

ENVIRONMENT (WALES) ACT 2016 Part1 – Section 6

The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

Report 2019

YSTRADGYNLAIS TOWN COUNCIL

1. Introduction

Ystradgynlais, the southern most town in Powys, developed because of the coal and iron industries of the 19th century. These have now been replaced by small industrial units throughout the district. The town is close to the northern terminus of the former 16 mile long Swansea Canal and the southern terminus of the 20 mile long former Brecon Forest Tramroad together forming a commercial artery from the sea to the heartland of Brecknock and provided local employment opportunities in the area.

Ystradgynlais provides a gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park making the surrounding area a popular venue for outdoor enthusiasts. The town is the area's business, transport and cultural centre with a busy shopping centre where the Welsh language is in common use.

The Town Council has 16 elected councillors with two part time members of staff representing approx.6,500 electors. The Council is divided into four wards:- Abercraf, Cwmtwrch, Ynyscedwyn and Ystradgynlais and has a current precept raised from Powys County Council of £294,000 (2020).

2. Council's Current Responsibilities

The Council is responsible

- to the local electorate for delivering a range of services
- for the provision and upkeep of local amenities.
- for representing the interests of individual members of the public and the wider community
- for supporting/encouraging members of the community to improve the local environment and services within the community
- for maintaining and enhancing the area's biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems.

3. Context of the Report

The *Environment (Wales) Act 2016* introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (section 6) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales. This section of the Act requires public authorities to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems'.

The consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems has to be embedded in the authority's policies, programmes and projects as well as its day to day activities.

Section 6(7) of the Environment Act requires public authorities to produce a report, before the end of 2019 and every third year after 2019, on current progress to improve biodiversity and enhance ecosystem resilience.

4. Welsh Government: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

This law came into force in April 2016 and sets a framework for improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It requires certain public bodies to think long term and work together towards seven national goals summarised below.

- *A more prosperous Wales:* An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.
- *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 (for example climate change).
- *A healthier Wales:* A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
- *A more equal Wales:* A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).
- *A Wales of cohesive communities:* Attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage, and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
- *A globally responsible Wales:* A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.

5. The Powys Public Service Board (PSB): Powys Well-being Plan

This sets out the local well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations Act and was launched by the PSB consisting of Powys County Council, Powys Teaching Health Board, Mid and West Wales Fire Service and Natural Resources Wales in May 2018. By law the Town Council must take steps to meet these local well-being objectives and report on them.

It focuses on four areas:-

- Social
- Economy
- Environment
- Culture

There is however more direct support needed from Powys County Council to support the Town Council in satisfying the requirements and implementation of the 'well-being plan'. Currently the Town Council provides for the plan's focus points as:-

(a) **Social.**

Funding is provided for Welfare Halls at Abercraf, Cwmtwrch and Ystradgynlais and to local volunteer groups/societies

(b) **Economy.**

Value for money is discussed and ensured in budget planning

(c) **Environment.**

See projects listed in Section 7

(d) **Culture.**

Support provided to the Welfare and other Halls in the provision of cultural events, exhibitions etc.

Financial support and working in partnership with the Heritage Society to provide interpretation panels etc and local art organisations in providing cultural events for persons of all ages.

6. Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales (NRAP)

NRAP Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels.

See 7 (a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)

NRAP Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management.

See 7 (e)

NRAP Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation.

See 7 (f) (iv)

NRAP Objective 4: Tackle Key Pressures on species and habitats

See 7 (e)

NRAP Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring.

See Work in progress 7(c) (i), (e), (f)

NRAP Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.

See Section 7 *Work in progress*

7. The Town Council has responsibility for the following:

(a) **Gorof Cemetery** - Grass is mown following a regular programme.

Hedges surrounding the cemetery are maintained in good order.

This encourages wildlife to the area and provides habitat for ground mammals and nesting birds. The use of pesticides /herbicides is not encouraged except on invasive species such as knotweed.

Timber and pruned branches from trees are stacked in the cemetery's expansion plots providing natural habitats for small birds and mammals found in the area.

(b) **Children's playgrounds** at the following locations

- (i) Cwmtwrch
- (ii) Caerlan
- (iii) Abercraf
- (iv) Penrhos skateboarding Park

In each playground there is a regular maintenance programme of grass cutting and tree maintenance.

Grass cutting is confined to late spring and summer only allowing natural plant and insect life to develop during the remainder of the year.

(c) **Parks/Open spaces** maintained are located at

- (i) **Coronation Park, Ystradgynlais** which covers an area of approx. 32 hectares.

Grass and hedges are maintained following a regular programme. Areas are left uncut to encourage wildlife habitats. Two footpaths pass through the park allowing open access to the public.

Species found at the site found by S. Coates, Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales, from a visit on 3rd June 2019..

Marsh Foxtail, Sweet vernal-grass, Silver Birch, Hard-fern, False-brome, Heather, Cuckoo flower, Star Sedge, Hairy Sedge, Common Sedge, Remote Sedge, Common Knapweed, Common Mouse-ear, Rosebay Willow-herb, Enchanter's-nightshade, Marsh Thistle, Hawthorn, Crested Dog's-tail, Wavy Hair-grass, Foxglove, Broad Buckler Fern, Male Fern, Beech, Japanese Knotweed, Wild Strawberry, Ash, Yorkshire-fog, Bluebell, Tutsan, Cat's-ear, Holly, Soft-rush, Heath Rush, common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Greater Bird's-

foot-trefoil, Heath wood-rush, Ragged-Robin, Yellow Pimpernel, Field Cow-Wheat, Purple moor-grass, Tufted forget-me-not, lousewort, Scots Pine, Rough Meadow-grass, Common Milkwort, Silverweed, Tormentil, Bracken, Pendunculate Oak, Meadow Buttercup, Creeping Buttercup, Bramble, Common Sorrel, Grey willow, Bittersweet, Rowan, Devil's-bit Scabious, Yew, Deergrass, Red Clover, White Clover, Gorse, Bilberry, Brooklime, Thyme-leaved Speedwell, Common Vetch.

- (ii) **War Memorial at Gorsedd Park, Ystradgynlais.**
The area around the Town's War memorial is maintained to a high standard with planting of appropriate shrubs/flowers to encourage wildlife habitats.

- (iii) **Diamond Park, Ystradgynlais** which covers an area of 14 hectares.
Development work at the Park commenced with PCC planning permission on 11th May 2005. The former colliery land was heavily infested with gorse which led to summer fire nuisance to an 'accessible to all' woodland fringed park with large open spaces for use by the public at large and particularly 'dog walkers' who could then enjoy using reasonably safe and commodious footpath conditions. Biodiversity was at the heart of much of the work with tree planting and thinning undertaken using a Woodland Grant obtained through the Forestry Commission, Lottery Funding provided through the New Opportunities Fund led by PCC's Biodiversity Officer and further funding from the environmental funder WREN to develop the Riverside Walk. The Environment Agency undertook works to improve fish spawning in Nant Gyrlais which runs through the park.
The Council decided to amend the grass cutting regime within the Park in July 2012 to encourage the growth of wild flowers and to enable natural habitats for wildlife to thrive. The large embankment to the eastern park boundary is now left uncut to promote and protect wildlife development.
Council funding has been provided to 'Blodau Ystradgynlais' a voluntary group whose members planted areas within the Park with appropriate flowers to encourage pollinators.
The *Riverside Walk* has been refurbished as a joint project with Ystradgynlais Heritage Society to

create a Miners' Memorial with appropriate planting by 'Blodau Ystradgynlais'.

Species found at the site include those listed below.

Alder, Oak, Rowan, Gorse, Hazel, Ash, Pied wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Red Bartsia, Japanese Knotweed, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Common Fleabane, Goat's Beard, Dandelion, Ribwort Plantain, Greater Plantain, Bramble, Bugle, Rough Hawkbit, Autumn Hawkbit, Mouse Eared Hawkweed, Common Cat's ear, Wild Strawberry, Creeping Cinquefoil, Silverweed, Common Eyebright, Creeping Thistle, Ragwort, Devils Bit Scabious, Woodruff, Squinancywort, Black Knapweed,

- (iv) **Daniel Protheroe Memorial Park, Ystradgynlais** covers an area of approx. 0.125 hectares. Refurbished as a joint project with Ystradgynlais Heritage Society in 2017 with appropriate planting by 'Blodau Ystradgynlais' to encourage bees and other pollinators. Two raised beds in the park are planted on a 'cottage garden theme' creating a community garden. In addition the provision of bird boxes, feeding stations, bee habitats and hedgehog house have been placed in the park. The grass bank is left uncut to encourage growth of wild flowers to provide source of nectar etc for bees and other insects.

- (d) **Fruit Trees** Funding has been provided by the members of the 'Blodau Ystradgynlais' volunteer group to plant a selection of fruit (mainly apple) trees which are native to Wales (*from the area shown in brackets*) on Council owned land at the following locations.

- (i) **Maes y Cwm Housing complex** – 6 apple trees and a cherry tree planted
Species planted: St Cecilia (Newport), Channel Beauty (Swansea), Talgarth (Brecon), Morgan Sweet (South Wales), Pig-yr-wydd (Llanwrda), Red Sentinel (crab apple) and Stella (cherry)
- (ii) **Library raised bed** – 1 tree planted
Species planted: Red Sentinel (crab apple)
- (iii) **Daniel Protheroe Park** - 4 apple trees planted
Species planted: Bardsey (Bardsey Island), Marged Nicolas (Dinefwr) Red crab apple, green crab apple
- (iv) Alongside footpath **at Heol Glantawe (near Café Chameleon)** 5 apple trees planted

Species planted: Talgarth (Brecon), Monmouth Green (Monmouth), St Cecilia (Newport), Bakers Delicious (South Wales), Channel Beauty (Swansea).

- (v) **Diamond Park-** 105 native trees have been ordered from the Woodland Trust which will be tolerant to an exposed site and which will assist in drying up damp areas. To be planted by volunteers and local youth organisations.

Species to be planted include: hazel, crab apple, downey birch, hawthorn, holly and goat willow.

(e) **Nature Reserves** located at the following areas on Council own land are maintained by the Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales.

- (i) **Cae Lynden** (2.4 hectares) alongside Gurnos footpath. (This was a football field. It is now a nature reserve of wet tussock grassland known as Rhos pasture. It is home to the rare marsh fritillary butterfly.

Habitats: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Rhos Pasture

Species recorded: Alder, Ash, Beech, Bramble, Brimstone, Creeping Buttercup, Dandelion, Devil's-bit Scabious, Dog violet, Enchanter's nightshade, English / Pedunculate Oak, Gatekeeper, Gorse, Hart's-Tongue, Hawthorn, Heather, Hedgehog, Herb Robert, Holly, Ivy, Lady-fern, Meadow Brown, Osier, Ragged-Robin, Sessile Oak, Snipe, Soft-rush, Stinging Nettle, Sycamore, Tormentil, Wood Avens, Woodcock).

- (ii) **Wern Plemys** (6.1 hectares) within the Diamond Park (The reserve consists of three wildflower meadows and a large area of woodland. The meadows feature a range of uncommon plants such as ragged robin, great burnet and devil's bit scabious. The damper parts provide excellent habitat for frogs. The woodland contains trees such as oak, ash, hawthorn and alder and provides home to a range of woodland birds. Grass-snakes, slow-worms and common lizard

Habitats: Brownfield, Lowland Meadows, Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Ponds, Rush Pasture

Species recorded by Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales 22-06-2011: Adder's-Tongue, Alder, Ash, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Blue Tit, Bracken, Bramble, Brimstone, Chiffchaff, Cock's foot, Common Blue, Common Cow-wheat, Common Dart, Common Frog, Common Lizard, Creeping Buttercup, Creeping Thistle, Crested Dog's tail, Dark Green Fritillary, Devil's-bit Scabious, Downy Birch,

Elephant Hawk-moth, Enchanter's nightshade, Foxglove, Germander Speedwell, Goat Willow, Gorse, Grass Snake, Great Burnet, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Green Woodpecker, Green-veined White, Grey Squirrel, Guelder-rose, Hawthorn, Hazel, Heather, Hedge Woundwort, Herb Robert, Holly, Holly Blue, Lady-fern, Lesser Celandine, Magpie, Meadow Brown, Meadowsweet, Mouse-ear, Nuthatch, Orange-tip, Pedunculate / English Oak, Pignut, Purple Hairstreak, Ragged-Robin, Rhinoceros Beetle, Ribwort Plantain, Ringlet, Rowan, Silver-washed Fritillary, Soft-rush, Speckled Wood, Stinging Nettle, Tormentil, Weasel, Whirligig beetle, White Clover, Wood Avens, Wood-sorrel, Woodcock, Yellow Meadow Ant).

- (iii) **Ystradfawr (40.9 hectares) adjacent to the Diamond Park.** (This reserve, once the site of extensive coal mining, is a great example of how nature has reclaimed the landscape. It is a rich mix of wildflower meadow, rhos pasture and young woodland. It is one of the best sites in Wales for the rare marsh fritillary butterfly.

Habitats: Brownfield, Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Ponds, Rhos Pasture, Rivers and Streams

Species recorded by Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales : Backswimmer, Bittersweet, Black Darter, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Bramble, Broad-bodied Chaser, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Clouded Yellow, Coal Tit, Common Frog, Common Lizard, Common Toad, Cuckoo, Daisy, Devil's-bit Scabious, Enchanter's nightshade, English / Pedunculate Oak, Goldcrest, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Gorse, Grass Snake, Great Burnet, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Green Woodpecker, Green-veined White, Grey Wagtail, Harvest Mouse, Hawthorn, Hazel, Heather, Holly, Ivy, Knapweed, Lady-fern, Large Red Damselfly, Large Skipper, Lesser Redpoll, Long-tailed Tit, Male-fern, Meadow Pipit, Migrant Hawker, Nuthatch, Orange-tip, Ragged-Robin, Red Clover, Ringlet, Robin, Rowan, Sand Sedge, Silver Birch, Siskin, Slow Worm, Soft-rush, Sorrel, Southern Hawker, Stinging Nettle, Stonefly, Sweet Vernal-grass, Tormentil, White Clover, Wild Angelica, Woodcock, Yorkshire-fog).

(f) Flower planting – working with volunteer groups and others in the district.

- (i) Council funding is provided to '**Blodau Ystradgynlais**' (a volunteer group) to plant seasonal flowers and shrubs in containers in the town centre, beds within the car park off Heol Eglwys and on the footpath linking the car park off Heol Maes y Dre and Heol Eglwys. Members of the group are also responsible for the biodiversity of the area around the Church Hall at Heol

Pantyffynon. The group along with the Probation Service, school pupils and youth organisations has created wild life habitats for bees and insects in the car parks at Heol Eglwys and Church Hall by erecting bird boxes and bug hotels. .

- (ii) Flower planting in Abercraf along roadside verges by the **Abercraf Regeneration Group** (a volunteer group) with Town Council funding.
- (iii) Funding provided for containers at various locations along the main road through the villages of Cwmtwrch.
- (iv) Landscaping work completed by the Town Council along footpath 110a in Glanrhyd (Ynyscedwyn Ward) which including the removal of invasive species such as rhododendron, prolific shrubs etc

8. Conclusion

Ystradgynlais Town Council has and will always consider biodiversity and associated environmental issues in its projects and annual maintenance work on Council owned land. With the Town Council's support, the past ten years has seen an improvement in the environment of the Ystradgynlais district with projects such as landscaping of derelict coal tips (Diamond Park), improvement in green spaces (Daniel Protheroe Park), the landscaping of run down areas (Heol Eglwys car park) and other sites. Over the next few years it hopes to continue this work at other sites for example at Coronation Park. The Town Council fully supports and recognises the work completed within the area by volunteers and associated groups in their combined efforts to improve the area's environment and fully accepts its role and responsibility in this context to encourage further environmental improvement works within the local community.