

Executive Summary

Vale of Glamorgan Council Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Duty

End of plan Report 2023-2026

Purpose

This report summarises the key findings and achievements from the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty Report 2025. It highlights progress made in fulfilling the Council's statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience between 2023 and 2025, while identifying the key challenges and priorities for future delivery.

Strategic Overview

The Vale of Glamorgan contains an extensive network of important wildlife sites, including 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), 353 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), nationally significant coastline, and habitats supporting rare and threatened species. The Council has continued to strengthen its contribution to nature recovery through policy development, partnership working, habitat management, species conservation, community engagement and evidence gathering.

Key strategic developments during the reporting period include:

- Adoption of the **Vale Nature Recovery Action Plan (2025-2040)**.
 - Preparation of a new **Biodiversity and Ecological Resilience Plan (2026-2029)**.
 - Adoption of the **Tree Strategy 2024-2039**, including a commitment to increase tree canopy cover by 7.5% by 2039.
 - Continued delivery through the Vale Local Nature Partnership (LNP), now comprising more than 55 partner organisations.
 - Increased integration of biodiversity considerations into planning, land management and corporate decision-making.
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Major Achievements

Habitat Restoration and Management

Significant progress has been made in restoring and managing habitats across the Vale.

Grasslands and Road Verges

The "Making Space for Nature" programme has transformed grassland management practices, with more than 60 road verges and public green spaces now managed under biodiversity-focused cutting regimes. The move from traditional frequent mowing to cut-and-collect management has improved wildflower diversity and habitat quality while engaging local communities through monitoring programmes and awareness campaigns.

Ponds and Wetland Creation

The Vale Local Nature Partnership has created or restored 11 ponds across the county, enhancing habitat connectivity and supporting priority species, particularly Great Crested Newts and other freshwater wildlife. Further pond projects are currently being developed across schools, parks and nature reserves.

Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

Tree and hedgerow creation has been a major focus:

- 3,874 trees planted through Vale LNP projects.
- More than 6,500 trees planted directly by the Council.
- Over 28,000 trees planted through the Restore the Thaw project.

Planting has focused on woodland expansion, river corridors, orchard creation, hedgerow restoration and climate resilience.

Community Orchards

More than 19 community orchards are now established across the Vale, supported by community volunteers and heritage fruit tree planting initiatives. New orchards continue to be created through partnership working and grant funding.

Species Conservation

The Council and its partners have delivered targeted conservation action for several priority species.

High Brown Fritillary Butterfly

The Vale remains home to Wales' only population of the High Brown Fritillary butterfly. Approximately 30 hectares of habitat have been managed through scrub removal and bracken control, helping maintain suitable breeding conditions. Monitoring has indicated stable populations during the reporting period.

Barn Owl and Chough

Conservation measures included:

- Installation of five Barn Owl nest boxes.
- Enhanced monitoring and habitat management.
- Continued support for coastal grazing systems essential for Chough feeding habitat.

Notably, a Barn Owl was recorded at Porthkerry for the first time since 2004.

Restore the Thaw Species Recovery

The Restore the Thaw project has delivered substantial action for species recovery, including:

- Release of over 365 Water Voles.
- Installation of 120 bat boxes.
- Creation of new otter holts.
- Great Crested Newt, adder and toad habitat restoration.
- Establishment of a managed beaver enclosure as part of a collaborative restoration initiative.

Community Engagement and Education

Public participation has become a major strength of biodiversity delivery in the Vale.

Engagement Highlights

Over the reporting period:

- 112 events were delivered.
- More than 4,300 people participated in biodiversity activities.
- More than 700 subscribers receive the Vale Nature newsletter.
- Biodiversity communication has expanded through social media and community outreach.

Volunteer Involvement

The Restore the Thaw project alone has engaged over 856 volunteers in habitat management, ecological surveys, citizen science programmes and practical conservation work.

Biodiversity Literacy Training

A new e-learning programme was launched in 2025 to improve biodiversity understanding across the Council and partner organisations.

- 60 staff completed the biodiversity literacy module.
- 62 staff and external partners attended workshops.
- Training is now embedded as an ongoing resource supporting Section 6 compliance.

Evidence, Monitoring and Planning

The Council has significantly improved its evidence base for nature recovery.

Key achievements include:

- Renewal of the Service Level Agreement with SEWBrEC.
- Comprehensive county-wide SINCR review.
- Survey of all Highway Verge Conservation Zones.
- Hedgerow mapping identifying approximately 1,250 km of hedgerows.
- Expansion of citizen science projects and biological recording schemes.
- Development of the Meadow Monitors programme to assess the effectiveness of grassland management changes.

These initiatives provide a stronger foundation for future biodiversity action and more informed decision-making.

Biodiversity Through Development

The Council has strengthened delivery of biodiversity net benefits through the planning process.

Over an 18-month period, biodiversity enhancements secured through planning applications included:

- 294 bat roost features.
- 41 swift nesting features.
- 140 bird nesting features.
- 27 reptile and amphibian hibernacula.
- 1,509 metres of native hedgerow planting.

- 174 native trees.
- 8 ponds.
- 2 orchards.

This demonstrates increasing integration of biodiversity enhancement into development across the Vale.

Key Challenges

Despite substantial progress, several challenges remain.

Delivering the 30x30 Target

Assessment work identified that only 1.1% of land and sea within the Vale currently meets international 30x30 criteria. Achieving this target will require significant additional habitat management, restoration and investment.

Funding and Resources

Nature recovery activity remains heavily dependent on external funding, particularly Welsh Government Local Places for Nature funding and National Lottery funding. Long-term financial certainty remains a significant concern.

Capacity Constraints

The Council's ecology service has limited staffing resources and remains under pressure from increasing responsibilities, particularly within planning and development management. Further embedding of biodiversity responsibilities across all service areas is required.

Funding Delays

Delays in grant approvals continue to impact project delivery, particularly where ecological surveys and habitat works are seasonally dependent.

Conclusion

The reporting period demonstrates significant progress in delivering biodiversity and ecosystem resilience across the Vale of Glamorgan. Strong partnership working, community engagement, habitat restoration and targeted conservation action have resulted in measurable improvements for wildlife and ecosystems.

Major achievements include extensive habitat restoration, creation of ponds and orchards, more than 38,000 trees planted through partnership programmes, successful

species recovery initiatives, expanded biodiversity monitoring and stronger integration of biodiversity into planning and corporate governance.

However, the scale of the biodiversity and climate crises means that continued effort, sustained investment and stronger integration of biodiversity across all Council functions will be essential if long-term nature recovery ambitions, including the 30x30 target, are to be achieved

The next 3 years 2026-2029

Gives us opportunity to build on previous successes and deliver further conservation gains, integrating conservation into every aspect of the councils works and engaging volunteers.

Some proposes targets are:

- Continuing to deliver high quality projects via supporting the Vale Nature Partnership
- Delivering the conservation goals in the Vale' Nature Recovery Action Plan
- Continued external collaboration to deliver projects, including Vale Coastal Forum, the Restore the Thaw project and work with a network of local nature groups, volunteers and organisations including the Wildlife Trust, Bumblebee Conservation and the Glamorgan Bird Group.

Deliver in-house conservation projects by working across a range of departments to deliver projects such as:

- Planting a minimum 1,500 trees per year
- Controlling Invasive species
- Increase area of wildflowers
- Promoting the use of natural flood management methods