



Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being in Wales (ENRaW) Grant Programme

End of Project Report 2019-20

Please complete the following details:

ENRaW Reference: ENRaW 007

Project Name: Connecting Green Infrastructure – South West

Organisation and Project Lead: Neath Port Talbot Council, Catrin Evans

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg
This document is also available in Welsh

1. Project Summary

Briefly summarise your project, where it was delivered, who delivered it and what was delivered.

The Connecting Green Infrastructure Project took forward a new and collaborative approach to designing and delivering green infrastructure (GI) across Neath Port Talbot (NPT), Swansea and Carmarthenshire, for the benefit of local communities and their natural environment. Through a new regional steering group, GI was delivered in ways that met local needs, supported communities and their health, built ecosystem resilience, and enhanced biodiversity.

The project was delivered by members of the steering group, which consisted of the Lead Partner, Neath Port Talbot Council; Delivery Partners, Swansea Council, Carmarthenshire County Council, Coed Lleol (Small Woods Association) and Cwmaman Town Council; and collaborative partners, Public Health Wales and Natural Resources Wales.

Activities were delivered by staff (existing and newly recruited), contractors, friends of groups and volunteers.

Project activities and outcomes were extensive and varied, as outlined in the final monitoring report and supporting Annex 2 document. These included:

- Practical site management of local nature reserves, woodland parks, community sites, parks
- Habitat creation and restoration – sand dune and dune slack creation, bog restoration, wildflower, hedgerow and tree planting
- Species management – clear conifer scrub for spring sandwort, marsh fritillary, bat and barn owl surveys
- Urban and school grounds improvements including extensive tree planting (7,120 saplings and 166 standards), planting of new hedge to improve air quality at Port Tennant, planting climbers to create a green wall in perimeter fencing, log piles for mini beasts, bug hotels, bird boxes, sundries and equipment and ongoing maintenance schedules. All of which provide eco-system services and as well as aid in noise attenuation, attract pollinators.
- Focused delivery of health and well-being activities, with participants reporting a demonstrable increase in physical and mental well-being.
- Engagement with stakeholders in the project, for current year delivery and for ongoing activities should future funding be secured as part of the RDP ENRaW funding stream.
- Progress in development of GI strategies and policies, particularly linking in with Planning Policy teams and review Local Development review processed. For example, development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Swansea Central Area: *Regenerating our City for Wildlife and Wellbeing* - to design multifunctional GI into the regeneration of the city centre. Collaborative project between Swansea Council and Natural Resources Wales.

2. Delivery Against National and Local Strategies, Plans and Priorities

Please describe how your project has supported the delivery of 'Prosperity for All' and the 'Natural Resources Policy'. Also identify any issue-specific plans to which your project has contributed (e.g. the Nature Recovery Action Plan, Action Plan for Pollinators, A Fly-tipping Free Wales etc.). You also need to reference any local plans and priorities (e.g. local Well-being, Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity Plans etc.) for which the project has supported their delivery.

Prosperity for All: At a regional and local level, we have engaged the community in the management of GI assets and our natural resources. Participation in the activities has encouraged healthier and more active lifestyles, with participants already reporting an improvement in their well-being. Activities have supported sustainable management of local sites for the benefit of the wider community and biodiversity, whilst access to green infrastructure, and the wider countryside, has been enhanced for less able people. Upskilling through volunteering and training initiatives will help develop skills for green jobs.

Natural Resources Policy: This project has delivered a place-based approach in seeking nature based solutions to improving wellbeing and community and environmental resilience with a particular focus on deprived areas. Our site based work with communities has helped develop resilient ecological networks whilst enabling the multiple benefits provided by multi-functional GI to be available to all. The ecosystem services attributable to new woodland planting, as well as appropriate management of grassland and bog habitats will increase carbon stores in soils and biomass, and will help mitigate climate change. Longer term, in areas with a high demand for GI, and nature-based solutions, e.g. NPT and Swansea, the increase in tree planting and GI features will assist in reducing noise and will enhance air quality.

Nature Recovery Action plan for Wales: The GI and biodiversity enhancement works support:

- **Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels** - Practical GI enhancement work in urban areas, on school grounds and educational activities to increase engagement and understanding
- **Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management** - Practical site management and enhancement, e.g. cutting fire breaks in heathland, hedge laying to improve connectivity and scrub clearance to maintain population of spring sandwort on SSSI.
- **Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation** - Maintain and create new sand dunes, restoration of bog habitat and urban / school tree planting. Wildflower to improve connectivity
- **Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats** - New fencing to introduce grazing on Cadle Heath LNR and holm oak and cotoneaster control on Mumbles Hill LNR and common.

Action Plan for Pollinators, Buglife B Lines Wales, Gower Important Invertebrate: Positive habitat management: Scrub, bracken, INNS control and meadow management on limestone grassland and coastal heath; meadow cut and collect on limestone grassland, coastal heath and wildflower rich verges; willow control in swamp at Swansea Vale Nature Reserve; wildflower planting along Swansea Bay wildlife corridor, insect Study Centre kits purchased for use at 6 schools.

Fly Tipping Free Wales - Litter Picking by Friends of Mayhill Washing Lake, Bishops Wood Local Nature Reserve Friends and at Garth Farm by Whitethorns Independent Day Service (IDS). Partnership working with Probation services to clear sites of fly-tipping throughout Neath Port Talbot.

The Local **Well-being, and Corporate Plans** for NPT, Swansea and Carmarthenshire all contain objectives for improving the well-being of citizens. The project activities have supported these plans by working to co-deliver improved multi-functional green infrastructure, the sustainable management of natural resources, nature recovery, and adaptation to and mitigation for Climate Change.

Furthermore, green infrastructure is part of partnership members' Public Service Board (PSB) objectives. For NPT, 'value our green infrastructure and the contribution it makes to our wellbeing' is seen as a cross-cutting theme, for Swansea 'Working with Nature- improving health, supporting biodiversity and reducing our carbon footprint' is one of four wellbeing objectives. In Carmarthenshire, GI is a theme that runs through a number of the PSB objectives.

Delivery of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the Section 6 Biodiversity Duty: Nature recovery and ecosystem resilience has been central to the delivery of this project, alongside improving understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and biodiversity. The GI actions delivered is consistent with the aspirations of the relevant biodiversity/nature plans, for example awareness raising initiatives and management of important bog habitats in Carmarthenshire.

Development of the Green Infrastructure Strategies in Swansea – The development of the city and county wide strategies support the Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy ER 2 Strategic Green Infrastructure Network, and emerging Supplementary Planning Guidance on Green Infrastructure.

3. Key Achievements

Please describe:

- The key achievements of the project referring back to its original aims and objectives;
- How you continued to apply SMNR principles during the delivery of your project and its impact;

The original aim of the project was to take a strategic approach to the maintenance, enhancement and creation of GI for the benefit of people, the economy and wildlife.

Due to the delay in grant confirmation, the project was delayed in terms of staff being appointed and therefore plans being devised, and in progressing with works on the ground. Furthermore, due to the grant being changed from a 3 year to 1 year funding allocation, certain key elements (such as the appointment of the NPT Project Manager and project delivery staff for Swansea) were unachievable. The inability to recruit did put pressure on existing staff to deliver the project and impacted on capacity to undertake monitoring and evaluation at a regional level to fully demonstrate the effectiveness of the project.

Consequently, the focus of the project shifted from what would have been development and planning, to delivery of capital works in a relatively short timescale. The project was successful in meeting the targets and delivering against the key tasks outlined in the budget and outcomes reprofiled at the end of the year.

In line with the project objectives (and as outlined in the final monitoring report, and supporting annex 2):

- Significant progress was made and the partnership has come together to support each other, share learning and ideas throughout the delivery period. The partnership structure is now well placed to continue to work across the region through future funding opportunities.
- Made use of best available data and modelling to identify, and deliver, opportunities for GI enhancement.
- Carried out sustainable management on our important sites across the region, supporting biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.
- Engaged, and involved people, in design, implementation and maintenance of new GI schemes. Supported volunteers and communities in managing and improving local sites, increasing provision and access to nature and community natural resources.
- Supported improved health and well-being through the provision of site based activities.
- Through internal engagement and engagement with partners, put measures and processes in place to deliver ongoing improvements for GI. For example, Swansea Central Area GI Strategy – Draft strategy produced following significant stakeholder engagement, draft strategy consultation completed between 20/11/2019 and 31/12/2019. Consultation analysis underway.

SMNR principles were considered and followed at every opportunity throughout the reporting period. The project partners proved to be adaptable throughout the financial year whilst grant approval was being pursued. Changes were made to the profile where needed, and alternative delivery mechanisms pursued, for example contractors or existing staff brought in to support activities where recruitment wasn't possible. Of note, social distancing measures were introduced during the final couple of weeks of project delivery, resulting in delays and changes to delivery methods. A slight delay to the cut and collect machine for Carmarthenshire due to it being quarantined at the border was resolved through agreement by WG to accept a slightly late delivery date.

Decisions and actions were appropriate to the scale that was needed, for example

decisions were taken by the steering group on project delivery across the region, whilst individual partners would focus on local delivery, through stakeholder involvement and public consultation. Community involvement and engagement was at the centre of project delivery, with people involved from design through to delivery, and management of sites benefitting significantly from the incredible input of our volunteers.

Project planning and delivery was based on an appropriate evidence base, drawing in the support of ecology colleagues, biological records and site surveys. A firm understanding of biodiversity and current environmental issues has allowed the partnership to build resilience across the region, with economic, social and environmental benefits being evidenced, as well as the prevention of any damage to ecosystems.

Project delivery has been carried out through collaboration and agreement, with ongoing maintenance of new schemes in place, volunteers and community groups empowered to continue to deliver improvements and a process for further delivery in place.

4. Outputs, Outcomes and Benefits

Please describe how your project has delivered against the original outputs, outcomes and benefits as set out in your original application or for larger scale projects, your agreed Delivery Plan. This may also include any wider social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits that were not set out in your original plan/application.

Key achievements are outlined below, with further detail outlined in Annex 2 provided as part of the final claim.

- A strong regional partnership is now in place for future working should additional funding be secured, with good communication and sharing of information and ideas between partners. The inclusion of partners, such as Public Health Wales, have proved invaluable in bringing additional expertise and contacts to the table.
- Awareness raising and engagement has been a key element of project delivery. Presentations have been given at the Wales GI Forum, public consultation events and at stakeholder groups, raising the profile of GI, the project and the ability of partners to deliver for the benefit of people as well as for the environment.
- Site planning and management has been undertaken across the region, building ecosystem resilience and supporting nature recovery.
- Delivery of new GI schemes, including significant tree planting has been undertaken, supporting climate action and wider benefits associated with urban greening and increase in canopy cover.
- Increased partnership working between health, education and the environment sectors. Partnerships have been developed and/or strengthened with agencies leading to referrals to woodland wellbeing programmes and open/monthly woodland sessions across two counties including a multitude of organisations from many sectors.
- Increased community involvement, supporting long term community action with increased ability to make change and inform decision making. Multiple FOGs and local residents have been involved in projects that have been delivered, including town park GI schemes, woodland craft workshops and community tree planting. One particular valley has benefitted from a community led scheme to increase

employability skills whilst preserving the local environment and promoting wellbeing. The same area has also seen major footpath works, where 20 stiles were replaced with 20 gates, enhancing 4.5km of riverside walks for all.

- Significant volunteer engagement and support, with a large variety of conservation tasks being carried out over the reporting period. In total, approximately 380 volunteer days with over 170 participants have taken place, with numerous other tasks and events being delivered across the region. Partners have registered with an accredited board (Agored Cymru) and have also trained staff to deliver courses on offer.
- Coed Lleol have delivered a total of 35 woodland sessions engaging a total of 105 participants across NPT and Carmarthen. Participants have reported a measurable improvement to their health and well-being.

5. Longer Term Sustainability

Please describe how you have secured the longer term sustainability of the project following the end of the grant funding, during its delivery e.g. securing of ongoing revenue or in kind support, contributions from local businesses, partnership agreement, community ownership/asset transfer etc. This can include any future plans for sustainability that are still being explored.

The ambition for long term sustainability of the project was greatly reduced at the re-profile stage, following revision of the grant offer from 3 years to 1 year, as it was recognised that longer term funding models, increased delivery through changes to policy, organisational work practices and working with wider partners support delivery was part of a 3 year strategy.

That being said, the project has made progress in reducing reliance on grant funding for future funding, whilst project outputs have been carried out in such a way as to provide long term benefits to participants and the natural environment.

Awareness raising, engagement and collaboration with internal council departments has raised the profile of GI, which is starting to become integrated into wider policies and strategies. For example, Swansea City and County GI Strategies, which are supported by action plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance on Green Infrastructure. The Strategy objectives will be embedded into the everyday practices / process of the relevant Swansea Council activities e.g. Strategic Planning, Development Control, Nature Conservation Team, Parks Services, Highways and Drainage and Regeneration. Progress will be monitored and reported via the Council's Corporate Priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity, Section 6 reporting process and Swansea PSB's Working with Nature Objective. The engagement work has created an informal network of local stakeholders to share information / skills and knowledge.

Site management and creation of GI enhancement schemes have consistently been carried out with self-sufficiency in mind. GI schemes are low maintenance and ongoing

maintenance have been agreed with the managing department. For example:

School ground GI improvements – NPT schools were provided with a maintenance schedule for the schemes and made a commitment to maintain this prior to commencement of the planting. Schools have actively engaged with the projects and the inclusion of pupils and staff has ensured a sense of ownership would be carried forward. Since completion, contact has been maintained with the schools, and all establishment maintenance is ongoing, despite many of the schools being closed due to Covid19.

Designated Site GI enhancements - The Councils will take responsibility for maintaining GI works undertaken on Council owned wildlife sites and green spaces. A collaborative approach is being taken, working with a number of services and colleagues across the council to share resources and expertise to help with the ongoing management and improvement of the sites. Volunteer support is well established and (subject to social distancing measures) it is anticipated that the Friend Groups and volunteers will continue to work with the Council to manage sites / works/ improvements.

Air Quality improvement scheme – a years' worth of watering and maintenance has been contracted into the project to ensure the hedge gets established.

The purchase of assets to support ongoing maintenance, for example workspace, container and tools for Cwmaman Town Council and the cut and collect machine for Carmarthenshire Council for wildflower meadow management, building capacity of the grounds maintenance team and reducing cost of more specialised future management.

6. Expenditure Report and Value for Money

Please complete the attached expenditure report (separate document) and explain below how the project has delivered value for money.

Please see *ENRaW 2019-20 - Large Scale - Expenditure Template ENRAW 007*, as provided with the claim documents, for a full breakdown of costs.

Collaboration provided the opportunity to share skills and resources, reducing the need to double up on expertise across the region. Shared posts between the Local Authorities provided a cost effective means of delivering the project, whilst building on existing partnership working with Coed Lleol, we were able to expand that service into Carmarthenshire at low cost.

We have worked with internal, and external partners, to facilitate immediate and long term change. Swansea has collaborated with NRW and involved stakeholders in the design and development of the GI Strategies which has enabled us to tap into a wide range of knowledge and skills, strengthening relations with internal and external stakeholders.

The project has followed corporate and organisational procurement rules to ensure we achieve best value in the purchasing of products and services.

Partners have collaborated with 'friends of' groups and volunteers to undertake some of the work which means that we have added value to the work undertaken. For example, £1046.77 for Swansea (based on 70 volunteers giving 127.5 hours at £8.21 per hour).

GI enhancements provide numerous physical and mental wellbeing benefits to the local community. For example the value of school ground improvements has multiple dimensions. It is the younger

generations that are most likely to see the predicted adverse effects of climate change and biodiversity decline, so it is therefore paramount that access to green space is made available to pupils at a young age and throughout their education. Not only will the multiple benefits of having access to GI be provided, but there is also the inherent opportunity for education, which could inspire today's pupils to become tomorrow's pioneers for nature conservation.

7. Lessons Learned and Future Opportunities

Please describe any lessons learned during delivery of the project. This can include any lessons identified through the monitoring and evaluation of the project. This section will also focus on lessons learned through collaborative delivery with partners and future opportunities arising from the partnership and project

Working as part of a formal regional partnership has presented both challenges and opportunities for better ways of working. Whilst partnership working within the environment sector is already well-established, it is relatively new for a partnership of this geographical scale to work together on a project which has required such significant staff input, in terms of development of the project as well as project delivery. Measures for project governance, such as detail within partnership agreements, steering group structures and sharing of responsibilities, are all detail which have taken longer to address than anticipated. Furthermore, due to the constraints of different procedures and protocols and the fact that systems and processes do not always facilitate efficient collaboration, there is a need to build in additional contingency time for decision making and collation of information.

As shared partnership responsibilities have become clearer and more defined, the partnership has become stronger. The partnership is at the stage now that partner strengths are recognised, processes are in place and there is greater opportunity for sharing of skills and knowledge. It has, however, been a challenging process at times, particularly where a fund requires multiple submissions and there is a need to react to changes in funding structures (such as the change from 3 years to 1 year). The process has outlined the need to clearly define responsibilities and shared goals at an early stage.

Once in place, collaboration of this scale presents excellent opportunities for sharing of skills and knowledge and strengthens regional understanding and cross organisational working relationships. Inevitably there are different strengths within different organisations, and particularly so for the Local Authorities, it is beneficial to be able to demonstrate / report on ways of working across the border.

Maintenance of key biodiversity sites and for delivery of new schemes is always a challenge. Funding within the public sector is stretched and grounds maintenance departments are not in a position to absorb the costs for ongoing maintenance. Consequently, schemes that have been delivered have been low maintenance, and have always been designed in collaboration with the maintaining departments, outlining where they support wider initiatives such as the decarbonisation agenda and corporate priorities, such as Well-being goals and objectives.

Progress has been made in terms of volunteer engagement and support of 'friends of groups', however the length of this project fund has been too short to achieve this in isolation. In recognition of the need for long term investment and continuity with volunteer

support, we have utilised this funding to primarily add value to, and to build on existing volunteering networks. Whilst we have been rewarded with the input of dedicated volunteers and community groups, it's clear that ongoing support for groups such as these are needed.

Building a local supply chain – There is a need to develop a local GI industry as part of Wales' green economy to manufacture and supply material / expertise and systems/and construction. Currently much of the expertise, systems and construction work is being brought in from outside of Wales which carries additional cost impacting on the viability of schemes.

Delivery - outdoor woodland based activities during the 6 month winter period has it challenges. A few sessions had to be cancelled or postponed due to inclement weather including high winds and flooding. Delivery of latter end of all schools projects was severely affected by Covid-19, however, the vast majority of trees were able to be planted. Flexibility of contractors and staff were key to achieving success with these project, particularly within challenging timescales.

Declaration by Project Lead


I declare that the information contained in this report is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.



The information provided is compliant with GDPR (*please refer to the GDPR Schedule in your Grant Award Letter*).



Electronic Signature

Electronic Signature:	
PRINT NAME:	Ceri Morris
Organisation:	Neath Port Talbot Council
Position:	Head of Planning and Public Protection
Date:	19/5/20

Please email your completed report to Welsh Government at the following email address:
EnvironmentGrants@Gov.Wales