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Championing Nature for a Healthy Future

Public Health Wales' Biodiversity Action Plan
2024 – 2027

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Public Health Wales' Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2027

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Staff photos from 'Make Space for Nature' communications campaign

1. Introduction

Purpose

This plan sets out how Public Health Wales is taking action to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems. As part of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, section 6, we have a duty to publish a plan and report on our progress¹. Our work to support biodiversity contributes to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act well-being goal of a 'resilient Wales' as well as our other strategic priorities. The plan is focused on what Public Health Wales will do and recognises the need to work in partnership across the wider health and care system in Wales and with other sectors.

In 2027, a Public Health Wales committed to biodiversity would be one where –



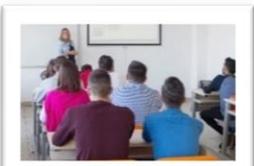
✓ Staff feel inspired and able to take actions to reduce their impact on the environment and support biodiversity both as individuals and as teams.



✓ Spending time in nature is seen as beneficial for the health and well-being of staff, and there are opportunities for this to happen on a regular basis.



✓ Access to biodiverse green and blue spaces are promoted within programmes focused on tackling health inequalities.



✓ We share good practice with the wider healthcare sector in Wales and help support and strengthen national networks with a focus on biodiversity and health.

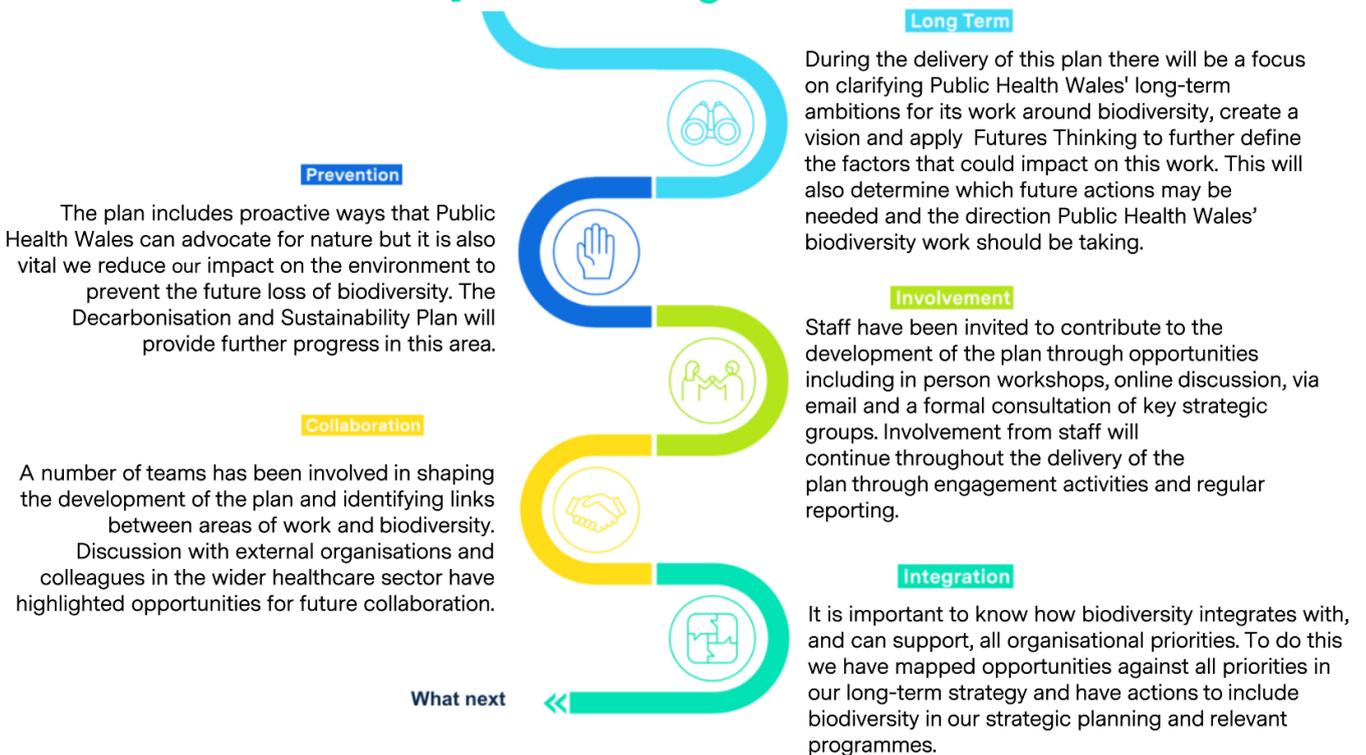
Context

To ensure the plan has the sustainable development principle at its heart, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's seven well-being goals and five Ways of Working were used as a framework in its development. The graphics on the following page demonstrate how.

How the plan contributes to the seven well-being goals...



...and the five ways of working



Links to our strategic priorities



The new Long Term Strategy published in 2023 sets out a vision where people live longer, healthier lives and where all people in Wales have fair and equal access to the things that lead to good health and well-being. We will achieve this through delivering our six strategic priorities (also our well-being objectives) which contribute to the seven well-being goals. To ensure the actions in the Biodiversity Action Plan are integrated with our long-term aims and vision, links were identified between biodiversity and the strategic priorities of Public Health Wales.

The table below shows how biodiversity and the natural environment is linked to, and can be supported, by all six priorities:

Priority	Link to biodiversity and nature
1. Influencing the wider determinants of health	For everyone in Wales to have the opportunity for good health, it will require healthy physical environments and a built and natural environment that supports our health and well-being as a key determinant of good health.
2. Promoting mental and social well-being	Social and mental well-being are the foundations for good health. There is strong evidence that access to green and natural environments can improve health and well-being, reduce levels of depression, anxiety and fatigue, enhance community cohesion and reduce loneliness.
3. Promoting healthy behaviours	In promoting healthy behaviours, we also acknowledge the contribution of these behaviours to the health of the planet . A key outcome is to increase health promoting behaviours including physical activity and healthy eating. Access to green and natural environments will improve both physical and mental health.
4. Supporting the development of a sustainable health and care system focused on prevention and early intervention	The healthcare system in Wales is a significant contributor to climate change, affecting the health and well-being of our population and consequently in turn affects our ability to deliver healthcare. An environmentally sustainable healthcare system focused on prevention, early intervention, reducing harm and inequalities will further support the climate emergency response across NHS Wales. Sustainable healthcare can deliver high quality, safe, effective care in ways which support sustainable use of resources and benefit the health and well-being of the people in Wales as well as the environment .



<p>5. Delivering excellent public health services to protect the public and maximise population health outcomes</p>	<p>Protecting the public, and the health of the population, from exposure to environmental problems such as air pollution are core responsibilities. Our environmental public health services ensure that we reduce the number of people who become ill or die as a result of environmental harms and increase the number of people who have health benefits from a good environment through advocacy, policy guidance, expert advice, and surveillance. Reducing human activities that drive the loss of biodiversity could also <u>lower the risk of future pandemics</u>.</p>
<p>6. Tackling the public health effects of climate change</p>	<p>Climate change will impact on the social and environmental determinants of health including clean air, food security and safe homes. It is a major contributor of biodiversity loss, damage and loss of the natural environment. Addressing this priority includes promoting biodiversity, healthy environments and lifestyles, harnessing behaviour change and health impact assessment methods to influence policy, decision making and infrastructure.</p>

2. Why is nature important for our health?

Wales is known for the beauty of its landscapes, the deep connection that people have to the land and the cultural traditions that have been shaped by our connection to nature.

However there has been an alarming and rapid change in biodiversity in recent years. [The State of Nature Report Wales](#) published in 2023 highlighted the widespread loss and degradation of habitats across Wales since 1970. Welsh wildlife is in decline with one in six species at risk of disappearing. This mirrors what is happening on a larger scale with the UK seeing an average 19% decline in species studied since 1970 and over 1 million species are severely threatened globally.

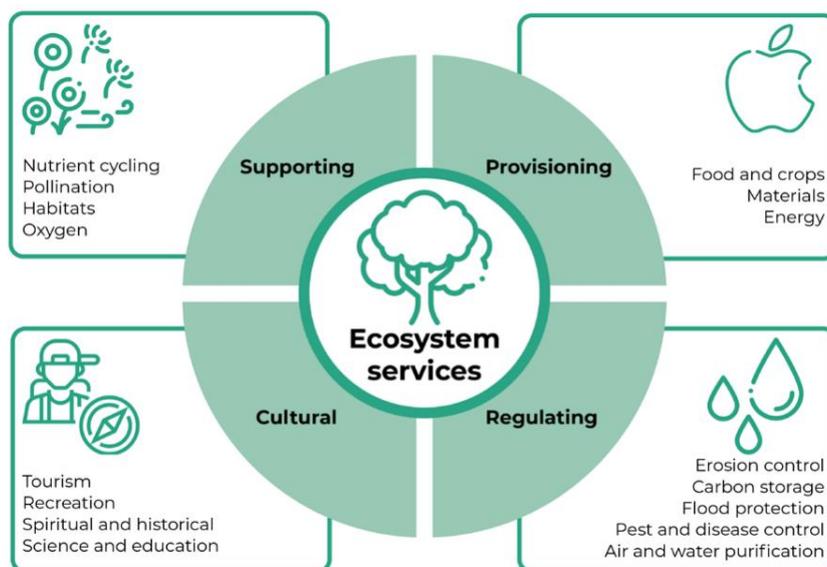
Changes in the way we manage our land for farming, and climate change have been shown to be the biggest causes of wildlife decline on our land, rivers and lakes². At sea and around our coasts, unsustainable fishing practices, climate change and marine development have had a significant impact on ecosystems. The UK's nature has been depleted by centuries of habitat loss and development well before widespread data gathering began in 1970.

This is bad news for the health and well-being of our communities in Wales. Our quality of life and very existence is dependent on nature. We need a rich network of plants, insects and animals to create a healthy environment which can support our food systems, sustain our air and water quality and help us adapt to climate change by protecting us from flooding and capturing carbon. Our mental and physical health, identity and culture are also deeply connected to the natural world.

We asked Public Health Wales' colleagues what nature meant to them...



This graphic from the Senedd Research 'Biodiversity Research Briefing' published in August 2021³ summarises the key co-benefits of a world rich in nature.





This has been backed up in recent years by a number of studies which have shown that -

- Green spaces can help mitigate against air pollution, which helps tackle climate change and reduce health impacts^{4 5} including cardiovascular and respiratory disease⁶.
- Being physically active in green outdoor environments, as opposed to indoor environments such as gyms, can be more supportive of human health^{7 8 9}.
- Public green spaces are associated with social interaction and improved social networking¹⁰, which can also lead to reduced violence, aggression and crime^{11 12}.

However, people in Wales do not have equal access to nature and green spaces, with those in the most disadvantaged areas having the least access but potential for the greatest gains. Several studies^{13 14 15} have highlighted a connection between access to green space and birth outcomes and morbidity for people from the most disadvantaged areas. Provision and accessibility of green space, and creating opportunities for interactions with nature, may be an overlooked resource for addressing health inequities. Research¹⁶ has found that as little as a 10% increase in green space exposure in urban settings can reduce health problems and improve well-being.

Response to the nature crisis

Organisations, charities, public bodies and Government are working together to halt the decline in species, restore habitats and celebrate our natural heritage. In Wales, the following legislation is in place to promote positive action for biodiversity and reduce our impact on the environment.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: This Act places a duty on public authorities to act sustainably for future generations, including to maintain and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience through the goal of a more Resilient Wales.

Environment (Wales) Act 2016: Section 6 of this Act requires public authorities to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems' ensuring biodiversity is considered in business planning, policies, plans and projects. Authorities are required to report on progress every three years and suggests using the Nature Recovery Action Plan to frame this.

The Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023: This Act introduces a range of measures to transform the Welsh agricultural sector by requiring the Welsh Ministers to exercise specified functions in the way they consider best contributes to achieving the sustainable land management objectives, supporting farmers to meet the needs of present and future generations.

In 2021 the Welsh Government declared a nature emergency and in 2024 set out proposals to introduce a Bill that will embed environmental principles into Welsh law, strengthen environmental governance in Wales and introduce a new and ambitious biodiversity targets framework.

3. Developing the plan

Providing engagement opportunities was integral to creating a plan informed by the knowledge and views of staff at all levels and across all directorates in Public Health Wales. In addition to a more standard consultation period where key networks, groups and colleagues were asked for feedback on the draft plan, a workshop was organised early in the process to engage staff on a deeper level and to help shape a new narrative and direction for biodiversity in the organisation.

Drawing inspiration from the creative engagement within the Nature & Us National Conversation led by Natural Resources Wales in 2023, a storyteller was asked to support the workshop and help develop an approach which would inspire participants.

“Sharing stories about our own nature connection is powerful. When we share our own personal reflections and memories or pass on traditional tales and true stories about nature, we are more likely to be heard and understood. Stories engage the heart as well as the mind and we forget the things we hear unless we have understood them in our hearts. When we realise that we love nature, that we are nature, then we will act.” Cath Little, Storyteller

After a session of storytelling and reflection, two key questions were considered: why is nature important to health and how can Public Health Wales be a voice for nature? Ideas and thoughts from the session have been integrated into this plan and will be considered within future actions including the development of a biodiversity narrative for Public Health Wales.



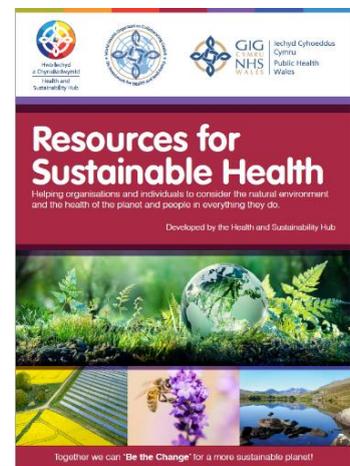
Nature & Health Workshop in Bute Park

4. What has already been achieved?

Public Health Wales' first Biodiversity Action Plan, published in 2019, outlined a number of recommendations and actions under 5 themes: Engaging and Supporting our Staff, Sustainable Procurement, Developing our Estate, Our Environmental Sustainability Programme and Supporting Other Public Bodies in Wales.

We have made progress in a number of areas and include the following achievements –

- ✓ Committed to 'Tackling the public health effects of climate change' as a strategic priority and set up the Public Health Wales Climate Change Programme Board which oversees our organisational approach to climate change.
- ✓ Published a second Decarbonisation and Sustainability Action Plan (2024-26) outlining the commitments we are taking to reduce our carbon emissions across our buildings, transport and procurement.
- ✓ Established **Green Advocates**, an informal staff network to help staff gain knowledge about aspects of sustainable development, climate change, decarbonisation, biodiversity loss, plastics and more.
- ✓ Published a comprehensive Health Impact Assessment of Climate change in Wales (2023) highlighting the impacts of climate change on health and well-being.
- ✓ Developed the Greener Primary Care Wales Framework and Award Scheme to support primary care contractors to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours.
- ✓ Developed the Healthy Environment Workshop to support teams to make sustainable changes to their home and work lives. 80 staff from 22 teams have taken part in the workshops and 9 action plans created.
- ✓ Supported Cardiff Healthy Travel Charter commitments which enable staff and visitors to adopt healthy, active travel to work, reducing air pollution, carbon emissions and making a positive impact on our natural environment.
- ✓ Published a 'Resources for Sustainable Health' e-catalogue which brings together all the resources produced by the Health & Sustainability Hub aimed at helping organisations and individuals to consider the natural environment and the health of the planet and people in everything they do.



Recent Highlights

Climate Change in Wales: Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

This HIA published in 2023 aims to support action on climate adaptation and resilience in Wales by providing evidence on the wider health impacts of climate change, and what it means for people's lives in the places they live, work, learn and play.



Quality, Nursing & Allied Health Professionals (QNAHPs) Well-being Walks

The QNAHPs Directorate organise twice-yearly nature walks for staff taking advantage of local routes to improve physical health and well-being. Feedback has been positive with staff reporting a boost in their mood and that they enjoyed doing a few hours of activity whilst exploring a new part of Wales.

Sustainability Calendar

'Green Up Your Act', Public Health Wales' new sustainability calendar, includes ideas on what staff can do to support nature. 'No Mow May' encouraged leaving a section of lawn for wild plants and flowers and June focused on how people can give nature a home in their own gardens.



5. Action Plan

Three objectives have been identified to help deliver our vision –

Objective 1: To support staff to reduce their environmental impact and take action for biodiversity			
Outcomes:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Staff understand the importance of biodiversity to public health and connection to the Climate Change strategic priority ✓ Staff and teams take action to reduce their impact on the environment and support biodiversity 			
Key Action	Desired outcome	Timeframe	Teams involved
Develop long-term goals and vision for our work on biodiversity	A journey map for biodiversity until 2035	Aug 2025	Health & Sustainability Hub with support from colleagues across PHW
Create a narrative to provide key pathway and messaging for our work on biodiversity	Evidence of communications using key messages	July 2025	Health & Sustainability Hub, Communications
Provide opportunities for staff to take action including Wales Nature Week, Sustainability Calendar and Green Advocates workshops	Staff make changes which impact positively on biodiversity	Annually	Health & Sustainability Hub, Communications, teams across PHW
Roll out the Healthy Environment Workshop to 100% of Directorates. 10 teams supported each year to develop and deliver their action plans	Teams make changes which reduce their impact on the environment and support biodiversity	March 2026	Health & Sustainability Hub supporting teams across PHW
Teams are encouraged to identify ways to spend more time in nature through e.g. promoting walking meetings, using meeting venues with access to green space, well-being walks, etc.	Staff well-being is enhanced by spending time in nature	Ongoing	Health & Sustainability Hub, Communications, teams across PHW

Objective 2: To demonstrate our commitment within planning, policy and service delivery

Outcomes:

- ✓ Biodiversity is considered as a priority in planning and strategic decision making
- ✓ Biodiverse green space is promoted and integrated within appropriate service delivery
- ✓ Public Health Wales' systems and processes make changes to minimise our impact on the natural environment

Key Action	Desired outcome	Timeframe	Teams involved
Actions to reduce our impact on the environment are included within the Decarbonisation & Sustainability Plan 2024-2026	PHW makes progress towards the goal of net zero emissions by 2030 and reduces its impact on the environment	March 2026	Decarbonisation & Sustainability Action Group
Explore how PHW's financial decisions (e.g. procurement) impact on biodiversity	Our financial decisions have a positive impact on the environment and biodiversity	2025	Health & Sustainability Hub working with other teams
Biodiversity is considered during the creation of route maps for the strategic priorities	Route maps include the importance of biodiversity to public health	End of 2024	Strategy and Planning, Executive Team
The importance of nature to health is promoted through the Hapus National Conversation on mental well-being as one of the 8 well-being pillars	People engage with information and resources that help promote a connection to nature	End of 2027	Health Improvement
Support more primary care practices to take positive action for biodiversity through the Greener Primary Care Wales Framework and Award Scheme	Increase in the number of practices involved in the Scheme and taking green space actions	Review at the end of each calendar year	Primary Care Division
The importance of nature to health and well-being is promoted in the 'Active Lessons' domain of the Daily Active Whole School Approach to Physical Activity initiative	Schools in Wales engage with information and resources that support a greater understanding of the importance of biodiversity	End of 2027	Health Improvement
Carry out Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) when making decisions of a strategic nature to assess the impact of proposals on environmental determinants of health, such as biodiversity, in accordance with the new regulations	PHW's strategic decisions consider the impact of projects on environmental determinants of health	Timeframes of regulations to be confirmed by Welsh Government	All teams within PHW, with support from WHIASU if appropriate

Objective 3: To work with partners and identify opportunities to contribute to wider work to support and enhance biodiversity

Outcomes:

- ✓ Public Health Wales' commitment to biodiversity is recognised by partners
- ✓ Public Health Wales advocates for biodiversity, shares good practice with stakeholders and supports relevant networks

Key Action	Desired Outcome	Timeframe	Teams involved
Co-ordinate networking opportunity with Green Health Wales to share case studies and learning	Knowledge and learning around biodiversity and green space activity is shared across the healthcare sector	Summer 2025	Health & Sustainability Hub
Work in partnership with Natural Resources Wales through the development of the Action Plan to support our Memorandum of Understanding	Evidence of partnership working across organisations	Summer 2025	Health & Sustainability Hub, working with teams in Health and Well-being
Report on PHW's Biodiversity actions as related to Section 6 of the Environment Act through contributing to Welsh Government's Section 6 group	Collaboration across public bodies in Wales	Ongoing	Health & Sustainability Hub
Contribute to new "Climate smart education Task & Finish group" to ensure that nature is included in future training and learning provision	Staff can take steps to champion biodiversity along with addressing the climate emergency	End of 2026	Health & Sustainability Hub
Contribute to the Sustainable Development Coordinators Cymru + network workshops to enable discussion and share good practice around biodiversity activity in the healthcare sector	Knowledge and learning around biodiversity and green space activity is shared with sustainable development professionals	End of 2027	Health & Sustainability Hub

Nature Recovery Action Plan

The actions support Welsh Government’s current biodiversity objectives as stated in the [Nature Recovery Action Plan, 2015](#). The table below highlights the links between objectives in the two plans:

	Supporting staff action	Planning, policy & service delivery	Working with partners
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			

6. Monitoring and Accountability

Actions will be reviewed annually, and an update report will be provided to the Climate Change Programme Board and Decarbonisation and Sustainability Action Group. The monitoring schedule is as follows –

- Autumn 2025 – this will form the basis for the next Section 6 report due at the end of 2025
- Autumn 2026 – interim review
- Spring 2027 – final review leading into the development of the next plan (2027 – 2030) at end of 2027

Case studies and achievements will be identified and shared with relevant stakeholders and networks.



References

- ¹ PHW's first Biodiversity Action Plan was published in 2019 with a Section 6 Progress Report published in 2023
- ² State of Nature 2023 - report on the UK's current biodiversity
- ³ 21-14-biodiversity.pdf (senedd.wales)
- ⁴ Dadvand, P. et al. 2012. Surrounding greenness and exposure to air pollution during pregnancy: an analysis of personal monitoring data. Environ. Health Perspect. 120, pp. 1286.
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- ¹³ Roe, J. et al. 2016. Understanding relationships between health, ethnicity, place and the role of urban green space in deprived urban communities. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 13, e681.
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- ¹⁶ de Vries, S. et al. 2003. Natural Environments—Healthy Environments? An Exploratory Analysis of the Relationship between Greenspace and Health. Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 35(10), pp.1717–1731.