



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Amgylchedd a Chynaliadwyedd **The Environment and Sustainability Committee**

Dydd Mercher, 21 Mai 2014
Wednesday, 21 May 2014

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Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mick Antoniw	Llafur Labour
Russell George	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Llyr Gruffydd	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Alun Ffred Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Antoinette Sandbach	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Leanne Bird	Swyddog Bioamrywiaeth, Cyngor Sir Ceredigion Biodiversity Officer, Ceredigion County Council
James Byrne	Rheolwr Eiriolaeth Tirweddau Byw, Ymddiriedolaethau Natur Cymru Living Landscapes Advocacy Manager, Wildlife Trusts Wales
Ceri Davies	Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol—yr Adran Gwybodaeth, Strategaeth a Chynllunio, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Executive Director for Knowledge, Strategy and Planning, Natural Resources Wales
Catrin Evans	Uned Fioamrywiaeth, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd Port Talbot Biodiversity Unit, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Julia Korn	Ymgynghorydd Ecosystemau a Bioamrywiaeth, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Ecosystems and Biodiversity Adviser, Natural Resources Wales
Steve Lucas	Swyddog Cymru, Ymddiriedolaeth Gwarchod Ystumod Wales Officer, Bat Conservation Trust
Katie-jo Luxton	Cyfarwyddwr, RSPB Cymru Director, RSPB Cymru
Rebecca Sharp	Uned Fioamrywiaeth, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd Port Talbot Biodiversity Unit, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Alun Davidson	Clerc Clerk
Catherine Hunt	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Nia Seaton	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:30.
The meeting began at 09:30.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Croeso i'r pwyllgor. Os bydd y larwm tân yn canu, gadewch yr ystafell yn unol â chyfarwyddyd y swyddogion. Diffoddwch eich ffonau symudol os gwelwch yn dda. Mae hawl gennych i siarad Cymraeg neu Saesneg. Rydym yn croesawu cyfraniadau yn unrhyw un o'r ddwy iaith.

Alun Ffred Jones: Welcome to the committee. If the fire alarm sounds, please leave the room in accordance with the ushers' instructions. Mobile phones should be switched off. You have the right to speak in Welsh or English. We welcome contributions in either language.

[2] Mae Gwyn Price wedi cymryd lle Vaughan Gething ar y pwyllgor ac rydym wedi cael ymddiheuriad gan Gwyn y bore yma.

Gwyn Price has taken Vaughan Gething's place on the committee and we have received apologies from Gwyn this morning.

09:31

Trafodaeth ynghylch Bioamrywiaeth: Partneriaid Sefyllfa Byd Natur Roundtable Discussion on Biodiversity: State of Nature Partners

[3] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Croeso atom y bore yma, y tri ohonoch—Steve Lucas, Katie-jo Luxton a James Byrne. Rydym yn edrych ymlaen at sesiwn ddiddorol o holi ac ateb. A wyf yn iawn i ddweud y bydd un ohonoch yn dweud gair o gyflwyniad? Katie, a hoffech chi wneud hynny?

Alun Ffred Jones: A warm welcome to all three of you this morning—Steve Lucas, Katie-jo Luxton and James Byrne. We look forward to an interesting question-and-answer session. Am I right in thinking that one of you will make some opening comments? Katie, would you like to do that?

[4] **Ms Luxton:** Yes, I will do so, briefly. Thank you very much for inviting us here today.

[5] We have met as a group of organisations as Wales Environment Link, and we have some common positions on where we are in relation to our views on biodiversity. So, the things I say have been agreed by a number of organisations, and we submitted a short paper to the committee.

[6] Our feeling, very much, at the moment, is one of frustration that we are not making enough progress, at the speed that we need to make, around biodiversity recovery. This committee, in 2010-11, conducted an inquiry into why biodiversity was declining and produced quite a thorough set of recommendations. It was quite disheartening to review the progress on those recommendations in advance of this meeting. There were 15 recommendations that were accepted by Government, either in whole, part or principle, and, of those, we believe that nine have not been done, or, we are unclear as to what progress has been made on them. We are aware of some progress on four of them, although, in some cases, that has been quite slow, and two of the recommendations have been completed. That does not show a huge amount of enthusiasm for tackling the problem.

[7] We are in an interesting place in that we have quite a lot of political support and interest around the loss of nature at the moment, which is very heartening. There is an

enthusiasm for tackling some of the big challenges around why biodiversity is declining and for tackling the drivers of our environmental degradation. The Minister has driven a new approach around natural resource management. That has the potential to provide a beneficial result for biodiversity in the long run. However, perhaps, at times, that has almost produced a kind of mystique that has been confusing for practitioners on the ground to get a hold of, and that makes it quite difficult for biodiversity, which is just one of many natural resources, to be prioritised and focused upon.

[8] Our concern is that the words ‘biodiversity’ or ‘nature’ are disappearing from many documents. I read Natural Resources Wales guidance on natural resource management and the word ‘biodiversity’ appears once in the whole document. Natural resource management is about integration; it is a process. We are lacking real, clear direction about what it is that will come out at the end of it. When the Minister, Alun Davies, responded and launched the nature fund last year at the Royal Welsh Show, he said that we need to be really clear where we are going, and that feels to me to be the one thing that is missing.

[9] The resources and capabilities to tackle biodiversity loss are found right across the private sector, the public sector and the third sector. It must be a collaborative endeavour. The role of Government in this is, therefore, to provide very clear leadership, and the report from this committee endorsed that.

[10] The piece that we have yet to see from Government is a clear strategy or plan as to what it is that needs to be recovered by when and a really clear idea of what success would look like, because so much flows from that. The resources of the other sectors—the private sector, the third sector—and across the public sector—can be galvanised towards the same shared endeavour. That clarity is lacking. It also then determines the shape of the governance of the frameworks we have in place and the type of monitoring we put in place to see whether the schemes we have are working and whether we are achieving outcomes. So, in conclusion, I think that we feel that some key planks are still missing from biodiversity. There are some big opportunities around at the moment, with the environment Bill and the future generations Bill, to rectify that and to make it really clear where biodiversity sits and how important it is to tackling some of the underlying issues.

[11] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. Thank you very much. It was remiss of me not to ask you to introduce yourselves for the record, so can you just state your names and what you represent?

[12] **Mr Lucas:** My name is Steve Lucas and I am the Wales officer for the Bat Conservation Trust.

[13] **Ms Luxton:** I am Katie-jo Luxton and I am the director of RSPB Cymru and a trustee of Wales Environment Link.

[14] **Mr Byrne:** I am James Byrne and I am the living landscapes advocacy manager for Wildlife Trusts Wales.

[15] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Thank you. We have received a paper late in the day from the RSPB, which has just been circulated, so apologies for that. You mentioned that there are two completed recommendations—two recommendations that the Government has responded to. Which are those two?

[16] **Ms Luxton:** You will have to give me a moment, I am afraid—

[17] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Skip that then. We will come back to it. Julie Morgan is next.

[18] **Julie Morgan:** You seemed to indicate that you do not think there is enough leadership from the Welsh Government. Would I be right in saying that?

[19] **Ms Luxton:** I think that there is a lot of energy being used, but the key things we need from Government around really focused targets, outcomes and outputs are still lacking. The Minister committed to producing a nature recovery plan this time last year, I believe, or perhaps a little bit later in the summer. That was going to be produced for the beginning of the year. We met the Government last week and we have a commitment that the plan is coming but it is taking an awfully long time. However, for me, we have the nature fund, which is a fantastic thing—I do not want to be at all dismissive of that because it is great to have the money that the Minister has put on the table to tackle this challenge—but it is very hard to know how to spend that money to best effect when you have yet to have a strategy. We felt that we had time while the scheme to spend that money was being developed to also produce a strategy, and we are quite frustrated, really, that we are now into spending the money, or starting to spend the money, and we are yet to know that we are doing that in the best way.

[20] **Julie Morgan:** So, you think that the commitment is there but you are concerned about the slow pace and delay.

[21] **Ms Luxton:** I think that the commitment is there but we need to be far more specific about what we need to achieve and to reach agreement around that. I think that, at times, there is a belief, perhaps, that biodiversity is a level of detail or a single focus and that in the new paradigm of natural resource management it is just one small thing. Therefore, there is an enthusiasm to focus on the big picture. That has a place—I am not saying that it does not—but, within that, practitioners need to be very clear what the component parts are that they need to be delivering on.

[22] **Mr Byrne:** I would agree with what Katie said. While we know that there is a commitment from Natural Resources Wales and from Alun Davies's ministry, we would also look—. One of the recommendations in the previous inquiry was to mainstream biodiversity and nature into other departments and ministries, and we do not think that that recommendation has been completed yet. We do not see the evidence that other ministries and other departments are looking into nature conservation. Obviously, one of the drivers that we keep hearing about is that natural resources and biodiversity contribute to economic wellbeing, health and social justice. However, that is all being taken forward through the environment ministry but not through the other ministries. In the 'Environment Strategy for Wales', which I believe is still current, it says:

[23] 'The environment is central to every aspect of life. It supplies our basic needs—clean air, water, food and a place to live... We recognise that the economy and the environment are closely linked and that a healthy, attractive environment will play a key role in attracting and retaining people to live and work in Wales... The environment also has a profound connection with our health and wellbeing... Putting sustainable development into practice means ensuring that economic and social policies address how they can help deliver environmental benefits and similarly our environmental policies will consider how they can enhance economic and social wellbeing.'

[24] That was from 2006, when Carwyn Jones was the Minister for the environment. He said in the foreword,

[25] 'I am pledging my ongoing commitment to delivering the vision set out in the Strategy'.

[26] As I said, however, we do not yet see the drivers for biodiversity coming from other departments. There is a lot of evidence, some of which I have here, about the economic

benefits that biodiversity gives to Wales, but also the health and wellbeing benefits that it gives to Wales and the rest of the UK. So, there is a lot of evidence, but we would like to see that picked up and driven forward by other departments.

[27] **Julie Morgan:** Have you seen any evidence in any departments that this is being mainstreamed at all?

[28] **Mr Byrne:** Yes, we have.

[29] **Julie Morgan:** Could you tell us of some good examples?

[30] **Mr Byrne:** Yes. A good example is in Visit Wales, which is looking to develop nature tourism. We are working with Visit Wales to develop an interactive wildlife brochure to try to capture more tourists and therefore more money coming in to nature conservation. So, it is happening, but it will probably be more piecemeal than strategic, and certainly not a driver within every Government department.

[31] **Mr Lucas:** The first recommendation from the 2011 report was this mainstreaming across all departments. In accepting that recommendation, the Minister, or the Government then said that it would:

[32] ‘undertake an audit of all Government Departments and agencies to identify current action for biodiversity’.

[33] We have yet to see that. None of us knows what came out of that report, or indeed whether that audit actually ever took place. It would be really useful if that information was made available, and perhaps to review and repeat that.

[34] **Llyr Gruffydd:** The future generations Bill will be an important part of this drive for the cultural change that we really want to effect across Wales, which would eventually translate the aspiration into actual action and difference on the ground. I think that I know the answer, but I had better ask: you would obviously be looking for an unequivocal reference to biodiversity in the goals that are being looked at in terms of the future generations Bill.

[35] **Mr Lucas:** Yes, and also clear and explicit recognition of having to live within our own environmental limits within that, as part of that.

[36] **Llyr Gruffydd:** If that was not there, would you feel that that would be a fundamental weakness in the FG Bill, and that, actually, it probably would not achieve this mainstreaming that we are looking for within the public sector in Wales?

[37] **Mr Lucas:** Absolutely. Yes.

[38] **Ms Luxton:** I think that if you went back again to the Minister at the time, who responded to the committee’s inquiry, you would see that she made it very clear that biodiversity should be a part of the sustainable development goals. I think that it is disappointing that the language has become quite different in a very short amount of time. So, we have moved through quite a lot of different ways of talking about the environment; we have had natural resource management, ecosystem management and biodiversity. It has become quite difficult for people to understand which are the things that we are doing. These phrases all mean different things to different people. In particular, ‘natural resources’ often makes people think of the mineral sector, and it is very easy for the biodiversity nature elements to be forgotten within that. I know that we have definitions in the environment Bill that will cover that, but it is very important that we make very clear the need to tackle the loss of biodiversity. It is a bit like climate change; these are big, intractable, systemic issues. They

are not going to be dealt with unless we tackle the root causes. I do believe that the Government has made some moves towards trying to do that with the natural resource management approach. My concern, really, is that biodiversity is becoming a bit of a detail in this wonderful new paradigm, and it is quite a difficult detail. Quite interestingly, we were talking about the nature fund with Government officials last Friday and it became clear that we will not be able to use the nature fund to just do a project to recover nature. We will have to deliver a range of other ecosystem service benefits as well. That is great—we should be trying to do that—but there are some things that just need fixing by direct attention, and there appear to be fewer and fewer resources available to do that kind of work.

09:45

[39] We have talked a bit about one of the analogies that one of the civil servants used, which was that biodiversity is like being stuck in triage, and we need to have a bigger-picture response. I think that is quite a good analogy. The problem is that we are now saying the equivalent of, 'If we just have a healthy living initiative, we won't need hospitals'. We have to have both. The key things we need to do are to have both direct biodiversity action on our protected sites, thinking about schemes such as Glastir and really making sure that they can deliver the priority outputs, and then a plan to increase the resilience around the wider landscape and tackling the species and habitats that are at risk of being lost. Right now, we are losing species from our countryside—right now.

[40] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I think that Mick Antoniw wants to say something about the legislation.

[41] **Mick Antoniw:** Llyr mentioned the future generations Bill. The narrative around the Bill, as I think that you were indicating, has changed to a greater socioeconomic sustainability focus. Do you see a problem with that?

[42] **Ms Luxton:** I do not think that we have a problem with it. What we want to have is the wildlife and environmental elements within it as well. The concern is that there is an international definition of sustainable development and it would be disappointing if the Welsh Government wanted to create its own version that was very different from the common understanding. So, we work to make sure that the place of the environment and, within that, nature, remains within the discourse. We will not have sustainable development if we only focus on the two pillars of social and economic.

[43] **Mr Byrne:** We believe that biodiversity should be a cross-cutting theme within Government, not just in the future generations Bill, but in the environment Bill, and going into different ministries as well.

[44] **Mick Antoniw:** On the socioeconomic side, it is environmental sustainability, and then socio and economic sustainability. Of course, they can be difficult partners, and the narrative definition around them can be very complicated. How do you think that everything you have been arguing about should fit in? What sort of narrative would you have around the balance of the three? There are often significant conflicts between them, and it is an issue that we will obviously have to grapple with when we see the Bill. Have you given any thought to how the socioeconomic factor fits into the environmental narrative more clearly?

[45] **Mr Lucas:** History has shown that the socioeconomic issues always take precedence over the environment: the environment can be fixed; we can deal with the environment, but we must march on with the socioeconomic issues. For some areas, that is fine, but that has resulted in impacts on the environment over the years, and history can show that quite easily.

[46] It is a question of perhaps changing the way that we think about our socioeconomic

development, and perhaps looking for alternatives. Inevitably, there will be times when one has to give way to the other, but, in general, if we carry on with this notion that economics and our social progress take precedence over the environment completely, then we will always have a system where we will not square that circle.

[47] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Is it an either/or?

[48] **Mr Lucas:** I would like to think it is not either/or. I think that if we were to look at things properly and carefully, in a planned way, all of them could be taken together at the same time.

[49] **Ms Luxton:** I think that there is a real opportunity here to use the existing paradigms out there. There are two pieces of legislation that exist across Europe. One is the habitats directive, which has a decision-making process in it that allows proper consideration of the environment and its needs, and looks at alternatives. That currently applies on internationally important protected sites. It does not stop development, it just looks at what is appropriate on those sites and at whether there are alternatives. There is also the strategic environmental assessment directive. Again, there is a decision-making process in that. Lots of people will roll their eyes at you when you talk about SEA, because it has become an enormous, complex administrative process but, actually, the principles and thoughts in there—the decision-making process in there—are probably the best way of making good, sustainable decisions. I think that Wales could go back to the principles of both those pieces of legislation and bring those in as the underpinning ways of dealing with sustainable development and making those hard decisions, because there are difficult decisions that need to be made. However, the habitats directive gives us a framework around compensation as well. So, when there are overriding reasons of public importance and there are no alternatives, it does allow sites to be damaged when there is compensation. That is a way forward.

[50] **Antoinette Sandbach:** You said, Katie-jo, that there is a lack of clear strategy or plan about what needs to be recovered and by when. It seems to me that a lot of that is around information and information gathering. We know that there is a lot of information out there that is not being co-ordinated, so what progress have you seen in pulling all that together?

[51] **Mr Lucas:** The problem that we have, I think—well, there are a number of fundamental problems with data collection. One is that our monitoring protocols are based on a UK level, so we are slowly moving over towards devolving that down to country levels. The other is the issue of resources to do that data collection. It is fine for species that are enigmatic—you know, the nice, sexy species of birds, butterflies and bats—but there are whole groups of species, rafts of taxonomic groups that do not fit easily, either because of lack of expert knowledge or lack of people and so on.

[52] However, that is being tackled gradually and slowly. We have the four local record centres that actively promote data collection, and my own organisation has a long-standing national bat monitoring programme, which will publish last year's survey disaggregated for Wales. I cannot divulge the results of that, because I do not know, but it will be available. So, progress is being made to try to get data at a Wales level. It is not an easy thing, but it is being done gradually.

[53] **Antoinette Sandbach:** In terms of what the Minister has to do, if there is not a baseline, you have nothing to measure it against. So—

[54] **Ms Luxton:** You are absolutely right. We have enough data to give us an indication of what is happening for quite a lot of species and habitats. What we do not have is a really good monitoring system to be able to report our progress. This goes back to the direction, because we have to know—. We signed up to an EU target to say that we will have halted the

loss of biodiversity by 2020 now. We need to know what that looks like for Wales, so what does success in 2020 look like for us? When we are all clear on that—and it will involve some tough conversations about the prioritisation of different habitats and species, but this sector is up for that conversation and we have done a lot of work towards that—then you can describe what the monitoring is that will tell you whether you have the success of that.

[55] **Antoinette Sandbach:** May I just check, it seemed to me that there was very little baseline data in the ‘State of Nature’ report that related to Wales, so are you now saying that there is enough baseline data to cover biodiversity in its broadest sense, or does more need to be done to actually get there? If we are not certain about where we are and where we are going, does more need to be done to draw a line and say, ‘Okay, whatever has happened in the past, we measure a baseline here and then we measure our achievements, targets or aims against that data’?

[56] **Mr Lucas:** I think that the evidence from the ‘State of Nature’ report and, indeed, from other monitoring protocols, is based on the best available data with the best expert opinion at the time. There will always be gaps and some of them may need to be filled specifically, while others could probably be done by other ways. However, it was done on the best available data using statistically robust information. It is interesting that the agri-environment schemes and the monitoring that has gone into that was all done without baseline data, so it is on both sides of the equation, I am afraid.

[57] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I am not suggesting that it is not. What I am asking is, what do you need the Government to do? What your report is suggesting is that the agri-environment schemes have not been successful. However, there has not really been any baseline against which those have been measured, and there have not, as far as I understand it, from your point of view, been proper targets against which the success or failure of Tir Cynnal and the other—

[58] **Ms Luxton:** There are two different things here: there is measuring outcomes for Wales, and there is measuring the success of schemes. There are quite different types of monitoring and surveillance that you would do to get the answer to both of those. There has been inadequate monitoring for biodiversity with most of our agri-environment schemes so far, although there has been a little bit of monitoring that has been done quite recently on Tir Gofal—but, again, without a baseline—looking at comparative sites, so that does give us some statistically robust information.

[59] I think that there is a crying need for more data. I think that it is one of the areas that the Government has recognised. The Minister recognised it back in 2011, and said that it was an urgent priority then; the Minister last year, at the Royal Welsh Show, put data right at the forefront of the things that he wanted to fix. So, there is some direction coming in around data, but it is a very expensive, complex world, and you have to be very clear what it is you are measuring and for what purpose—whether it is schemes or outcomes that you are measuring. There is a workshop happening shortly around data, so I think that we are making progress, but, again, I come back to the point that we need to know what it is that we want to measure, based upon what it is that we are trying to achieve, or we will endlessly go around in circles, and then come back and say, ‘Oh, we did not measure the right things’.

[60] **William Powell:** As we know, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to address issues around biodiversity, and to work for progress. Your late paper notes, with some disappointment, the failure of public authorities to deliver adequately on those duties. Do you feel that we have the balance between carrot and stick—between incentivisation on the one hand and enforcement on the other—right presently?

[61] **Mr Byrne:** What I would say is that the NERC Act 2006 has not been a particularly strong duty. There is a duty on it for all public bodies to have a regard to biodiversity. As far as we know, there have not been any successful prosecutions relating from the NERC duty. We have not seen the NERC duty being systematically reported on through different departments in local government. However, it is not just about local government; it is about national Government, and all public bodies. We would like to see the NERC duty strengthened, and, possibly through the environment Bill, have more carrots and sticks, as you put it.

[62] **Ms Luxton:** I think that that does require review. We know that tackling biodiversity is really tricky, and it requires action across all the different policy areas, and it requires a level of join-up that is, frankly, challenging for any organisation, let alone Government. That is the reason why we have pushed so hard for much clearer targets and direction. The NERC duty produced a list of habitats and species that are priorities for Wales; unfortunately, there has been very little focus on those, and I think that that is one area that we would like to see greater focus on, to really plan what we are going to do for those priority habitats and species.

[63] However, we have an opportunity now, with both the future generations Bill, as we have touched on, and also our environment Bill, to provide much clearer direction on this. There is a group of organisations saying that, while they understand that biodiversity is just one of a number of natural resources that this Bill is legislating for, this Bill provides an opportunity to really set a clear steer across the public sector to recover biodiversity. That is why we have all called, in Wales Environment Link, for a biodiversity duty and a climate change duty to be put on the face of the Bill. Now, in our conversations with Government, it has so far rejected that approach, because it feels that that is putting a spotlight on a few individual bits of the natural resources portfolio, if you like. However, we feel that that is required, to give all of the public sector, including local government, a real focus on this.

10:00

[64] At a time when everybody is having to really focus their resources just on their statutory duties—that is what is happening in a lot of places—biodiversity is often one of the things that is dropping down the agenda, as the duty is a bit vague, organisations are a bit unclear about what they have to do and the leadership from Government is not as clear as it could be. You will be talking to local government officials later, but my experience of talking to them is that, quite often, the staff and officers at the junior level of biodiversity feel that they are pushing water uphill.

[65] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Joyce Watson, are you moving on to protected areas?

[66] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. My question follows on into the same area in terms of the protected sites. You talk about designated areas and focus. There are some areas where there is a clear focus, and I just wanted to ask a little bit around that focus and if, in your collective opinion, you feel that progress has been made to get those protected sites, whether they are on land or at sea, into a favourable condition?

[67] **Ms Luxton:** It is incremental and I think that we would like to see it move forward with great alacrity. When the environment strategy 2006 was published, one of the key outcomes of that, outcome 21, was focusing on improving the condition of all of our protected sites, from the international and national down to local sites. It set deadlines of 2015 and 2026; we are not on course to meet any of those. One of the concerns that we have is that the reason for the protected site network was based around priority habitats and species. With the rise of natural resource management, there is enthusiasm to broaden what goes on in those areas. However, it is a little bit unclear, and that has the potential to be an opportunity but also to provide another layer of complexity and confusion around what needs to be done.

Increasing the management on these sites is the primary goal, and we are not on target.

[68] **Mr Byrne:** I would say that these sites of nature conservation are our gemstones—these are the cathedrals of nature conservation. If we want to repopulate the countryside with these habitats and species and get the ecosystem services and the economic and health and wellbeing benefits from them, we need to be managing them appropriately and making them top-notch. However, a 2010 rapid review by the Countryside Council for Wales showed that 68% of sites of special scientific interest were in an unfavourable condition and 71% of assessed habitat features were in an unfavourable condition. These are mostly our best sites, as well. SSSIs were always supposed to be a representative sample, as well, of our best habitats. So, for example, if there were five ancient woodlands within an area of search, one or two of them would be designated as SSSIs, with potentially the rest of the others taken up by local wildlife site designations. So, local wildlife sites can be just as important and just as biodiverse as SSSIs, as well, but they are potentially not given the same level of protection or funding as SSSIs are given. There are two elements that we need to look at: the national and the local wildlife sites.

[69] **Mr Lucas:** I would like to add that, in my experience of working with developers in the planning system as a whole, in my 25 years in this profession, what they repeatedly say to me is that that site is protected and that has a designation, which tells us something about that site and about the value that society places on that site. So, they will try usually to avoid impacting on the site if they can. So, that then leaves open all the rest and, as James has just said—and this is one of my pet things—not all sites are protected equally, and they should be. So, we have this continuum from sites that are protected and sites that should be protected, but are equally as good as protected, all the way down to the sites that are ecologically of little value, if you like. So, what we want to see, really, are these core areas of species and habitats properly protected and properly managed, and they need to sit with the strategic area for ecosystem functionality.

[70] **Alun Ffred Jones:** On the nature fund that was set up, and there are seven areas that have been designated where this money can be spent, but they are not the same areas as SSSIs and all the other protected areas.

[71] **Ms Luxton:** I think that ‘designated’ is probably the wrong word. They are just, sort of, areas put forward as priorities for the funding.

[72] **Alun Ffred Jones:** So, the money from the nature fund will not be available for spending in certain areas, in protected areas.

[73] **Ms Luxton:** Yes, that is my understanding.

[74] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Were you consulted at all about these seven areas that have been indicated for the major fund?

[75] **Ms Luxton:** There has been quite a lot of process, of inputting ideas from all across civil society, really—from landowners to public sector bodies, ideas have been input for how to spend this money over the last nine to 10 months. The selection of areas, I understand, was made by officials based on the ideas that came forward.

[76] **Joyce Watson:** Turning to protected sites, I again ask for your views on any progress on designation of any further marine protected sites.

[77] **Ms Luxton:** This has been a massive issue—

[78] **Joyce Watson:** I know; that is why I am asking.

[79] **Ms Luxton:** There is some progress at last, but, again, this has taken a very long time, and there is a legal obligation on the Welsh Government to have completed a coherent ecological network by 2015. I think that it looks like a really tall order to meet this deadline now. However, there is commitment across the sector to support the Government where we can, because this is an absolutely crucial part of what we need to do. Our seas are under enormous pressure, because they are out of sight and out of mind. We still have some of the best wildlife at sea, and, certainly in my area of work around seabirds, the enormous crashes in seabird colonies in Scotland are linked primarily to a loss of food in the food chain—so, sand eels and things like that in the sea, such small fry, which form the basis of the food chain. We have not yet seen that in Wales, so we still have a chance to protect the basis of our ecosystem, if you like, and we should grasp it rapidly before the same pressures come further south.

[80] **Joyce Watson:** In much of the cases of loss of birds, particularly in Scotland, as you have just mentioned, they starved, quite frankly, because of the exceptional weather that we have had: the storms. Maybe they are a one-off; maybe they are not. How do we deal, in your opinion, with preventing that happening again? We cannot prevent storms—of course we cannot, because even the politicians cannot control the weather.

[81] **Ms Luxton:** The decline in birds such as kittiwakes was happening in Scotland even before the storms. This has been going on for about eight years—the decline that I am aware of. One of the key things—this is still not being utterly accepted—is protecting the foraging areas of seabirds. We have been very good at protecting the cliffs on which many of them nest, but they spend a very small proportion of their lives on cliffs—it is when they are breeding, and that is a tiny percentage of their life. Most of their life is spent foraging at sea, and we have no protected areas for seabirds foraging at sea. At the moment, that is still not part of the protected area network, and that is a big part of our campaign.

[82] **Joyce Watson:** May I ask just one further question? I live in Pembrokeshire, so it is fairly obvious where I am going with this. Do you have any data on puffins' feeding sites, and have you seen any decline or effect in their feeding grounds?

[83] **Mr Byrne:** Marine is not my area of expertise, but I will get the full answer to that for you from my marine colleagues. Obviously, the storms have affected the seabirds on the Pembrokeshire islands. To what extent, I am not aware, but certainly, as Katie-jo mentioned, there is ongoing work by NRW to look at extensions to the protected area network for the SPAs. As I say, I will get back to you specifically on that point.

[84] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Thank you; we will look forward to receiving that information.

[85] **Llyr Gruffydd:** The overriding message for me here is that, while there are good examples of things happening out there, there is this lack of a clear direction, a strategy, a plan. Is that not what the nature recovery plan should provide?

[86] **Ms Luxton:** Yes.

[87] **Llyr Gruffydd:** One word answers are fine; there is no problem with that. My understanding is that we are expecting something in July of this year. Are you in the loop with these discussions, or are you not?

[88] **Ms Luxton:** Part of the European biodiversity strategy is that all member states—in the UK, we have decided that each devolved country will produce its own biodiversity strategy—must produce a biodiversity strategy by 2015. What is not 100% clear to me is whether the nature recovery plan that we talked about last year, which in many ways we

thought would be a quick job, to provide direction to things such as the nature fund, Glastir—the key pieces of the toolkit, if you like, to fix biodiversity—is clear about which species and habitats Glastir was going to fix, which things were going to be fixed by protected sites and which things could be fixed by nature fund interventions. That has not happened in time to inform those discussions. Therefore, we are now in a place where we have to make a call as to whether we are going to produce a nature recovery plan to provide that direction rapidly, and involve that into the European biodiversity strategy, or whether we try to have a slightly longer trajectory and produce a really good biodiversity strategy. My understanding from the meeting last week was that we are going to try to produce a quick nature recovery strategy in the next couple of months—we will try to do this in July; it was originally meant to be March, I think. That will evolve into the biodiversity strategy.

[89] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Would that be your preference, given the circumstances?

[90] **Mr Lucas:** It is the best thing that we have got under the present circumstances. Katie-jo and I sit on the Wales biodiversity strategy board, and these things get discussed one month and maybe not the next, and it gets brought up again. Part of the frustration that we felt, I guess, is that, on some of these issues, we have offered to go away and input—almost like a task and finish group, if you like—and those offers have never really been taken up. So, there has always been this apparent lack of progress. I understand—correct me if I am wrong, Katie—that that is going to happen for the recovery plan to get something in time for July. It is what we have, is it not?

[91] **Llyr Gruffydd:** What sort of inter-relation do you foresee between the nature recovery plan and the area-based planning stuff that is going to be in the environment Bill?

[92] **Ms Luxton:** I think that that is a very good question. There is going to be a natural resource management policy for Wales. I would hope that that contains very clear objectives and targets for biodiversity. So, I would hope that the first nature recovery plan, which might need to be something quite quick and quite focused, will be the first draft of the first plank of a natural resource policy. However, again, that is not clear.

[93] I suppose that the frustration we have is that it feels a little bit like unless we kick up a bit of a stink in each of these biodiversity strategy meetings, progress is not being made. What I had in mind when Government said that it was going to lead on biodiversity policy was a bit more leadership and a bit more progress that it would own. It is very clear from NRW's corporate plan: it has words to the effect of, 'We will play our part in biodiversity recovery'. It is a bit unclear what that part is yet. However, I can understand where NRW is, because if the Government has not set the direction, it is quite hard for any of us to know what part we are playing towards the Wales plc endeavour, if you like.

[94] In the past, we would have had a statutory agency, in CCW, that would have provided quite a high level of policy direction in support of the Government action. That has not emerged from NRW as yet. From what I understand from conversations with that body, it feels that that is very much the Government's role now, and that it will contribute to delivering it and provide technical advice as required.

[95] **William Powell:** You have spoken of the need for high-level strategic clarity on these issues, but on the ground it is the local biodiversity action plans that inform activity in local areas that help to contribute as a whole. How do you see them feeding into the nature recovery plan in a way that would be meaningful?

10:15

[96] **Ms Luxton:** The biodiversity process has had two different approaches. There was

the top-down approach, looking at what is important for us as a nation, and we had a list of what the high priorities for biodiversity were and we had biodiversity action plans. All of that has gone now, sadly. Then, there was a kind of bottom-up approach, looking at what local people valued and wanted to keep. Both were valid, but they did not always gear together and, therefore, I think that there is an opportunity in the natural resource management area plans to meld both the local area contribution and the national targets with what local people value and want to manage. That is a really big opportunity and it is an area where there is scope for the Government to provide a very clear direction about how that is done. We have contributed to thoughts on how that could be done in the past around a project that was run on the Gwent levels around the networked environment region, which looked at how to layer up different priorities, both coming from communities upwards and coming from the Government downwards. So, there are some models out there.

[97] **William Powell:** Yes, and, obviously, public authorities and local authorities have a key role to play in this. Later this morning, we are due to meet a selection of representatives from the world of local government. What message and what questions would you like us to bring to them with regard to making greater progress in this area, particularly to improve the delivery of enhanced status of our biodiversity, in accordance with the NERC duty?

[98] **Mr Byrne:** It is probably more of a question for the local authority leaders, because one of the strong messages that we are trying to get across is that biodiversity recovery cannot just be done by NRW, local authority ecologists or conservation organisations; it takes a concerted effort from all local authority departments and all Government ministries as well. So, the pollinator action plan is a good example of where all public land should be looked at from the perspective of improving it for pollinators, whether it be a scrappy piece of land in local authority ownership that could be converted for pollinators, or roadside verges et cetera. There is a really strong part for the Government estate to play. It is potentially a quick win as well, if we utilise the Government and local authorities' estates, to put in more biodiversity. That could be a quick win, because the land is there, we can use it and we can get more things in.

[99] However, as I said, it is not just local authorities; it is every department in a local authority and in Government as well. The reports that I have here—there is one from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, which was funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England, called 'Green Infrastructure's contribution to economic growth: a review'. It is about putting green infrastructure into towns and cities and in the countryside in order to stimulate and contribute towards economic growth. There are various reports about that and how it can be done. There is one from the European Commission entitled 'Restoring ecosystems likely to be economically profitable'—

[100] **Alun Ffred Jones:** May I just cut across you? Russell George wants to come in.

[101] **Russell George:** Yes, thank you, Chair. Following on from William Powell's question, with regard to local authorities, are there any local authorities that you think are good examples, where they are taking their lead from a cabinet level, where, perhaps, they have got a cabinet member who has taken responsibility for some of the issues that you just talked about?

[102] **Mr Lucas:** I think that you would have to ask the local authorities. I do not personally have that level of information.

[103] **Mr Byrne:** I can answer that. I know that Monmouthshire recently passed a pollinator action plan, and that was at a council level. It will be looking into putting in biodiverse road verges and looking at its landholdings to see where it can put more biodiversity into the landholdings. Monmouthshire also worked with Gwent Wildlife Trust on

the Natural Assets programme, which receives European funds and funds from Monmouthshire County Council. This looked at local wildlife sites and offered a small capital grants scheme, run by Gwent Wildlife Trust, to which people applied for a few hundred pounds or, at most, a couple of thousand pounds, to get land cleared, to get scrub encroachment cleared and to buy co-operative machinery that people could use, and getting contractors in to put up fencing, et cetera. That was a very good example, and it brought a lot of biodiversity and a lot of wildflower meadows were put back into good condition. Once again, that was led by Monmouthshire council.

[104] **Russell George:** Was that as a result of a lead being taken by the cabinet?

[105] **Ms Luxton:** We could all probably think of some really good examples, and not just from local authorities. There are some great examples of work with private businesses. However, the problem is that they are often isolated and dependent on an individual who has a passion for this and who has made it work. It is not systemic. The challenge relates to the question of what we need, both in terms of legislation and direction—the carrot and the stick, as you put it earlier, Bill—that provides that and makes it systemic. My concern is that we still do not have the right framework to drive this. If we could get some clear targets in the environment Bill, it would give a link back, certainly across the public sector, to secure the need to contribute towards this. That would be the first step. If you look at local authorities' reporting, you will see that biodiversity is rarely in the top level of reporting, which means that it is deprioritised in times of tight resources.

[106] **Russell George:** My point was that, perhaps at cabinet level, where you see a list of responsibilities for cabinet members, you do not often see the issues that we are talking about being listed as a responsibility for one particular cabinet member. You are right that it may be an officer within the authority who is driving it, but there is no lead, perhaps, from the top.

[107] Going back to the earlier discussion on communication on biodiversity among Government departments, Katie-jo, you were knowledgeable on the report from the third Assembly on biodiversity, and recommendation 19 of that report, which the Government accepted, talked about the Welsh Government working in partnership with key stakeholders to develop a new communication strategy for biodiversity across all departments to explore opportunities for communicating the importance of biodiversity through their work—and we have talked a bit about this. The Government accepted that recommendation, but what was the journey of that stakeholder group?

[108] **Ms Luxton:** There were a large number of stakeholder groups around at the time under the umbrella of something called Living Wales and the NEF—the natural environment framework—and a communications group was working at that point. However, all of those groups had ended by 2011 and, to my knowledge, there has been no co-ordinated way of taking that forward.

[109] **Russell George:** Is that something you think should be addressed?

[110] **Ms Luxton:** It is one of the recommendations from the previous report that I would stand by, yes. The report was excellent.

[111] **Alun Ffred Jones:** May I challenge you on a couple of things? There has been a bit of doom and gloom from you this morning, if I may say so, but there are excellent examples of recovery. For example, in the north-west, bats are blooming and are all over the place. In addition, of course, no road scheme goes ahead without a very expensive protection scheme to protect their flight paths, and so on. So, it is not true to say that governments do not take heed of biodiversity needs.

[112] **Mr Lucas:** The reason that bats appear to be doing well at the moment is difficult to pin down. It could be due to a range of complex issues.

[113] **Alun Ffred Jones:** It is not that they appear to be doing well; they are doing well.

[114] **Mr Lucas:** Yes, they are doing well—the ones that we measure. However, it is difficult to pin down the real reasons for that. Of course, the Government is putting in a lot of money, and legislation is in place to ensure that bats, birds, habitats and biodiversity are taken into account, and they very often are, particularly with larger scale projects. However, it is quite often the very small salami-slicing of activities that go on in the countryside that has an impact. Yes, bats are heavily protected, and properly protected. As Katie-jo was saying earlier, with respect to the sea birds, the nesting places are protected, but not the foraging areas, and we have the same within the terrestrial environment as well. So, some things are happening and we applaud that. However, there is still much more to be done.

[115] **Ms Luxton:** There has been a lot of work, and I think that one of the challenges for the nature conservation sector is that it is very easy to end up in a place that is largely about regulation and protection. Really, that is the last place that we want to go. We want to be in a position where we are working alongside people, because conservation is all done through people—the actual stuff with tractors and machines is pretty easy; it is the people who are the challenge. So, you have to work alongside people to get them to value the things that you value, which are perhaps important on a national, or even an international, scale. Making the finances work for people on farm businesses, for example, can be quite tricky, and that was one of the key roles of agri-environment schemes—to provide support for those people who are providing wider public goods.

[116] I think that there are some fantastic examples of where this works. I was talking to a farmer recently in Snowdonia who was amazed to know that his farm is one of three farms in Wales that still have the twite bird—they have gone from the rest of Wales, but he has always had them, so he did not know. What we were saying was, ‘You are the person who knows best how to keep twite, because you still have them’. So, we work alongside them.

[117] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Is twite singular or plural?

[118] **Ms Luxton:** A twite is a little brown bird—it is not particularly sexy to look at, but it is rather special, and there are only three farms left in Wales with them. So, it is really important that those farmers are supported to carry on doing what they are doing, and they are the people who know this best. So, 90% of what we need to do in conservation is to work alongside people on the ground, who live alongside biodiversity and who have businesses and working lives that impact on that biodiversity. What we want to do is to support that far more effectively, and to align the income streams, in the public sector and in the private sector, to support it. There are plenty of good examples—what we need to do is to do that on a far bigger scale.

[119] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Okay. I am going to give you a minute each to finish off.

[120] **Mr Byrne:** I would just point out that you mentioned a road scheme and how no road scheme goes ahead without detailed environmental assessments. However, obviously, one very good example of probably a very unsustainable policy, or direction, from Welsh Government is an inquiry that you are currently undertaking on the M4, which goes through five or six sites of special scientific interest. So, I would point out that there are more sustainable options out there, and this committee is looking at that one.

[121] **Alun Ffred Jones:** That has been noted by the committee.

[122] **Mr Lucas:** I think that what we need is some good, clear direction, proper target setting of where we want to get to, and what that is going to look like. We need clear direction from not just the Minister, but those who are responsible for implementing that.

[123] **Ms Luxton:** The previous biodiversity inquiry noted that there was not enough understanding in the Government of what was happening out there, and I think that a comment was made that the practitioners seemed to know far more than the officials responsible. I still think that we are stuck in a place where we have a kind of theoretical paradigm, and we need to listen far more to the practitioners in order to really make sure that we get delivery on the ground. The connection to really changing things on the ground requires clear direction, targets and outputs.

[124] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. A gaf fi ddiolch yn fawr iawn i'r tri ohonoch am ddod mewn ac am ateb ein cwestiynau ni? Fe gewch chi gopi, wrth gwrs, o'r *transcript*, er cywirdeb, wedyn. Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi.

Alun Ffred Jones: Thank you very much. May I thank the three of you for coming in and for answering our questions? You will, of course, have a copy of the transcript, for accuracy, later. Thank you very much to you all.

[125] Right, we will take a short break now, and we will be back in 10 minutes.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:29 a 10:39.
The meeting adjourned between 10:29 and 10:39.*

Trafodaeth ynghylch Bioamrywiaeth: Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru ac Awdurdodau Lleol

Roundtable Discussion on Biodiversity: Natural Resources Wales and Local Authorities

[126] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Rydym yn symud ymlaen i eitem 3. Rydym yn dal i gael trafodaeth ar adroddiad 'Sefyllfa Byd Natur' o fis Mai 2013. Dyna yw sylfaen ein trafodaeth ac mae gennych y papurau briffio. Rydym yn croesawu pum tyst y bore yma. Bore da. Croeso cynnes. Rydym yn gallu holi cwestiynau yn Gymraeg neu yn Saesneg. A yw'r cyfieithu'n gweithio i'r rhai sydd ei angen? Gwelaf fod popeth yn iawn.

Alun Ffred Jones: We are moving on to item 3. We are still having a discussion on the 'State of Nature' report of May 2013. That is the basis of our discussion and you have the briefing papers. We welcome five witnesses this morning. Good morning. A warm welcome to you all. We can ask you questions in Welsh or English. Is the translation working for those who need it? I see that everything is okay.

[127] Gofynnaf i chi gyflwyno eich hunain i ddechrau a dweud beth yr ydych yn ei gynrychioli, ac wedyn awn ni ymlaen i'r sesiwn gwestiynau. Pwy sy'n dechrau? Julia.

I will ask you to introduce yourselves first and state what you represent, and then we will move on to the next session of questions. Who is going to start? Julia.

[128] **Ms Korn:** I am Julia Korn, from Natural Resources Wales.

[129] **Ms Davies:** I am Ceri Davies, from Natural Resources Wales.

[130] **Ms Bird:** I am Leanne Bird, from Ceredigion County Council.

[131] **Ms Evans:** I am Catrin Evans, from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

[132] **Ms Sharp:** I am Rebecca Sharp, from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

[133] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A very warm welcome to you. We look forward to hearing your views and your answers. Julie, would you like to kick off?

[134] **Julie Morgan:** Yes; thank you very much, Chair. Wales failed to meet its biodiversity targets from 2010. Could you give me your views about whether we are more likely to achieve the 2020 targets?

[135] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Who is going to kick off?

[136] **Julie Morgan:** Natural Resources Wales could kick off.

[137] **Ms Davies:** I guess that we would say that we have a unique opportunity at the moment with the formation of Natural Resources Wales bringing together some key bodies with responsibilities for biodiversity and environmental protection. There is also the legislative programme that is in place, and that gives us a huge opportunity to join together, if you like, across a range of legislative areas—the ecosystems approach through the environment Bill, the future generations Bill and the planning Bill being just some of those elements that could help us to deliver those targets and join up the responsibilities across the public sector. From an organisational point of view, we now have a huge range of duties and responsibilities, which means that we can demonstrate on our own land, for example, how good land management practice can help to deliver biodiversity targets. So, I think that it is a combination of a new organisation with responsibilities that are much broader and wider than previous organisations had, plus the legislative programme, and the prospect of a nature recovery plan, which will help us to target and focus our actions to improve the situation.

[138] **Julie Morgan:** So, do you think that you are likely to reach the 2020 targets?

[139] **Ms Davies:** In terms of whether we will reach the 2020 targets, I think that we will need to see that we are on the right trajectory first. I think that what we need is the nature recovery plan, which will set out the high-level objectives and principles, and then, below that, we will need to have a package of measures and targets that will get us on track. Then, obviously, with the monitoring and reviewing of those, we will be able to chart whether the actions that we are putting in place now will help us to deliver that. However, I think that looking at the ecosystems approach and the fact that it is looking much wider and looking to integrate more things gives us a better prospect, because we can then reach out to those sectors that perhaps have not been so involved in the past, like the economy and transport sectors, for example, which need to be playing their part in helping to deliver, and the planning system also needs to help us to deliver.

[140] **Julie Morgan:** Just on that one point, and staying with Welsh Government just for the moment, do you think that biodiversity has been mainstreamed across other Welsh Government departments?

[141] **Ms Davies:** I do not think that we are quite there yet. I think that there is more work to be done with some of the other sectors, like transport and economy, for example. I think that the legislative programme, and bringing together the planning elements, is showing promise. So, I think that we would certainly want to demonstrate, through the example of bringing together the elements that are currently on the legislative programme, that this is what needs to be done and that more action needs to be taken. In some departments, there has been more liaison on this—there is more discussion and liaison with the health department, for example, and also with tourism, but I think that there are other elements that we need to work with a lot more closely.

[142] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Can I bring in Llyr?

[143] **Llyr Gruffydd:** I just want to pick up on your answer there. When you were speaking about the nature recovery plan, you said that it would provide the high-level objectives and principles. Should it not be much more delivery-focused in terms of actually providing the targets and that direction that we heard about in our earlier evidence? Your perception of what it will be seems quite different to what others are saying.

10:45

[144] **Ms Davies:** I think that what we need to understand is what the whole package will look like because, at the moment, along with other organisations and the organisations that were sat round the table earlier, we have been involved in the Wales biodiversity strategy steering group and the discussions focused on trying to gain agreement in setting the high-level principles. I think that what we would like to see below that is a clear action plan with targets to show that we are then charting that progress towards achieving those principles and also the resources that are required to deliver that.

[145] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, is there a suggestion there that, if it sticks to the timetable, we will see the plan in July but that there will then be another piece of work on targets?

[146] **Ms Korn:** The policy lead is Welsh Government so it is setting the time frame rather than Natural Resources Wales, but we do agree that, within that, we will need measures to track progress against the outcomes. Those targets we put in place need to enable us to meet other reporting commitments, such as with regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity and for article 17 of the habitats directive. So, we are in agreement that there is a requirement to have those measures in place.

[147] **Llyr Gruffydd:** There is a requirement to have those measures in place but would you expect those to be delivered by July?

[148] **Ms Korn:** I do not know what the time frame is now for delivery of the nature recovery plan, so you would have to go back—

[149] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Would you like them to be delivered in July?

[150] **Ms Korn:** I think that it is urgent that we get on with the nature recovery plan and scope that out. I would not expect to see a finished nature recovery plan by July because I do not think we have got—. I would expect to see a consultation ready to be launched.

[151] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Are you saying that there will be a consultation in July?

[152] **Ms Korn:** We do not know the time frame, but how many weeks do we have to the Royal Welsh show now?

[153] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Six or seven.

[154] **Ms Korn:** I think that we need a realistic time frame; that is what I am saying. Welsh Government officials will set the time frame, so we do not know what it will be.

[155] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Russell George is next.

[156] **Russell George:** My question is to the county council representatives. With regard to meeting biodiversity targets, you obviously take your policy lead from Welsh Government. So, how do you deliver those within your county councils?

[157] **Ms Bird:** I think that there is quite a mix across county councils with regard to how different things are being delivered. We have a variety of different staff who all sit in different sections, and it is mainly down to the particular officers, of which there may be one, two or three at most, within the counties pushing upwards consistently—

[158] **Russell George:** Pushing upwards to—

[159] **Ms Bird:** To chief executives and to cabinets, informing them about the duty and trying to get into other sections and other departments to try to make them aware of the NERC duty and what they should be doing. It is slow progress. It is constantly reactive. You might hear about people doing different things. There is not a top-down approach. I think that that is mainly a lack of direction from Welsh Government on the importance of biodiversity and our duty and a direction on how to deliver it. I think that, in the planning system—I do not know whether they would agree in other authorities—there has been a lot of progress. With technical advice note 5 and the new British standards that have come out and local development plan policies, there has been quite a lot of progress within biodiversity and protection and trying to get enhancements in. However, across other departments—. We now have an officer in highways, which has been a really good benefit, but in health and education and those areas and with regard to green infrastructure and tourism there is a real lack of a push, and it is always the officer in the post having to do the work. We only have so many hands.

[160] **Russell George:** You mentioned that Welsh Government perhaps needs to be more proactive in pushing policy, but you also said that you are driving it from the bottom up so the chief executive, the cabinet member or senior officers are not pushing the policy down—you are pushing it up to them. Is that the wrong way round?

[161] **Ms Bird:** Yes. We have biodiversity champions, but quite often they are not sure how they can help with things. Local service boards have been created and we have the sustainable futures sub-group. On the single integrated plan that was produced for our local authority, it is constantly a case that we get to hear about it and then I will chip in. It is not being led; it is not a key component.

[162] **Russell George:** Do you have a senior officer or a director within the county council who is ultimately responsible?

[163] **Ms Bird:** We have head of service, and things like that, so—

[164] **Russell George:** Is there one particular officer who is taking the lead?

[165] **Ms Bird:** Not particularly.

[166] **Russell George:** What about a cabinet member? Which cabinet member is responsible?

[167] **Ms Bird:** Like I say, we have biodiversity champions, but—

[168] **Russell George:** And are they cabinet members?

[169] **Ms Bird:** Yes.

[170] **Russell George:** Right, okay. Is that the same or not in your local authorities as well?

[171] **Ms Evans:** Yes.

[172] **Ms Sharp:** Yes.

[173] **Mr Bird:** It differs in each local authority as to how much they are integrated into the system, and how interested—

[174] **Russell George:** Okay. I am interested to hear from your colleagues on the same point.

[175] **Ms Evans:** I support a lot of what Leanne said. It goes back to what was discussed earlier in that biodiversity is not mainstreamed. We do make progress; there has been a lot of progress made over the last 10 years since I joined the local authority. However, it is very much on a personal basis. If you develop a good working relationship with someone, you can get a lot done. It does not come down from the top. That is no disrespect to people at that level, but they are under so much pressure to deliver multiple projects—

[176] **Russell George:** It is not then a priority.

[177] **Ms Evans:** It is not a priority. They do not have to do it. I know that we have the NERC duty, but it is not a strong piece of legislation. As was mentioned earlier this morning, I do not think there has been any use of the NERC duty in terms of prosecution. The guidance that came out for that was very useful, but it is just guidance. We spend a lot of time working with different departments to look at opportunities to deliver change through that guidance, but at the end of the day budgets are being cut. Some of the things that we have managed to introduce we can feel starting to recede now. There is a lot of pressure on local authorities. A lot of the staff are trying to do their best, but they have their own job to do and they do not see it as part of it—they see it as an add-on.

[178] **Russell George:** What about the idea that, perhaps, there should not be a particular lead, and that it should be more about a culture within an organisation rather than a particular lead? Perhaps you could comment on your local authority.

[179] **Ms Sharp:** I agree with that. There is a large number of staff in local authorities and if you talk to them on a personal level, you will find that they are actually really interested in biodiversity. They are interested in wildlife outside of their job. However, when you ask them to do something to do with their particular job and their particular work area, it is then seen as an additional thing and another pressure being put on them. It does not quite make sense to me, because they actually are interested, just not in work. If there was a culture change and it was more mainstream, that would help a lot for us to even get to the point where we can start talking to people on a sensible level to deliver something really positive.

[180] **Alun Ffred Jones:** NERC—I see that one or two people were looking a bit nonplussed like me—stands for Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and there is a note by the RSPB on it. I am sure that most of you knew that, but that is for those of us who did not.

[181] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I know that there has been much talk in previous inquiries about wildlife corridors. I would be interested to hear from you, Leanne, because you spoke about getting highways on board, and I know that a campaign has been run across the UK, not just in Wales, about, for example, roadside verges. It seems to me that there is an opportunity for a win-win for the local council by saying, ‘Yes, you can cut the corners so that you still have the visibility, but you can leave the vast majority of the verge that perhaps runs for many miles.’ In your councils, what are your issues on roadside verges, because if you are in highways, that is a really good win because you will be spending less on cutting roadside verges, you will have more opportunities and you will have a biodiversity corridor?

[182] **Ms Bird:** It is actually my colleague who works there, but, for a number of years now, since 2005, I think, we have had roadside verge reserves, which are areas that vary from being very short to several miles long, that are either cut only once a year or, in fact, with some of them in the uplands, we just indicate that they do not need cutting at all. We have moved on from that. Recently, in the new contract, we have looked at just cutting the visibility splays three times a year, I think. Then, instead of doing two main cuts, there will be just one now. So, we have actually reduced the cutting. We have had several studies done on the verges, on when is best to cut and things like that as well, and whether it is best to leave them and cut them in September. It seems that, actually, if you want good diversity, you have to cut them at different times, and that is not necessarily sustainable for local authorities. However, I think moving away from cutting the whole verge more often will be of great benefit.

[183] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Obviously, there are these studies at Ceredigion council—. It is Ceredigion council that you are from, is it not?

[184] **Ms Bird:** Yes.

[185] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I think that NRW is co-ordinating the Wales data information hub. What progress has been made on that, for terrestrial and for marine as well?

[186] **Ms Davies:** We are working with the Welsh Government on the Wales information hub. That is one of the delivery items that it wants to bring about under the environment Bill. What we are looking at there is bringing together the information that is held by all sorts of organisations so that we can all access and use that for making decisions. What I would say also is that what we are doing specifically is running three trials at the moment across Wales to look at the ecosystems approach and how we bring together the elements of the information to inform the decision making there. So, I think that it will be part and parcel of those trial areas to look at how best we can bring together that information and feed it into the Wales information hub so that it can be used by others. Also, another requirement on which we have been working with the Welsh Government is the state of natural resources report. Again, rather than each individual organisation reporting on its particular element, we are looking at how we can produce something that will be bringing together all of the work.

[187] **Antoinette Sandbach:** To clarify, you are not actually beyond the planning stage. I think that we were looking at information gaps and problems around data over a year ago now. So, have you actually progressed beyond planning to implementation?

[188] **Ms Korn:** For the data information hub?

[189] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Yes.

[190] **Ms Korn:** Again, the Welsh Government is leading on that and we are acting as advisers on the development of that hub.

[191] **Antoinette Sandbach:** So, in your work with the Welsh Government, have you actually progressed beyond advising to implementation?

[192] **Ms Korn:** It has not got to the implementation stage, but I would have to go back to colleagues who work on the data side to get you a further answer on that question.

[193] **Antoinette Sandbach:** If you could, that would be great.

[194] **Ms Davies:** We are pulling together the data that we have, and that others might have, but it has not been implemented yet.

[195] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Bill Powell, is your question on this?

[196] **William Powell:** Yes, please. Diolch, Gadeirydd. First of all, I have a question for colleagues from local government. You are obviously passionate about your own roles in terms of the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, but I think that there is a message coming through that, on occasions, you feel rather isolated. The previous panel referred to just pushing the message up the organisation—pushing water uphill. I wonder to what extent you have the opportunity to share good practice across local authorities in Wales, not just to build up your own morale, but to take these matters forward. Secondly, what message do you need from the Welsh Government to actually make your role easier, given the vital importance that it has for the future of our natural environment?

[197] **Ms Evans:** With the first question, I feel that there is quite a good network with the local authorities in south Wales. There is a local officer group, which one of my colleagues sits on—I think that there is one from every local authority—and that is a good opportunity to share good practice, but also to share problems, and how to overcome them. What was the second question?

11:00

[198] **William Powell:** The second question was on what message you need from Welsh Government in terms of a greater impetus, potentially, to get these matters taken more seriously at the highest level of local government in Wales.

[199] **Ms Evans:** It is not so much about a message, I think, coming down from Welsh Government, but seeing that change come through. Where there are funding streams coming through to other departments, there needs to be a requirement for them to speak to us early on, where there is guidance coming through to other departments. It is very much about what comes through to the economic section and transport and those sections—they need to integrate. We keep telling them that they need to be speaking to us early on. What often happens is that things come through to the planning stage, or they come across a protected species, and they come to us too late, because they have not considered us early on. It then becomes a problem, and it then remains a negative issue, whereas, I think that, if that message is there early enough, and if it is in documents coming down from the Welsh Government, then I just think that they get to us that much sooner.

[200] **William Powell:** Also, what impact has the advent of NRW had thus far? Obviously, it is relatively early days, but, in terms of the clarity of message, and in terms of your interaction with the organisation, as opposed to the previous legacy bodies, what impact do you feel on the ground thus far?

[201] **Ms Evans:** I think that Becky deals with NRW more closely through planning.

[202] **Ms Sharp:** Yes. I deal a lot with planning applications, so I deal with my colleagues over in NRW to do with planning. I think that it is still early days, and they are still struggling to find their feet on just staff organisation, so it can be difficult to even just find out who the relevant member of staff dealing with a certain application can be. However, it is a case of, I think, that they are still reorganising a bit, so the actual staff themselves are not completely sure. That is the feeling that I get.

[203] **William Powell:** That is clearly your experience.

[204] **Ms Sharp:** I would ask NRW to clarify that itself. However, it can be a little bit difficult to find who is actually dealing with things.

[205] **William Powell:** Okay, thank you. Chair, I have one final question, if I may, which is directed more towards NRW. I think that we picked up a message from our previous panel that, to some extent, the advent of NRW, and the sort of more uniform approach, has, in some ways, led to a dilution of the biodiversity duty that was previously vested in the Countryside Council for Wales. To what extent do you think that that is correct, and what can and should be done to address it, if there is some basis to the suggestion that came forward from the previous panel?

[206] **Ms Davies:** Okay. If I could, I will come back on the planning issue as well. So, in terms of the duties in NRW, the duties of all of the legacy bodies were brought over in their entirety, so there has been no dilution of the duty. The way that we have to weigh our duties, if you like, is that we start with the most specific duty. So, depending on what we are looking at—if it is a planning consultation response or a permitting application—then we start with the specific duties, and then we look to ensure that they are implemented. Then, obviously, as we move up, we will look at the more general have-regard-to duties, and then, eventually, at the top of all of that sits a very overarching purpose. So, the duties are there, and they are enshrined within the legislation that has formed NRW.

[207] I think, though, that what we would accept is that there is different terminology now being used around ecosystems approach and natural resource management, and I think that the absence of terminology around biodiversity and conservation is perhaps fuelling a perception that we have stopped looking at those things. However, we have statutory duties that we deliver through the range of our functions, whether that is through permitting, for example—. We have a role and responsibility to ensure that the proper duties are considered and that we only take decisions that mean that we are meeting those. However, I think that there is probably more that can be done—across ourselves and the Welsh Government—to ensure that, when we are talking about ecosystems approach and natural resource management and planning, that does enshrine, at the very heart of it, biodiversity as being the sort of foundation, if you like, of sustainability, moving forward.

[208] If I could pick up on the planning issue, I think, just a couple of weeks ago, Emyr and Peter were in talking about our first year and I think that one of the things that they pointed out was that planning and our response as a statutory consultee was a key delivery target for us and remains very high profile for us. We have not quite met the standards that we would have wanted to have achieved in terms of our response times, but we are working hard on that and putting in place single points of contact, so that local authorities and others know who to come to. So, there is still work to be done, we accept that and we are taking and listening to the feedback and trying to put in place new actions to ensure that we can improve our performance on that.

[209] **William Powell:** I am grateful. Thank you.

[210] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Before coming to Joyce Watson, I will just pick up on the data issue. The Minister, when he was in with us, said in response to a question about the creation of the data hub:

[211] ‘that is something that NRW will be continuing to lead on and which will be a part of the new information-gathering structures’.

[212] So, is it true that the NRW is leading in the creation of the data hub?

[213] **Ms Davies:** I think that what has happened over the timescale is that the data hub that was originally being talked about was pulling together the data and information that the three legacy bodies held into a common platform that was available and accessible to all. What then

happened in the discussions with Welsh Government is that that turned from a data hub into more of an information hub. That is where Welsh Government is taking the lead. So, we will provide our data, which is publicly available data, in a common format and platform, but the information hub is more than that, so it goes beyond just the data to the information that other organisations might have as well and marrying that together, so that we have one place to go to—

[214] **Alun Ffred Jones:** But you are leading on this—

[215] **Ms Davies:** We are supporting the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government is leading on the information hub.

[216] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Well, the Minister thinks that you are leading. Do you think that there is a bit of confusion here?

[217] **Ms Davies:** In the discussions that we are having with the officials, there is no confusion. We are working very hard with them and we hold a lot of the data that will end up in that place, but it is very much being led from there.

[218] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Joyce Watson is next.

[219] **Joyce Watson:** I want to ask NRW, because we have had evidence, and it follows on from what Bill was asking this morning, that your corporate plan just mentions biodiversity once. So, it leaves people wondering—I think that this is the question that we are trying to get the answer to—whether there is a lack of terminology that everybody understands, so they are looking for key words that others might be using differently, or whether there is a distinct lack of understanding and a commitment by NRW to biodiversity. As a committee, that is what we need to know. So, could I have a response to that, please?

[220] **Ms Davies:** Our corporate plan does refer to biodiversity and we have a section within one of the programmes that is about our contribution to achieving and meeting the targets. Clearly, we have statutory duties and responsibilities that are not listed within the corporate plan, but they are there and they are part of our business plan in terms of our delivery.

[221] Also, what I would say, in contrast to that, is that one of the things that we have tried to do with the corporate plan is to look wider than just at the specific activities that we do, and to include within there some indicators of the state of biodiversity going forward so that we can ensure that we are not just looking at whether or not we are successful in delivering our activities, but, actually, that we are aiming to deliver and contribute to the wider delivery. We can only do that by having targets that we are not solely responsible for meeting, but to which we make a contribution.

[222] So I think that what we have tried to do, through our corporate plan, is to set out the high-level strategic objective and then have some fairly stretching indicators that will signal to us whether or not the actions that we are undertaking are the right ones, so that we can then re-address that through the annual refresh of the corporate plan. However, I think that the detail that perhaps people might be looking for sits within the business plans, which then will talk about the specific activities on the ground. However, we also have a section in the corporate plan that sets out quite clearly what our roles are, and included in that are our roles in designation and in regulation, but what we have not done is listed, as a series, the legislative duties that we have to deliver, because they are included within the legislation that formed NRW.

[223] **Ms Korn:** May I just to add to that? In the corporate plan, we have three

commitments under halting the loss of biodiversity. The first one is a commitment to contribute to, or play our part in, delivering the Aichi, which is the Convention on Biological Diversity 2020, targets, and the EU biodiversity targets. We also have a commitment to our protected sites series, and we have a commitment to connectivity. So, actually, they are quite far-ranging commitments and there is a lot of work that can be delivered under those commitments. The overarching policy is natural resource management but, within that, we have three fairly strong commitments to biodiversity, which will also be delivered across other parts of the corporate plan.

[224] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. We have heard a lot about planning and whether people understand what it is that they are doing, but I want to come at this from another angle and ask about the importance of local development plans. Unless I have misunderstood it, if you have a local development plan, it tells the bodies in advance where you intend to do what it is that you intend to do, and there are designated pieces of land on which you hope to build, not to build or whatever. I suppose that I could start with NRW—I am not sure whether Ceredigion has an LDP and I am not sure whether you, in Neath Port Talbot, have an LDP. What value would you place on a local development plan in helping you to do your job?

[225] **Ms Davies:** That is absolutely key. A key role for us is that we deal with 9,000 particular planning applications a year, but it is really important for us to be talking to the local authorities at the strategic level, where areas of land for future development are being identified. Therefore, at that point, we can be talking about where there might be problems for a whole range of issues, including biodiversity, but also looking for other options, and different places, so that we can try to drive developments in the right place. Our influencing of the local development plans is absolutely key and, going forward, the national development framework will be really important for us, as well. So, moving to dealing with the most strategic elements, so that we drive developments to the right places, is of fundamental importance for us.

[226] **Joyce Watson:** Can I just ask this? We have heard a lot of evidence, saying, ‘This department doesn’t own it, that department doesn’t own it, and they all shove it down to us, we can’t cope and they can’t cope’. Is the local development plan—because it is about economic development and it is about the total development of that area, wherever it sits in all its entirety and all its directives—not the opportunity for all those discussions to happen?

[227] **Ms Davies:** I would agree with that, and I think that what we would be wanting to do from Natural Resources Wales is bring the evidence that we have to the table, so that we are talking about evidence-based decisions on where development areas should be and what the risks are. That is not to blight particular areas, but just to be really clear about what higher standards might need to be met if, for example, development is going to occur there, and doing that on an evidence basis.

[228] **Ms Korn:** Going forward into the future, it is important that we look at how all the strategic plans for the planning system interface with the area-based management plans that we will be producing in response to the environment legislation.

[229] **Ms Bird:** Ceredigion has a local development plan, and I would like to say that, in our council, we were really lucky, because it put the resources into having a member of staff within the local development planning team. That has meant that I have been able to be involved in every single stage, looking at every single candidate site and every policy, commenting all the way through. I think that that has left us with a plan that is quite environment focused and has some good direction for development in terms of biodiversity and the wider environment.

11:15

[230] However, I do not think that a lot of local authorities have been as lucky, and many of the ecological departments have been handed various parts, and there has not been that integration with the plans. Maybe opportunities have been lost with certain local development plans. As you said, this is the opportunity, the local development plan, and that good practice could be followed by other local authorities, by putting the resources in at the beginning.

[231] **Ms Evans:** We do not yet have an LDP, but I—

[232] **Joyce Watson:** You do not have an LDP?

[233] **Ms Evans:** It is in the process of being completed.

[234] **Joyce Watson:** Still? Okay, fine.

[235] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Can I let Antoinette Sandbach come in, and then I will come back to you, Joyce.

[236] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I would like to go back to what Ceri Davies said about evidence-based decision making in NRW in particular, and the example that you can set on your own estate, as it were. Have you got baseline survey data for your own land in terms of biodiversity?

[237] **Ms Korn:** We have ongoing monitoring on our special areas of conservation, so European-protected sites, but we do not have a baseline for all the land that we own. We certainly do not have baseline data for all the sites.

[238] **Antoinette Sandbach:** So, you do not have baseline data for all the sites and you do not have it for all the land that you own. I know that you talked about a new experimental way of working and trying new ideas. Would it not be a priority for NRW to get those baseline data? What are you doing to work with non-governmental organisations and to fund NGOs to help you get—not NGOs, sorry, but third sector organisations. Sorry.

[239] **Ms Davies:** I understand what you mean.

[240] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Yes, to help them to fund that kind of initial exercise.

[241] **Ms Davies:** We tend to use our partnership funding approach to work with third sector organisations to help us to improve the evidence base. As you will probably be aware, we have undertaken a review of our partnership funding to bring together the resources that we can put into that, going forward, from the three legacy bodies. A recent decision by the board supported our continuing with that approach moving forward, of having strategic partnerships with organisations that provide those sorts of services, but also of being able to offer another funding stream for other new ways of moving forward some more on the innovation side. So, we will be launching very shortly the new partnership funding approach from Natural Resources Wales, which will include those two elements of the strategic partnerships that provide things like the evidence and the data sets, but also a fund to look for innovation and new ways of working.

[242] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Sorry, I am not clear on whether that is only for evidence or data sets on your estate, or whether it is broader.

[243] **Ms Davies:** It is broader than that, because it is looking at the things that I referred to earlier. We are obviously keen to be an exemplar on our own estate, but we also need to continue to look at how that fits into the whole: what is the general state of nature and state of

environment that we need to be improving, and what new and different actions do we need to put in place?

[244] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Given that there are some specialisms around, for example, spiders or bats, or certainly more unusual species, such as, I do not know, maybe ants—I am not an expert in this area, but I suppose that bumble bees might be an example—what are you doing to make sure that those very specialist areas where you may not have in-house expertise are actually being funded so that you have that expertise available both to you—and I can see the council representatives nodding—and perhaps to the wider community, so that that is accessible? At a county council level, that kind of data and information simply could not be funded.

[245] **Ms Davies:** Yes, absolutely, and that is where the strategic partnership funding comes in. It may be that we have lots of specialists within our organisation, but there may be particular things that are better placed elsewhere. We would look to use our partnership funding to support where we need that as part of our developing evidence base, so that we can use that evidence and those data and take them into account in our decision making.

[246] **Antoinette Sandbach:** What about the councils? How is NRW looking to make that specialist resourcing that may be needed on a particular site in a particular area in a particular council available—or more publicly available?

[247] **Ms Davies:** Our ambition, and our aim, is to provide the information and the data that we have, to make it available to all. Coming back to the information hub, that is where we see that information being available to all the organisations to use—and also for them to contribute the evidence and the information that they have through their own working specialists, so that we can similarly use it.

[248] **Ms Korn:** We have also, over the years, along with other partners, invested in the local record centres, which cover the whole of Wales. When we fund projects, we request that the data be shared with the local record centres, and also we have had our data added to the data sets within the local record centres. All this can be pulled together to help to inform planning decisions.

[249] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Just to be clear now, you are talking about information centres, so where would the data be held? Would they be held by you somewhere, or by someone else?

[250] **Ms Davies:** Our data would be held by us, but made available, so we share them. It is about us collecting information and then sharing it with others so that it can be used by others to make decisions, too.

[251] **Llyr Gruffydd:** You just referenced an earlier answer on the area-based natural resources plans that are being mooted in the environment Bill. This is a question that I asked earlier of the previous panel: how do you envisage those linking in or complementing the nature recovery plan?

[252] **Ms Korn:** I would expect that the nature recovery plan would support delivery of the area-based management plans, and inform delivery of those on species, habitats and biodiversity generally. I think that some high-level policy statement within that, setting out how the nature recovery plan integrates with other plans, projects, strategies and programmes across government, would be really useful, including the area-based plans that are proposed within the environment Bill.

[253] **Llyr Gruffydd:** There will clearly be asks on Natural Resources Wales within the nature recovery plan, I would expect. Would you as an organisation expect additional

resources in order to deliver that? I think that it is widely known that capacity is an issue, not only for Natural Resources Wales but for the wider public sector.

[254] **Ms Davies:** I think that it depends on the ask. That is why we were referring earlier to, as well as having clear principles, having a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of everybody in that, so that we can ensure that we are not duplicating effort elsewhere, but are dealing with what we each need to deal with and bring to the table. Then, clearly, if there were new duties, and it was not about doing things differently or duties that we currently hold, then, yes, we would expect to have that discussion with Welsh Government about how we resource that and take it forward. However, there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of new ways of working, of us working more in collaboration with others, and bringing together the work of NRW. There is a lot that we can contribute that we currently do, and it is bringing that together in the first instance and then looking at what the new burdens might be, and having that discussion at that point.

[255] **Llyr Gruffydd:** With that clarity and overall responsibility that you would look for from Government, in terms of the nature recovery plan, are you confident that that is there at the moment in terms of your current role around biodiversity?

[256] **Ms Davies:** In terms of our current role, we are quite clear, and the legislation sets that out. What we are looking for in the package of what forms the nature recovery plan, if you like, is real clarity for all other contributions, so that everybody can be clear who is delivering what, and who is responsible for what. We see the nature recovery plan really bringing this together so that others looking in can be clear what our role is, and we can be clear about the role of others. The group that has been working with the Welsh Government on developing the principles is a very wide group, and my feeling is, from being at the discussions, that they are all anticipating contributing to the delivery of it, but we really need to be clear what the governance arrangements are, who is doing what, and measuring that performance going forward.

[257] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So the nature recovery plan will galvanise, in a sense, maybe a clear sense of direction, purpose, and everybody's roles and responsibilities. However, that is not there at the moment and that plan is not there, so what I am asking is where does that galvanizing focus come from at the moment?

[258] **Ms Davies:** The plan is not there at the moment, and we understand from the meetings that we were at on Friday that there are meetings planned to get that crystallised and in place. So, they have a plan to produce it. However, it is important that we galvanize that work that is being done with all of the people who have contributed, from the farming unions to the local authorities and ourselves, because it is not just action for NRW or just action for the Welsh Government; it is very much widespread, and that is about all of us working together to deliver it.

[259] **Llyr Gruffydd:** You clearly see the impetus for that coming from the Welsh Government and not from Natural Resources Wales.

[260] **Ms Davies:** We are a key contributor to it, and we have played our part all the way through the development, but there is a wider group of people involved with a role to deliver. We see the nature recovery plan as being the thing that brings it all together, galvanizes that and makes it really clear who is doing what, going forward, with the measures to be able to demonstrate the success.

[261] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Do you share a sense of urgency then in the need to get on with it, to get it done and to get it agreed, with targets mapped out and that sort of pathway clearly marked?

[262] **Ms Davies:** Yes, we do. We think that it is better to get that out there now and ready to move that forward so that everybody has that clarity. We can always add to it in future, but we need to get that done.

[263] **Alun Ffred Jones:** In terms of your own responsibilities, a report in 2006 said that 68% of SSSIs in Wales were in poor condition. That was your predecessor body's responsibility, and now it is yours. Does that suggest a failure to deliver, even on those important sites?

[264] **Ms Davies:** I think that it shows us that this is a priority, moving forward, and that it still is a key area of work for us. It has been prioritised over the last year and we will continue to try to undertake the actions and get the actions in place to ensure that we improve on that.

[265] **Ms Korn:** We are trying to bring together resources for tackling the issues around protected sites and setting those in the context of the wider landscape, so that we are really building ecosystem resilience. We are improving diversity, the extent and connectivity so that the protected sites areas can be seen to be coming into favourable condition, and we need to be able to underpin that resilience of the wider environment. To do that you have to start to demonstrate how that supports wider public objectives and then be able to tap into other funding streams, through the rural development plan et cetera. So, I think that that is an aim of area based management, and some of these things can be trialled through the three trial areas that we have running within Natural Resources Wales. However, that would be with protected sites staying central to our conservation policy for biodiversity habitats and species and geodiversity.

[266] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Mick, did you want to ask anything about legislation?

[267] **Mick Antoniw:** Yes, but only a little bit about how you see the development of the future generations Bill, bearing in mind the change narrative now, which is very much opposed to being about environmental sustainability, but now with socioeconomic sustainability. Have you given any thought to that? We are obviously waiting for the Bill. We do not know quite what will be in it. We have had various statements on it. Have you given any thought as to what you think this Bill should achieve? How might it impact on a number of the programmes?

[268] **Ms Davies:** We certainly have. We have been part of the advisory panel, along with a range of others, feeding in our thoughts and comments on the development of the Bill. It is good that it is looking to embed the environment across a number of the goals, as they were. I know that they are still under discussion and are being reformed, but it was good that there was a thread of the environment through it. However, I guess that the point that we have been making and continue to make is that we still see that there needs to be a recognition of the environment and its limits within it, and that it needs to continue to underpin good economic prosperity. In society, you need to have some sense of the quality of the environment, and that needs to be in the goals. So, we will certainly be pushing for that element of a sense of the quality of the environment that is needed for the ongoing sustainability, plus the sense of there being limits and the need for some recognition of that. However, I think that coming at it from those other angles will again help to do the thing that we were talking about very early on in this session, around bringing other people and organisations in so that we can work together and look for those shared outcomes so that they can understand the environment and we can better understand the economy and the societal sides of that.

11:30

[269] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Are there any other questions from Members?

[270] **Joyce Watson:** I would like to ask one question. Again, coming back to protected sites, in NRW's opinion, has there been progress on designation of further marine protected sites?

[271] **Ms Davies:** I think that it was mentioned earlier that we have suggested extensions to three marine protected sites; they are currently with the Welsh Government. The consultation period ended in April and we are looking at the responses to the consultation in order to make a recommendation to continue with those designations, but the decision will be with the Welsh Minister on whether he continues with that.

[272] **Joyce Watson:** Do you have any idea of a time frame?

[273] **Ms Davies:** There is due to be a meeting in mid-June. We will make our recommendations based on the responses to the consultation and then a decision after that.

[274] **Joyce Watson:** My last question is on the rural development plan. I do not think that anyone has asked about the significance of the rural development plan and biodiversity and ecosystems—or whatever language we are using today—and the impact of the rural development plan and consideration by you.

[275] **Ms Davies:** We have worked very closely with the agriculture and rural team in Welsh Government and fed in comments during the development of the consultation. We have also sent in a substantive consultation response on both the RDP and Glastir, which we can send to you. In summary, we are very supportive of the additional focus on the environmental measures and see that, if we can follow that through, there is really good opportunity to ensure that the basic quality of good agricultural practice will help us in our move to achieve better status for biodiversity. So, we think that there is a great opportunity ahead of us to improve on past performance.

[276] **Joyce Watson:** Forgive me, but I think that the rural development plan is a little bit more than just agriculture. Could I ask Ceredigion County Council to answer my question?

[277] **Ms Bird:** I have not seen the plans going on from the rural development plan now that the current term is finished, but I think that there were potentially a few opportunities missed in the previous rural development plan to help benefit biodiversity. If there are further environmental aspects coming forward, that is good. However, like Ceri said, it has to follow through and it cannot just be a main objective because it has to then feed into the different projects. So, when officers are looking at providing grants to different projects, the RDP is a key aspect in terms of whether they will provide money to those projects—it is a key consideration.

[278] **Ms Evans:** I do not feel that biodiversity jumps out in proposals for the future RDP, but I think that the opportunity is there and I think that it is down to the local authority partnerships to draw in the relevant partners. I have linked in in our area, but it was not the natural process for the RDP team to come to me; I think that it happens the other way around. I think that people in the biodiversity world, particularly at the local authority level, do not necessarily look at the wide funding pots that are out there because it is not our background. Sometimes opportunities could be missed and it would be nice if it were more defined in the whole funding process to look at these wider opportunities.

[279] **Joyce Watson:** So, you say that definition would help, but there has to be something that follows from the definition that enables you to have money or to deliver services. So, where do you think that that should sit? I am talking about direction, really, from that.

[280] **Ms Evans:** I think that it must come from the RDP teams themselves, because they guide the direction of the projects in their local action groups, but I think that there is a role for the biodiversity teams to play as well, because it is possible to fit projects within the wider scope.

[281] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you.

[282] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi am ddod i mewn ac am gyfrannu, Rebecca Sharp, Catrin Evans, Leanne Bird, Ceri Davies a Julia Korn. Rydym yn ddiolchgar iawn i chi am gyfrannu. Byddwn yn anfon *transcript* atoch ichi sicrhau cywirdeb yr hyn sydd wedi cael ei ddweud. Manteisiaf ar y cyfle hefyd i ddiolch i Gyfoeth Naturiol Cymru am ei groeso yng Ngarwnant yr wythnos diwethaf ar ymweliad—roedd yn werth chweil. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Alun Ffred Jones: Thank you for joining us and for contributing, Rebecca Sharp, Catrin Evans, Leanne Bird, Ceri Davies and Julia Korn. Thank you very much for contributing today. We will send you a transcript to ensure that it is accurate. I will also take the opportunity to thank Natural Resources Wales for the welcome that we received in Garwnant last week on our visit—it was really worthwhile. Thank you.

[283] **Ms Evans:** Could I make one further point? Sorry to come in at the end here. There has been a lot of talk about the need for mainstreaming in local authorities, but as well as that, something that we have not really talked about is building the capacity of the biodiversity teams, because it is something that is diminishing in the local authorities now. It is understandable, with the budget cuts, that the biodiversity teams will be looked at, but I am conscious that there are funding sources out there, particularly through NRW, Welsh Government, Tidy Towns and that kind of thing. I think that there is a need to make that funding more accessible and more usable, perhaps, for staff resource, because it is often late in the day that the funding comes through, and we are always playing catch-up. I think that we need to be looking at more long-term funding for funding that already exists, rather than having funding in place for one year and looking for two years, three years. That is a plea, possibly to NRW as well as the Welsh Government, to make better use of the funding sources.

[284] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Thank you for making that point.

[285] **Ms Bird:** Sorry, but could I make one extra point as well? I just want to go back to Julie's first question on whether we can meet these targets. Ceri mentioned that there is a lot of opportunity for us to meet the targets. I think that there is a lot of opportunity and a lot of potential that we could, but I think that for every day we are waiting for plans to be written and everything, we are missing opportunities, such as through play—there is guidance out on how to meet play sufficiency and things like that. There is mention of children needing outdoor spaces, but there is no integration there with biodiversity. We are missing opportunities all the time as we wait for these things to come through, and Welsh Government is consulting on how it is going to consult on a lot of things now—you know, we just need to get on with it, really.

[286] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I think that that is a very apt way of ending the discussion. Diolch yn fawr.

11:38

**Papurau i'w Nodi
Papers to Note**

[287] **Alun Ffred Jones:** We have the minutes of the meeting on 7 May and a letter from the Minister.

[288] **Mick Antoniw:** Chair, I just want to bring one thing in, once we have noted these letters.

[289] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yes, I will accept that. Are these papers noted? I see that they are. Okay. Right, Mick.

[290] **Mick Antoniw:** Chair, we—

[291] **Julie Morgan:** Is this public or private?

[292] **Alun Ffred Jones:** We are in public session at the moment.

[293] **Mick Antoniw:** It is with regard to the fact that we wrote last week about the consultation on the M4. I thought that it might be useful, because we will almost be concluding our work on that, to have a visit to see the area and the routes. I have certainly driven it, and I know that others have, and it added an awful lot to my understanding of the options. I was wondering if that is a feasibility or possibility to look into.

[294] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Well, you have support from that side, anyway.

[295] **Julie Morgan:** I have also been along the route, and I was struck by the steelworks route; it is parallel to the route that is planned—

[296] **Alun Ffred Jones:** That would be very useful, I am sure, to give us a feel for the area. Shall we try to arrange that?

[297] **Mr Davidson:** Yes, we can look into it. As it stands at the moment, we do not have any committee time available to do it, so we would have to look at dates outside our meeting slots.

[298] **Alun Ffred Jones:** We will hold discussions with people about availability and so on and we will see what can be done.

[299] **Llyr Gruffydd:** May I just ask about the evidence that we have received today? What do we do with it? I feel that there is an issue. Possibly, we should send a letter from the committee to the Minister seeking clarity around the timetable for the nature recovery plan and what is intended to be delivered by when. We have had one version of events that talked about high-level objectives and principles and another that says that what we need are targets and articulated directions. So, I am just wondering whether we should write to the Minister asking for clarity around what we can expect—

[300] **William Powell:** And on the issue of who is leading and who is advising.

[301] **Antoinette Sandbach:** And also whether it is the plan or the consultation on the plan that is coming out in July. It is not clear.

[302] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Yes, of course.

[303] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Well, hold on. I am quite happy for us to consider this. Do we want to consider it in private?

[304] **Mick Antoniw:** We should do it in private session.

[305] **Alun Ffred Jones:** The next meeting of this committee will be on 5 June, when we will receive testimony on forestry as part of our inquiry.

11:41

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[306] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Cynigiaf fod

Alun Ffred Jones: I move that

y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog 17.42(vi).

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

[307] Gwelaf fod y pwyllgor yn gytûn.

I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11:41.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11:41.*