

Title: Biodiversity Management Systems Project

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Background/Progress

This is the first paper to the steering group.

Project active since July 2011. Scheduled to finish 15 December 2011.

Plan/Proposals

The Biodiversity Management Systems (BMS) project is developing new ways of working to manage biodiversity issues within planning and project design/inception in Torfaen. The project proposes a four tiered land classification for biodiversity that will provide information targeted on the decisions made within different Service Areas in the Council. This approach could be used to manage all ecosystems services to provide a coherent approach to managing green infrastructure.

Objectives

- To develop new processes in the Council to support decision making relating to the wise use of green infrastructure assets in the borough.
- To provide evidence to the Welsh Government that an ecosystem services approach can be used to deliver sustainable outcomes in a Local Authority;

The two objectives are complementary to the development of a working model for national strategies and local delivery of effective green infrastructure management.

Outcomes

- Effective decision support to protect and manage green infrastructure
- Faster decision making (especially in planning)
- Improved ecosystem services achieved from green spaces
- Increased funding to improve green infrastructure
- Ecosystem Service management at the heart of TCBC priorities
- Evidence of effective delivery mechanism for NEF/NER

Background

Decisions that affect Green Infrastructure are effectively asset management decisions. Which sites are appropriate to develop? What is the optimum management of a site to gain the most services? Such decisions are currently poorly served with the information available to the decision makers as it is generally in a language associated with technical issues and the legislative and policy drivers. Through the BMS project, information on biodiversity assets will be simpler to use by planners deciding on whether a development

is acceptable or not. The best opportunities for environmental enhancement will also be much clearer.

The same methodology of four tiers and a project register can be used to spatially plan all other ecosystem services e.g. recreation, tourism, water management, community involvement. If all of the services that green infrastructure assets could provide are spatially planned and analysed in the same “language” within GIS, it will be clear which assets provide the most services now and which assets could be enhanced, or managed differently to provide more services in the future.

The tiered information would create a Local Authority natural resource plan directly related to day to day decisions made by all work areas on asset management. Whilst providing a realistic delivery mechanism for national natural resource planning, these systems would need to rely on the national systems to provide information in the same “language”. Criteria used for establishing tiers and identifying the best opportunities for enhancement would need to be compatible at all relevant scales. National, sub regional and local scales will be necessary within the national process. Development of the optimum suite of natural resource plans will be most effective if it is a coordinated consideration of the needs of both national and local decision makers. This project will be able to provide the perspective of a local decision making body to the development of the national approach.

The Torfaen natural resources plan (NRP) would sit alongside the LDP as a central organising plan within the Council. The NRP would provide the information required by the Authority to allocate economic development sites appropriately through the LDP and to protect critical assets through Development Control. The NRP would also provide a ready made register of offsetting projects to help facilitate sustainable development.

There is strong commonality of objectives with national planning improvement, communities first and scrutiny agendas. All these processes aim to make the planning process faster; more effective at delivering sustainable outcomes; and with effective monitoring and scrutiny. The project offers a realistic deliverable mechanism for improved outcomes for all of these programmes as well as NER/NEF.

The Welsh Government legislative programme includes Sustainability, Environment and Planning Bills by 2014. Implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) must be complete by 2014 (including time for examination in public). Local Authorities are currently within prescribed programmes for adopting LDPs (Torfaen examination in public scheduled for June 2012). Development of policy streams including the NER and NEF is in progress.

The outcomes from all these programmes could affect the implementation of the proposed systems. Equally however, the proposed systems could usefully inform these programmes.

Subject to funding, the Torfaen project could usefully be extended to summer 2013 (LDP scheduled adoption) - feeding into and learning from the national legislative and policy programmes.

Proposed phases of extension of BMS project

Taking the current BMS project as Phase 1, the following phases are proposed: Phase 2: to 31 Mar 2012: Extend BMS project to all ecosystem services on green infrastructure; Provide evidence to NER / NEF programmes; Phase 3: to 30 Jun 2012: Provide detail on systems up to public inquiry; Incorporate into approach to CIL; Coordinate with national/regional scales; Phase 4: 1 to 30 Jun 2013: Develop detailed valuation criteria; monitoring protocols and design guide; Disseminate case study,

Action Requested

- Ask all WBP members to engage with the project as necessary YES