement planting, remedial works and future challenges
- Advice to schools and other lease holders on the management and planting of trees
- Advice to other departments: for example air quality and trees, SUDS and trees, Carbon storage and trees
- Engaging with, responding to and advising local residents in relations to trees

### Strategy Action Plan

- Create a cross-disciplinary working group to: monitor the implementation of the strategy; develop an initial tree planting programme; ensure risks and benefits are addressed; operational and regulatory matters; integration with broader land management considerations (flood, biodiversity, carbon storage etc); and integration with policy (Revised Local Development Plan, Flood Risk Management Plan, Action for Nature, Air Quality, sales/leases etc.).
- Support a condition survey of all the trees for which RCT has management responsibility to form a single data base.
- Review the extent of woodland across the County Borough, including ancient woodland and naturally regenerating woodland. Establish how Council policy can assist in its protection and management, its relationship to other habitats of biodiversity value and the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Review and monitor the extent and condition of woodland on Council owned land and in particular, monitor the area of naturally regenerating woodland on the Council's estate, with priority for the sites in excess of 10ha which feature in the Council's carbon calculation submissions to Welsh Government.
- Ensure that new policies for the protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerows are embedded in the Revised Local Development Plan where appropriate and supported by evidence and integrated into the Green Infrastructure Assessment where appropriate. Ensure policies are adequately enforced for the lifetime of the development
- Support a comprehensive review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas to reassess historical orders and potentially implement new orders to protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees. Review, strengthen, resource and consistently implement enforcement policies, to ensure protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
- Establish the overall value of Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees, to show what condition and size they are, and how much they benefit the environment and the ecosystem services they provide.
- Establish a cycle of tree risk assessment and update management and action plans.
- Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service areas on the value of trees, TPOs, and the tree strategy's vision and operational matters

- Develop and adopt a Tree Risk Assessment Management tool for making decisions about tree felling, pollarding, pruning and coppicing
- Develop an effective biosecurity policy to reduce the risk of introduced pests and diseases that may threaten native woodland cover as well as planted and new trees.
- Develop an effective strategy for ash-dieback, that deals with the risks, allows unaffected trees to be retained and addresses canopy cover.
- Establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme. Improve communication and understanding between the Council, Community Councils and residents relating to: local issues and concerns; tree strategy and detailed policy; the value of trees, woodlands and other natural habitats; and operational matters such essential works.
- Establish a working partnership with NRW private, community and charitable owners of land, businesses and local developers in the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands, contributing to maintaining and where appropriate increasing canopy cover across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Set objectives that clearly define what future success looks like and the specific benefits the urban forest is expected to deliver together with milestones for progress during the life of the strategy.
- Establish monitoring standards that can identify how much of the expected benefits of tree, woodland and hedgerow planting have been achieved.
- Ensure integration of the tree strategy objectives and outcomes with local biodiversity prioritise and objectives to ensure complementary delivery of action.
- In urban settings develop opportunities to plant long-lived trees and hedgerows to support wildlife, provide Green Infrastructure services and public amenity value, with a focus on urban areas with tree cover below 10%.
- Outside settlement boundaries protect existing woodlands and rely primarily on natural woodland regeneration for woodland expansion.
- Create cross council working practices to implement and inform this Strategy, building an informed and expert work force that supports the care and management of trees and woodlands across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Monitor and review the Strategy, in partnership with the cross-disciplinary working group, every 3 years.
- Produce detailed policy and guidance notes to be followed by RCTCBC, contractors and other partners in following this strategy.
- Where possible encourage plans for new building or development to make provision for retaining existing trees, space for natural regeneration and, where appropriate, increasing the canopy cover.
- Support local tree nurseries to provide future tree stock with appropriate biosecurity, that will be climate resilient and offer appropriate planting for Rhondda Cynon Taf's environment and local biodiversity context. This will include schools, community groups and volunteers collecting seeds and cuttings of suitable trees and growing them on.

### Communications and Public Engagement

This is an area of work which is increasingly important due to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. It is important both to communicate the Council's policies and also to understand and address public concerns.

A wide range of individuals and groups have important roles and interests in the Borough's trees and RCT knows it cannot achieve the vision of this strategy alone. In developing and delivering this strategy RCT wants to bring people along with it. Working with Natural Resources Wales and other woodland managers in RCT will be an important part of this. A programme of consultation and engagement with residents, businesses, specialist and community organisations is proposed as part of the development of the Strategy.

### Governance

It is important that this strategy remains a live document and is continuously used, updated and referred to. RCT propose that the Rhondda Cynon Taf Tree Strategy is governed by a regular and robust review process between the Council and stakeholders. Taking account of the Council's emerging statutory development plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy, and Local Nature Plan this would cover:

- Performance of the strategy
- The relevance of the strategy in relation to local and national policy
- The need for any updated or amended content in the strategy as necessary
- A published report every three years

### Statutory Duties

As the Local Authority for the Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf, have a wide variety of statutory duties which RCT are required to perform by law. These are detailed in Appendix 2.



**PART 2**  
**TREE AND WOODLAND**  
**MANAGEMENT**

## Part 2: Tree and Woodland Management

### Protection and maintenance of existing trees, hedges and woodland

Data collection will be required to identify existing trees, hedges and woodland in RCT. This will be a major task given the extent of woodland in RCT. The priority for RCT should be those trees and woodlands in urban areas and in particular those which are the primary responsibility of the Council (such as on Council owned land, adjacent to the highway or in housing developments).

The mapping may require specific software, (such i-Tree/CAVAT used by Wirral, or Tree Plotter Inventory used by Birmingham). The type of software used can provide an assessment of the benefits/value of the resource, as well as risk assessment reviews, management schedules etc. The quality of the existing stock, including tree health, age, size, species, tree risk assessment, status (e.g. TPO/ Conservation Area, Green Infrastructure) the identification of ancient woodland, veteran and notable trees should be recorded. This database should include links to detailed surveys undertaken (for example for specific diseases, risk assessment or bat surveys).

As a result of the strategy, we will consider the resources required to robustly enforce legal measures to protect existing tree stock this will require additional resources.

To ensure Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees are protected, The Council will carry out a review of existing Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas across the borough and consider implementing additional orders and more extensive enforcement where appropriate.

RCTCBC is committed to a single strategy and related policy implementation whereby all relevant departments build, maintain and use one resource/database.

### Location of Trees:

It is important to know how many trees we have and where. We will create such a record by using effective tools, like i-Tree [Tree Benefits! | i-Tree \(itreetools.org\)](http://www.itreetools.org) or Tree Plotter Inventory [TreePlotter INVENTORY - Tree Inventory Software - PlanIt Geo](#). This takes a scientifically- determined sample to give a standardised calculation of the effectiveness of trees in lowering temperature, pollutants, greenhouse-effect gases or in increasing the benefits for our quality of life.

It is also important that we don't just rely on the number of trees as a measure of their benefit to climate change, as a two-foot high sapling and a 300 year-old oak coming into its prime, each count as one tree, but they don't make the same difference to our environment.

National Forest Inventory data from NRW shows that about a third of RCT is woodland. NRW 2013 data on the tree canopy in selected urban areas, which include all trees, whether in gardens, fields, parks woodland, urban spaces or streets. The map and table from the 2013 report is included in Part 3 on page 22.

Measuring the tree canopy still does not provide a basis for calculating the full benefits of trees in the same way as the intended 'i-tree' eco programme can, which can take

into account the type, condition, size, age, health and other vital statistics of trees. Rhondda Cynon Taf will therefore create a baseline through i- tree Eco as a starting point for establishing realistic targets for management budgets, tree retention and replacement and increasing canopy cover in tree-deprived areas.

Trees in RCT are affected by a number of pathogens, typically imported with diseased tree stock. Ash die-back is of particular concern to the Council as it adversely affects highway trees. Further work is required to address the risk, protect disease free or recovering trees and monitor natural regeneration.

There is a maze of legislation around planning, development, sustainability, climate change and nature conservation to take into consideration. Local policies and existing plans need to be considered, updated, and new approaches may need to be added to the strategy. Some of these are considered in Appendix 2

Whilst there is a UK and Wales wide priority to increase canopy cover, this strategy recognises that RCT already exceeds the UK and Wales targets. We also have to respect the international and Wales biodiversity targets and recognise the important contribution that the unique carbon-rich (organic) and undisturbed soils and semi-natural vegetation of much of RCT to carbon capture and storage. The Natures Assets report to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in Nov 2020 ([Cabinet Report MTSP One4aLL LG \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)) sets out the Council's priorities in this regard.

This means that RCT will **not** encourage tree planting in the following areas:

- SSSI and SAC sites
- S7 Priority Habitats
- Species-rich grassland, permanent pastures important for grassland fungi, marshy grasslands, heaths, bogs, ffridd (bracken slopes), natural floodplains, species rich colliery spoil and within existing semi-natural woodlands
- SINC
- Pollinator habitats
- Sites where natural carbon soil store would be compromised by planting.

These habitats are valuable in their own right and are increasingly rare in Wales, across the UK and globally. The need for maintenance, removal or regeneration of existing trees on these sites may be considered, being mindful of the characteristics of the site and following best practice.

In urban areas, tree planting locations require careful consideration. Trees should not be planted in locations where the tree does not have space to grow, both above and below ground. This can contribute to poor tree health, high maintenance costs and removal before the green infrastructure, aesthetic and carbon storage benefits are realised. Where-ever possible Green Infrastructure should be planned in an integrated way for longevity and to maximise benefits for the public. It should always be one of the first and most important decisions when considering space allocation in the urban environment. Maintenance must be considered from the outset.

Obtaining professional advice and the consent of the Council's tree officer (for planting on public land) is essential. The advice of an arboricultural consultant, for planting on private land, is also recommended, similarly for planting proposals by community

groups. Planning matters relating to trees, including TPOs, will need to be informed by professional advice.

## Quality of existing stock

### Tree risk assessment

The risk of being struck and killed by a tree or branch falling is extremely low (in the order of one in 10 million for those trees in or adjacent to areas of high public use). However, the low level of overall risk may not be perceived in this way by the public, particularly following an incident. (Health and Safety Executive (reviewed 2014).

Public safety aspects will be addressed by RCTCBC as part of their approach to managing tree health. A sensible approach will ensure the maintenance of a healthy tree stock, the sound management of the environment and will satisfy health and safety requirements. RCT will develop a Risk Management tool to assist in decision-making around works to trees.

RCT will determine an inspection and recording regime with relevant control measures, following current industry standards and best practice. Individual tree inspection may only be necessary in specific circumstances, for example, where a particular tree:

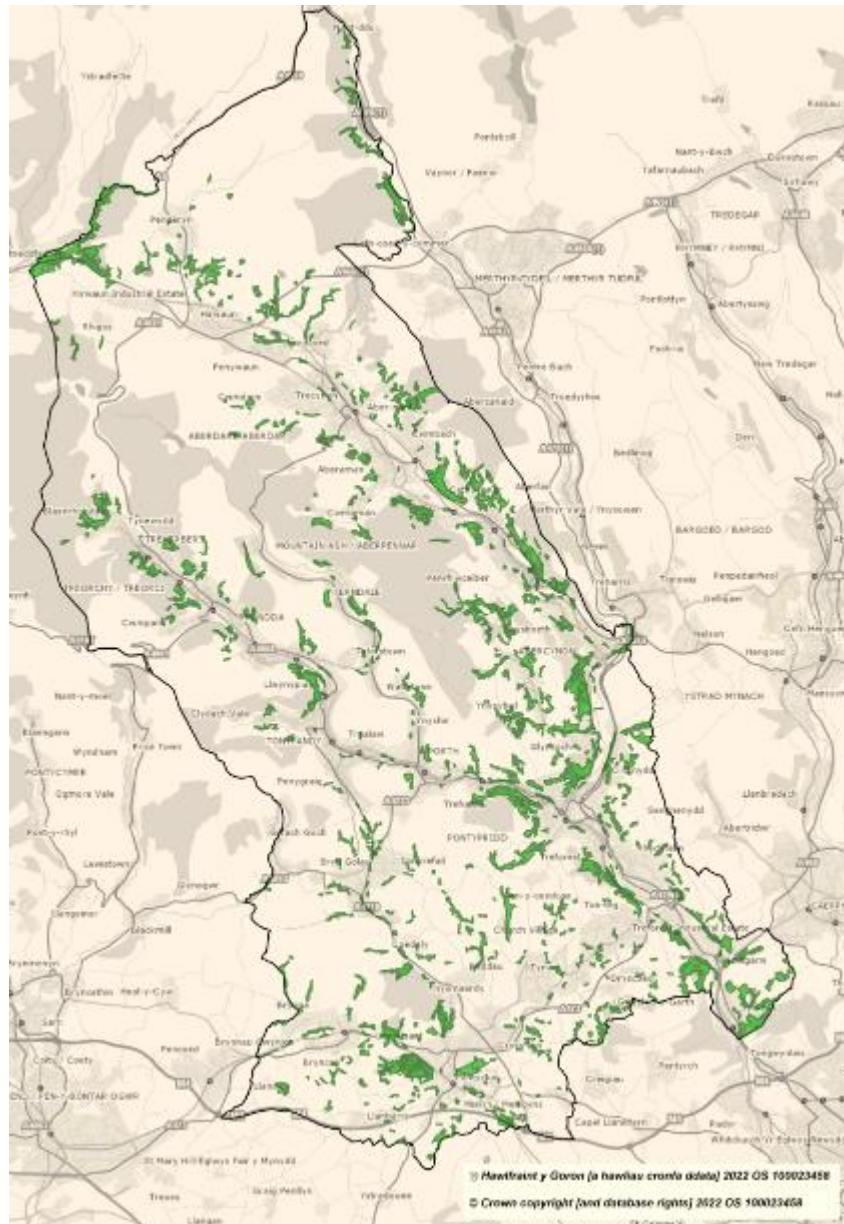
- is in a place frequently visited by the public; and
- has been identified as having structural faults that are likely to make it unstable; and
- has been identified for regular monitoring after a decision has been made to retain it with these faults.

Any planned work on trees or woodland on council land will take account of biodiversity issues e.g. bird nesting, bats roosting. At initial assessment, before any work on trees is undertaken, the local ecology will be assessed by a competent and experienced person and decisions regarding work on trees will take the expert's conclusions into consideration. Biodiversity considerations will be prioritised when providing advice, guidance and planning around tree risk management and all recommendations provided to private landowners.

## Ancient Woodland, Veteran Trees and Notable Trees

Ancient woods, defined as those continuously wooded since 1600CE, are home to more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK. They are the closest we have to natural woodland in the UK and an irreplaceable part of our heritage.

Figure 3  
Ancient Woodland Coverage in RCT from [www.lle.gov.wales](http://www.lle.gov.wales)



RCTCBC will identify resources to protect and enhance its ancient woodland holdings, which are extensive and include Craig Pont Rhondda SSSI and Local Nature Reserve, Craig Yr Hesg Local Nature Reserve and all ancient woodland Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). This will include resources to help people to appreciate the value of these woods and use them without harming the wildlife. RCT will work with the Local Nature Partnership, local communities and interested groups to achieve this.

The Woodland Trust has produced a guide to help people recognise trees that have special interest and to help justify why a tree (or group of trees) stands out from others of the same species. Sometimes it is important that their specific qualities can be clearly recognised, so they can be properly protected and managed.

RCT will take into account the value of existing mature trees and invest in a greater range of options whereby trees can be retained safely. We need to keep existing 'old' trees to ensure future veteran trees!

### Tree Felling

Sometimes it may be necessary to fell trees at a site after risk assessment has been undertaken. RCT will only fell trees when they are dangerous and there is a risk of people being injured, or disease would have adverse impact on the remaining stock. A tree is considered dangerous if it is in very poor condition, for example because of a significant or notifiable disease or if it is structurally unsound. Taking the decision to remove or cutback a tree is always the absolute last resort and one the Council makes when there is no other option. For every tree the Council fells on public land, replacement will be required. The number of replacement trees planted will be determined in relation to the size of the original tree felled.

Entire deadwood, if safe, can provide a hugely important contribution to naturally succeeding woodland habitat. By leaving more deadwood in place, where it is possible and safe to do so, habitats may be established for a wide variety of invertebrates and other organisms.

RCT tree risk assessment will always seek all alternative options to felling trees or removing hedgerows:

- Keep dead and dying trees wherever possible, as they provide important habitats for wildlife
- When looking at a dying tree, consider managed retrenchment or turn retained standing trunks into a feature or sculpture
- Leave cut or fallen branches as complete as possible. Leave them where they fall or move them closer to the tree to decay naturally and even artistically
  - decaying wood is too valuable to be burnt or chipped
- Stumps are important reservoirs of biodiversity and provide an historical record of a tree. Leave them to decay naturally
- Where health and safety concerns exist, felling is not the only option. Changing public access routes so they are kept away from the tree or reducing the extent of the tree canopy are often amongst acceptable alternative strategies.

The gradual incremental tree loss due to poor quality tree work and unnecessary felling is one of the biggest threats to the privately owned urban and suburban tree-scape. RCT commits to working with its partners to improve standards of tree surgery on Rhondda Cynon Taf and better inform the public in best practice in tree care.

### Protection and enforcement of legal measures to protect existing tree stock

There is extensive legislation and policy in Wales that supports environmental best practice. In relation to trees, the key policies are:

#### Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

TPOs are administered by the Council and are made to protect trees that bring significant amenity benefit to the local area. This protection is particularly important where trees are under threat. All types of tree but not bushes or shrubs, can be

protected, and a TPO can protect anything from a single tree to all trees within a defined area or woodland. Any species can be protected, but no species is automatically protected by a Tree Preservation Order. 'Amenity' is not defined in law, so authorities need to exercise judgment when deciding whether it is within their powers to make an Order. Orders should be used to protect selected trees and woodlands if their removal would have a significant negative impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public. Before authorities make or confirm an order they should be able to show that protection would bring a reasonable degree of public benefit in the present or future, thereby evidencing that it is expedient to serve a TPO.

Conservation Areas have protection to ensure permission is required to work on trees and some hedges and time is allowed to apply TPO protection where appropriate. Before authorities make or confirm an order they should be able to show that protection would bring a reasonable degree of public benefit in the present or future. It may be expedient to make a TPO if we believe there is a risk of trees being cut down or pruned in ways which would have a significant impact on the amenity of the area.

Conservation Areas protect trees by requiring that anyone proposing to cut down or carry out work on a tree in a conservation area must give six weeks' prior notice. The purpose of this requirement is to give the council time to consider making an order on the trees. A Conservation area notice is not an application for consent under an Order. Instead, it is used to protect trees in Conservation Areas which are not protected by TPOs. RCTCBC commits to vigorously enforce all infringements of TPO's and Conservation Area protections.

TPO's do not normally cover trees on Council owned land because it is assumed the same level of protection will be given by the Council to its own tree stock. This position should be clarified in policy and applied in all Council leases. Consideration should always be given to TPO protection for trees on land the Council proposes to sell.

### Legislation, policy and guidelines

All landowners have a common duty of care under the Occupier's Liability Acts (1957) and (1984) and statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974).

All public bodies in Wales are subject to the "biodiversity duty" contained in The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 s.6. This states that public bodies, including Local Authorities: "...must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions". The Council must report on the S.6 Duty every three years to Welsh Government (next due end 2022).

Appendix 2 provides a summary of the key Wales, UK, regional and local legislation, policy and guidance relevant to this Strategy. The range is extensive and the success of the Strategy will depend on integrating the various concern into a coherent whole. This should reflect the specific landscape, culture and aspirations of Rhondda Cynon Taf and its constituent communities. For example; the RCT Climate Change Strategy sets out the ambition 'to protect and enhance our wild spaces and work with nature to tackle both the Climate and Nature Emergencies and benefit our communities'. The

Vision for this Tree Policy is built upon this ambition and is underpinned by a series of related commitments set out within the Climate Change Strategy.

There is an extensive literature available for Local Authorities and landowners/homeowners on the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands. RCTCBC will take into account 'best practice' when implementing this strategy. These include relevant British Standards that provide clear, best practice guidance and recommendations on many issues. Two key standards are BS3998: 2010 Recommendations for Tree Work and BS5837: 2012 Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations.

There is a range of legislation that protects biodiversity and urban green spaces by regulating planning, contamination and conservation. Legislation relevant in Wales is listed in Appendix 2.

#### Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11) (6.4.24-26)

Trees, woodlands, copses and hedgerows are of great importance for biodiversity. They are important connecting habitats for resilient ecological networks and make valuable wider contribution to landscape character, sense of place, air quality, recreation and local climate moderation. They also play a vital role in tackling the climate emergency by locking up carbon, and can provide shade and shelter, a sustainable energy source and building materials. The particular role, siting and design requirements of urban trees in providing health and well-being benefits to communities, now and in the future should be promoted as part of plan making and decision taking

Planning authorities should protect trees, hedgerows, groups of trees and areas of woodland where they have ecological value, contribute to the character or amenity of a particular locality, or perform a beneficial and identified green infrastructure function. Planning authorities should consider the importance of native woodland and valued trees, and should have regard, where appropriate, to local authority tree strategies or SPG. Permanent removal of woodland should only be permitted where it would achieve significant and clearly defined public benefits. Where woodland or trees are removed as part of a proposed scheme, developers will be expected to provide compensatory planting.

Ancient woodland and semi-natural woodlands and individual ancient, veteran and heritage trees are irreplaceable natural resources, and have significant landscape, biodiversity and cultural value. Such trees and woodlands should be afforded protection from development which would result in their loss or deterioration unless there are significant and clearly defined public benefits; this protection should prevent potentially damaging operations and their unnecessary loss.

#### Trees and Planning:

As part of the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan (RLDP) all the existing policies in the adopted Local Development Plan will be reviewed. The current LDP provides some policy guidance regarding trees. Core policies CS1 and CS2 make reference to 'protecting the cultural identity of the Strategy Area by protecting historic built heritage and the natural environment'.



Policies relating to the environment are also included in the Area Wide section, for example AW4 Community Infrastructure and Planning Obligations refers to Environmental and Landscape improvements, AW5 supports proposals which where appropriate, existing site features of built and natural environment value would be retained, and AW6 Design and Placemaking includes landscaping and planting, and protecting and enhancing the landscape and biodiversity.

Policy AW8 Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment is the main policy relating to biodiversity and is supported by specific Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Nature Conservation. This contains two paragraphs (below) in relation to trees on development sites. ([Nature conservation \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk) )

*'4.1.16 Where a planning application affects trees, woodlands or hedges on or adjacent to the development site, applicants will be expected to provide information about these and the impact of their proposals on them, both in respect of their nature conservation and amenity value. Where important features are affected, the Council will require a tree report as specified in the British Standards Institutes, BS 5837: Trees in relation to construction.*

*4.1.17 This report should be based on a survey by an appropriately qualified arboriculturalist, categorise the trees and set out the arboricultural implications of the proposed development. For trees etc. that are to be retained, or areas to be planted, an Arboricultural Method Statement and a Tree Protection Plan should be provided and Construction Exclusion Zones identified on the site layout plan. Any specified works to trees etc. should conform to BS 3998: Recommendations for Tree work.'*

The Nature conservation SPG also makes multiple references to trees, woodlands, hedges and Tree Preservation Orders.

The council also has a number of policy statements regarding trees on its website

- TPO [Tree Preservation Order | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)
- Conservation areas [Conservation areas | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)
- Dangerous trees [Dangerous Trees | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)
- Reporting overgrowth etc,

## Trees and Development

Proposals for development and other land use changes will need to consider how trees, woodland and hedges will be successfully integrated with the overall scheme. To avoid future conflict, the following must be carefully considered:

- appropriate space for retained and new trees to allow for future growth and spread;
- how to avoid damage due to compaction of soil, severing roots or branches; and
- the need for infrastructure and service installation as well as the presence of pre-existing utility provision to be mindful of trees.

In exceptional circumstances where the loss of existing trees and hedgerows can be fully justified through a site specific arboricultural assessment, provision will be required for replacement plantings in a suitable location. Developers should use the Council's pre-application service to obtain expert advice on the matters that will need to be addressed, before a formal planning application is made. Any Supplementary Planning Guidance must be followed. ( [Nature conservation \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk) contains the current requirements)

### Highway Works and Utility Services

Street trees can be vulnerable to damage from work associated with installation and repair of utility services. This can result in loss of vigour and at worst, death, both of which may take several years to become evident. It also poses a health and safety risk if trees are made unstable (severing of major roots) and work just covered over. Utility services should be aware of and work to the current best practice guidelines. Guidelines on the planning, installation, and maintenance of utility apparatus in proximity to trees.

RCTCBC commits to holding discussions and agreeing terms of best practice with any company or organisation that has permitted development rights.

### Deliberate Damage and Vandalism

Damage to trees, both deliberate and through ignorance, is sadly common. Criminal damage includes cutting down, lopping or topping trees, snapping saplings, setting fires beneath trees and various other attempts to kill trees.

Accidental or careless damage to trees includes vehicle impact, damage from strimming and mowing around trees and compaction from parking on grass verges etc.

Damage may also be related to highway use and maintenance by the installation of driveways, infrastructure and signage or through contamination from salt in grit or hydrocarbons etc.

RCTCBC will apply suitable planning conditions to protect new and existing trees and enforce them.

Most damage to trees is through ignorance and will be addressed by Information and education campaigns but cases of deliberate or wilful accidental damage will be prosecuted.

Viewing trees as public assets, rather than liabilities will allow the Council to make better and more consistent decisions about Rhondda Cynon Taf's tree stock in all areas of conflicting interests and damage. This will also facilitate responses where the value of a single tree in monetary terms enables quantifiable and justifiable decision making.

# **PART 3**

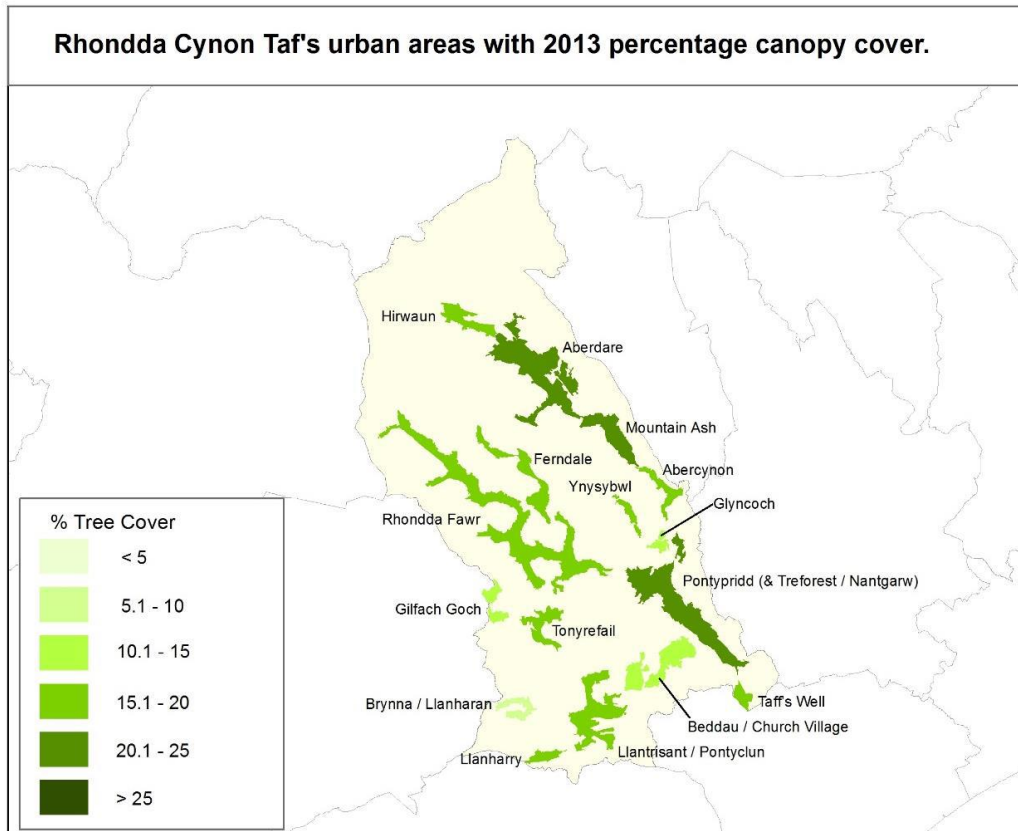
# **URBAN TREE STOCK**

## Part 3: Urban Tree Stock

### What we have

Rhondda Cynon Taf has extensive canopy cover in urban areas, but unfortunately the most recent NRW survey indicates that we are losing large mature trees which contribute so much to our townscape, biodiversity and amenity.

The urban areas surveyed by NRW are illustrated below.



The table below summarises the results of the 2013 survey. Eleven of the 16 urban areas have cover greater than the Wales national average with Aberdare, Pontypridd and Mountain Ash exceeding 20%.

Only Brynna / Llanharan (9.8%), Beddau / Church Village (11.7%), Gilfach Goch (12.2%) and Glyncoch (12.4%) fall below 15% cover. NRW also considered former Communities First areas and none showed a serious under provision of canopy. The Valleys are unusual in this regard; 'leafy suburbs' are typically associated with richer neighbourhoods but in RCT almost all communities benefit from extensive tree cover. NRW note that much of this cover in RCT is in woodlands, which need to be well managed and accessible for the public to gain full benefit.

Urban Area	Landscape Character Zone	Population ONS 2011 Census	Urban Area (ha)	Total Cover '13 (ha)	Total Cover '13 (%)
Rhondda Fawr	H. of Valleys	58,904	1538	278	18.1%
Aberdare	H. of Valleys	29,748	1026	224	21.9%
Pontypridd (& Treforest / Nantgarw)	S. Valleys	30,457	1004	215	21.4%
Llantrisant / Pontyclun	S. Valleys	14,422	605	103	17.0%
Beddau / Church Village	S. Valleys	8,236	470	55	11.7%
Ferndale (& Maerdy)	H. of Valleys	7,338	351	68	19.3%
Mountain Ash	H. of Valleys	11,230	332	78	23.4%
Hirwaun	H. of Valleys	7,247	229	40	17.3%
Tonyrefail	S. Valleys	9,317	224	35	15.8%
Abercynon	S. Valleys	5,983	158	30	18.9%
Brynna / Llanharan	S. Valleys	6,686	141	14	9.8%
Gilfach Goch	S. Valleys	4,395	132	16	12.2%
Llanharry	S. Valleys	3,035	92	16	17.2%
Taff's Well	S. Valleys	5,567	91	17	18.2%
Ynysybwl	S. Valleys	3,503	84	15	17.5%
Glyncoch	S. Valleys	4,020	71	9	12.4%

Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing urban tree stock contains a mixture of native and non-native species of different ages in our streets, parks, river and rail corridors and in private gardens. While the existing urban trees were often originally planted, in RCT trees from the pre-development landscape have survived and flourished. The proximity to native woodlands in the surrounding countryside means that even urban locations can be colonised by natural regeneration from the natural seedbank.

### Rhondda Cynon Taf Tree Legacy

Mature, larger trees are particularly important for our legacy, for their ecological value and for the ecosystem services they provide (such as carbon stored from the atmosphere). Ensuring that maintenance and management of the urban tree stock is particularly important for the long-term development of large and mature trees. Efforts must be increased to protect them and reduce the premature loss of these important trees. The Council will also work with all landowners to promote best practice in trees, woodland and hedgerows management on their land

Natural regeneration, which is an extremely robust and strong process in RCT, with no attendant carbon footprint and minimal risk of spreading tree disease, should be encouraged in and around woodlands where this doesn't compromise other priority habitats or important landscape or cultural features.

Where planting is considered, this should be on the basis of the right tree for the right place, and with a clear understanding of the existing biodiversity value of the site.

Trees should be chosen that are appropriate to each individual site and have the space, both above and below ground, to grow to maturity. Wherever appropriate, RCT will plant locally grown and propagated trees. The nature conservation benefits of planting and encouraging characteristic native trees will be recognised.

Climate change means that the range and distribution of trees will change over time, also the range of tree pests and diseases. For native trees that sexual reproduce there is likely to be considerable natural adaptation and natural resilience to a changing climate. The major native trees of RCT also occur much further south in Europe where they have proven capacity to adapt to different climatic conditions.

Increasing temperatures may also allow non-native trees to survive with the potential for new invasive species effecting a wider area, and the potential for attendant biodiversity loss. An example of this is the invasive Cherry Laurel, a plant native to the Azores that benefits from higher temperatures and the damp conditions and threatens to overwhelm the natural flora within RCT woodlands. In urban centres where concrete and buildings may cause significant localised hot spots the use of heat-tolerant species may be required.

This also presents challenges for how the Council manages existing trees in urban areas.

- Consideration of the future climatic suitability of new trees as the climate in Rhondda Cynon Taf changes, especially given the long life span of many trees
- Consideration of how our existing tree stocks may be affected by changing climatic conditions and potentially greater frequency of extreme weather events
- Consideration of the future biodiversity impacts of introducing non-native tree species into areas of high biodiversity importance.

There are many factors which need to be considered when planting urban trees, woodland trees and hedgerows, involving both species selection and the actual growing and living conditions for the trees in the future. (See Appendix 4: The Right Tree in the Right Place – Deciding What to Plant)

Whilst trees will be affected by climate change, they are also part of the solution to Climate mitigation and adaptation. We need a variety of tree species, and trees of varying age in order to create a legacy for the future, and we need to work with natural process where those can realise the best results.

### Specification, Planting and Maintenance

Many trees in urban areas are compromised by ground conditions, proximity to buildings and roads, disturbance to roots from utilities and loss of canopy spread through management pressures. It is therefore particularly important in urban situations to plant the right tree for the right place. Non-native species, which are not ecological problematic or invasive, may be considered in these situations. It is however important to recognise that non-native species will not support the range and diversity of native wildlife.

Maintenance of urban trees is also important, for promoting tree health, prolonging life, managing risk and maintaining the space for the tree to develop.

Where planting is undertaken RCT will ensure that all tree plantings follow best practice. This includes ensuring water in periods of high temperature and/or drought, and that all appropriate protections are made.

Collaboration with local communities will be vital to success when planting urban trees across the County Borough. Vandalism of planted trees is a continuing problem and urban trees often generate comment. Overhanging branches, leaf litter, satellite reception, loss of view, parking obstructions, uneven pavements etc. are frequent complaints. At the same time, pruning, other works and tree removal may also be unpopular.

### Species Diversity Selection

In urban situations a wider choice of planted trees may reduce the risk of pests, diseases, and climate change. Retention is always better than planting. There must be trees in varying age classes to replace the mature trees as they decline and die. It is important to allow for loss in all age classes due to damage, past poor maintenance, or disease. The urban environment is often difficult for trees and therefore the choice of tree species must be appropriate to the location to gain maximum benefit. Trees lost or made vulnerable through climate change and disease may need to be replaced with more resilient species. For example, the choice of urban replacements for diseased ash, so as to gain the greatest benefit to wildlife and people. In ash woodlands particular value will be placed on both the natural reaction of ash to selection pressure of ash die back, and the development of naturally resistant trees, and also to the reaction of other native trees species to the gaps and spaces created by dying trees. It is, for instance, anticipated that oak, sycamore and beech will naturally seed into and take advantage of such opportunities in RCT.

Imported diseases and pests are a major threat to our trees, so all trees bought by RCTCBC will be certified as grown and propagated in Wales. We will support local communities and groups in setting up tree nurseries using locally collected seed, to access a wider genetic pool than is available commercially. Where it does not compromise other priority habitats, natural regeneration, which comes disease free, from the local seedbank, and with no attendant carbon footprint will be facilitated where possible.

### Replacement Planting

In urban areas replacement planting will be essential to ensure continuity of the tree stock. A single young tree will take many years to achieve the size and scale of a large mature 'one and one' for one replacement does not give the same benefit. If it is found necessary to remove trees the Council will ensure that appropriate replacement based on a site related arboricultural assessment takes place. Trees will generally be replaced in the same location but in some circumstances a nearby location may be more practical and appropriate.

### Woodland

Where there is scope to expand an existing urban woodland, natural growth will be prioritised as the best means to increase woodland cover. Planted trees have an inherent carbon footprint based on the whole process of their propagation and raising in nurseries, transportation, plastic tubes and cane provision when planted, and

aftercare. The disturbance of soils to form planting pits releases soil carbons. These are inherent problems with woodland planting which need to be considered in all cases. In comparison natural regeneration of woodland involves no human derived carbon footprint, and minimal aftercare. The process leads to natural diversification, and the trees that establish are much less prone to drought or competition.

In general, established woodlands benefit from having a range of tree ages, densities and species for the benefit of biodiversity and continuity of crown cover. However, woodlands are long term habitats that take hundreds of years to fully develop, and which will go through continued adaptation and change as they do so. There are natural processes within woodlands which lead to structural changes over time, competition between adjacent trees, wind throw, and disease can all interact to influence structural diversification.

### Trees in Hard Landscapes

It is a priority to plant trees in areas within hard surfacing such as car parks, streets and pedestrianised areas. It is better to design open planting areas, but where this is not possible, special planting techniques are available which ensure adequate soil volumes to ensure the trees reach their full potential. The publication by TDAG, 'Trees in hard landscapes - a guide for delivery' considers practical challenges and solutions to allow integration of trees in our streets, civic spaces and surface car parks.

These areas are the most challenging urban environments for growing trees but are also the areas that benefit most from their inclusion. The Council commits to best practice in the use of modern planting techniques which have been researched and developed to enable successful tree establishment and growth in these areas.

### Existing Trees in the Highway

The 2013 NRW survey of trees in urban areas of RCT identified transport routes (including verges and pavements) as an important component of the urban tree resource. In RCT they comprise 18% of the urban land and include 9% of the urban tree cover. (the figures for Wales' urban areas for comparison is 16% of Wales' urban land and 9% of cover). They also note that motorised traffic causes much of the urban air and surface water pollution, which trees have the ability to remove. (Town Tree Cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough ([cyfoethnaturiol.cymru](http://cyfoethnaturiol.cymru))).

Urban air quality is most affected by road traffic emissions producing nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter. Commercial food cooking and wood- fuel stoves are also significant sources of particulate matter in some areas. Trees absorb some nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter by acting as a 'filter'. The simplest and best way to improve air quality is to plan urban places to reduce sources of pollution. Green infrastructure can help reduce pollution by providing welcoming spaces through which people will prefer to walk or cycle rather than drive. Improvements can be made from modifications to the urban environment, including the number, size, and position of urban trees and hedges e.g. around school playgrounds, health centres, shopping areas.

Trees add considerably to our streetscape and parking areas however streets offer a very unnatural environment for trees and so they need special care and protection. In



residential areas verges have often been resurfaced with tarmac and used for parking and where tree roots could previously access adjacent gardens, these have now been paved. Highway trees are not only located within the carriageway and footways but also within verges and small areas of green space. These areas need to be retained and protected as they provide a better growing space than fully hard surfaced areas and opportunities should be taken wherever possible to reinstate this soft landscaping. Because it is difficult to get replacement trees established in the existing highway, the removal of street trees will only be considered as a last resort where all other solutions have been considered. RCTCBC will set best practice for urban tree pit use maintaining and improving existing tree plantings where possible.

### Trees in Parks and Cemeteries

Rhondda Cynon Taf has x parks and green spaces, of which 4 Council and 9 community sites have Green Flag accreditation.

According to the NRW survey of urban areas in RCT referred to earlier, public open space hosts as much as 60% of urban tree cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf, whilst public open space accounts for 26% of urban land. (For Wales the figures are 53% of all tree cover in our Welsh communities in public open space which makes up only 22% of urban land).

Parks are very important contributors to the overall environment and landscape character of the area. Parks include some key heritage designed landscapes, where the overall design and the treescape must be maintained in future management and restoration plans. In other parks tree cover will be increased in line with site specific, design led management plans that seek to maximise the aesthetic, social, health and ecological benefit of our parks. Parks could provide a clear exemplar of planning for the future and best practice in tree care, maintenance and planting. The principle should be that retention is better than replanting.

Ecologically rich areas, especially with trees, have been shown to help reduce people's stress levels and improve general mental health and well-being. Wildlife continues to decline nationally. Parks have an important role to play in supporting wildlife and will be managed to encourage this.

It is important that whenever trees are lost in our parks they are replaced. This strategy seeks to develop management plans that anticipate future climate and tree problems. RCT will commit to working constructively with Friends Groups and other stakeholders to review park management plans in light of both climate change and biodiversity plans and this Strategy.

The table below shows if Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands are located in cemeteries managed by RCT.

CEMETERY	TREES	HEDGEROWS	WOODLAND
Abercynon Cemetery	X		
Aberdare Cemetery	X	X	X
Aberffrd Cemetery (Old Mountain Ash)	X		X
Bryn y Gaer Cemetery (Hirwaun)	X	X	
Cefn y Parc Cemetery(Talbot Green)	X		X

Ferndale Cemetery	X	X	X
Glyntaff Cemetery and Crematorium	X	X	X
Llanharan Cemetery	X		
Llwydcoed Crematorium	X	X	X
Maes yr Arian Cemetery (New Mountain Ash)	X	X	
Penrhys Cemetery	X	X	X
Trealaw Cemetery	X	X	
Treorchy Cemetery	X	X	
Ty Rhiw Cemetery(Taffs Well)	X	X	
Ynysybwl Cemetery	X		
Abercynon Cemetery	X		
Aberdare Cemetery	X	X	X
Aberffrwd Cemetery(Old Mountain Ash)	X		X
Bryn y Gaer Cemetery(Hirwaun)	X	X	
Cefn y Parc Cemetery(Talbot Green)	X		X
Ferndale Cemetery	X	X	X
Glyntaff Cemetery and Crematorium	X	X	X
Llanharan Cemetery	X		
Llwydcoed Crematorium	X	X	X
Maes yr Arian Cemetery(New Mountain Ash)	X	X	
Penrhys Cemetery	X	X	X
Trealaw Cemetery	X	X	
Treorchy Cemetery	X	X	
Ty Rhiw Cemetery(Taffs Well)	X	X	
Ynysybwl Cemetery	X		

## School grounds

There are 117 school premises in RCT, the majority of which have some green space and many have trees, hedges and woodlands within their grounds. As with other urban spaces, some of these are survivals from the pre-development landscape (and probably including some ancient woodland) but many were planted, either when the school was built or more recently. The management of school grounds is typically the responsibility of the school governing body and head teacher. Some schools have extensive woodlands, planted decades ago, where these areas require specialist advice to maintain them in a safe condition for pupils to use these valuable external areas for the curriculum. There is an urgent need to review the support and advice available to schools for planting and maintaining tree species, grounds management, to maximise the benefits for amenity, climate change, biodiversity and to allow schools to take full advantage of much needed external teaching and learning spaces to assist in delivering the 'New Curriculum for Wales'.

## Trees in Private Gardens

Private residential gardens provide only 14% of urban tree cover in RCT despite taking up about 35% of the urban area. In Wales' urban areas, private gardens cover about

the same area but provide 20% of all Wales' town tree cover. This is probably due to the dense population and settlement pattern in Rhondda Cynon Taf, but it emphasises the importance of the tree canopy in Council ownership or management to local amenity. - (Town Tree Cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough ([cyfoethnaturiol.cymru](http://cyfoethnaturiol.cymru))).

## Green Infrastructure

The provision of green infrastructure in and around urban areas is now widely recognised as contributing towards creating places where people want to live and work. Planning Policy Wales, green infrastructure has been defined as:

*“the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect places”. Green Infrastructure can function at a range of different scales; from entire ecosystems such as wetlands and rivers to parks, fields and gardens at the local scale and street trees, hedgerows, roadside verges, and green roofs/walls at the micro scale. (PPW 11, paragraph 6.2.1).*

RCTCBC will undertake a Green Infrastructure Assessment (GIA) for the Revised Local Development Plan. This will include sites and corridors that contribute to the green and blue elements of our urban infrastructure. An example of Green Infrastructure relevant to this strategy could be visual and auditory barriers to separate housing from other uses, busy roads and railways and other residential areas. Trees and hedgerows, especially in urban areas, can help provide visual barriers as well as barriers to pollution, noise and wind.

The GIA will need to

- **Identify** where existing green infrastructure can currently be found and where there may be opportunities for improvement, such as through the provision of new green infrastructure, or the enhancement of existing green infrastructure;
- **Consider** what improvements can be made to biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, as well as consider the needs of local communities and society as a whole and how these can be met through green infrastructure;
- **Be applicable** at a range of different levels, from helping to inform the planning of green infrastructure at a development site level, to the more strategic level planning needed to inform, for example, strategies for growth (6.2.9) or to identify suitable locations for off-site compensation (6.4.21).
- **Be regularly reviewed**, to ensure that the information contained within them is up to date and appropriate for use as an evidence base, to inform development management decisions and assists with relevant reporting requirements (6.2.12)

It is worth highlighting that in addition to Planning Policy Wales, there are other drivers for the delivery of green infrastructure, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. (NRW guidance note 042 June 2021)

## Orchards

RCT has very little in the way of traditional orchards. There is however potential within Parks, School Grounds and urban community green spaces to plant orchards. However, to be successful fruit trees do require annual aftercare pruning involving skill and knowledge of what needs doing. There is therefore a long-term commitment required.

## Sale of Council Land

Where Council land is sold or leased there may be an increased risk of tree loss and failure to replace them. Valuable trees will be identified and protected prior to sale or transfer of the land to retain the County Borough's asset for the benefit of the wider population. The Council will expect the new landowners or lease holders to work within the guidelines of this Tree Strategy and where appropriate will ask for annual data from them regarding the future condition on felling and planting to feed into our figures for monitoring progress.

## Nurseries

Sourcing local provenance, disease free trees will be difficult. Importation of trees played a part in the rapid spread of Ash dieback and further importation runs the risk of importing more pests or diseases. Commercial stock often comes from a limited genetic base and is therefore vulnerable when new disease strikes. The Council will actively engage with volunteer-assisted nurseries that can collect local seed and grow up until large enough to plant out. This will provide a variety of local genotypes and trees that are likely to be adapted to local conditions.

While this should not be the only source of trees for Rhondda Cynon Taf, it can play an important part and increase community involvement in new trees while at the same time managing biosecurity i.e. the prevention of the introduction and spread of harmful organisms.

The primary driver for including biosecurity in procurement policy is to prevent the transmission of pests and diseases due to transportation of tree stock, specifically transportation without adequate oversight or an effective audit trail attributing ownership and a chain of custody from seed to planted tree at its final destination.

## Planting for Resilience

This strategy will contribute to Rhondda Cynon Taf's emerging strategy on climate change. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016, sets the context for resilience and the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) in Wales. It also introduces a requirement for NRW to produce Area Statements and the South Central Wales Area Statement gives a framework for both policy and resilience. The two 'cornerstone' themes 'Building Resilient Ecosystems' and 'Connecting People with Nature' are relevant as are the three specific issues or challenges: Working with Water, Improving Health and Improving Air Quality. Green Infrastructure is a recurring feature of the Areas Statement.

Seven ecosystem profiles are being developed and will provide an evidence base for policy making. The ecosystems are peatlands, freshwater, woodlands, grasslands, valleys and urban (plus coastal).

## Environmental Goals for Tree Resilience:

Ecosystem resilience underpins the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources. The Environment Act defines the as four elements that contribute to adaptability. In their guide [Natural Resources Wales / Ecosystem resilience field guide](#) NRW define these as

- Diversity - at a variety of different levels and scales, including genetic diversity, species diversity, diversity within and between ecosystems and structural diversity for example.
- Extent - where its area is sufficiently large to sustain populations, support ecological processes and cope with negative edge effects like predation.
- Condition - where the impacts of pressures and demands are positively managed so that the physical environment can support a comprehensive range of organisms and healthy populations.
- Connectivity - where organisms can move within and between different ecosystems, from foraging or migration of individuals, through dispersal of seeds and genes, to the major shifts of species' populations to adjust to a changing climate.
- Ecosystem resilience comes about as a result of an interplay between these aspects, allowing ecosystems to adapt, recover and resist pressures and demands more readily. It is important to note that this applies to all ecosystems in RCT, not just trees and woodlands.

## Tree Pests and Diseases

Trees, like all plants, can be attacked by a wide variety of diseases and pests. Dutch Elm Disease in 1970's severely reduced the elm population. Part of the role of the tree risk management programme which will be developed through this strategy will consider the threat of diseases to trees.

Chalara Ash - dieback is of particular importance to the Council as it has become established in parts of the County Borough and can pose a particular threat to trees in the highway corridor. The Council will develop a protocol for dealing with Ash- dieback issues in RCT.

There are opportunities to harvest seed from Rhondda Cynon Taf's own existing tree stock. Mature trees which have naturally seeded in Rhondda Cynon Taf are likely to be best suited to Rhondda Cynon Taf's climate and growing conditions and may be disease resistant. For example, certain mature Wych Elms (*Ulmus glabra*) in Rhondda Cynon Taf appear to show resistance to Dutch Elm Disease, and ash trees are also showing natural resistance to ash dieback.

Following good biosecurity practices is critical for preventing the introduction of pests and diseases.

## Trees and Development of Land

Planning applications will need to demonstrate that there will be enough room for the future growth of new and retained trees to ensure long term retention and avoid pressure from future occupiers to top, lop, or fell healthy trees due to safety concerns or effects on living conditions in order to obtain reasonable sunlight and unshaded

external amenity space. Planning applications will need to provide sufficient information to enable proper consideration of trees on and around the development site with tree survey and planting scheme with appropriate root protection zones undertaken to the latest British Standard. The selection of new species to be planted will use the “right tree for right place” approach.

### Tree Management Plans

Trees and woodlands need long term management to ensure their current and future value. Opportunities will be taken on both Council and private land to achieve this long-term management. This will be done through funding applications, working with communities, partner landholders and land managers and, within developments, through planning conditions and any appropriate and necessary obligations as set out in the forthcoming Revised Local Development Plan.

### Staff Skills and Training

Arboricultural inspections and works are carried out to the relevant British Standards and following current industry best practice guidance. All staff dealing with trees whether in a planning, landscape, design, highway, safety or operational context will hold the relevant skills, experience and qualifications to undertake their particular roles. Rhondda Cynon Taf's Ranger Service includes several staff with excellent woodland management skills. These skills will be recognised and used, including training other staff. Rangers will be kept informed of all plans and contribute to initiatives about the sites they manage.

Arboriculture is a skilled profession, and for good reason as arboricultural work done improperly can be dangerous and pose risks both to people, property and trees. In the UK, two accreditation schemes exist which provide assurance of the competence and skill of contractors:

- Arboricultural Association
- International Association of Arborists

Council contractors will be held to arboricultural association standards and relevant British Standards for all work, and to set best practice in managing its own tree estate.

### Community and Voluntary Engagement

Community support and voluntary engagement will be vital to the successful implementation of this strategy. RCTCBC commits to building a good communication strategy to attract support, advice and help from across local communities.

- A wealth of knowledge and experience exists in Rhondda Cynon Taf's communities around trees and woodland.
- Members of the public on the ground are in the best position to spot signs of tree disease, vandalism etc. or other woodland issues in their local areas.
- Community involvement with trees, woodland and other habitat management, whether it be the council's planting proposals or those of community or private sector interests will create a sense of ownership for new and expanded trees and woodlands. A sense of community pride will protect new trees and woodlands from vandalism.
- The Council will use its interactive 'Lets Talk' platform to engage with communities and develop Let's Talk Trees.

**‘Trees are key to sense of place, identity and pride in local communities’**

The Council will develop effective communication channels using both online and paper-based platforms as well as face-to-face local meetings to support the strategy and effectively communicate about the occurrence of and reasoning for planned works. We will share this information more widely with interested groups, individuals and the general public and will encourage residents to get involved with local tree planting and woodland and biodiversity management initiatives, and to engage with them to ensure they are part of the long-term delivery of tree, woodland and wider habitat and biodiversity delivery across the County Borough.

**PART 4**  
**RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S**  
**HEDGEROW STRATEGY**



## Part 4: Rhondda Cynon Taf's Hedgerow Strategy

### Definition of a Hedgerow

A hedgerow or hedge is a line of woody plants, at least 20m long and up to 5m wide, usually one which is or was a boundary. (Hedgerow Regulations 1997). In Rhondda Cynon Taf hedgerows are important habitat and cultural/landscape feature. Within RCT hedgerows are particularly a feature of the lowland parts of the Cynon Valley and the Taff Ely area, where they are part of ancient pastoral landscapes created when land was first farmed. In many cases our hedgerows are hundreds and possibly thousands of years old. They are linear strips of original ancient woodland, retained and managed as field boundaries by the earliest farmers. As such in their species-richness they are of enormous biodiversity and cultural landscape value.

In the more upland parts of the County Borough, traditional field boundaries typically comprise stone walls. Both types of boundary are of landscape significant in Rhondda Cynon Taf, contributing to the connectivity of habitats across the countryside.

The main threats to traditional boundaries in Rhondda Cynon Taf are from management neglect and from development. The Council has opportunities to improve hedgerow management practices, especially in relation to road verges and to protect hedges in development through the planning system.

Some initiatives to increase hedgerow length to combat climate change are not always appropriate in RCT due to the nature of the historical boundaries, their importance in illustrating landscape history and their locally characteristic fauna and flora.

### Value of Hedges

Hedges and stone wall boundaries have great benefits for wildlife and make important and regionally distinct contributions to the landscape of the valleys.

- They act as refuges, food sources, shelter and corridors for movement of wildlife. In RCT their continuity is of particular importance for a number of s. 7 species including dormice and bats.
- The presence of some taller trees adds to their wildlife value, as song-posts, perching posts and shelter.
- Hedges benefit people by filtering pollutants from the air, lessening noise and providing screening, all at human height. They are of particular benefit in urban areas and around key sites such as schools and hospitals and along roads.
- Hedges can be valuable where height or width is restricted so larger trees are inappropriate.
- Hedges need to be maintained to keep their value, being best when growing densely without gaps. Hedge-laying styles vary between the north and south of the County Borough.
- In RCT species-rich hedgerows are features of cultural and historic landscape value. Their species composition and the hedge construction varies between different parts of the County Borough and the diversity of species can be a guide to the age of the hedge.
- Valuable hedges, e.g. species-rich hedges or ones of historical importance can be protected by The Hedgerow Regulations 1997. Sites of Importance for

Nature Conservation (SINC) may include ancient and species rich hedgerows in RCT.

Hedgerows, hedge banks and stone walls are acknowledged as an important part of green infrastructure and the Council will seek to protect and manage existing hedges and where appropriate, new planting of simple hawthorn or hazel hedges.

Hedgerows are an undervalued resource. They are important for biodiversity and provide a range of benefits to people. In the past, hedges were used as larders of healthy seasonal food – apples, berries and nuts were collected as a healthy tasty supplement to the diet. Today, we need them as wildlife corridors and because of the large numbers of animals from songbirds to pollinating insects that they support. Existing urban hedges are often clipped, sterile habitats. By changing peoples' perception of what a hedge should be, from a neat 'box' to a more natural and 'wild' hedge, we can improve many urban edges for both biodiversity and for food.

### Council Hedges

Hedges will be retained on Council land wherever possible. Young hedgerows will be managed to ensure that they develop into healthy mature hedges in accordance with good practice. Staff training in the management of hedges will be required.

In certain urban locations hedges of exotic or ornamental species may be more suitable and will still contribute to amenity and wildlife. Leyland Cypress hybrids and invasive non-natives such as cherry laurel, will not be specified for use as hedging on Council property. The use of thorny species in house estates or schools should be avoided, unless the hedgerows are being used for security reasons.

Hedges in house gardens are the responsibility of individual owners/tenants and the Council will provide advice and guidance to encourage their retention and sustainable management.

### Hedges on Private Land

Although most hedges cannot be protected by a TPO, many, ancient countryside hedgerows in RCT do qualify as 'important' under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 and can have some protection through that process. In some cases, hedgerows also form parts of Sites of Importance for Conservation (SINC) and will have the appropriate planning policy considerations if affected by planning applications. For hedges on development sites the Council will seek protection, improvement, replacement and when appropriate the planting of new hedges. New hedges will also be sought where appropriate to act as boundary features. Generally speaking, new hedges will typically be simple in composition (hazel or hawthorn) and of the construction style typical of the locality. Stone walls or hedge banks may be more appropriate in some areas or RCT.

### Enforcement

RCTCBC will ensure that existing hedgerow legislation is properly enforced. The Council will prosecute offenders who damage or destroy hedges in contravention of the law. Where an offence has been committed the Council will take appropriate enforcement action which may include prosecution proceedings. Note this will require increased resources.

All requests for works to hedges on private land will be assessed in accordance with statutory requirements by the Local Planning Authority to determine whether an application is needed under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 and any other subsequent legislation. The Local Planning Authority is required to determine a Hedgerow Removal Notice including an assessment as to whether the hedge can be classed as “important” under the Hedgerow Regulations.

Requests for work to hedges on Council property will be assessed and authorised by RCTCBC with reference to the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 and best practice guidance.

### High Hedge Legislation

Complaints relating to evergreen hedges over 2m in height will be considered in the context of the High Hedges legislation as set out in Part 8 of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 which gives local authorities powers to adjudicate in unresolved disputes over high evergreen hedges: the complainant must first try to resolve the issue through negotiation with the hedge owner.

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-05/high-hedge-appeals-guidance.pdf>





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## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE

6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022

#### S.6 BIODIVERSITY DUTY: THREE YEAR REPORT TO WELSH GOVERNMENT 2020 TO 2022

#### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE & CORPORATE SERVICES

**AUTHOR:** Elizabeth Dean, Environment Planner

Appendices - Appendix A: S.6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan 2019/20 to 2022/23

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Sub-Committees with an update on the progress in developing and implementing the Council's S.6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan; and to seek approval to submit the Action Plan to Welsh Government and to publicise it on the Council's website as required by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Members consider the information contained within this report and the progress made to integrate consideration of biodiversity into all Council services, since the last formal report in 2019.
- 2.1 Members endorse the report and Appendix A for submission to Welsh Government and for inclusion on the Council's website.

#### 3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (S.6) created a new Duty which states that public bodies, including Local Authorities  
*"...must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions".*

The Act also establishes a 3 yearly reporting schedule, the second report is due in December 2022.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 When the new Duty was introduced by the Environment Act an initial report for Members was prepared in 2017 and procedures were established within the Council to identify existing biodiversity activity, raise awareness of the Duty, identify new initiatives and develop a reporting mechanism.
- 4.2 The first report (2017-19) was considered by members in Autumn 2019 <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18207/Report.pdf?LLL=0> and subsequently submitted to Welsh Government. The second report for the period 2020-22 is now due.
- 4.3 Welsh Government produced guidance with regard to the Duty in 2019, ([Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty: reporting guidance](#)) which encouraged public bodies to develop procedures to suit local circumstances but wherever possible align and integrate these with existing corporate arrangements. The RCT procedure, described below, was well established before the guidance was issued and satisfies the general requirements.
- 4.4 The Council's performance management system has been utilised to embed the routine consideration of biodiversity across the Authority. Each year since 2017 (except during COVID), a 'Biodiversity Duty' question has been included in the Service Self Evaluation (SSE) undertaken by each Council service which informs their subsequent Service Delivery Plans. This encourages managers to think about their impacts on biodiversity, report on progress and identify opportunities. The SSE and Delivery Plans are signed off by the relevant Cabinet members. The next round of SSE is currently underway to inform the delivery plans for 23/24.
- 4.5 Welsh Government undertook an evaluation of the first round of Duty submissions from public bodies and the process used in RCT featured in a good practice presentation by Welsh Government to Local Government Environmental Directors in November 2021.

#### **5. The proposed Report to Welsh Government: the Duty Action Plan 2019/20 to 2022/23**

- 5.1 The reporting mechanism established for the previous round has been continued for the current three-year period. This is based on an Action Plan spreadsheet, appended to this report (Appendix A). The Action Plan themes reflect the main areas of Council activity, namely:
- public engagement,
  - planning,
  - estate management,
  - water management,



- education,
- advice to the public,
- corporate planning, and
- working with neighbours and statutory bodies.

- 5.2 Individual actions under these headings are classified as ‘on-going’ or ‘project’ (with start and finish dates) and a summary of progress is given for the financial years 19/20, 20/21, 21/22 and 22/23 (to Sept). The use of financial years follows normal Council reporting, but this means there are four reports to cover the 3-year period given in the legislation. Other columns provide information about the officers involved and any general comments.
- 5.3 A new column (NRAP objectives) has been added to the spreadsheet for the current reporting round. It is recommended in the Welsh Government guidance, that public bodies should show how their actions contribute to the objectives of the Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP). These are
- Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels.
  - Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management,
  - Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation,
  - Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats,
  - Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring,
  - Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.
- 5.4 The Action Plan shows the diversity of biodiversity activity across the Authority and the steady progress in addressing biodiversity issues at both a strategic level and in practical applications. Progress has been made across all the themes, and cross departmental working is beginning to make a real difference to the work of the Council as a whole. Some of the successes and issues highlighted by the updating of the Action Plan are given below.
- 5.5 The long-standing integration of biodiversity into the planning system has been a major success, from initial enquiries and ‘pre-app’ through to long term management via S106 agreements. Several of the Council managed sites now feature as part of the Living Landscape project and will provide ‘nature reserves’ on the doorstep for local residents and businesses for years to come. However, due to Covid disruption and capacity across the sector there are some planning agreements where the developer is failing to provide required information or in some cases has failed to provide the approved mitigation.
- 5.6 With regard to Estate management, the establishment of the Nature’s Assets Climate change officer group has broadened the appreciation of the Council’s land holdings for biodiversity, as well as carbon storage, tree cover, water retention and community engagement. In addition, there is a growing demand for community uses of Council owned land, and internal procedures have been set up to evaluate these.

- 5.7 With regard to Water management, since the last review the consideration of biodiversity in Council ordinary watercourse consent procedures has become routine and is making a difference for wildlife and people. The new legal requirement for Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) for a wide range of developments (not all of which require planning consent) is a new pressure. Managing the biodiversity impacts of SUDS is not straight forward, as the preferred 'natural solutions' can be very damaging to biodiversity. SUDs is a separate regulatory process and depending on the approach of the developer it can be challenging to integrate this with the planning requirements. Discussions are in hand to address these kinds of issues through early engagement and joint working and to ensure that there is no conflict between what has been secured for ecological mitigation and what is necessary to meet SUDs/SAB requirements.
- 5.8 In addition to monitoring progress, the Service Self Evaluation identifies 'potential areas for improvement', which may be subject to further discussion and added to the action plan. Examples below, identified in the 2021 round of SSE, demonstrate how the declaration of the Nature Emergency is putting increased pressure on the resources available within the council to deliver the necessary activity.
- 5.9 Encouragingly, several departments have identified the need for service specific training to develop their understanding of biodiversity in RCT and the scope for further engagement. This is very welcome but does put pressure on current resources. Access to existing on-line materials is being investigated but this is not necessarily the most appropriate vehicle compared to in person, service specific discussions.
- 5.10 Engagement of schools and young people is another area where the aspirations are growing. The Education and Inclusion SSE included the following in their potential areas for improvement:
- 'Future work is planned with the Council's ecologist to roll out working with all school councils and eco committees'
- Other proposals include a young people's Environment and Sustainability Forum, and school biodiversity champions.
- 5.11 Whilst there is clear evidence that the consideration of biodiversity issues is now embedded in Council decision making across all services this does mean that further consideration is needed to ensure the current resources within the Council and in particular the Countryside team are sufficient to meet the demands placed upon them. In addition, further focus on biodiversity has been announced by Welsh Government with the 'Deep Dive' launched in October (see below) emphasising a range of activity and requirements including the tripling of peatland restoration schemes but without clarity at this stage of how this activity will be funded.

- 5.12 The increasing demand on our Countryside team has been recognised over recent years and a Graduate and Apprentice have been brought on board. However, there is a need that with the continued increase in demand we are clear around exactly where our priorities are set and that we work across service areas to ensure that our resources are directed to those priorities.

## **6. Future development**

- 6.1 Members may be aware that Welsh Government declared a Nature Emergency in summer 2021. Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change, has recently completed a [Biodiversity 'deep dive' with recommendations](#) for a step change in Wales action on reversing biodiversity decline in line with the up-coming UN Conference of the Parties on Biodiversity ([COP15](#)). These include a priority to 'Embed Nature Recovery in policy and strategy in public bodies in Wales', supported by actions to strengthen the delivery of the S.6 Duty across all Government portfolios and public bodies.
- 6.2 As a result of the Deep Dive, Welsh Government has recently identified additional spending over the next three years for biodiversity, but this does not cover the S.6 Duty, which public bodies are expected to adopt as part of their normal service delivery.
- 6.3 The [Duty Guidance](#) from Welsh Government encourages the integration of the work into the Corporate Plan. The current Plan does address biodiversity, however this is an area members may wish to consider further when the RCT Corporate Plan is developed for the period beyond 2024. There may be synergies with the new performance and governance functions for local authorities under [part six of the Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#).

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/ SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 7.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report. Members may wish to note that some of the specific actions, set out in Appendix A, (such as 4.3 Park Lane School SUDS) may create positive opportunities for particular groups.

## **8. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT**

- 8.1 As described in 4.4 above, a collaborative approach has been developed across the Authority to progress the Duty. The RCT Local Nature Partnership was consulted at an early stage to advise on the suitability of the action themes.

8.2

## **9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no direct implications as a result of this report, however, the Welsh Language Impact Assessment of any scheme that will be implemented as a result of the Action Plan will be considered in the development of those projects.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 10.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, financial implications may arise in association with the actions the Council undertakes to comply with the Duty and these will be considered as and when necessary.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a plan of action regarding the Biodiversity Duty and to report to Welsh Government, as set out in S.6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

## **12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 12.1 This report contributes to a wide range of the Council's priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan for 2020 to 2024. Specifically, it contributes to investing in our greenspaces and to delivering natural carbon storage solutions such as those provided by trees, peat bogs, marshy grassland and other natural habitats across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses.

- 12.2 The Duty Action Plan reflects the five ways of working in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Biodiversity work must be based on long-term considerations and is focused on preventative and precautionary action. It seeks to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem resilience into projects to realise multiple benefits for local residents and wildlife.

- 12.3 Biodiversity work contributes specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility goals of the Act, but in the longer term it could have implications for all the goals

## **13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS**

- 13.1 The Biodiversity Duty is of strategic importance across the whole of RCT.

## **14. CONCLUSION**

- 14.1 The Council is required to report progress in the discharge of its Biodiversity Duty to Welsh Government every three years. This report and the action plan presented at Appendix A show the actions undertaken over the last 3 years.

**Other Information:-**

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee:** *Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity*

**Contact Officer:** *Elizabeth Dean, Environment Planner*

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE**

**6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT, IN  
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE &  
CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Background Papers**

None.

2019/22 Biodiversity Duty: Action spreadsheet		main contact	on-going or project	started	progress 2019/20	progress 20/21	progress 21/22	progress 22/23	Comments and Wales Nature Recovery Plan (NRAP) objective objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels. Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management, Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation, Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats, Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring, Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.	completed
<b>1. Biodiversity and the local community</b>										
1.1	Local Nature Partnership (formerly LBAP partnership)	Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on-going	1997	Partnership meetings held April, July, Oct and Jan. Slow progress with LBAP review due to delay in WG funding. Some consultation events held in summer. Flood/Covid delay in early 2020. Appointment of LNP co-ordinator 1.5 days per week with WG funding via WCVA Jan 20 to Mar 2022.	covid disruption to planned meetings and events programme, on line meetings re-established from Oct, Partnership quarterly and Action for Nature review meetings monthly commencing with species reviews	covid disruption to planned meetings and events programme, on line meetings continued, Partnership quarterly and Action for Nature review meetings monthly completing species reviews then looking at habitat groups. Co-production of website to replace former paper documents. Communities in Action evening meetings instigated quarterly between Partnership meetings. Draft of Action for Nature website consultation 29th Jan to 11th March 2022. Loss of LNP co-ordinator when WG funding ceased end of March 22	Amendments made to Action for Nature website, report of consultation completed and circulated to Partnership and respondents.'Under construction' banner removed by Partnership. On line Partnership meetings held in April and July, with an site visit to Cefn yr hendy Living Landscape site in September and an in-person partnership meeting in October.		1,2,3,4,5,6
1.2	Recorders' Newsletter	Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on-going	1997	summary for 2018 produced and distributed Sept 19	no progress due to covid disruption and pressure of work	no progress due to pressure of work, but highlighted as a priority in Action for Nature draft	no progress to end Oct due to pressure of work, but retained as a priority in the final 'Action for Nature'. Discussions with Partnership proposed with regard to a new digital format.	Recorders' Newsletter summarises wildlife reports from members of the public sent to the Council's Ecologist	1,2,5
1.3	council sites and community groups	Liz Dean/ Richard Wistow/Kate Stock/Marie Fowler (to Oct 21)	on going	1997	Pontyclun wildflower walk, Beddau Biodiversity Ramble, Aberdare Park moth and bat events, Dare Valley Country Park bird and student events, monthly summer childrens events at Dare Valley and Ynysangharad Park (Magnificent minibeasts, muddy masterpieces, beautiful butterflies, den building)	Plans for community engagement work on RCT 'Countryside' sites with the Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales disrupted due to COVID. Limited opportunities for other practical community engagement. Some 'socially distanced' Devil's Bit scabious planting with Buglife at Y Pant school, Parc Nant Celyn and Ynysddu field in November	continuing disruption due to COVID but socially distanced 'grab a rake' events at St Dyfrigs, Park Lane, Blaenrhondda Park, Hendreforgan, Talgarn Road Verge in sept, liaison with community and friends groups in parks, Community garden project in Ynysangharad Park, Wilder Health events at Clydach Vale jan-mar 22	Some COVID disruption but a gradual return of community events at various sites. LNP visit to Cefn Yr Hendy Living Landscape site in Sept. Loss of staff and pressures of routine and grant funded work has severely limited community engagement. 'Grab a rake' a casualty		1
1.4	Living Landscapes	Liz Dean/ Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on-going	formally 2020	initial discussions and mapping undertaken by the Wildlife Trust during the period 2016-19 led to the development of a project outline by the Local Nature Partnership	Initially raised in Natures Assets report, prepared pre-covid but approved by CCCSG and cabinet late in 2020. Continued project development, including bids for graduate ecologist and 2 biodiversity apprentices to support delivery.	Project included in Action for Nature review by Partnership, graduate and apprentices in post from Sept, Living Landscape report approved by Cabinet in October. Grant bid to WG submitted via WCVA in Jan, approved in principle in February. Practical on site works Oct-March (staff only/socially distanced initially due to COVID restrictions)	Welsh Government Capital grant Local Places for Nature (LPFN) of (£373k) grant confirmed April, plus revenue for posts (to Mar23). Appointment following advertisement and interview of the 2 former Biodiversity Apprentices in late Sept. Works in hand to progress capital spend on 29 Living Landscape sites (fencing, water, geo-collars, woodland management, interpretation etc.) by March 23		2,3,4,6
1.5	Let's Talk RCT	Chris Davies/Liz Dean/Marie Fowler (to oct 21)	project	2020		Let's Talk Wildflowers developed following adoption of wildflower grassland management policy by the Council in Jan 2020	Lets Talk Wildflowers informed revised grass cutting schedules for wildflower management. Commenced Lets Talk Trees, delayed due to loss of staff.	Let's Talk Trees launched in Oct to celebrate trees and woodland in RCT and to support the consultation on the Council's draft tree strategy		1,2,4,5 tbc
<b>Biodiversity and the Planning System</b>										

2.1	implement current policy and guidance	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock	on-going	2011	Ecological review has been undertaken of 1026 planning applications received by the local planning authority in 19/20, including the review of SEWBREC data searches	1359 planning applications reviewed in 20/21, including the review of SEWBREC data searches	Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21, 1459 planning applications reviewed 21/22, including the review of SEWBREC data searches	359 planning applications reviewed in q1 of 22/23 (to end of June), including the review of SEWBREC data searches. Full year data available in April 23	Ecological review covers the full range of ecological scrutiny in the planning process. From initial sifting and consideration of ecological potential of planning applications (ex. adverts and non material changes apps), through to site visits as necessary, scoping for required ecological assessments, review and scrutiny of submitted ecological assessments, negotiating proposed mitigation and ultimately ecological recommendations in accordance with adopted planning policy. From PPW10 in 2018, all development should protect and enhance biodiversity.	1,2,4,5,6		
2.2	monitor implementation of planning mitigation	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock, Jen Wakeford/ Leanne Lott	on-going	2019	PPW10 includes reference (6.2.12). Using existing S106 quarterly meetings and monthly biodiversity meetings to establish procedures.	staff changes (JW replaced by LL) and covid disruption to meeting pattern and engagement with developers with approved mitigation schemes.	Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21, table of S106 relating to peat restoration prepared for Planning/Climate Change meetings. Continued COVID disruption	Further work with windfarm operators with S106 for on-going habitat restoration projects, to identify potential benefits of peatland restoration to Natural Floodrisk Management (NFM) in high risk catchments (led by Catrin Evans in drainage). Further work required to re-establish contacts with developers with approved mitigation schemes (see 2.4 below)	loss of regular meetings and contacts with developers/ changes in personel during COVID has impacted delivery	3		
2.3	monitor the impact of development on SINC	Richard Wistow/ Clare Hewitt	on-going	2011	3 schemes directly affected designated SINC. All of these have mitigation schemes and management plans secured through a Section 106 agreement, over a total site area of 18.57ha. The zip line application in Rhigos accounts for 17ha of this.	3 schemes directly affected a designated SINC. Two of these have mitigation schemes and management plans secured through a Section 106 agreement, over a total site area of 2.28ha. The one application where there was no SINC mitigation scheme was due to existing damage to the SINC.	The 2021-2022 AMR is still in preparation, however two schemes directly affect a designated SINC. Both of these have mitigation schemes secured via a S106 agreement, over a total site area of 0.38ha.	This data will be available in May 2023	Data is published in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) available the following year	1,2,3,4,5,6		
2.4	management of S106 agreements	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock	on-going	1998	Outline management plans prepared for 5 sites (Parc Eirin, Cefn yr Hendy, Danygraig Heights, Pant Marsh and Llanharan Quarry) where land and funding is vested with the Council. Works have been undertaken at Cefn yr Hendy, Pant Marsh and Parc Eirin. On-going work at Penycymoedd (including Heritage Lottery bid, approved in August). Annual monitoring of 14 (developer) management plans by ecologist/tree officer. 24 agreements under negotiation/awaiting trigger points.	Covid disruption to management works on site, in particular shortage of fencing contractors. Contractor works at Danygraig, and Parc Eirin. Three new mitigation scheme added from 19/20 consents (Zipworld/Tower, Blaenrhondda and Mynydd Bwlfa). Annual monitoring and recording of negotiations status disrupted by COVID.	Two new sites added from 20/21 consents at Penycymoedd and former Clairnant factory. Annual monitoring and recording of negotiations status disrupted by COVID. Graduate Ecologist and 2 Biodiversity Apprentices assisting from Sept 21. Practical management works undertaken in-house Sept-March at Parc Eirin, Pant Marsh and Llanharan Quarry. Contractor works at Danygraig, Cefn yr hendy and Llanharan Quarry. 5 council managed sites included in the Living Landscape project approved by cabinet in Oct	Two new sites added from 21/22 consents at Pantydrynne and CraigrAllt Nantgarw. Annual (or more frequent) monitoring of 9 developer management plans by Ecologist, negotiations regarding 13 agreements not currently being implemented post development, 14 agreements under negotiation or awaiting trigger. 2 agreements lost to SUDS development. Contractor works at Danygraig, Cefn yr hendy and Llanharan Quarry. Interpretation panels planned at Living Landscape sites (Parc Eirin, Llanharan Quarry, Pant Marsh and Cefn Yr hendy). In-house practical works at a number of sites.	Concern re COVID impact and the number of agreements where the developer is not providing the required information regarding the implementation of the mitigation or has failed to provide the mitigation.	1,2,3,4,5,6		
2.5	evidence relating to the multiple benefits of negotiated S106 agreements to inform the review of the LDP	Liz Dean / Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock	project	2015	Continued liason with Wildlife Trust towards the completion of the 'opportunity' mapping project in accordance with LDP review programme	covid disruption including furlough for staff/loss of staff at Wildlife Trust delayed mapping. Some data assembled for input to LDP background papers	Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21, table of S106 relating to peat restoration prepared for Planning/ Climate Change meetings. Site mapping being undertaken in house due to staff turnover at WTSWW and Grad appointment.	discussions of benefits of peatland restoration and Natural Flood Management initiated with some S106 windfarm developers (CE)		1,3,4,5,6		



2.6	Ensure the Biodiversity Duty is reflected in the review of the LDP	Owen Jones/Liz Dean / Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	project	2018	Report on LDP preparation to cabinet (18/06/19). Note prepared for the LDP Review Report (08/19). Welsh Government published the Development Plans Manual and the National Development Framework for consultation	Formal approval was given to begin the preparation of the Revised LDP 2020 – 2030 in September. Initial Green Infrastructure data report prepared for LDP, based on analysis of PPW10 and biodiversity duty. Review of SINC boundaries in relation to the regional selection criteria. Future Wales, The National Plan to 2040 published. Candidate sites procedure established. Integrated Sustainability Appraisal prepared by consultants with input from across the Council	Natures' Assets working group considered LDP and climate change themes. Council approval to cease work on the RLDP and begin work on a new RLDP with a plan period of 2022 – 2037.	New RLDP agreed by WG April 22, to begin a new timetable from then. The initial assessment of candidate sites previously submitted was completed. This included the consideration of sites against the existing and proposed SINC and higher level ecological designations. A 2nd call for sites was also opened. Update of ISA in preparation. Updating of SINC descriptions commenced		1,2,3,4,5,6	2025/2026.	
2.7	and in the new Strategic Plan for the Cardiff City Region, City Deal and Metro proposals	Owen Jones/Liz Dean / Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock	project	2018	Strategic Development Plan (regional) reported to Cabinet (06/19). Issue of Biodiversity Duty and SDP raised at Wales meeting in June. Welsh Government published the Development Plans Manual and the National Development Framework for consultation.	covid disruption, capital region report to Cabinet Feb21	continued covid disruption, regional discussions continuing in advance of the formal Capital Region establishment.	Although no formal preparation of the SDP has begun, the South East Wales Strategic Planning Group continue to prepare pieces of joint evidence base, where possible, on a region wide basis. Consideration is also being given to options of how the funding of the preparation of the SDP could take place between member authorities. This is in advance of the formal set up of the necessary CJC committees. Ad hoc contacts re ecological surveys for metro works.		1,2,3,4,5,6		
2.8	and in the new Strategic Opportunity Area proposals	Liz Dean/Sarah Mee/Pete Mortimer	project	2018	nominated officers and a project board in Regeneration to lead on each. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cynon Gateway – Energizing the Region: Sarah Mee</li> <li>• The Wider Pontypridd, Treforest – Edge of the City, Heart of the Region: Debbie Pike</li> <li>• Pontypridd Town – Pivotal in the Region: Andrea Vlrgo</li> <li>• A4119 Corridor: Regional Rhondda Gateway: Rhian Jones</li> <li>• Llanilid on the M4: Driving the Regional Economy: Rhian Jones</li> </ul>	https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s22294/Report.pdf?LLL=0, cabinet report Cynon gateway Sep 2020, A4119 dualing report to cabinet Dec20 https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s23953/Report.pdf?LLL=0, covid disruption	covid disruption, Levelling up proposals cabinet June 21 https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s29034/Report.pdf?LLL=0 Llanilid cabinet report Dec 21 https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s32612/Report.pdf?LLL=0 Pontypridd cabinet report autumn 21: https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s31967/Report.pdf?LLL=0, Pontypridd Placemaking plan Feb22 cabinet report https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s34015/Report.pdf?LLL=0/ published Mar22.	The Pontypridd Placemaking Plan has undergone a range of consultation and has been approved for use subject to the inclusion of amendments following consultation. PONTYPRIDD PLACEMAKING PLAN CABINET JUNE 22 PONTYPRIDD PLACEMAKING PLAN CABINET JUNE 22 APPENDIX The A4119 Dualling project has been successful in securing UK Government Levelling Up Funding and the main construction contract is in place and work on delivery has commenced on site in 2022/23. Work to prepare a new Town Centre Strategy for Aberdare is in preparation and the draft will be subject to a programme of engagement and consultation with the public, key stakeholders and organisations.	The Strategic Opportunity Areas provide a framework to inform the focus of regeneration and development opportunities. In this way priorities will be informed and detailed plans and strategies will consider how best the Biodiversity duty is reflected.	1,2,3,4,5,6		
2.9	use of sewbrec data	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock, Bethan Jenkins	on-going	2009	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC, format of data supply changed.	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC, includes access to Aderyn dataset but this requires specialist interpretation. Ongoing issues with planning application data arising after the ecologists observations have been submitted to the planning officer.	Planning have a Service Level Agreement with SEWBREC. Ongoing issues with planning application data arising after the ecologists observations have been submitted to planning officers, and with the staff time required for in house searches of the database.	Unresolved staff time issues relating to planning application checks and ad hoc departmental enquiries.	5		
2.10	Green Infrastructure Assessment	Liz Dean/ Clare Hewitt	on going	2019	brief note prepared, discussions with LDP team	Initial report prepared, Nov meeting NRW re draft guidance.	good practice examples collated and training events attended. NRW published guidance June 21	good practice examples collated and training events attended.		1,2,3,4,5,6		
2.11	Ensure new statutory nature conservation designations are mapped onto Corporate GIS systems - responsible body ITC	Michael Brutsch/Gillian Hobbs	project	2019	SSSI layer updated 30/04/19		SSSI data uploaded again Feb 22		RCT Ecologist is the most likely consultee that NRW will contact when new SSSI are designated.	5	2019, but new errors subsequently found, corrected 2022	
<b>3. Biodiversity and land /estate management</b>												

3.1	cut and collect	Steve Owen/Gareth Henson/ Richard Wistow/Marie Fowler/ Kate Stock	on-going	2016	Meetings and training sessions with Streetcare, following the transfer of grasscutting. Visits, lists and mapping of additional sites in Cynon, Rhondda and Taf for 2020. Grassland notices for Cemeteries. Countyside cut and collect of key Countryside grassland sites with the sofrak.	Capital funding from WG 'Local Places for Nature' purchase Amazone cut and collect machine, training materials provided as COVID restricted in-person training, also affected cutting schedules and resulted in many 'unintentional' flowery verges, generally welcomed by the public. Countryside cut and collect of key Countryside grassland sites with the sofrak.	Capital funding from WG 'Local Places for Nature' to purchase a further Amazone cut and collect machine. RCT Lets Talk Wildflowers above, allows public to nominate sites to add to the schedule. Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21, MF left Oct. Additional sites reviewed for additon in 22/23, Countyside cut and collect of key Countryside grassland sites with the sofrak.	Mapping of operational and proposed sites, additional equipment (Rytec and trailer) ordered with LPfN funding, A total of 1,360,490sqm in cut and collect management this year. Discussion with cemeteries to bring 5 Living Landscape sites into cut and collect management from spring 23. Countyside cut and collect of key Countryside grassland sites with the sofrak.	Re-organisation of service provision has seen the road verge 'Cut and Collect' machine operation moved to the Streetcare Department. A number of the larger Key Countryside and Living Landscape sites continue to be cut by Countryside with the original 'sofrak' machine which is better able to cope with wet conditions	1,2,3,4,6		
3.2	Transfer of management works from Parks and Countryside section to Streetcare to identify biodiversity training/information provision (as raised in 2017SSE), in particular with regard to the Wildlife Law aspects, such as protocols for nesting birds, sensitive areas (e.g. dormouse priority areas, SSSI) etc.	Richard Wistow/ Nigel Wheeler/Steve Owen	project	2018	meetings with team leaders held, site signs, notices etc. supplied, social media proposal for 2020 season in preparation.	training for operatives and supervisors carried out prior to the grass cutting season, some limitations re on-site training due to COVID restrictions. Nesting bird advice for website. Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21	training for operatives and supervisors carried out prior to the grass cutting season, some limitations re on site training due to COVID restrictions. Nesting bird advice for website. Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21		grass verge management transferred from Parks to Streetcare in April 2018. Parks supervisors transferred from April 2019.	1,2,3		2022
3.3	Corporate Estates Department liaise with Council's Countryside section regarding occasional third party requests for positive biodiversity land management licences on Council owned land	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock/ Richard Skinner/Kelly Daniels	on-going	2017	ecological advisory role continued as opportunities and issues arise, including advice on potential grazing opportunities for 'rented' grazing sites.	ecological advisory role continued as opportunities and issues arise, including advice on potential grazing opportunities for 'rented' grazing sites.	ecological advisory role continued as opportunities and issues arise, including advice on potential grazing opportunities for 'rented' grazing sites. Healthy Hillside project (see below) Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21	ecological advisory role continued as opportunities and issues arise, including advice on potential grazing opportunities for 'rented' grazing sites. Healthy Hillside project (see below), increasing enquiries re community uses (see 3.6 below)		1,2,4		
3.4	Japanese Knotweed management on Council land	Gareth Henson / David Brown	on going		Wildlife Trust grant bid approved. Council treatment of 231 sites, area 2,231m <sup>2</sup>	Council treatment of 262 sites, area 2,262m <sup>2</sup>	Council treatment of 448 sites, area 4,480m <sup>2</sup> . Knotweed officer David Brown appointed Sept 21, report to Scrutiny Feb 22	treatment undertaken in autumn 22, data available April 2023		2,4		
3.5	Fly Tipping control/removal	Steve Owen/ Tim Jones	on going		2945 tips cleared	3146 flytips cleared	3293 flytips cleared	q1 843 fly tipping incidents, final data available end of April 2023		2,4		
3.6	Corporate estates department liaise with Council's Countryside section regarding biodiversity implications of land disposal, and building refurbishments, demolitions and new developments	various/Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on going		adhoc advice given for example Cwmbach school roof collapse and bat issues	covid disruption, limited input this year, work with Welcome to Our Woods re Council owned land at Corbett Street	increasing demand for observations on proposals for community use of Council owned land. Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21	Ensure continuity with Countryside transfer to Planning. Continuing enquires for community use of Council owned land, including Corbett Street agro forestry project with Welcome to our Woods. Corporate Estates review of the grazing portfolio this year may allow biodiversity considerations in Council licencing.	See also Nature's Assets below. The Council's land portfolio is increasingly being seen as an important contributor to community well-being and ecosystem resilience and this has resource implications, in particular for ecological expertise.	1,2,3,4,5,6		
3.7	Healthy Hillside/Grazing site work	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock/Kelly Daniels	on going	2013	In accordance with a new timetable for WG EnRaW grant submission, the Health Hillside partnership is preparing a submission. 5 RCT Conservation Grazing sites on-going and preparation works to deliver 2 more sites through planning mitigation/gain in preparation.	Healthy Hillside delay due to COVID, NRW progressed negotiations with WG, agreed input from RCT and other partners. Council site at Tylorstown tip on hold due to landslip remediation.	Healthy Hillside Project commenced, led by NRW, with staff from Wildlife Trust (Tara Daniels) progressing works on Council owned sites at Clydach Vale and Penrhys. Works include habitat mapping, bracken rolling, balsam bashing, vegetation clearance for fire breaks and fencelines, Wilder Health sessions, purchase of management machinery for Fire Service and support for MSc student. Additional sites in Llantrisant and in neighbouring LAs. Conservation grazing continuing on a number of Council owned sites.	Conservation grazing licences which cover 7 RCT owned sites, some of which were not grazed this season due to drought conditions. Living Landscapes project funding will allow the installation of water troughs at some sites) Healthy Hillside project continues.	Health Hillside project identified in RCT and Merthyr Community Safety plan as a multiple partnership project delivering best practice for grass fire prevention	1,2,3,4,5	Healthy Hillside due to complete grant aid spend by July 23	

3.8	Highways Infrastructure Programme	Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on-going		Further development of schemes and issues, including closeworking with Highways engineers in development of species specific bat mitigation measures.	llanharan bypass, cynon gateway, a4119 dualling major projects plus liaison re minor projects	llanharan bypass, cynon gateway, a4119 dualling major projects plus liaison re minor engineering projects.	A4119 dualling under construction,including mitigation and enhancement works. Cynon gateway received planning consent, mitigation and enhancement package agreed. Llanharan bypass still in design and negotiation of mitigation and enhancement measures. Tylorstown tip reclamation proposals under discussion in addition to minor engineering projects		1,2,3,4,5,6		
<b>4. Biodiversity and water management</b>												
4.1	ordinary water course consents	Anthony Chorley/Liam Swanwick/ Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on going	2012	44 ordinary watercourse applications.	70 ordinary watercourse applications.	115 ordinary watercourse applications.	55 ordinary watercourse applications (to end of Aug).	Numbers rising year on year with implications for ecologist's workload	1,2,4		
4.2	introduction and operation of sustainable drainage (SUDS) regulations	Owen Griffiths/Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on going	2015	24 full applications received, 18 validated	51 full applications received of which 46 validated	69 full applications received of which 60 validated	to end Sept 29 full applications received of which 23 validated. Ecologist not consulted routinely, except in relation to Planning applications (to end Sept) but procedures in place for future consultation on all validated schemes.	see Park Lane School below. Numbers rising and new consultation procedures have implications for the Ecologist's workload. Concern also that 'natural solutions' can be very damaging for biodiversity and can conflict with agreed planning mitigation/enhancement for biodiversity if not considered at the same time.	1,2,4		
4.3	Park Lane School SUDS	Richard Wistow / Darren Miller / Mark Powell	project	2019	discussion of biodiversity opportunity, design and negotiation re space for pitch and SUDS suitable for 'cut and collect', design in progress, text for Corporate Performance Report May19.	Multi year funding from WG flood branch capital programme 2019-2022. Works commenced on site.	Major works completed, cut and collect autumn 21, 'grab a rake' community event on steep banks Sept. Devils bit scabious planting winter. Included in Living Landscape pilot project of 29 sites (cabinet Oct 2021)	Funding from Welsh Government (Local Places for Nature) for interpretation panel to be completed by March23	objective to achieve flood risk reduction for the school, utilizing space between Aberdare Park and a redundant pitch. A marshy grassland site, which can be 'cut and collect', provide outdoor education space for the school and contribute to the rhos pasture network for the marsh fritillary butterfly.	1,2,3,4		2022, on-going maintenance and community engagement via Living Landscape project (see above)
4.4	Pontypridd Raingarden/ Pretty Ponty	Owen Griffiths /Marie Fowler to Oct 21	project	2020	grant bid to WG Natural Floodrisk management fund	successful grant bid implemented	Replacement tree planted			1,3		2021
4.5	Ely Catchment Partnership	Owen Jones/Andy Stone/Liz Dean/ Becky Davies NRW	currently project	2022			NRW initiated investigation of catchment wide partnership for the river Ely (Cardiff/Vale/RCT/WW/NRW and voluntary sector), to address the Water Framework Directive failures. Fortnightly meetings Jan-Mar 22 to identify issues, interrelationships, responsibilities and potential solutions.	further occasional meetings co-ordinated by NRW to develop and share natural capital studies commissioned from consultants and progress the Partnership	Ely is Wales' worst river with regard to the Water Framework Directive, with the Clun classified as 'bad' and a programme of remedial works is required.	1,2,3,4,5,6		
<b>5. Biodiversity and education</b>												
5.1	walk to the wild	Liz Dean	was on going, funding now ceased	2014	Grant funding ceased. Regional funding bid for outdoor learning failed. Training meeting and AGM of the RCT and Merthyr Outdoor Learning Group held at Ynysangharad Park Pontypridd, 4th July. Activities led by Rhian Vale, 12 mostly teachers attended. New chair elected (Ian Timbrell Cwmbach Community School).				Ambition to continue 'Walk to the Wild' if funding can be identified and to publish the resources generated to date on the website.			2019

5.2	school grounds for biodiversity	Richard Wistow/ Richard Bowen/Marie Fowler to nov 21	project	2019	visits to 7 schools (Ysgol Llanhari, Ynysboeth, YGG Tonyrefail, Trealaw, Oaklands primary, Llanharan primary, Glenboi) with education officers and production of reports for proposed biodiversity management of school grounds	covid disruption to original programme. Visit to Gwauncelyn (Nov) and recommendations for replacement of felled trees	Advice to University of S Wales re grassland 'cut and collect' management. As a result of schools interest, Education identify staff to support school grounds projects	Ysgol Llanhari are exploring options for creating a wildflower meadow on an embankment, YGG Tonyrefail are cultivating a wildflower meadow (as per the report). The remaining sites are predominantly 'hard yard' sites and thus the changes there have been focused on the wildlife accomodation and planting up raised beds etc. Some of this work is paused as Learning Curve space is repurposed for Ukrainian refugees.	Funding of school grounds management is delegated to the school	1,2,3	2022 but on-going via Education support
5.3	green-roofed outdoor classrooms	Richard Bowen	project	2021		grant bid to WG Local Places for Nature for 6 outdoor classrooms with green roofs-successful.	7 classrooms completed, 6 funded via the grant and an additional classroom funded by the council	video of project in preparation, on going maintenance to be managed jointly by RCT and the respective schools.	Local Places for Nature funding from Welsh Government. Sites with limited access to green-space selected	1,2,3	2022
5.4	swifts in schools	Liz Dean/ Richard Bowen	project	2022			the reported decline in swift nesting (and house martins and swallows) in Ferndale prompted a repeat of the 2004 'Is Martin at home?' school survey in the northern Rhondda Fach (zero nests reported!) and proposals for nest sites on school buildings	Local Places for Nature funding being explored for a wider project across RCT. Some schools installing nest boxes provided by Learning Curve projects	swifts, swallows and house martins rely on buildings for their nest sites and were once common and widespread across RCT. Populations have crashed in recent years and providing nest sites may help to reverse this decline	1,2,3,4,5	funding available til march 23
<b>6. Biodiversity and advice to the public</b>											
		Richard Wistow/Kate Stock	on-going	1997	advice/queries received on an ad hoc and on-going basis covering a wide range of ecological issues	advice/queries received on an ad hoc and on-going basis covering a wide range of ecological issues	advice/queries received on an ad hoc and on-going basis covering a wide range of ecological issues. Graduate Ecologist assisting from Sept 21	advice/queries received on an ad hoc and on-going basis covering a wide range of ecological issues. LNP co-ordination returned to RCT apr 22, facebook page requires monitoring by KS		2,3,4,5	
<b>7. Biodiversity and corporate planning</b>											
7.1	Service Self Evaluation of Biodiversity	Lesley Lawson/ Liz Dean	on going	2017	Action plan updated, Input to corporate performance report for 18/19	floods and covid disruption, revised SSE process	SSE process and Biodiversity Q reinstated autumn 2021, The RCT approach has been commended and featured in a good practice presentation by Welsh Government to the LG Environmental Directors (Nov). 20 service evaluations considered	action plan updated. SSE for 22/23 to be completed by 9th Dec 22		1,6	
7.2	Biodiversity Duty Plan	Richard Wistow/ Kate Stock/Liz Dean	on going	2016	Action plan updated, report to scrutiny 10th Oct and Cabinet 21st Nov to allow submission to Welsh Government by December 2019. <a href="https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18906/Report%201.pdf?LLL=0">https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18906/Report%201.pdf?LLL=0</a>	Action Plan on hold although actions continued	action plan updated , actions continued	report to scrutiny Nov and Climate Change cabinet sub-Committee Dec for submission to WG by end of 2022	Environment (Wales) Act 2016 S6. Legal duty to report to WG every 3 years (Dec 2019 and Dec 2022)	1,6	
7.3	Procurement Services continue to address biodiversity within its service provision and consider in policy reviews and associated documentation and processes.	Liz Dean/ Steve Vaughan/ Marc Cumbie	on-going	2018	Through consultation with relevant service areas and suppliers, the Council's Procurement Service is in the process of implementing a robust approach to the reduction of single use plastics. The approach adopted to date, aligns itself with the 'Plastics Recycling Route Map' for Wales.	report to Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group Nov 20 and update Mar 21	update report to Climate Change cabinet steering Group March 22 draft procurement strategy21/24 Cabinet 21/03/22 <a href="https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s34512/Procurement%20Strategy%20Report.pdf?LLL=0">https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s34512/Procurement%20Strategy%20Report.pdf?LLL=0</a>	The Procurement Service use the Welsh Government Sustainability Risk Assessment in our Invitations to Tender. Unless otherwise agreed, any products or services procured under this Contract shall (where possible) meet the minimum mandatory Government Buying Standards ( <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collecti- ons/sustainable-procurement-the- government-buying-standards-gbs">https://www.gov.uk/government/collecti- ons/sustainable-procurement-the- government-buying-standards-gbs</a> ) In respect of single use plastics, we've widened the scope of this to 'single use items'		1,6	

7.4	Climate Change Strategy	Lesley Lawson	on-going	2019	Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group (CCCSG) established, received Biodiversity Duty report at first meeting	Draft strategy to Cabinet Mar21 <a href="https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s25810/Report.pdf?LLL=0">https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s25810/Report.pdf?LLL=0</a> , public consultation including Let's Talk Climate Change	Climate Change Officer Working Group established with the primary aim of supporting the practical implementation of the policies and strategic direction determined by the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee (CCSC), including actions relating to Net Zero and becoming a carbon neutral organisation by 2030.	Following consultation, the Strategy adopted by Cabinet in June 2022 <a href="https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s35286/Climate%20Change%20Report%20-%20Cabinet%2022%20June%202022.pdf?LLL=0">https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s35286/Climate%20Change%20Report%20-%20Cabinet%2022%20June%202022.pdf?LLL=0</a> , Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee with decision making powers established. Decarbonisation dashboard launched for internal pilot.		1,6		
7.5	Natures' Assets Group	Jon Arroyo/Ffion Edwards/Liz Dean/Richard Wistow	on-going	2021	Nature's Assets report prepared for Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Group, but consideration delayed due to COVID	Following report, and a further report on the Councils proposed wildflower grassland management policy, officer working group proposed to develop the work programme	The Nature's Assets officer group established April 2021 (sub-group of Climate Change officer Working Group see above). Work programme includes ancient woodland and the Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) platinum Jubilee celebrations (report 140621), the Edinburgh Declaration (report 020322) which considers the LA role in implementing the UN Convention on Biodiversity. Commissioned work on peatlands in RCT.	May announcement of Glyncornel Woods, Llwynypia as one of the 70 Ancient Woodlands selected to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth. Draft Tree Strategy (Cabinet June, consultation Sept-Oct), Let's Talk Trees from Oct, NRW Peatland Restoration Grant submitted Jul, approved Sept for investigative project in Cwmparc, to be completed by Mar23, Living Landscape project (see above), input to landuse and land-use change element of Net Zero reporting including proposals for a baseline survey of regenerating woodland on Council owned land. Solar farm proposals (report 031022)		1,2,3,4,5,6		
<b>8. Working with neighbouring authorities and other statutory bodies</b>												
8.1	Input to area statements	Liz Dean / Richard Wistow	on-going?	2017	attended workshop on 8 May, submitted paperwork. Submission re data gaps (natural regeneration of woodland, soil carbon). Area Statement for South Central (RCT/ Merthyr/ Bridgend/ Cardiff/ Vale) published March 2020	COVID disruption, continuing input on-line. Proposals for Ecosystem profiles for South Central, discussions in Oct /Nov and re grasslands and valleys profiles in Feb. input to the NRW Forest Resource Plan for Penycymoedd, in conjunction with NPT.	Response to draft ecosystem profiles for freshwater, peatland, woodland, grasslands, the valleys and urban. Regional meeting oct re progress. Ely Valley initiative (see above) resulting from AS work. Input to NRW Forest Resource Plans for the upper Rhondda, including meetings in Treherbert with Welcome to Our Woods and contributions relating to water management as well as biodiversity.	Profiles to be published on NRW website. Input to initial work by NRW on resilient ecosystems and networks across South Central. Input to NRW Forest Resource Plans for the southern part of the County Borough	the NRW South Central area includes RCT, Bridgend, Merthyr, Cardiff and the Vale	1,2,3,4,5,6		
8.2	WG ENRaW grant bids	Richard Wistow/ Liz Dean	project	2018	Successful bids for Rhos Pasture (Butterfly Conservation), Healthy Hillside (Wildlife Trust), LNP partnerships (WCVA/WBP), Hirwaun Ind Estate (RCT), KWT, Pollinators and freshwater Invertebrates (Buglife), bridleways (Vale).	Healthy Hillside (NRW/Wildlife Trust): see 3.7 above, LNP partnerships (WCVA/WBP); see 1.1 above	Healthy Hillside (NRW/WildlifeTrust) see 3.7 above. Nature Networks led by Bridgend approved, staff appointed Feb, sites in RCT identified. LNP partnership see 1.1 above.project funding ends Mar 22	Healthy Hillside (NRW/WildlifeTrust) see 3.7 above. CwmTaf Nature Networks (BCBC) works planned for Barry Sidings, Gelliwion, Glyncornel, Aberdare Park and Cefn yr Hendy		1,2,3,4,5	all projects end by June 23	
<b>9. Other</b>												















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