



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB COMMITTEE

27TH SEPTEMBER 2023

**‘NATURE ON YOUR DOORSTEP’:
UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LIVING LANDSCAPE
PROJECT IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PROSPERITY AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Author(s): Simon Gale

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members on Local Places for Nature grant funded works undertaken in 22/23 and planned for 23/24 and 24/25.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members consider the progress reported, the planned expenditure and how this contributes to the broader objective of developing a Living Landscape project across RCT.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the use of Welsh Government ‘Local Places for Nature’ funding to the Local Nature Partnership, contributes to the achievement of ‘Action for Nature’ the nature plan for RCT, and to the Council’s biodiversity aspirations.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In October 2021, cabinet received a report <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s31455/Report.pdf?LLL=0> on the Living Landscape project. This identified 29 potential sites for a pilot project to promote the sustainable management of Council owned land and to engage local communities in the project. At the time funding was being sought to progress the work.

- 4.2 The RCT Local Nature Partnership was able to access Welsh Government 'Local Places for Nature' funding to implement capital works at the 29 sites in 2022/23 as they met the grant criteria as potential '**Nature on Your Doorstep**' sites. Local Places for Nature' is a Wales-wide programme administered by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and delivered by Local Nature Partnerships in all Local Authority and National Park areas.
- 4.3 In 22/23 this funding (£335.7k) allowed the creation of 29 natural capital assets, with spending on fencing, water provision for sites with conservation grazing, woodland works, machinery (for biodiversity management), interpretation boards and web site development. A map of the sites is appended (Appendix One). Other expenditure included homes for wildlife, including a major programme of swift box installation on suitable school buildings. In addition to the capital allocation, £60k revenue was provided to administer the spend. The Council's former biodiversity apprentices were the successful applicants for the two temporary Biodiversity Officer posts.
- 4.4 In early August this year, Welsh Government approved further funding for the current financial year (23/24, £413.5k) and for 2024/25 (£538.8k) in accordance with our submitted plan to create additional 'Nature on your Doorstep' sites on Council owned land. Again, an annual revenue allocation (£72k) is in place to support the continuation of the Biodiversity Officers posts until (at least) March 2025.
- 4.5 The approved plan for the period 23/24 and 24/25 is for a further 15 'Nature on Your Doorstep' sites to be created in each financial year. (minimum of 30 over 2 years). Although the capital allocations for each financial year are fixed, the two-year programme allows more flexibility and the inclusion of sites with longer lead in times, where works are seasonal or need to be phased. With this in mind, the draft plan submitted to Welsh Government in June, included a 'long-list' of potential sites, from which the 30 sites will be selected. In drawing up the list, coverage of all wards across the County Borough has been sought, but this has not been possible in every case, largely due to the lack of suitable Council landownership in some wards. Unfortunately, school grounds cannot be considered as Nature on Your Doorstep sites unless they are open to the public. Discussions with land managers are ongoing to finalise the site list for 23/24. The type of works planned for the current year are similar to those undertaken at the original 29 sites and are designed to provide the infrastructure for sustainable long-term management for biodiversity and for public enjoyment of nature close to home. Appendix 2 includes the map of the 'long-list' sites. Appendix 3 is the combined ward list, identifying the 22/23 sites, the priority sites for 23/24, those removed following

investigation and sites requiring further discussion. Wards with no currently identified sites are also included.

- 4.6 As a condition of the funding, the Council is required to maintain the natural capital assets created and the equipment purchased for a minimum of five years. There is also a requirement to publicise the project and the contribution of Welsh Government funding to the creation of community assets.
- 4.7 In addition to the capital and associated revenue for Local Places for Nature, Welsh Government provided additional **Biodiversity revenue funding** for the period October 22 to March 23 (£36k) and has allocated biodiversity revenue for 23/24 and 24/25 (£48k each year). This funding is a result of the Biodiversity Deep-Dive undertaken by Welsh Government following the declaration of a Nature Emergency. The revenue funding has specific output requirements relating to the Local Nature Partnership, the Council's S.6 Biodiversity Duty and the United Nations '30 by 30' goal. Further details are given in Appendix 4
- 4.8 These outputs align with work currently being progressed by the Partnership and by the Council and the funding is a welcome recognition of the role of local action for biodiversity. It is noted that the role of communications and social media is reflected in the biodiversity output measures as well as in the 'Nature on your Doorstep capital spending.
- 4.9 The **Living Landscape** project, is a key action in the Local Nature Plan for RCT <https://rctlnp.wixsite.com/rct-actionfornature> prepared by the Partnership and received by members [Cabinet Report MTSP One4aLL LG \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#) in October 2022. The project provides a framework for sustainable land management for biodiversity and climate change across Rhondda Cynon Taf. The project is also a key delivery mechanism for the Council's Section 6 Biodiversity Duty.
- 4.10 The sites currently being developed have particular importance for engaging local communities, however the 'Nature on Your Doorstep' capital funding is not designed for long-term community involvement. Promotion and engagement with all potential audiences and users is seen by the Partnership to be key to the successful delivery of the project. The Partnership is therefore investigating opportunities to include walks, talks and events at various sites. The grant funding has enabled the development of the Living Landscape web site, and in the current financial year the exciting potential for social media promotion through the production of RCT Living Landscape films is being explored. These short films will focus on sites, their biodiversity and their management. This will enable the Council to engage an on-line audience and introduce the sites to local residents and visitors.

- 4.11 As mentioned in the earlier report, the long-term potential of the Living Landscape project is to bring together a network of sites in biodiversity management, reflecting the important habitats across RCT. All of the pilot sites and the current proposals are on Council owned land, however there are a number of sites being managed for biodiversity by others. These include sites managed by developers as a requirement of planning agreements, Wildlife Trust reserves and others. As the priority given to tackling the nature and climate emergency increases, further sites are likely to come forward. The Living Landscape project and the Local Nature Partnership provides a mechanism to share local knowledge and expertise, and co-ordinate a landscape scale approach to nature conservation.
- 4.12 This landscape scale is important for biodiversity conservation, especially in a changing climate. Networked sites, that can allow habitats to evolve and adapt to change, and prevent species becoming isolated, are a central focus of the emerging NRW Area Statement for south central Wales. It will also be an important component of the Green Infrastructure Assessment required for the review of the Local Development Plan. RCT is fortunate to host extensive and connected areas of semi-natural habitat, rich in biodiversity and close to peoples' homes and workplaces. The Living Landscape project provides the opportunity to actively manage land for nature. Through the development of a network of biodiversity sites it will help to support the biodiversity functioning of RCT. The project also offers the opportunity for innovative and active engagement with local people and communities. Its nature-based solutions will also directly contribute to climate change mitigation.
- 4.12 As a reflection of this wider role, the Council's Climate Change Strategy includes a Performance Measure to 'Increase the number of Council and partner sites actively managed for nature to 100 by 2030'. In 22/23 29 sites were achieved (totalling 40ha) and, as indicated in this report, further sites will be added in the next 2 years. This performance measure will assist the Council to support the UN (and Welsh Government) goal of 30% of land and sea to be in biodiversity management by 2030.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 There are no implications as a direct result of this report.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

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

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

The sub committee's discussion and recommendation will inform the cabinet decision

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

The immediate costs associated with this work can be met from the allocated grant funding. The works are designed to promote sustainable long-term management of Council owned sites in line with our Biodiversity Duty. The Council will be responsible for the maintenance of assets for 5 years as detailed in para 4.6 above.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 is relevant. Part One covers the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and includes the Biodiversity Duty (S6). This part also sets the context for policy and action for the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. Part Two considers climate change and informs Welsh Government policy in this regard.

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

10.1 The Living Landscapes project contributes to the Council's priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. Specifically, it contributes to 'People' by Encouraging all residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles and maintain their mental wellbeing and to 'Places' by Getting the best out of our parks by looking after and investing in our greenspaces and specifically, 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.

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 Living Landscape project aims to involve all the relevant stakeholders and to integrate the biodiversity, carbon, water and community benefits in the proposed works. 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 The Living Landscape Project continues to develop, supporting both the Local Nature Partnership's 'Action for Nature' and the Council's climate change and biodiversity policies. The contribution of the Welsh Government's 'Local Places for Nature' grant funding to developing 'Nature on your Doorstep' in RCT sites is gratefully acknowledged.

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

27TH SEPTEMBER 2023

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PROSPERITY AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Item:

Background Papers

none

Appendix One: Map of the 2022/23 Nature on Your Doorstep sites

Appendix Two: Map of initial proposed 'long-list' sites from which 23/24 and
24/25 sites will be chosen.

Appendix Three: Ward and potential site table

Appendix Four: Biodiversity Revenue outputs 23-25