



Comisiynydd
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Dyfodol
Cymru

**Future
Generations
Commissioner
for Wales**

The Future Generations Report 2020: Executive Summaries



Let's create the future together

A Resilient Wales



“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.”

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

Our natural environment is vital for our well-being. Wild and natural landscapes sustain us; they give us clean water to drink and fresh air to breathe, they store carbon and protect our homes from flooding, and they can help make us happy and healthy. Nature gives us the foundations for our economy, energy system and our food and farming. Pollinators alone, for example, are worth more than £430m a year to UK agriculture. Nature’s health is intrinsically linked to our own.

However, we are in the midst of an ecological and biodiversity crisis on par with the climate emergency. We know that 60% of species are in decline and that one million species globally are threatened with extinction; including 40% of insects globally. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. Nature’s health and people’s health are linked, and the path to recovery starts with a plan for putting wildlife back in our lives.

“The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.”

Sir Robert Watson, Chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services



Policy Recommendations

Welsh Government should commit to large-scale habitat restoration, creation and connectivity throughout Wales, which includes setting statutory targets for nature recovery and specific species recovery measures to help prevent extinction.

Welsh Government should...

Aim to increase spending year on year in line with the recommendations of the UK Committee on Climate Change as set out in my 10 point plan on the climate and nature emergency. (Also a recommendation in CH2)

Commit to prohibiting the use of pesticides by public bodies and set annual targets towards phasing out the use of chemical pesticides on land.

Develop a food system strategy for Wales linking together all parts of the food system from farm to fork.

Work in cohesion with The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner to ensure there is guidance and effective accountability mechanisms on the reporting of the section 6 duty and the well-being goal: A Resilient Wales.

Work with public bodies to deliver 20% tree canopy cover in every town and city in Wales by 2030.

Set standards to ensure people can access natural green space within 300 metres of their home. (Also a recommendation in CH3: A Wales of Cohesive Communities)

Advice on setting well-being objectives for all public bodies and boards covered by the Well-being of Future Generations Act (including Welsh Government)

Please refer to the chapter on Setting Good Well-being Objectives, but in setting their objectives specifically in relation to this goal, all public bodies and boards covered by the Act should:

- Clearly demonstrate the connections between their well-being objectives and steps on the environment, and other areas such as poverty, adverse childhood experience, health and community cohesion.
- Clearly set out how they understand the definition of the goal 'A Resilient Wales'.
- Align their actions and reporting on this goal with their commitment under section 6 duty of the Environment (Wales) Act (2016).

In setting their steps, public bodies and boards covered by the Well-being of Future Generations Act (including Welsh Government) should focus in the following areas and should:

- Declare a nature and climate emergency and rapidly accelerate the scale and pace of change to help tackle these challenges.
- Seek to maintain and enhance the natural environment through managing land and sea appropriately to create healthy functioning biodiverse ecosystems and encourage others to do the same.
- Invest in and value the important role biodiverse green and blue space plays in supporting people's health and community well-being.
- Develop your knowledge of nature and increase awareness of the importance of a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems, and prepare people with skills fit for the future.
- Seek to improve water and air quality, making the environment healthier for both wildlife and people.
- Use natural resources sustainably - being adaptive to an evolving environment.

Where are we now? My assessment of progress in achieving A Resilient Wales:

Biodiversity - the variety of all life on earth - has seen an overall 60% decline in species across the globe since 1970.

The UK [State of Nature report](#) describes the UK as “among the most nature-depleted countries in the world” and the [State of Natural Resources Report](#), produced by Natural Resources Wales, shows that no ecosystem in Wales is currently showing all the attributes of resilience.



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We have an opportunity in Wales to work together and restore our natural environment through the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which introduces the sustainable management of natural resources.

The [State of Natural Resources Report](#) sets out the national evidence base on the resilience of ecosystems in Wales, and the Welsh Government’s Natural Resources Policy sets out the national priorities as delivering nature-based solutions; increasing renewable energy and resource efficiency; taking a place-based approach. Natural Resources Wales’ Area Statements will aim to help deliver these across Wales, and Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty for public authorities in Wales.



Well-being objectives and steps relating to the ‘environment’ set by many public bodies do not reflect the definition of the ‘Resilient Wales’ well-being goal, and/or are reliant on other strategies, duties or plans.

It is not always clear how public bodies are helping achieve ‘a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems’. For example, well-being objectives on the ‘environment’ will often include steps on areas such as waste and recycling. However, using resources efficiently, which includes minimising and reducing waste, is more aligned within the definition of a prosperous Wales. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of the definition of Wales’ well-being goals. From the information currently available, it also appears (at the time of writing) only a handful of public bodies have submitted reports, and even fewer published plans, on how they are embedding the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their day to day activities, policies, plans and programmes under the Section 6 Duty of the Environment (Wales) Act.

There has been a marked change in political commitment and leadership towards meeting the aspirations of the Act in the last year, including on the M4 relief road and declaring a climate and nature emergency, but this needs to filter down to all the actions of Welsh Government.

This was apparent in the First Minister’s decision on the M4 relief road, the government’s budget allocation for 2020-21 (which included an increased focus on biodiversity restoration and decarbonisation), taking action to address the climate and nature crises together, and several recent policies and initiatives. For example, ‘[Prosperity for all: A Low Carbon Wales](#)’ and [Planning Policy Wales](#) are a clear indication of positive change in the level of priority nature is being given by the Government.

Planning Policy Wales plays a significant role in moving us towards a low carbon society which supports healthy functioning ecosystems.

In late 2019, the Welsh Government Planning Division wrote to every planning authority, reminding them “that development should not cause any significant loss of habitats or populations of species, locally or nationally and must provide a net benefit for biodiversity”, in accordance with the duty to enhance biodiversity under the Environment Act. This is a positive step and I expect to see the implementation of Planning Policy Wales demonstrate how the planning system is helping to reverse the decline in biodiversity and increase the resilience of ecosystems by ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to both protect against loss and to secure enhancement.

There is growing recognition at a local and national level of the benefits of increasing tree cover.

Some local authorities such as Wrexham County Borough Council, Bridgend County Borough Council and Cardiff Council have started using i-tree assessments to quantify these benefits in their areas. I would like to see these being used regularly across all of Wales.

There is recognition of the role unsustainable agricultural management plays in the lack of biodiversity in our natural environment. However, there are key policy developments in progress which support sustainable land management.

Welsh Government’s [‘Sustainable Farming and our land’ report](#) presents revised proposals for consultation, following the ‘Brexit and our Land’ consultation. In it, Welsh Government propose to pursue an overall objective of sustainable land management. This approach is a welcome development which, if implemented correctly, could make a significant contribution to meeting the goal of a resilient Wales.



The publication of Wales' first National Marine Plan is an important milestone for our seas, but implementation will be key.

Our seas are an incredible natural asset and support an abundance of diverse and vibrant species, habitats and ecosystems. They also contribute to our well-being, contribute millions to our economy, support thousands of jobs and offer a rich, distinctive heritage. However, our seas are not in good shape. For example, recent evidence suggests that marine ecosystems are not fully resilient, and there is a lack of confidence in the conservation status of many protected features. To help address these challenges, Welsh Government published its first ever [Welsh National Marine Plan](#) in November 2019, setting out the policy for the next 20 years for the sustainable use of our seas, and Natural Resources Wales will publish its first Marine Area Statement in 2020 which, based on the 'Area Profile', will set out what success would look like and the actions identified to get there.

Public bodies and Public Services Boards are recognising the important role green and blue space plays in people's health and well-being. However, they need to go further to ensure these areas are biodiverse and resilient, so we do not lose the preventive role they play.

Good examples include Bridgend County Borough Council developing their green spaces as early years learning spaces, providing activities and facilities aimed at experiential learning of children outdoors, and Glanrhydd hospital (Swansea Bay Health Board) becoming the first hospital in Wales to gain a green flag award. Scaling up these efforts is important not only for wildlife but also because studies have shown that the psychological benefits increase with the richness of species and diversity. This means green and blue spaces should be rich and biodiverse.

There is a need for programmes and approaches which help ensure everyone can live in and access a healthy, wildlife-rich natural world.

It is concerning that the most deprived communities are less likely to live in the greenest areas, and yet, we know time spent in nature has an impact on indicators such as social contact, cohesion and integration, crime levels and education. For example, the Cydcoed initiative in Wales aimed to increase community involvement in local woodlands in areas of either poor access or high deprivation. Its [evaluation](#) found that there had been an increase in social contact, trust, and active engagement, along with a reduction in antisocial behaviour. I would like to see public bodies and Public Services Boards identifying ways, including through the use of technology, they can help connect people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds with nature.

There is a growing focus on the benefits of developing an understanding amongst children and young people of the value and importance of nature.

Our current and future generations will need different skills for a future that will rely on halting and preventing the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, and dealing with major socio-economic change. This means we need to ensure our children are developing knowledge and connection to nature from an early age. In Wales, over 90% of schools are registered on the Eco-Schools programme which has helped pupils learn about sustainable living and global citizenship for 25 years. There are many examples of good practice in schools. For example, in Merthyr Tydfil 23 schools (in 2018-19) had a Green Flag award, with four schools achieving platinum status - platinum schools are ranked among the best in the world on the Eco-Schools programme.



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There is increasing awareness and expectation from the public around the nature and climate crises. This provides public bodies and Public Services Boards with an opportunity and imperative for increasing their level of ambition relating to nature and the environment.

For example, in a [survey in June 2018](#), 64% of those polled in Wales stated they want measures to protect the environment to be strengthened when we leave the EU.

Membership of conservation and environmental charities also represents one of the largest groups within civil society, for example WWF Cymru has 4,129 members and over 37,000 supporters. I would like to see public bodies work with citizens to develop their objectives and steps to help accelerate the scale and pace of change needed to meet these challenges, increase awareness and understanding amongst their staff across Wales and use sound evidence to inform their decision making.

Given the scale of the challenge, regional growth deals and businesses (and others) all have an important role to play.

For example, Swansea Bay City Deal's portfolio of major projects totalling £58.7 million aimed at tackling climate change and building regional excellence in renewable energy.

Public bodies need to recognise healthy resilient ecosystems are fundamental to our health and well-being, and working with nature is an important part of the solution to addressing many of the significant challenges we face.

For example, nature-based solutions that look at the whole catchment area, rather than a specific point of flooding, can help prevent flooding, as well as bring other benefits. Dwr Cymru's 'Brecon Beacons megacatchment' project, and work to restore the active blanket bog in the Berwyn and Migneint Special Areas of Conservation, are examples of catchment scale, collaborative approaches that seek to restore and connect a variety of habitats.

Poor air quality impacts people and wildlife, and public bodies should seek ways to reduce air pollution to meet Wales' climate change commitments and ensure clean air for current and future generations.

In the UK, poor outdoor air quality is linked to between 28,000 and 50,000 deaths each year with children, the elderly, or those with existing medical conditions most at risk. Air pollution also harms the natural environment, with 74% of Welsh habitats receiving damaging inputs from air pollution. Transport is an area where there are several good examples of public bodies looking at the way their staff travel and focusing their efforts on reducing emissions from commuting. For example, Cardiff Public Services Board and the Vale of Glamorgan Public Services Board have signed up to a Healthy Travel Charter, containing commitments to support walking, cycling, public transport and ultra-low emissions vehicle use, and there are plans to extend the approach across Wales during 2020-21. However, moving towards a low-carbon society will require a dramatic shift in the way we move ourselves and our goods.

A Clean Air Act for Wales should help ensure clean air in Wales for people and the environment.

I expect to see this plan provide Wales with a robust legislative and regulatory air quality management framework that ensures clean air in Wales for people and the environment, including promoting the necessary shift from the private motor vehicle to active travel and public transport and increasing public awareness about air pollution and behavioural change.

Cities such as [Milan](#), [Melbourne](#), [Berlin](#) and [Shanghai](#), are using nature to [tackle policy problems](#), such as urban greening for city cooling, improving citizen engagement to restore public land and flood prevention.

[Denbighshire County Council](#) is seeking to increase [tree canopy](#) in Rhyl. Their five-year ambition is for 18,000 trees to be planted. They are working with Natural Resources Wales and developed community planting days managing to plant 3,000 by the end of 2017/18. The steps they are taking not only seek to enhance nature but also recognise the importance of connecting communities to nature, particularly the benefits to well-being it provides.



How we design our urban environments can help improve air quality, and bring many other benefits.

The design and diversity of green infrastructure can play a significant role in removing air pollution. Trees, for example, absorb pollutants and intercept harmful particulates from vehicle emissions – in Wrexham, trees were found to remove 60 tonnes of pollutants each year. It is positive to see public bodies and Public Services Boards increasingly taking action to develop and implement green infrastructure in their areas. For example, Swansea Council's step to 'Prepare a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the City Centre' and the Gwent Green Grid Partnership established to develop a more consistent approach to Green Infrastructure management across Gwent, helping create healthier citizens, stimulates business opportunities and provides community benefits (cohesion, skills development and volunteering) – a great example of regional collaboration.



Below are the areas I recommend that all public bodies, including Welsh Government, should focus on:

- Maintain and enhance the natural environment through managing land and sea appropriately to create healthy functioning ecosystems
- Make the most of natural green and blue space to support well-being
- Urgent need for a better knowledge of nature
- Clean air and water for wildlife and people
- Ensure we use natural resources efficiently

For my full evidence, assessment, key findings and advice please see the section on A Resilient Wales in Chapter 3: Progress against the well-being goals of the Future Generations Report.

