

Report to	Executive Panel
Date	15 September 2025
Lead Officer	Helen MacArthur, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Tim Christensen, Environment and Climate Change Manager
Subject	Biodiversity Report and Plan



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To seek a recommendation for formal approval and adoption of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service)'s statutory Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Report (2022-2025) and the associated Biodiversity Action Plan (2025-2028), ensuring compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The legislative framework for environmental protection in Wales is undergoing a fundamental shift. The new Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill moves beyond the existing duty to "maintain and enhance" biodiversity to an explicit objective to "halt and reverse" its decline. This change elevates biodiversity from a compliance exercise to a core strategic consideration for the Service.
- 3 The review of the 2022-2025 period demonstrates the Service's competence in meeting this challenge. Key achievements include the trial of sustainable Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel and the phase-out of persistent "forever chemical" firefighting foams to protect water quality.
- 4 The proposed 2025-2028 Action Plan represents a step-change in ambition, moving from compliance to proactive leadership in nature recovery. Flagship initiatives include a "Greening Our Stations" programme to convert at least 15% of suitable mown grassland to wildflower meadows, a robust 2-for-1 tree replacement policy, and the adoption of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) principle for all new capital projects.

RECOMMENDATION

- 5 It is recommended that Members:
- i) **Endorse the draft Biodiversity Report and Plan for approval by North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority); and**
 - ii) **Approve the publication of the Report and Plan on the Service's website until it has been considered for ratification by the Authority.**

BACKGROUND

- 6 The Authority has a statutory duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to "maintain and enhance biodiversity" and promote ecosystem resilience. This is reinforced by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with this plan directly contributing to the "A Resilient Wales" national goal. The legislative landscape is intensifying following the Senedd's declaration of a nature emergency. The new Environment Bill (June 2025) will establish a legal objective to "halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity," raising the standard for compliance. This plan is designed to proactively align the Service with this higher standard.

INFORMATION

- 7 The Service has made significant progress by embedding biodiversity within its overarching Environmental Strategy 2023-2030. This approach has delivered notable achievements:
- **Strategic Integration:** Biodiversity co-benefits are now delivered through core decarbonisation plans for power, heat, and fleet, demonstrating a mature, holistic approach.
 - **Pollution Prevention:** The phase-out of environmentally persistent fluorosurfactant foams has been initiated, and sustainable, palm oil-free HVO fuel is being trialled to avoid contributing to deforestation.
 - **Habitat Enhancement:** Pollinator-friendly habitats have been created at eight fire stations through a revised grounds maintenance contract, and swift nesting boxes have been installed at two stations in partnership with the North Wales Wildlife Trust.
 - **Evidence-Based Management:** A comprehensive Tree Inventory across all 47 sites has been completed, alongside a risk assessment for Ash Die-back, enabling a targeted and proactive management plan.

8 The new action plan moves beyond foundational work towards delivering ambitious, measurable nature recovery. Key commitments include:

- **Habitat Creation:** A "Greening Our Stations" programme will convert a minimum of 15% of suitable mown grassland to wildflower meadows or for native tree planting by March 2028.
- **Species & Habitat Safeguarding:** The Ash Die-back management plan will be implemented, replacing every removed tree with two new native trees. A formal "Biodiversity Net Gain" principle will be adopted for all new capital projects from April 2026, ensuring developments leave nature in a better state.
- **Embedding Culture:** A mandatory environmental e-learning module for senior staff will be launched, alongside a staff-led "Biodiversity Champions" network.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The plan directly supports the national goal of "A Resilient Wales" by maintaining and enhancing a biodiverse natural environment with healthy, functioning ecosystems. It embodies the five ways of working (long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, involvement) outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Budget	Cost of planned biodiversity enhancements to the Service estate is £10,000 over three years. The adoption of Biodiversity Net Gain for future capital projects will be integrated into project planning and costing from the outset, representing an efficient, preventative approach to managing environmental impact rather than a retrospective cost
Legal	Approval is a legal necessity to fulfil the Service's statutory duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The plan's proactive stance ensures the Service is well-prepared for the heightened requirements of the forthcoming Environment Bill, mitigating the risk of future non-compliance and scrutiny from the new Office of Environmental Governance Wales (OEGW).
Staffing	None
Equalities / Human Rights / Welsh Language	None
Risks	• Legal non-compliance • The plan actively manages physical and financial risks. The Ash Die-back plan mitigates the health and safety risk of falling trees on Service property. Similarly, phasing out "forever chemical" foams prevents future land contamination, avoiding potentially significant remediation costs and liabilities.