

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022)

**To meet requirements of
Section 6 Biodiversity and
Ecosystem Resilience duty of the
Environment (Wales) Act 2016**



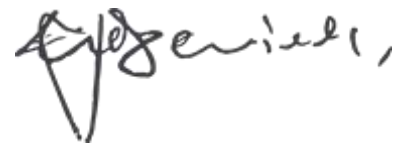
Photos: Clockwise from left; Cwmcelyn Pond; Waun y Pound ponds, Silent Valley

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1. Executive Summary

The Council recognises that resilient ecosystems underpinned by a biodiverse landscape deliver multiple benefits for the people of Blaenau Gwent. We are committed to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and working in partnership with others to ensure the sustainability of the subsequent benefits and their contribution to the well-being goals.



Councillor N. J. Daniels, Leader of the council

This Forward Plan has been prepared to meet the Section 6 Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and outlines the Council's commitments to meeting requirements of the legislation. It will also contribute to delivering the Council's requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Section 6 of the Environment Act places a duty on the Local Authority to **'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity'** so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, the Local Authority must also seek to **'promote the resilience of ecosystems'**. The duty replaces the section 40 duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act 2006), in relation to Wales.

The Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Forward Plan:

- Summarises the relevant legislative requirements for biodiversity & ecosystem resilience (Section 2 and Appendices in Section 7).
- Sets out aims for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to meet the duty (Section 3).
- Through Service Area Action Plans, identifies objectives for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's compliance with the Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience duty (Section 4).

Carrying out the requirements under the new biodiversity duty will help to:

- contribute to physical and mental health and wellbeing of people who live and work in the borough;
- offer opportunities for community engagement and volunteering
- take action to intercept and help break down air, water and soil pollution;
- take action to reduce flood peaks; and
- play an important role in tackling global climate change and take action to regulate local climate.

Further benefits provided by resilient ecosystems through the sustainable management of natural resources, and how they contribute to the Well-being Goals, are expanded on in Section 7.2.

2. Introduction to the Forward Plan

The Environment (Wales) Act was introduced in March 2016; it is a statutory duty that the Council must comply with. Part 1 of the Act sets out Wales' approach to planning and managing natural resources at a national and local level with a general purpose linked to statutory 'principles of sustainable management of natural resources'.

Section 6 of part 1 places a duty on the Local Authority to seek to:

- 'maintain and enhance biodiversity' so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions and
- 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'

To assist in implementing the new duty the Local Authority is required to publish a Forward Plan on how they intend to comply with the biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty and then report on how that plan is working. The first Forward Plan was due in March 2017. This was delayed in Blaenau Gwent due to resource constraints and awaiting formal guidance from Welsh Government.

The duty to forward plan ensures that biodiversity is considered at the decision-making level, and the new reporting duty ensures the Local Authority takes responsibility for showing how our actions have helped to enhance our natural resources and ecosystems.

This Forward Plan follows guidance prepared by Welsh Government and considers the seven Wellbeing Goals contained in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the principles of Sustainable Development objectives of the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales and the Ecosystem Approach Principles (Section 7.1, 7.3, 7.4 & 7.5).

Service Area opportunities and objectives (section 4) have been derived via discussion with managers from all service departments throughout 2018 and 2019. These interviews have highlighted risks and opportunities for delivery of the Environment Act duty. The interview template can be found in section 7.6. A more detailed set of questions was used within the Green Infrastructure team and is available upon request.

It will be an evolving plan that can be updated in line with further evidence from Natural Resources Wales such as Area Statements. Blaenau Gwent CBC will be required to report on the outcomes of this plan by December 2019 and then

subsequently every three years. The Forward Plan will be reviewed accordingly in light of that reporting.

3. Forward Plan

3.1 Aims

To maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, by 2022, aims to:

1. Reduce overall resource use; reuse where possible and recycle everything recyclable.
2. Increase biodiversity and ecosystems understanding in the council staff and councillors through appropriate channels including Service Area Environment Champions and the Councillor Biodiversity Champion role.
3. Embody the challenge of integrating the Active Travel, Wellbeing of Future Generations, Planning and Environment Acts to encourage sustainability in the ways we live, work and play.
4. Promote responsible use of natural resources in Blaenau Gwent by working in partnership with others to initiate action and behaviour change.
5. Maintain and enhance biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience on council owned land, particularly with regard to priority species and habitats.
6. Support the Blaenau Gwent & Torfaen Local Nature Partnership.

These aims also contribute to meeting the council's corporate and well-being objectives.

3.2 Forward Plan timeline

Activity in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to develop and implement the Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan as required by the Environment Act (Wales) 2016:

2019-20

- Business plan linked objectives start April 2019
- Implementation of objectives
- Start Environment Champions in April 2019, quarterly meetings
- Report to Welsh Government by end of December 2019

2020-21

- Implementation of objectives
- Quarterly Environment Champion meetings
- Report to Scrutiny Committee in April 2020

2021-22

- Implementation of objectives
- Quarterly Environment Champion meetings
- Report to Scrutiny Committee in April 2021
- Develop new plan before end of March 2022

2022-23

- Report to Scrutiny Committee in April 2022
- New Plan from April 2022

3.3 Forward Plan responsibilities

The Green Infrastructure Team is responsible for leading, reporting on and providing advice related to the implementation of the Environment Act across the council.

The Green Infrastructure Team can provide guidance on fulfilling the Council's Biodiversity Duty however implementation of each action plan will be the responsibility of the individual Service Area managers.

4 Service Area Action Plans

4.1 Governance & Partnerships

Governance & Partnerships	
<p>Summary of functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate performance, scrutiny and democratic services • Policy, partnerships & engagement 	
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holder of corporate business plan and progress monitoring • Gateway to many engagement forums • Link to well-being plan 	
	Objective 1: Support the integration of Forward Plan objectives into council Corporate Business Plans and provide quarterly reporting
	Objective 2: Provide a link to Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan and Public Service Board

4.2 Resources

Resources
<p>Summary of functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial services • Revenue services • Internal audit / risk management
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore Environmental Management System accreditation (e.g. Green Dragon or ISO 14001)
Objectives to be set

4.3 Commercial Services

Commercial Services	
<p>Summary of functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer service • Communications • Procurement 	
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External communications with residents, businesses & tourists • Internal communication led by Environment Champions group • Consider local, regional and global impacts of procurement of goods • Contribute to procurement strategy 	
	Objectives to be set

4.4 Organisational Development

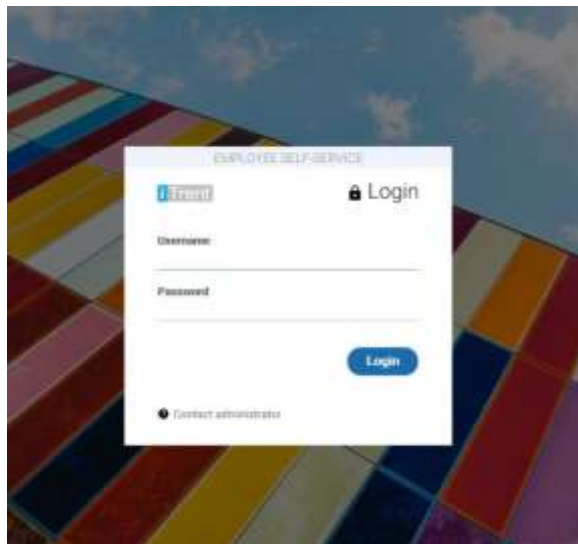
Organisational Development

Summary of functions:

- Human Resources
- Health & Safety
- Business support

Opportunities:

- Contribute to Organisational Development strategy
- Encourage work culture changes for example taking meetings outside and actively travelling (cycling or walking) to work



Online HR system


Objective 1:

Take further steps towards implementation of a “paperless office” via the further development of the iTrent system and the roll-out of the self service functions


4.4 Social Services

Social Services	
Summary of functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Social Services • Child Social Services 	
Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple opportunities exist in children's and adult's services: • Using green spaces • Improving and enhancing social service property gardens and grounds • Engaging well-being of children in council care 	
 <p>Photo: Getty Images</p>	Objective 1: Green Infrastructure team (Environment Act leads) to attend Provider Managers meeting annually
	Objective 2: Encourage nature friendly management at our Provider Services outside spaces
	Objective 3: Engage our citizens and staff with the environment through involvement in environmental projects within our Provider Services

4.5 Regeneration & Community Services

Regeneration & Community Services	
<p>Summary of functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline integrated services • Public Protection • Property Services • Infrastructure • Regeneration • Planning 	
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate land management • Involving local communities • Engaging more people in their local green spaces • Improving access and quality of local green spaces • LDP policies • Increasing efficiency of council buildings 	
	<p>Objective 1: Work towards the Local Development Plan (LDP) aims, including the production of Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Guidance</p>
	<p>Objective 2: Maintain and enhance biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience on council owned land, particularly with regard to Section 7 priority species and habitats in partnership with community groups, Gwent Wildlife Trust and others.</p>
	<p>Objective 3: Ensure that the Council Embraces the Well-being of Future Generations Act across the service functions and contribute to improving educational standards in relation to biodiversity.</p>
	<p>Objective 4: Support the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in its work as a strategic partnership of organisations and individuals directing and delivering nature conservation in both Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent boroughs, at local and wider landscape scales.</p>
<p>Supporting pollinators with pollen & nectar rich verge planting in Ebbw Vale. Photo: Liz Hancocks</p>	

4.6 Education

Education	
<p>Summary of functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion and school improvement • Transformation & performance • Youth service 	
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging schools and students via educational sessions and eco-councils • Attend Head Teachers meetings • Management for nature on school grounds • To get students involved in the council e.g. work placement projects 	
 <p>Engaging school pupils with Natural Resource Management. Photo: Aileen Vaughan</p>	Objective 1: Engage schools and students via educational sessions and eco-councils and embed sustainability
	Objective 2: Green Infrastructure team (Environment Act leads) to attend a Head Teachers meeting annually
	Objective 3: Encourage nature friendly management on school grounds
	Objective 4: Engage young people with the environment through the youth service

5 Reporting

5.1 Mid-year 2019-20 summary

	Business Plan linked Objectives	Environment Champion	Further engagement
Governance & Partnerships	Yes	Yes	Yes
Resources	No	No	-
Commercial Services	No	Yes	Yes
Organisational Development	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social Services	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regeneration & Community Services	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Councillors	Not applicable	Yes	Yes

5.2 Reporting schedule

One of the principles of the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources set out in the Environment Act is that we should be adaptable and plan, monitor, review and change our work as we gain a better understanding through improved evidence and our experiences. This way we can work together to ensure that with every iteration of the Forward Plan further steps can be taken to embed the duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity into every function of the council.

Blaenau Gwent CBC will be required to report on the outcomes of this plan by December 2019 and then subsequently every three years. The Forward Plan will be reviewed accordingly in light of that reporting.

6 References

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Corporate Plan 2018-22:

<http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/policies-plans-strategies/corporate-plan-2018-2022/>

(accessed 13/09/19)

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Well-being Objectives 2017:

http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Council/Policies_Strategies_Plans/Wellbeing_Objectives_-_June_2017-WF3.pdf (accessed 13/09/19)

Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan 2018-23:

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/well-being-plan.aspx> (accessed 13/09/19)

Environment (Wales) Act 2016:

<https://gov.wales/environment-wales-act-2016-overview> (accessed 13/09/19)

Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales 2015:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/nature-recovery-action-plan-2015.pdf> (accessed 13/09/19)

State of Natural Resources Report 2016:

<https://naturalresources.wales/evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/the-state-of-natural-resources-report-assessment-of-the-sustainable-management-of-natural-resources/?lang=en> (accessed 13/09/19)

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

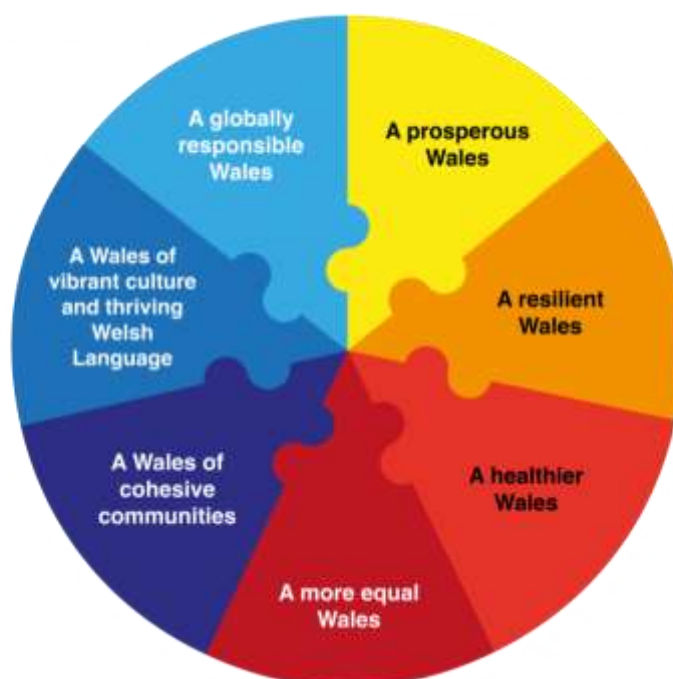
<https://gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-wales-act-2015-guidance> (accessed 13/09/19)

7 Appendices

7.2 Link to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ensures the Local Authority takes a more joined up approach to improving the environmental, as well as the economic, cultural and social well-being of Wales. The sustainable management of natural resources put in place by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 enables Wales' natural resources (including biodiversity) to be managed in a more proactive, sustainable and joined-up way.

There are seven well-being goals that the Local Authority must work towards achieving. These are:



The 'resilient Wales' goal is the top commitment to biodiversity:

"A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change)"

By implementing the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 the Local Authority will maximise its contributions to the Well-being goals contained in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

7.3 Benefits provided by resilient ecosystems

Well-being Goals	Benefits
A Prosperous Wales	Natural resources provide significant opportunities for employment and economic activity in Wales. Many of our key industries, such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, energy and tourism are dependent on natural resources.
A Resilient Wales	Biodiversity, mountains, moorlands and heaths, semi-natural grasslands, woodlands, urban greenspaces, rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands, coastline and marine ecosystems all contribute to supporting Wales' ability to adapt to climate change. They are fundamental in supporting all of the well-being goals.
A Healthier Wales	Natural resources make a significant contribution to the physical health and mental wellbeing of people in Wales. For example, trees help to absorb pollutants and improve air quality; access to nature and greenspace has positive impacts on physical and mental health.
An Equal Wales	Equal access to ecosystems that provide cultural services would contribute to equality in Wales. At present, access is not equally distributed. For example, not everyone lives in close proximity to accessible greenspace.
A Wales of Cohesive Communities	Involving communities in the management of their local parks and woodlands has been shown to improve community cohesion and reduce antisocial behaviour.
A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language	Landscapes have played a significant role in the development of distinct cultural practices, such as local building techniques which use local materials and locally specific art and literature.
A Globally Responsible Wales	The environment supplies all our material resources, so we must better understand the impacts of our activities globally in terms of both imports and exports. By making these inter-linkages and dependencies more explicit, it becomes clear that taking action to build the resilience of natural resources will provide significant other benefits across the Well-Being Goals.

Source: State of Natural Resources Report, 2016

7.4 Sustainable Development Five Ways of Working

In addition the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out five ways of working linked to sustainable development, that public bodies must adhere to in order to demonstrate how they are meeting their duty. Any plan/project must now demonstrate that they are following these ways of working.



7.5 Link to the Environment (Wales) 2016 Act Ecosystem Approach

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 helps to deliver the sustainable management of natural resources as it requires the Local Authority, in delivering the new biodiversity duty, to promote the resilience of ecosystems – the ‘**ecosystem approach**’. This approach, developed by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity has been acknowledged internationally as the most effective method of addressing biodiversity decline.

The Environment (Wales) Act puts the ecosystem approach into statute through a set of principles, which are based on the 12 principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). These principles must be used in designing and implementing projects and programmes of work.

The ecosystem approach is an application of joined-up planning and management processes that look at ecosystems as a whole and seeks to build the resilience of those ecosystems and the multiple benefits that they provide. As biodiversity underpins the resilience of ecosystems, it is a fundamental component of the approach.

Ecosystem Approach Principles

1. **Societal Choice:** The objectives of management of land, water and living resources are a matter of societal choices.
2. **Localised Decisions:** Management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level
3. **Adjacent Effects:** Ecosystem managers should consider the effects (actual or potential) of their activities on adjacent and other ecosystems
4. **Economic Drivers:** Recognizing potential gains from management, there is usually a need to understand and manage the ecosystem in an economic context. Any such ecosystem-management programme should:
 - a. Reduce those market distortions that adversely affect biological diversity;
 - b. Align incentives to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use;
 - c. Internalize costs and benefits in the given ecosystem to the extent feasible.
5. **Resilience:** Conservation of ecosystem structure and functioning, in order to maintain ecosystem services, should be a priority target of the ecosystem approach
6. **Integrity:** Ecosystem must be managed within the limits of their functioning
7. **Spatial and Temporal Scale:** The ecosystem approach should be undertaken at the appropriate spatial and temporal scales
8. **Temporal Scale:** Recognizing the varying temporal scales and lag-effects that characterize ecosystem processes, objectives for ecosystem management should be set for the long term.
9. **Managing Change:** Management must recognize that change is inevitable

10. **Balancing conservation and use of biodiversity:** The ecosystem approach should seek the appropriate balance between, and integration of, conservation and use of biological diversity
11. **Evidence:** The ecosystem approach should consider all forms of relevant information, including scientific and indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices.
12. **Stakeholder Engagement:** The ecosystem approach should involve all relevant sectors of society and scientific disciplines.

7.6 Link to Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales

The Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales produced by Welsh Government in 2015 is aimed at addressing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by:

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

It sets out how Wales will deliver the commitments of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to halt the decline in biodiversity by 2020 and then reverse that decline.

By fulfilling the Environment Act's biodiversity and ecosystem resilience duty, the Local Authority will help to achieve the Nature Recovery Action Plan objectives. 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 principle 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 pressure 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

7.7 Service Area Action Plan interview template

Generating Service Area Action Plans

to contribute to the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan to meet Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016

These questions are aimed at finding out what we do well already and what areas we need to focus on to help deliver the obligations under the Act. Your answers will form the basis of service area action plans which will be shared with the service area for feedback before completion of the forward plan.

Name	
Job Title	
Service Area	

Questions

1. What are the opportunities for your service area to gain more from the Green Infrastructure¹ currently present in Blaenau Gwent?
2. Please indicate areas of responsibility/activity within your department:

- ☐ Influencing land or resource use
- ☐ Land management e.g. activities such as grazing, vegetation removal, planting
- ☐ Authorising activities on land
- ☐ Utilising council owned land for activities, e.g. Local Nature Reserves or/and the Green Infrastructure network in Blaenau Gwent (footpaths, cycle paths etc.)
- ☐ Liaising with environmental organisations or/and community groups
- ☐ Work related to energy use; carbon emission etc.
- ☐ Procuring or using natural resources on council business e.g. stationary, food, building materials

Others:

¹ Green Infrastructure: is a network of connected, accessible, multi-functional sites (including parks, woodland, informal open spaces, and nature reserves) as well as linkages (such as river corridors and wildlife corridors) that can bring about multiple social, health, economic and environmental benefits to the area. The sites are multi-functional in that apart from their ecological value they can be used for various purposes, for example, leisure activities and promoting tourism with associated benefits in terms of health and the economy.

3. What do you think you already do well?
Examples could be:
policies / actions on the ground / supporting volunteers or community groups

4. What could you do better, or more of, and what are the barriers?

(E.g. when planting areas with wildflowers for pollinators make sure that the habitat is also suitable for other stages of the invertebrate life cycle)

5. Have you started to incorporate the five ways of working linked to sustainable development from the Wellbeing of Future Generations act?
(Long-term/ Prevention/ Integration/ Collaboration/ Involvement)
6. Are there any aspects of green infrastructure or/and biodiversity and ecosystem resilience that you or your service area would like to understand better – please describe?
7. Evidence collecting, decision making and reporting. Are you collecting evidence on the need for, and monitoring the success or otherwise of your actions? Any examples, and can we share your case study/ data?

Further information

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 enhances the previous NERC² Act 2006 duty to require all public authorities, when carrying out their functions in Wales, to seek to “maintain and enhance biodiversity” where it is within the proper exercise of their functions. In doing so, public authorities must also seek to “promote the resilience of ecosystems”.

Under the Act, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has to report to Welsh Government on the actions we aim to take.. This is a statutory requirement that the Council must comply with.

We are currently in development of the Forward Plan. It was agreed at SMT in May 2017 to take forward proposals to interview all service area managers to establish what we are doing well already and what actions we need to take to comply with the Act.

Contacts:

Chris Engel, Green Infrastructure Team Manager, extension 5545
Liz Hancocks, Ecologist, extension 5702

The Green Infrastructure Team is responsible for leading the reporting on and providing advice related to the implementation of the Environment Act across Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

² NERC – Natural Environment and Rural Communities