



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Integrated Sustainability Appraisal: of the Strategic Planning Guidance for the Gwent Levels National Natural Resource Area (Future Wales Policy 9)

Scoping Report

Welsh Government: February 2026

Table of Contents

Chapter	Heading/Subheading	Page Number
1	Background to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Purpose of the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report	5-18
1.1	Introduction	5-6
1.2	What is the Gwent Levels Pilot Planning Guidance?	6-7
1.3	What is an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal?	7-9
1.4	What is the relationship between the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance, the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	9-17
1.5	How does the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance relate to other Welsh Government plans and strategies?	17
1.6	Will a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) be undertaken?	18
2	The Sustainability Appraisal Process	19-28
2.1	Stages in the Sustainability Appraisal Process	19-22
2.2	An Integrated Approach to Assessing Impact	22-28
3	STAGE A1: Review of Relevant Plans, Programmes and Environmental Objectives	29-34
3.1	Introduction	29-34
4	STAGE A2 AND A3: Baseline Information and Identification of Key Sustainability Issues and Opportunities	35-43
4.1	Introduction	35-36
4.2	Methodology	36-43
5	STAGE A4: The Appraisal Process and Integrated Sustainability Appraisal Framework	44-54
5.1	Appraisal Process	44-45
5.2	Development of the ISA Objectives	45
5.3	The Integrated Sustainability Appraisal Framework	46-55
5.4	Internal Compatibility of ISA Objectives	56
5.5	Coverage of the Integrated Impact Assessments by ISA Objective	57
5.6	Coverage of the SEA Directive Topics by ISA Objective	58
6	Next Steps	59
6.1	General	59
	Appendix A	60-142
	Appendix B	143-182
	Bibliography (additional to references listed in Appendix A)	183

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter	Figure/Table	Description	Page Number
1.3	Figure 1-1	Outline of ISA and Gwent Levels Planning Guidance Process	8
1.4	Table 1-1	Well-being of Future Generations Act Goals	10
1.4	Table 1-2	Well-being of Future Generations Act Five Ways of Working	12
1.4	Table 1-3	How the Ways of Working Apply to the Planning Guidance	13-17
2.1	Figure 2-1	Stages in the ISA Process	21-22
2.2	Table 2-1	Summary of Impact Assessments Screened into the ISA	25-28
3.1	Table 3-1	Key Themes Resulting from the Review of Other Plans, Policies and Programmes	30-34
4.2	Table 4-1	Key Sustainability Issues and Opportunities	37-43
5.3	Table 5-1	ISA Objectives and Questions	46-55
5.4	Table 5-2	Internal Compatibility of ISA Objectives	56
5.5	Table 5-3	IIAs and Main ISA Objectives	57
5.6	Table 5-4	SEA Directive Topics and Main ISA Objectives	58
Appendix B – Full Baseline Data			
B	Figure B-1	Cardiff Capital Region Commuting Ratios	146
B	Figure B-2	Example of a Habitat of Principal Importance on the Gwent Levels	150
B	Table B-1	Species in peril other than dune systems	153
B	Figure B-3	Some of the Ecological Designations on the Gwent Levels	154
B	Figure B-4	Hydrology of the Gwent Levels	157
B	Figure B-5	Determinants of Health	161
B	Figure B-6	Map of the Gwent Levels Amenity Space	162
B	Figure B-7	Local Authority Population Estimates (2020-2023)	164
B	Figure B-8	Local Authority Components of Population Change (2022/23)	165
B	Figure B-9	Age of the Population by Local Authority (2023)	166
B	Figure B-10	Local Authority Principal Population Projections (2018-based)	167
B	Figure B-11	Local Authority Deprivation Levels (2019)	169
B	Table B-2	Local Authority Housing Completions	170
B	Table B-3	Local Authority Housing Provision proposals in emerging Revised LDPs	171
B	Figure B-12	Designated Heritage Assets on the Gwent Levels	178

Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definitions
AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
CV-19	Covid 19
DECCA	Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and Adaptability
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GCR	Geological Conservation Review
GI	Green Infrastructure (Term includes blue infrastructure when applicable)
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
INNS	Invasive Non-Native Species
ISA	Integrated Sustainability Appraisal
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LDP	Local Development Plan
LLP	Living Levels Partnership
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
MCA	Marine Character Area
NBB	Net Benefit for Biodiversity
NNRA	National Natural Resource Areas
NRAP	Nature Recovery Action Plan
NRW	Natural Resources Wales
PEN	Priority Ecological Network
PES	Payment of Ecosystem Services
PPW	Planning Policy Wales
PROW	Public Rights of Way

REN	Resilient Ecological Networks
RLDP	Replacement Local Development Plan
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SDP	Strategic Development Plan
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEP	Strategic Enhancement Plan
SINC	Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
SLA	Special Landscape Area
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMP	Shoreline Management Plan
SMNR	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
SoNRR	State of Natural Resources Report
SPA	Special Protection Area
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WIMD	Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

1. Background to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Purpose of the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA) Scoping Report

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Policy 9 of Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 identifies the Gwent Levels as one of nine National Natural Resource Areas (NNRA) across Wales. The Welsh Government is currently preparing pilot planning guidance on the Gwent Levels which will be strategic planning guidance for the Gwent Levels National Natural Resource Area. The pilot planning guidance will help deliver the requirements of Policy 9 by identifying and safeguarding resilient ecological networks (REN) across the Gwent Levels landscape. More information on the planning guidance is available on the [Welsh Government website](#).

1.1.2 The planning guidance aims to assist with reversing the decline of as well as facilitating the enhancement of biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems across the Gwent Levels landscape. As a result, the guidance will have a role in influencing future land use on the Levels and therefore, it is important that we have a comprehensive understanding of both the positive and adverse effects this guidance could potentially have on social, economic, environmental and cultural factors that are specific to the Levels. In order to understand these potential effects and to ensure that the draft planning guidance is robust, meaningful, and aligned with statutory requirements, we are producing in tandem an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA). The ISA provides a process which demonstrates what consideration has been given to the contribution that the guidance can potentially make to Wales's seven national well-being goals, and that it embeds within it the principle of sustainable development, provided for by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This ISA is based on a comprehensive evidence base approach and aims to ensure that the guidance appropriately takes into account social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors specific to the Levels.

1.1.3 This assessment has been undertaken by adopting a precautionary approach to the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Officials considered Figure 2: Application of the SEA Directive to Plans and Programmes in '[A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive](#)' and concluded it was highly likely the Directive required an SEA of the planning guidance.

1.1.4 The Welsh Government has decided to integrate other assessments it undertakes as an organisation in producing its plans, projects and workstreams into the SEA process. Some of those assessments are statutory, including health, Welsh language, Children's Rights and equalities impact assessments and the Welsh Government will therefore be undertaking an ISA to combine all these assessments into one document.

1.2 What is the Gwent Levels Pilot Planning Guidance?

1.2.1 The Gwent Levels comprise a large area of reclaimed estuarine alluvium between the Rivers Rhymney and Wye in southeast Wales, collectively known as the Gwent Levels. The land is intersected by a network of reens that are managed by NRW and smaller field ditches that are responsibility of the landowner. The exact geographical extent of the Gwent Levels planning guidance will be determined as part of the drafting of the guidance itself. For the purposes of this Scoping work the Living Levels Partnership (LLP) boundary has been used as an indicative boundary for the Levels taking into account also the slightly wider area covered by the Initial Area of Search used as part of the Resilient Ecological Network Mapping work led by NRW. [Gwent Levels, Mapping Resilient Ecological Network core zones and nature recovery zones](#)

1.2.2 The Gwent Levels has many statutory and non-statutory designations at the Welsh UK and European level for its biodiversity, landscape and historic landscape. With these designations in mind, the Levels play a crucial role, both regionally and nationally, in climate change adaptation and mitigation and in addressing the nature emergency. The Levels also provide important supporting habitat to the Severn Estuary, Wye and Usk Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and the Severn Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

1.2.3 In spite of these protective designations, the Gwent Levels continues to be vulnerable to development (including energy schemes) largely due to its location between the heavily populated urban areas of Cardiff and Newport, its flat topography, good infrastructure and grid connectivity and capacity and lack of consistent long-term appropriate land management. The degradation and fragmentation of the Levels from development, and some management practices, could impact negatively on the ability of the SSSIs on the Gwent Levels to perform their intended ecological function thus contributing to an overall loss of biodiversity and ecosystem and climate resilience.

1.2.4 A Ministerial commitment was made in the Summer 2021 for the Welsh Government officials to work with partners and stakeholders on a pilot project to prepare national planning guidance for the Gwent Levels. The Levels is identified in Policy 9 of Future Wales: The National Plan 2040, as a NNRA and the guidance will help deliver the requirements of Policy 9 to safeguard and create resilient ecological networks.

1.2.5 Once published, the guidance should be applied alongside Future Wales and Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and in the preparation of strategic and local development plans and in the determination of planning applications on the Gwent Levels.

1.3 What is an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA)?

1.3.1 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

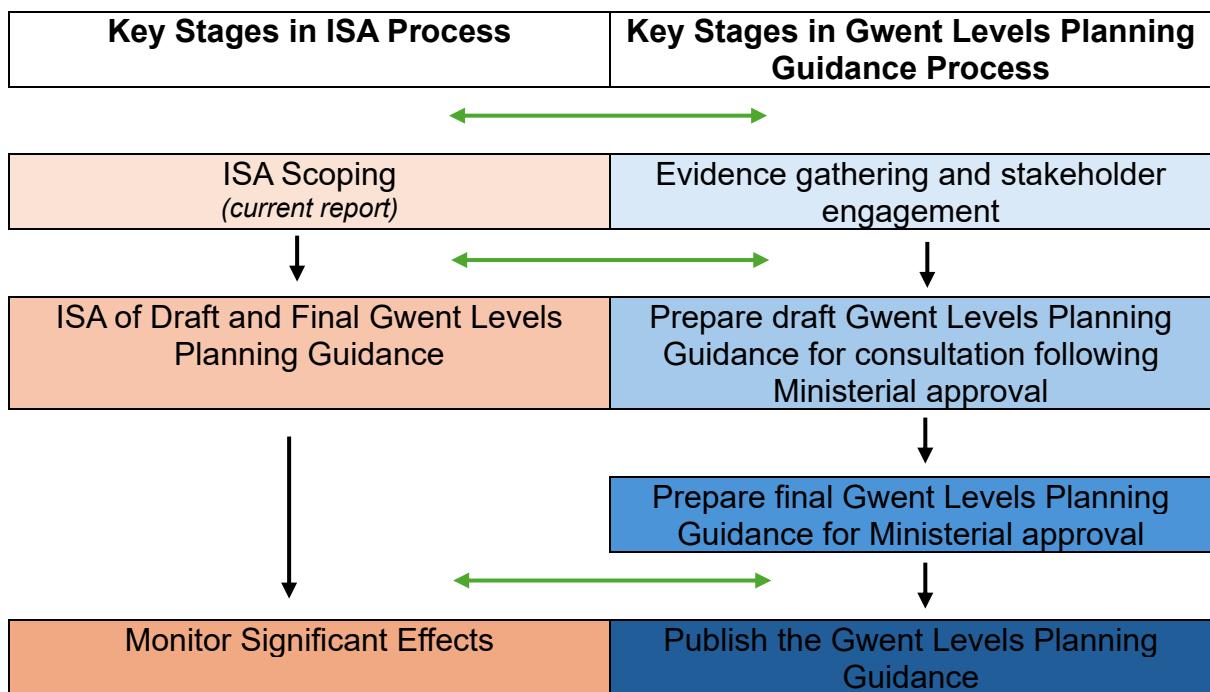
1.3.2 A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a process for assessing the environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts of the Gwent Levels planning guidance and aims to ensure that sustainable development is at the heart of preparing the guidance. To avoid unnecessary confusion and duplication, the SA for the purposes of this planning guidance incorporates the legal requirements of the SEA, and thus throughout this document, reference made to the term 'SA' should also be taken to incorporate the requirements of the SEA Directive and vice versa. The SEA by itself is a process for evaluating the likely environmental effects of the planning guidance to ensure that environmental issues are integrated and assessed at the earliest opportunity for the decision-making processes for both the ISA framework and the planning guidance. The SA therefore includes the SEA Directive's specific requirements along with the consideration of sustainability matters more generally.

1.3.3. The SA/SEA is an iterative and on-going process and stages and tasks in this process will be revisited, updated or revised as the guidance develops to take account of new or updated evidence as well as consultation responses.

1.3.4 Guidance produced by the UK Government (referred to in paragraph 1.1.3) presents a series of prescribed stages for a SEA. These stages are adapted for this ISA to cover more than just environmental issues. Nevertheless, the principles and legal requirements of the SEA Regulations will be upheld, and this Scoping Report identifies and explains the specific requirements of the SEA Directive that will need to be fulfilled.

Figure 1-1 below illustrates the main stages of the ISA process and how these fit with the process for preparing the Gwent Levels planning guidance. A more detailed explanation is provided in Section 2 of this Scoping Report.

Figure 1-1 Outline of the ISA and Gwent Levels Planning Guidance Process



1.3.5 Why are we integrating other assessments?

1.3.6 One of the five ways of working in accordance with the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (see para 1.4.7 below) is the need to take an integrated approach to what we do. Given that regard must be had by planning authorities to guidance being prepared for the Gwent Levels, we have sought to integrate our approach to the SA/SEA with other statutory and non-statutory assessments. This allows a more rounded view of the potential sustainability implications and opportunities arising from the planning guidance.

1.3.7 The following additional statutory and non-statutory impact assessments have been incorporated into the ISA process with further detail provided in Section 2 of this Scoping Report:

- Children's Rights
- Equalities
- Rural Proofing
- Sustainable Land Management (SLM)
- Health
- Economic Development
- Welsh Language
- Climate Change
- Biodiversity.

1.3.8 What is the Scoping Report stage of the ISA process?

1.3.9 This Scoping Report represents the initial stage of the ISA and sets the scope and assessment framework for the remainder of the assessment process. It has been shaped by stakeholder engagement and follows the methodology set out in the published guidance (in paragraph 1.1.3) and seeks to:

- Set the scope and level of detail for the ISA
- Identify relevant plans, policies, programmes and initiatives that will inform the ISA process and the planning guidance
- Identify relevant information about existing environmental, social, cultural and economic conditions on the Gwent Levels. If this information is not available for just the Gwent Levels, then it has been captured at the next level up, which is at local authority level, and is then explained in the context of the Gwent Levels landscape
- Identify key sustainability issues and opportunities
- Present the framework for the ISA against which this can then be used to appraise the planning guidance as it gets developed.
-

1.4 What is the relationship between the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance, the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?

1.4.1 The Gwent Levels pilot planning guidance will directly support and implement the requirements of Policy 9 in Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. All public authorities in Wales should have regard to and ensure that decisions and plans are in accordance with the findings, recommendations and conclusions in the guidance. The ISA is one of the processes through which the planning guidance will be evidenced and shaped and places sustainable development at its heart.

1.4.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 gained royal ascent in April 2015. The Act requires that public bodies, including the Welsh Government, carry out sustainable development to improve the well-being of Wales. Sustainable development is defined in the Act as:

“Sustainable development” means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals.

1.4.3 The Act identifies how public bodies should operate to deliver sustainable development and the process of improving well-being. Whilst there are many things that can determine a person’s quality of life (or well-being), they can be broadly categorised as environmental, social, cultural and economic factors. These factors are captured in the Act’s seven well-being goals and set out in Table 1-1 below:

Table 1-1 Well-being of Future Generations Act Goals

Goal	Brief Description
A prosperous Wales	This goal focuses on a vibrant, innovative, and productive economy that uses resources efficiently and proportionally, with a skilled and well-educated population.
A resilient Wales	This goal emphasises a society that is adaptable to change, including climate change, and that protects and enhances ecosystems.
A healthier Wales	This goal aims to improve and protect the physical and mental well-being of all people in Wales.
A more equal Wales	This goal focuses on creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, regardless of background or circumstances.
A Wales of cohesive communities	This goal promotes attractive, viable, safe, and well-connected communities where people feel a sense of belonging.
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	This goal seeks to promote and protect Welsh culture, heritage, and the language, encouraging participation in arts, sports, and recreation.
A globally responsible Wales	This goal ensures that Wales considers the impact of its actions on global well-being, contributing to a more sustainable world.

1.4.4 The Importance of Integrating the Seven Well-being Goals in the ISA

1.4.5 The well-being goals have been integral to the preparation of this Scoping Report, which includes the:

- Review of evidence
- Identification of issues and opportunities
- Structuring the assessment framework
- ISA Framework.

1.4.6 The main outcome of the first stages of developing the ISA Framework is to develop SA objectives with which the planning guidance can be assessed against. The [ISA objectives for the National Development Framework](#) (now known as Future Wales: The National Plan 2040) were taken as the starting point and reviewed, where necessary, in line with the aims and intended purpose of the planning guidance, the key sustainability issues and evidence to inform the development of the ISA objectives.

1.4.7 Ways of Working

1.4.8 To achieve the seven well-being goals, the Act requires that public bodies must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This principle is made up of the five ways of working that all public bodies are required to consider when applying sustainable development. Table 1-2 below identifies and briefly explains the five ways of working:

Table 1-2 Well-being of Future Generations Act Five Ways of Working

Ways of Working	Brief Description
1. Long term	The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
2. Integration	Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
3. Involvement	The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.
4. Collaboration	Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
5. Prevention	How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

1.4.9 The Ways of Working and the Gwent Levels Pilot Planning Guidance

1.4.10 The ways of working have been integral to the ISA and the work undertaken to date, as well as the work that lies ahead. Table 1-3 below considers how the ways of working shape what the Welsh Government do in terms of drafting the planning guidance and how this can help achieve sustainable development.

Table 1-3 How the Ways of Working Apply to the Planning Guidance

Long term
Development of Planning Guidance To ensure we consider the long term, the planning guidance will implement the requirements of Policy 9 in Future Wales: The National Plan 2040, with a remaining 14-year framework upon publication of the guidance, which is anticipated in 2026. The guidance will also support thinking beyond 2040 and will inform the first review of Future Wales (Policy 9). The guidance will also make use of more recent evidence and trends and seek to understand their outcomes and implications and how this will be applied on the Gwent Levels and potentially other NNRA (identified in Future Wales: Policy 9) across Wales. Ultimately, the pilot planning guidance is a long term strategic spatial document that is not constrained by short term needs.
Role of ISA The role of the ISA is to support the guidance long term, the process for which is set out in paragraph 1.3.9 of this Scoping Report. The testing framework that will emerge from this report will test the emerging guidance and assess its ability to deliver long term objectives and spatial change as well as consider short, medium and long term impacts.
Integration
Development of Planning Guidance The pilot planning guidance is a national document that will spatially identify resilient ecological networks (RENs) on the Gwent Levels, specifically, and set out a process on how this could potentially be applied to other NNRA across Wales. The process of identifying RENs for the purposes of this planning guidance is through a detailed and evidence-based assessment led by Natural Resource

Wales (NRW). The approach applied by NRW identifies the connections between environmental, social, cultural and economic issues at every stage in the mapping process. This can be seen from the Gwent Levels Mapping Resilient Ecological Network core zones and nature recovery zones report ([Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network core zones and nature recovery zones](#)).

Role of ISA

The ISA is an integrated approach to the development and assessment of the planning guidance to ensure a holistic approach is undertaken, knowledge is shared, and links are recognised between different topic areas and subsequent goals.

The ISA process incorporates a review of relevant plans, policies, programmes and environmental objectives at a local (Gwent Levels specific), regional and national scale. This enables us, the Welsh Government, to identify synergies and opportunities, as well as any inconsistencies and constraints. A compatibility test of the assessment framework has also been undertaken to ensure any conflicts are identified, resolved or managed appropriately in Table 5-2 of this report.

The integrated approach to the ISA is set out later in this Scoping Report (section 2.2).

Involvement

Development of Planning Guidance

Involving key stakeholders and local partners is integral to developing the pilot planning guidance.

In addition to the formal consultation period on the ISA and draft planning guidance (currently anticipated for consultation winter 2025/26), there has been extensive and considerable engagement throughout the process to date largely with:

- Statutory stakeholders
- Local authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (Cardiff, Newport and Monmouthshire)
- Local partners
- Local charities and organisations

As the process moves forward, this engagement will continue to be a key feature alongside the formal consultation period.

Role of ISA

The ISA provides an important opportunity for people to get involved in shaping the planning guidance as it progresses.

To capture key views and ensure a comprehensive assessment is undertaken a number of stakeholders were invited to contribute to a draft of the Scoping Report over a 5 week period in line with the SEA requirements. Appropriate amendments to the Scoping Report have been made taking into account the responses received. Stakeholders consulted on the draft Scoping Report included:

- Statutory consultees as required by the SEA Regulations:
 - NRW
 - Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)
- Non-statutory consultees who have a role in providing integrated assessment advice or who have a role with regards producing the planning guidance:
 - Gwent Levels Working Group (that included NRW, local authorities and local partnerships)
 - Policy 9 Task & Finish Group
 - Integrated Impact Assessment Welsh Government contacts (e.g. Welsh language and health)
- Other non-statutory consultees consulted included:
 - Forestry Commission England
 - Environment Agency England
 - Historic England
 - Natural England
 - Marine Management Organisation
 - Severn Estuary Partnership
 - Renewable UK Cymru
 - Solar Energy UK

The representations received during the 5-week consultation have informed this final Scoping Report to ensure a robust framework and assessment has been produced.

Future stages of the ISA will continue to involve and engage a variety of organisations and individuals to ensure a wide range of views continue to be captured and help inform the planning guidance.

Collaboration

Development of Planning Guidance

The planning guidance will not on its own be able to tackle and mitigate all of the key environmental, social, cultural and economic issues facing the Gwent Levels

landscape. The guidance will however set out what issues it can assist with addressing. Those and other issues will rely on collaboration between different parties in order to holistically secure the sustainability of the Gwent Levels landscape moving forward. There will also be an opportunity for the guidance to facilitate the workstreams and actions of other groups and organisations to help deliver the overarching aim of identifying and safeguarding RENs on the Gwent Levels. By supporting the delivery of this overarching aim, the planning guidance will seek to maximise positive outcomes and deliver across all 7 well-being goals.

The planning guidance will inform all levels of the planning system, from the decision on individual developments and proposals at the local scale on the Gwent Levels, to the content of local and strategic development plans (SDP) and to nationally, in future reviews of Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 and PPW.

The planning guidance will assist individuals and organisations that have a stake in the Gwent Levels landscape in shaping its future.

Role of ISA

The ISA process (in paragraph 1.3.9) has identified key issues and opportunities which could potentially be addressed by the planning guidance. Following engagement and on-going collaboration with stakeholders and end users, the evidence in this Scoping Report may need to be amended and updated, as necessary. Any updates or amendments will inform the ISA Framework against which the planning guidance will be further tested.

Prevention

Development of Planning Guidance

The planning system is one of the key Government levers in identifying current and future land-use issues or problems and taking steps to address them, so that they are avoided or mitigated against. It also provides scope for identifying opportunities to safeguard and enhance the resilience of ecological networks and ecosystem services. The planning guidance will identify issues and opportunities on the Gwent Levels and align the planning system nationally (through Future Wales, PPW and the guidance itself), regionally through SDPs and locally (through LDPs to address them. The strength of the planning system and specifically this national spatial planning guidance on the Gwent Levels is that it can intervene over the long term to coordinate the outcomes of land-use decisions to achieve positive change. The guidance does this as there is a legal requirement for planning decisions to be made, and for development plans to be produced, that are in accordance with Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. The guidance being produced for the Gwent Levels is attributed to Future Wales (Policy 9) and

therefore planning decisions will need to be made, and development plans will need to be produced, in accordance with the guidance.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance will be evidence-based and subject to an ongoing programme of monitoring and review to establish progress towards meeting objectives and any intervention, if necessary. A link to the REN mapping for the Gwent Levels (that will be hosted on Data Map Wales by NRW) should be included within the guidance and this mapping may be updated more frequently by NRW as circumstances dictate moving forward.

Role of ISA

The ISA is evidence based and feeds through the Scoping Report to shape the ISA Framework. The review of this evidence identifies key issues and opportunities for the planning guidance to consider and ensures the guidance avoids negative and enhances positive outcomes, where possible. The identification of issues and trends at an early stage in this Scoping Report will shape the ISA Framework objectives and decision aiding questions, which in turn will assist in shaping the emerging guidance.

1.5 How does the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance relate to other Welsh Government plans and strategies?

1.5.1 In addition to supporting the delivery of the well-being goals, the planning guidance will play an important role in helping to deliver key environmental policies and strategies in (amongst others):

- Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Policy 9)
- PPW (Chapter 6)
- Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) for Wales
- Welsh Government Natural Resources Policy
- Welsh Government Biodiversity Deep Dive Recommendations
- Welsh National Marine Plan
- Welsh Government Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) Guide.

1.5.2 Other key documents reviewed are summarised later in this Scoping Report in Appendix A.

1.6 Will a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) be undertaken?

1.6.1 The European Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna (the 'Habitats Directive') requires that any plan or programme likely to have a significant impact upon a Natura 2000 site (in this instance the Severn Estuary SAC, Severn Estuary SPA and Severn Estuary Ramsar site along with the River Usk SAC and River Wye SAC), which is not directly concerned with the management of the site for nature conservation, must be subject to an Appropriate Assessment. The Directive was transposed into Welsh law via the Habitats Regulations and the overarching process is referred to as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

1.6.2 A consideration of the likelihood of significant effects (known as HRA screening) will be undertaken to determine if the planning guidance could generate an adverse impact on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites, its conservation objectives and qualifying interests. This is likely be undertaken during Autumn/Winter 2025/26. The results of the screening report will be reflected upon and integrated, where necessary, into the ISA, as part of the iterative process.

2. The Sustainability Appraisal Process

2.1 Stages in the Sustainability Appraisal Process

2.1.1 The Practical Guide to the SEA Directive (link in paragraph 1.1.3) subdivides the SEA process into a series of stages. These stages are mirrored in this ISA with additional information provided to ensure each of the integrated assessments is incorporated. Figure 2-1 presents the key stages of the ISA and identifies which assessments will be integrated as part of the process.

2.1.2 In summary, the ISA will comprise the following process:

2.1.3 Stage A: Setting the Context and Objectives, Establishing the Baseline and Deciding on Scope (*This Report*)

2.1.4 This report is the Scoping stage of the ISA process. This stage provides the basis on which the following stages of the ISA will be undertaken. The review of other relevant plans, policies and programmes and the development of sustainability objectives will establish the context within which the planning guidance will be assessed. To predict how the planning guidance could affect environmental, social, cultural and economic factors, it is first important to understand the current state of these factors and then examine their likely evolution without the implementation of the guidance. This baseline is then analysed, to identify the key sustainability issues that will inform the emerging guidance and opportunities that the guidance could influence. Following on from this, the ISA Framework would have been established to determine a set of key objectives and questions that will be used to assess the emerging guidance and how it could improve environmental, social, cultural and economic factors, within the context of the well-being goals.

2.1.5 The Scoping Report consultation process will help to refine this work and produce an ISA Framework that is effective in appraising the guidance.

2.1.6 Stages B1 and B2: Developing and Refining Alternatives and Assessing Effects (*Next Stage*)

2.1.7 Following the Scoping consultation, the ISA will move to Stage B and this will involve the assessment of any alternative and preferred options for proposals in the guidance, which is measured against the established ISA Framework. The assessment of the options will identify those that are the most and least sustainable against the objectives, with recommendations made for improvements or alternatives, if appropriate. This process will inform the options to be taken forward and consulted on in the next stage of the process and the identification of the preferred option.

2.1.8 Stages B3, B4, B5 and B6: Predicting and Evaluating the Effects of the Draft Planning Guidance, including Alternatives

2.1.9 Following the development of the preferred option(s), this stage of the process is the evaluation of the predicted significant effects. The evaluation involves forming a judgement on whether the predicted effects would be significant, or not. Stages B5 and B6 are integral to this process and comprise recommendations for an improvement in outcomes and potential monitoring of predicted significant effects.

2.1.10 Stages C and D Draft ISA Report and Consultation

2.1.11 At this stage a draft ISA Report will be published (Stage C) to accompany the consultation on the draft pilot planning guidance for the Gwent Levels (Stage D), which is currently anticipated winter 2025/26.

2.1.12 Following the consultation on the draft planning guidance, the ISA will be updated to reflect any significant changes because of the consultation (continuation of Stage D). A final ISA Report will then be produced to accompany the published Gwent Levels Pilot Planning Guidance later in 2026.

2.1.13 Stage E: Monitoring the Significant Effects of the Planning Guidance

2.1.14 This stage includes the finalisation of a monitoring framework that will be used to identify issues, both positive and negative, and significant effects of the planning guidance over time. Following the publication of the guidance, a post-adoption ISA Statement may be prepared, alongside a Statement of Environmental Particulars, providing detail on how the ISA process has influenced the development of the planning guidance, the predicted significant effects, and monitoring framework.

Figure 2-1 Stages in the ISA Process

Assessments Integrated	ISA Stages
Screening for Children's Rights, Equalities, Rural Proofing, SLM, Health, Economic Development, Welsh Language, Socio-economic, Climate Change, Biodiversity, Justice, Privacy and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	<p>SA/SEA Screening</p> <p>Is a formal SA that fulfils the SEA Regulations required?</p>
<p>Scoping and evidence gathering for each of the following incorporated into each stage of the ISA Scoping:</p> <p>Screening for Children's Rights, Equalities, Rural Proofing, SLM, Health, Economic Development, Welsh Language, Socio-economic, Climate Change and Biodiversity</p> <p>Screened out Justice, Privacy and EIA as set out in paragraph 2.2.7 of this report</p>	<p>Stage A: Scoping</p> <p>A1: Identifying other relevant plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives A2: Collecting baseline information A3: Identifying sustainability problems A4: Developing ISA objectives A5: Consulting on the Scoping Report</p>
<p>Input into developing alternatives and assessing effects for each of the following incorporated into each stage of ISA Stage B through ISA Framework and specialist input:</p> <p>Screening for Children's Rights, Equalities, Rural Proofing, SLM, Health, Economic Development, Welsh Language, Socio-economic, Climate Change and Biodiversity</p>	<p>Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects</p> <p>B1: Testing the Gwent Levels guidance objectives against the ISA objectives B2: Developing strategic alternatives B3: Predicting the effects of the guidance including alternatives B4: Evaluating the effects of the guidance including alternatives B5: Considering ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising benefits</p>

	B6: Proposing measures to monitor the effects of implementing the guidance
Assessment of the above to be reported within the ISA Report	Stage C: Prepare draft ISA Report Prepare formal ISA Report and Non-Technical Summary to report findings of ISA of draft planning guidance
Consultation on the above assessments as part of the Draft ISA Report Update assessment of the above as part of ISA of final planning guidance and report in final ISA Report	Stage D: Consultation on draft ISA Report and assessing significant changes D1: Consulting on the ISA Report D2: Assessing significant changes made to the final planning guidance and updating the ISA Report D3: Post Adoption Statement and Statement of Particulars
Monitoring the significant effects of the above assessments as part of ISA Monitoring	Stage E: Monitoring the Significant Effects of the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance

2.2 An Integrated Approach to Assessing Impact

2.2.1 Section 1 of this report identifies that in addition to the SEA and possible HRA (the need for which is yet to be determined), the ISA will integrate a series of impact assessments. The details of the approach to the impact assessments are set out later in this Scoping Report and recognises the wider determinants that overlap between the different impact assessments and enables a holistic view to be taken.

2.2.2 Some of the impact assessments are statutory and others are required by the Welsh Government as set out below:

2.2.3 Statutory Impact Assessments:

1. **Children's Rights Impact Assessment:** Ministers are required to have due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child when exercising any of their functions
2. **Equality Impact Assessment:** The Equality Act 2010 places a General Equality Duty on Welsh public authorities, including the Welsh Government, to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, as well as to advance equality of opportunity and to foster

good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3. **Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Impact Assessment:** There is a legal requirement that whenever Welsh Ministers provide support for, or regulate, agriculture, other activities carried out on land used for agriculture, or ancillary activities, they must do so in accordance with the SLM duty.
4. **Welsh Language Impact Assessment:** The Welsh Government has a statutory obligation to fully consider the effects of the Welsh Language. This means considering the Welsh language in everything that we do. Considering the impacts, both positive and negative, of our work on the Welsh language and Welsh speaking people and communities.
5. **Biodiversity Impact Assessment:** Section 6 in Part 1 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty (the s. 6 duty) for public authorities (as listed in s. 6(9) of the Act), including the Welsh Ministers, in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales. The s. 6 duty requires that the Welsh Ministers must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems.

2.2.4 Welsh Government Required Assessments:

1. **Rural Proofing Impact Assessment:** Rural proofing is a Welsh Government commitment, underpinned by the principles of social justice, sustainability, equality and fairness, and includes action to improve the quality of life for those residing in our Welsh rural communities.
2. **Health Impact Assessment:** This assessment considers how the health and well-being of a population may be affected by a proposed action, be it a policy, programme, plan, project or a change to the organisation or delivery of a public service.
3. **Socio-economic Duty Impact Assessment:** The Duty requires Welsh Ministers when taking strategic decisions, to have due regard to the need to reduce inequality of outcomes that result from socio-economic disadvantages.
4. **Economic Impact Assessment:** This assessment is important to understand the impact of proposed laws, policies and other actions on businesses and across the private, third and voluntary sectors in Wales
5. **Climate Change Impact Assessment:** It is important for the Welsh Government to consider how a policy will affect greenhouse gas emissions and how changing weather patterns because of climate change could affect its implementation.

2.2.5 All 10 impact assessments identified above have been screened-in and integrated into the ISA. Each assessment has been screened to establish whether the planning guidance may have a potential impact for that particular assessment, and a summary of

the findings is set out in Table 2-1 below. These initial findings will be further considered and assessed in Stage B of the ISA process as set out in Figure 2-1.

2.2.6 Assessments Screened Out

2.2.7 A further 3 impact assessments have each been screened and it is considered that these assessments are not impacted by the planning guidance, and as there is no legal requirement for them to be undertaken, they have been screened out of the process, however this will be kept under review:

- **Justice Impact Assessment:** The planning guidance has no legal implications as it does not constitute new primary legislation nor create, remove or amend an offence.
- **Privacy Impact Assessment:** The planning guidance does not involve the use of personal data
- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** An EIA is required for projects and large-scale built development that are likely to have a significant effect on the environment. Annex I and Annex II of the EIA set out these projects, which include, but is not limited, to, large scale housing developments and infrastructure projects, such as motorways or power stations. The Gwent Levels Planning Guidance does not fall into either of these two categories. Moreover, any potential environmental impacts that the planning guidance may have should be identified through the SA/SEA that is already incorporated into the ISA Framework.

Table 2-1 Summary of Impact Assessments Screened into the ISA

Impact Assessment	Summary of Screening Results
1. Children's Rights Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on children's rights.</p> <p>The Articles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have been reviewed and the following articles have been identified as the most relevant so far that broadly cover children's health, education and disability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Article 2 - non-discrimination• Article 6 – life, survival and development• Article 12 – respect for the views of the child• Article 13 – freedom of expression• Article 15 – freedom of association• Article 23 – children with a disability• Article 24 – health and health services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 27 – adequate standard of living • Article 28 – right to education • Article 29 – goals of education • Article 31 – leisure, play and culture • Article 42 – knowledge of rights <p>The UNCRC Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have also been reviewed and section 45 has been identified as relevant as it addresses climate change and pollution.</p> <p>The findings of this scoping work have identified how the guidance may be able to enhance the UNCRC articles. This could possibly be achieved through the protection and enhancement of the Gwent Levels by facilitating recreation and improving access to nature for all, including children and young people. The guidance may help to foster healthy lifestyle choices, support physical and mental well-being, and encourage social interaction in various settings. Additionally, it has the opportunity to promote the development of educational spaces and skill-building, which can support an increase in environmental awareness and understanding. It may also contribute to achieving climate change targets by supporting measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reducing both air and water pollution.</p> <p>The review has identified the need to ensure that children and young people are engaged and involved in the development of the guidance document.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore takes into account the requirements in relation to children and young people (see Table 5-1).</p>
2. Equality Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on opportunities to advance equality of opportunity.</p> <p>The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine protected characteristic groups, and of these groups, the following have been <u>screened in</u> for further consideration in the assessment process as they are the characteristics more likely to be influenced by the guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability • Pregnancy and Maternity <p>For those protected characteristics <u>screened out</u> (below), it was considered at this stage that they would not be affected by the planning guidance, which focusses on implementing the requirements of Policy 9 in Future Wales to enhance biodiversity, the resilience of ecosystems and the provision of green infrastructure, but this will be kept under review.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex • Sexual orientation • Gender reassignment • Marriage and civil partnership • Race • Religion or belief <p>The ISA Framework incorporates objectives and decision-aiding questions on promoting equality of opportunity (see Table 5-1).</p>
3. Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on SLM for agriculture.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore incorporates SLM and agricultural objectives and decision-aiding questions (see Table 5-1).</p>
4. Welsh Language Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on the Welsh language.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore incorporates Welsh language objectives and decision-aiding questions (see Table 5-1).</p>
5. Biodiversity Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on biodiversity.</p> <p>Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a duty on public authorities, which includes the Welsh Government, to maintain and enhance biodiversity and in so doing, promote the resilience of ecosystems.</p>

	<p>The ISA framework therefore incorporates biodiversity objectives and decision-aiding questions (see Table 5-1).</p>
6. Rural Proofing Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on rural areas.</p> <p>The ISA framework therefore incorporates rural proofing objectives and decision aiding questions (see Table 5-1).</p>
7. Health Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on health and well-being.</p> <p>The assessment on health will be based on the methodology advocated on the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) website.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore incorporates health and well-being objectives and decision-aiding questions (see Table 5-1).</p>
8. Socio-economic Duty Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on reducing inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore incorporates objectives and decision-aiding questions to improve equality and reduce socio-economic disadvantage (see Table 5-1).</p>
9. Economic Impact Assessment:	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on the economy, which includes businesses, public and third sectors and the general public.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore incorporates economic objectives and decision-aiding questions (see Table 5-1).</p>
10. Climate Change Impact Assessment	<p>At this early stage, it has been concluded that the planning guidance will have a potential impact on climate change.</p> <p>The ISA Framework therefore incorporates objectives and decision-aiding questions on climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (see Table 5-1).</p>

2.2.8 The 10 impact assessments listed in Table 2-1 have been fully integrated into the ISA Framework through specific objectives and decision-aiding questions. The cross-cutting nature of these impacts are recognised and as each topic will be considered holistically, it may not be necessary to repeat topics across theme

3. STAGE A1: Review of Relevant Plans, Programmes and Environmental Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 To establish a clear scope for the ISA Framework, it is necessary to review and develop an understanding of the wider range of plans, policies and programmes relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance. Understanding this relationship will enable the Welsh Government to take advantage of synergies, identify opportunities and deal with inconsistencies and constraints.

3.1.2 As the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance is an area specific document, the other plans, policies and programmes of relevance will be at a local, regional and national level.

3.1.3 The iterative nature of this work will ensure new plans, policies and programmes that are published as the planning guidance develops can, and will be, considered.

3.1.4 The requirements of the SEA Directive for this stage of the process are:

‘....an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes’ (Annex 1(a)).

‘the environmental protection objectives, established at international (European), Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation’ (Annex 1(e)).

3.1.5 A review of other plans, policies and programmes that may affect the preparation of the planning guidance was undertaken to contribute to the development of the guidance and ISA. This included:

- The identification of any environmental, social, cultural and economic objectives that should be reflected in the ISA process and that is of importance to each of the integrated assessment strands
- Identification of any factors that might influence the preparation of the planning guidance
- Identification of common themes or synergies between plans and programmes
- Identification of any objectives or aims that would either contribute positively or represent potential conflict or challenge to the development of the planning guidance, other plans and programmes
- Identification of any baseline data relevant to the ISA.

3.1.6 Key common themes from the review of other plans, policies and programmes are presented in Table 3-1 below. The themes are considered against the seven well-being goals and environment issues of relevance to the SEA, as listed in Annex 1(f) of the SEA Directive. A more detailed breakdown is provided in Annex A.

Table 3-1 Key Themes Resulting from the Review of Other Plans, Policies and Programmes

Theme 1: Fauna (species)	
Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Spatially identify and safeguard resilient and ecological networks (REN's) to maintain and enhance biodiversity	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales
At the heart of REN's is the protection and management of statutory and non-statutory designated sites and species	A Healthier Wales A Globally Responsible Wales
Biodiversity conservation and enhancement is more effective through increased engagement, communication and knowledge transfer in all levels of decision making	
Understanding the impact of inappropriate management, and developments on species and defined features of SSSI.	
Enhance habitat and connectivity within the Gwent Levels which will in turn help support and restore features of the River Usk, River Wye and Severn Estuary SAC and SPA (the Nature 2000 network).	
Theme 2: The Natural Environment and its Resources	
Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as ecological networks to build the resilience of natural systems over the long term and help address the climate and nature emergencies	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Globally Responsible Wales

<p>Support the green growth agenda and resource efficient economy by building on the success of renewable energy and recycling</p> <p>Protect and restore nature to ensure the provision of ecosystem services and benefits now and into the future.</p> <p>Enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels</p> <p>Support and promote a sustainable approach to food production, ensuring that such practices contribute towards addressing the climate and nature emergency.</p>	
Theme 3: Green Infrastructure	
Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Maximise the protection and provision of Green Infrastructure (GI) and its networks	A Wales of Cohesive Communities
Increase GI in, around and between urban areas with improved access and linkages	A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language
Identify areas of opportunities to increase GI and maximise the benefits to resilient ecological network	A Globally Responsible Wales A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales
Theme 4: Flora (Habitats)	
Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as REN's to support habitat protection, restoration or creation	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales
Increase resilience of our natural environment and its statutory	A Globally Responsible Wales

<p>designations by restoring and managing habitats and tackling key pressures</p> <p>Support habitats and wildlife unique to the Gwent Levels with a focus on the establishment and management of grasslands, hedgerows and orchards.</p> <p>Reduce the spread of invasive non-native species.</p>	
--	--

Key Theme 5: Cultural Heritage and Landscape

Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
<p>Conserve and enhance the Gwent Levels historic and cultural landscape for the benefit of local communities and to promote the Gwent Levels as a visitor destination</p>	<p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <p>A Resilient Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p> <p>A Wales of Cohesive communities</p>
<p>Conserve and enhance the unique landscape and biodiversity of the Gwent Levels by identifying and safeguarding REN's with a focus on maintaining the area's traditional drainage systems, semi-natural grassland, wooded areas, soil carbon storage and farming</p>	<p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>
<p>Mapping opportunities to further safeguard and enhance the historic and cultural landscape for the benefit of local communities and visitors.</p>	
<p>Consider the implications of light pollution and ensure that the tranquillity and remoteness of the Gwent Levels landscape character is maintained and enhanced</p>	

Theme 6: Marine and Coastal Environment

Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
<p>Protect and promote the valuable marine environment and coastline of the Gwent Levels to support coastal tourism and recreation opportunities and create resilient communities</p>	<p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <p>A Resilient Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p>

To highlight the importance of the biodiversity of the coastline and the Severn Estuary marine environment adjacent to the Gwent levels.	A More Equal Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Globally Responsible Wales
--	---

Theme 7: Climate Change

Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Increase resilience to climate change by tackling the nature and climate emergencies together. Improving the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels will maximise the ability to protect, prevent and reduce climate impact with a focus on connecting and restoring natural habitats, flood risk management, protecting carbon stores and exploring renewable energy opportunities	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Globally Responsible Wales

Theme 8: Water

Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Tackle diffuse and acute water pollution and improve water quality of the traditional drainage network on the Gwent Levels supported by sustainable farming methods Improve land and water management of the traditional drainage systems on the Gwent Levels to reduce flood risk and improve aquatic habitats	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Globally Responsible Wales

Theme 9: Health and Well-being

Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Ensure that our natural resources promote nature-based solutions to improve health and well-being by promoting active travel links, educational opportunities and markets for farm produce from the Gwent Levels	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities

	<p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>
Theme 10: Air	
Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Enhance the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels to deliver nature-based solutions that benefit air quality by supporting the management and provision of woodland and green and blue infrastructure	<p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <p>A Resilient Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>
Theme 11: Population	
Key Themes from the Review	Relevant Well-being Goals
Consider the impacts and needs of the potential increase in population within these authorities on the Gwent Levels landscape	<p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>

4. STAGE A2 AND A3: Baseline Information and Identification of Key Sustainability Issues and Opportunities

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Baseline information (environmental, social, cultural and economic) provides the basis for predicting and monitoring effects and helps to identify issues and alternative ways of dealing with them.

4.1.2 As the Gwent Levels Planning guidance is a site/area specific document, baseline evidence gathering has been focussed on the Gwent Levels, where possible. However, where data is not available at this level, evidence has been used from the next tier up at local authority scale. As the Gwent Levels spans three local authority areas, publicly available data has been used across all three authorities in Cardiff Council, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council. Whilst this data is representative of each Council as a whole (including areas both within and outside the Gwent Levels), it still provides a clear indication of environmental, social, cultural and economic influences impacting the Gwent Levels landscape.

4.1.3 The collection of baseline information is a requirement of the SEA Directive for this stage in the process:

‘relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme’ and ‘the environmental characteristics of the areas likely to be significantly affected’ (Schedule 2-2 and 2-3)

‘any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds(a) and the Habitats Directive’ (Schedule 2-4)

4.1.4 Understanding the characteristics of the Gwent Levels’ environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being is essential to understand the potential effects of the planning guidance as it emerges. Characterising the environmental and sustainability baseline, issues and context is therefore important for defining the ISA Framework as a whole and involves the following elements:

- Characterising the current state of the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of the Gwent Levels
- Understanding future trends based on current trends and future projections that may impact the Gwent Levels environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being

- Use this information to identify existing problems and opportunities that could potentially be influenced by the planning guidance recognising that, in some instances, the guidance is not the best mechanism to address all issues.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 The environmental, social, cultural and economic baseline was characterised through the following methods:

- Review of relevant national, regional and local plans, strategies and programmes
- Data research based around a series of baseline datasets from local authorities and local partners.

4.2.2 A key source of information is the most up-to-date Scoping Reports that support LDP preparation in Cardiff Council, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council. Site-specific information pertaining to the Gwent Levels landscape has been reviewed using information where it exists from local partners, particularly the LLP.

4.2.3 The full baseline data including issues, opportunities and data gaps is presented in Appendix B. This baseline data has been divided according to the seven Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 goals and then subdivided by topics. Whilst there are overlaps between the baseline sets and topics, each of the baseline topics in the SEA Regulations is represented.

4.2.4 Table 4-1 presents the key sustainability issues and opportunities for the Gwent Levels identified across the seven Well-being goals and ISA topic subheadings that stem from the baseline data (Appendix B). When considering the narrow focus of the Gwent Levels guidance, when compared to a development plan, the guidance will focus only on implementing the requirements of Policy 9 in Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 and as a result:

- Some of the ISA topics have been grouped together to cover overlapping issues
- Not all ISA topics are best addressed through the guidance. For example, baseline data has been collected on deprivation levels and housing need (Appendix B), but this has not resulted in opportunities for the planning guidance to address because of the focussed area of coverage in the guidance, which is around securing resilient ecological networks, resilient ecosystem services and green (and blue) infrastructure.

Table 4-1 Key Sustainability Issues and Opportunities

Well-being Goals	Summary of Key Issues	Opportunities for the Planning Guidance to Address
A Prosperous Wales	<p>The Economy, Employment and Income:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post CV-19 the tourism industry, and its associated economic benefits, have declined significantly across the Gwent Levels landscape. In line with national trends, the development of employment land has been low in authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape and because these three authorities are generally more viable (in land value) than most other authorities across Wales, this has resulted in employment land being used for alternative uses, such as housing developments. <p>Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational attainment, particularly in Newport, is much lower compared to the other authorities of Cardiff and Monmouthshire that span the Gwent Levels landscape. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance may seek to promote the tourism industry across the Gwent Levels landscape to increase the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of local communities The guidance may provide opportunities to assist with the promotion of economic resilience across the Gwent Levels landscape The guidance may seek to help improve local skills and knowledge by identifying the Gwent Levels landscape as a natural learning resource.
A Resilient Wales	<p>Air Quality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air quality is poor in urban areas adjacent to the Gwent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance may have the potential to contribute towards improving air quality by encouraging active travel on Public Rights of Way

	<p>Levels because of high vehicle emissions.</p> <p>Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna / Climate and Flood Risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key Section 7 habitat, as well as statutory, non-statutory designations and protected sites on the Gwent Levels, is at risk from development, fragmentation, flooding and the impacts of climate change particularly due to the effects of cumulative fragmentation of habitats caused by these factors. With habitats at risk, the unique range of species they support is also vulnerable to significant loss. Fragmentation poses a risk to the wider ecosystem resilience of the Gwent levels. <p>Water Environment / Geology and Soils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gwent Levels and intertidal zone is vulnerable to flooding caused by rising sea levels from climate change, fluvial flooding and sub-optimal management of the area's drainage systems. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gwent Levels' water levels are negatively impacted by water storage capacity during periods of tidal lock and 	<p>(PROW), promoted trails and cycle network routes across the Gwent Levels and between adjoining urban areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance should protect, and safeguard identified habitat, ecological networks and improve connectivity between supporting habitats to enhance biodiversity and provide strategic direction for their enhancement on the Gwent Levels. The guidance should support the protection and enhancement of statutory nature conservation designations including the features for which they were designated/ notified and the qualifying features which underpin them, and protected species. The guidance must support Gwent level adaptation to climate change and promote key ecosystem services. The Guidance should support ecosystem resilience (Diversity, Extent, Condition and Connectivity) and ecosystem functions provided across the Gwent Levels. The guidance should look to assist with reducing flood risk by managing the
--	---	---

	<p>water availability during prolonged dry periods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the inter-connectivity of the reen and field ditch network and associated grasslands the impacts to the condition and functionality of the hydrology of the SSSI (in terms of water quality as well as quantity) if changed can be far reaching. • Non-native invasive species being caused by shipping activity, contaminated gear and clothing from recreational activities like angling, commercial operations and the movement of equipment or materials during habitat restoration 	<p>drainage system on the Gwent Levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidance should ensure that land management and development proposals are informed by sound evidence which has fully considered the interconnectedness of the hydrological system across the Gwent Levels and any potential impact upon it. • Look for opportunities through the guidance to help reduce the spread of invasive non-native species.
A Healthier Wales	<p>Human Health / Well-being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a significant lack of amenity and open green space for residents and local communities to access in the urbanised authorities west of the Gwent Levels landscape which is likely to be impacting on life expectancy, health and general well-being. • Fragmentation and climate change may put more pressure on local food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidance may seek to identify, promote and safeguard recreational space, green space and blue space which form part of ecological networks within and adjoining the Gwent Levels landscape to ensure that they are accessible to all. Safeguarding these areas for their amenity value could in turn positively impact the health and the well-being of residents within and adjoining the Gwent Levels along with improving overall access to nature.

	system within the Gwent levels.	
A More Equal Wales	<p>Population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The local population in authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape is expected to continue to grow over the next 5 years which will also result in an increase to the ageing population 65 years and over. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance should seek to safeguard the Gwent Levels landscape as a 'green lung' in the increasingly urbanised and built-up areas of Cardiff and Newport. The guidance should seek to promote the status of the Gwent Levels landscape, and its associated benefits, that includes, but is not limited to, supporting older people's health, providing equality of opportunity for all ages and disabilities and improving social connections.
A Wales of Cohesive Communities	<p>Crime:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fly-tipping and other forms of littering are major problems on the Gwent Levels and pose significant challenges to the environment and local communities. Litter is also a problem for the Severn Estuary <p>Transport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions are high in the authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape and is caused, for the most part, by high levels of commuting in and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance may identify and raise awareness of the environmental damage caused by littering and fly-tipping on the Gwent Levels to help authorities, local partners and residents tackle the issue. The guidance should seek to assist in maintaining and improving air quality in and around the Gwent Levels by enhancing the area's open green space and promoting non-car modes of transport, particularly safe active travel routes for walking and cycling.

	<p>around south-east Wales, which may be impacting the Gwent Levels landscape.</p>	
A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language	<p>Landscape / Cultural and Heritage Assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New urban development and infrastructure schemes on the Gwent Levels are significantly impacting the area's historic landscape, ecological designations and visual and sensory qualities, particularly the area's strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness. • The distinctive landscape features of drainage ditches and reens on the Gwent Levels is vulnerable through lack of appropriate management and maintenance, changes in drainage, climate change/ extreme weather, development pressures and land use changes and practices. • Rising sea levels and seasonal and unseasonal flooding linked to climate change is resulting in 'coastal squeeze', challenges in agricultural productivity and is a risk to homes and livelihoods. An estimate that 11% of the saltmarsh habitat will be lost due to coastal squeeze by 2055. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidance should identify opportunities to guide and control new development proposals on the Gwent Levels to help safeguard the area's historic and landscape qualities, promote the Welsh language and protect the area's ecological designations for, amongst other things, the benefit of local communities and visitors. • The guidance should seek to protect drainage ditches, reens and supporting habitat on the Gwent Levels to increase connectivity with core sites of ecological value. This could include a requirement for appropriate management and maintenance of the drainage system to be part of the consideration of any land use management and proposals going forward. • The guidance should highlight that the distinctive landscape features of drainage ditches and reens on the

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activities of the agricultural sector are contributing to changing the Gwent Levels landscape resulting in more intensive agricultural practices and overgrazing on the saltmarsh, increased flood risk (through a lack of ditch management) and reduced water quality. 	<p>Gwent Levels are vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather events. Land management and development proposals should consider how they might help address the implication of climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance should promote and protect the long-term sustainability of the Gwent Levels and its adjoining and interdependent protected marine environment to address the challenges of climate change and the pressures from potential development proposals. The guidance may identify opportunities to help facilitate a viable and vibrant agricultural community and economy on the promotion of a local food supply system in the Gwent Levels that works in harmony with the promotion, maintenance and management of the area.
A Globally Responsible Wales	<p>Greenhouse Gas Emissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support national priorities and strive to reduce carbon emissions across the Gwent Levels landscape. 	<p>The guidance may support the reduction of carbon emissions across the Gwent Levels by promoting a mix of conservation efforts, community action and sustainable land management.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon stores on the Gwent Levels are at risk from drainage, development and land-use change. <p>Energy Production:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gwent Levels landscape is vulnerable to potential further large-scale renewable energy development - particularly from solar schemes, but also from wind and tidal range developments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The guidance may support the management, protection and enhancement of carbon stores across the Gwent Levels landscape. The guidance may need to identify whether there are opportunities that could balance renewable energy development with protecting the special qualities and features of the Gwent Levels landscape.
--	---	--

5. STAGE A4: The Appraisal Process and Integrated Sustainability Appraisal Framework

5.1 Appraisal Process

5.1.1 At this stage, the precise content or structure of the Gwent Levels planning guidance has not been developed, so the approach to appraising the guidance will need to be flexible until the content is developed in more detail. However, it is possible to outline the basic principles that will underpin the appraisal, which is supported by requirements in the SEA Regulations and Guide (paragraph 1.1.3 of this report):

1. It will primarily be a qualitative appraisal
2. It will likely be undertaken in-house by Welsh Government officials
3. The appraisal will follow an integrated and iterative assessment approach and Table 5-3 demonstrates how the requirements of the impact assessments have been included in the ISA Framework of objectives used to appraise the planning guidance
4. Consultation and engagement on the draft ISA of the planning guidance will be with statutory consultees, other interested parties and the public (Stage D only)
5. The ISA Framework of appraisal objectives (Table 5-1) will be the primary appraisal tool
6. The appraisal will be evidence-based and will consider the likely effects of the planning guidance on the Gwent Levels sustainability baseline
7. The appraisal will include coverage of the potential spatial effects of the planning guidance and will draw upon evidence of physical, environmental, social, cultural and economic constraints, sensitivities and opportunities
8. The appraisal will use matrices to help describe the potential effects of the planning guidance against the ISA Framework
9. The appraisal will consider (a) direct and indirect effects (b) secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects (c) effects over space and time (d) the reversibility of effects (e) transboundary effects and (f) the level of confidence in the appraisal
10. The appraisal will be iterative and will include feedback of recommendations to the drafting of the planning guidance to identify measures to mitigate any negative effects and enhance positive ones
11. Preferred options for the planning guidance and their reasonable alternatives will be appraised.

5.1.2 Table 5-4 demonstrates how the requirements of the SEA Directive have been included in the ISA Framework of objectives which will be used to appraise the planning guidance.

5.1.3 Geographical Scope of the ISA

5.1.4 The geographical scope of the ISA will be driven by the geographical scope of the planning guidance, which is area specific. As the Gwent Levels is a strategic site/area that spans parts of three local authority areas in southeast Wales between Cardiff and Chepstow and along the northern edge of the Severn Estuary, some of the baseline issues may relate to neighbouring England (for example, employment and commuting flows) and terrestrial and marine effects (up to the mean low water mark) will all need to be considered.

5.1.5 Temporal Scope of the ISA

5.1.6 The planning guidance will apply alongside Future Wales, which will remain in force until 2040 or until it is updated. This timescale will be reflected in the ISA, along with any sustainability effects that may extend for the long term beyond 2040.

5.1.7 Assessment of Alternatives

5.1.8 It is a requirement of the SEA Directive that reasonable alternatives are assessed using the ISA Framework. At this stage, the type and range of reasonable alternatives is not known, but the appraisal will determine the positive and adverse effects of each option, and the reasonable alternatives, and the outcome of the assessments will be used by the Welsh Government to inform our decision on the preferred option and help to shape the guidance document. Any scope for mitigation will be considered and the Welsh Government will justify its choice of alternatives and reasons for selecting the preferred approach.

5.2 Development of the ISA Objectives

5.2.1 The ISA objectives have been developed by:

- A review of relevant plans, policies, programmes and environmental (sustainability) objectives
- A review of baseline information, issues and opportunities
- Consideration of other appraisal strands identified in Section 2.2 of this report
- Guided by the SA objectives in the [Scoping Report for Future Wales: The National Plan 2040](#), where appropriate.

5.2.2 Each ISA objective has been assessed for its internal compatibility and a compatibility matrix has been included later in this report in Table 5-2. This exercise is to highlight any potential for incompatibility between objectives at an early stage in the process and for any potential issues to be balanced within the framework. It is often the case that ISA objectives have some degree of uncertainty, but the appraisal process seeks to identify a balance or compromise between these.

5.3 The Integrated Sustainability Appraisal Framework

5.3.1 To test the performance of the planning guidance, we have established an ISA Framework containing 16 ISA objectives covering environmental, social, cultural and economic issues. The assessment of the planning guidance using the Framework will consider all the Framework in a holistic way and will encompass the interrelationships between each of the objectives and decision-aiding questions, where relevant.

5.3.2 The ISA objectives will be separate from any objectives included in the Gwent Levels planning guidance, Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 and wider Welsh Government objectives.

5.3.3 To help measure the performance of the planning guidance against the ISA objectives, the objectives are supported by a number of decision-aiding questions. Not all of these questions will be used as part of the assessment at each stage, as this will depend on what is being assessed and the relevance of the stage. The assessment process will be transparent and clear on how the guidance is developed and the methodology used. The draft ISA Framework is presented in Table 5-1 below along with the corresponding Well-being goals.

Table 5-1 ISA Objectives and Questions

ISA Framework for Assessing the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance		
ISA Objectives	Decision aiding questions 'Will the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance....'	Well-being goal
Economy		
1. To promote sustainable economic growth and strengthen the resilience of the rural economy across the Gwent Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting opportunities for children and young people to have a say in how land is used?• Promote opportunities for sustainable economic growth?• Support opportunities for the enhancement and diversification of the rural economy?• Encourage opportunities for new and existing businesses?• Promote opportunities for a vibrant and viable agricultural sector?• Promote opportunities for the sustainable management of agricultural land?• Support opportunities for businesses and infrastructure to become more resilient when facing the risks from climate change?	<p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <p>A Resilient Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p> <p>A More Equal Wales</p> <p>A Wales of Cohesive Communities</p> <p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage opportunities for skills and training? 	A Globally Responsible Wales
2. To encourage and promote sustainable tourism opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and encourage opportunities for sustainable tourism that sensitively capitalises on the area's unique environment, cultural, heritage and other landscape assets? • Support opportunities for new and existing businesses? 	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Globally Responsible Wales
Education		
3. To encourage opportunities to increase educational attainment across all age groups by using the Gwent Levels landscape as a natural learning resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and support an increase in levels of participation and educational attainment for all members of society? • Encourage and support an improvement in the provision of education and training through land-use planning and local community initiatives? • Encourage and support volunteering opportunities and Citizen Science Projects on the Gwent Levels? • Encourage and support school children and higher education establishments to use the Gwent Levels as a natural learning resource? 	A Prosperous Wales A Healthier Wales A More Equal Wales A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

		A Globally Responsible Wales
Air Quality		
4. To promote opportunities to encourage the protection and improvement of air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote opportunities to improve and protect air quality? Encourage opportunities within which the impact of emissions (from adjoining urban areas, roads and railways) will be reduced? Promote opportunities to protect the Gwent Levels so it is not adversely affected by air pollution? Encourage active travel across the Gwent Levels? Improve active travel links between the more rural Gwent Levels landscape and adjoining urban areas? 	A Resilient Wales A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Globally Responsible Wales
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna		
5. To halt and reverse biodiversity loss and contribute to the protection and effective management of 30% of our land, freshwater and sea for nature by 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities to safeguard, enhance and create ecological networks? Protect ecological networks so that they are not unduly compromised by future development? Identify ecological networks to help mitigate and adapt to climate change? Identify ecological networks to protect the range of species found on the Gwent Levels? Identify ecological networks that support key ecosystem services? Create opportunities to increase the diversity, extent, condition, connectivity and adaptability (DECCA) of ecosystems 	A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

	<p>on the Gwent Levels to deliver a Net Benefit for Biodiversity (NBB)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of the area's Section 7 habitat, statutory and non-statutory designated sites? • Create opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of the marine environment? • Create opportunities to safeguard the dynamic interface and intertidal area of the Gwent Levels where land meets sea? • Create opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of natural green space? • Create opportunities to monitor Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) distribution, prevent spread and address the issues caused by these species? • Create opportunities for raising awareness and promoting good biosecurity practices to reduce the level and spread of INNS? 	A Globally Responsible Wales
--	--	------------------------------

Climate and Flood Risk

6. To contribute to the reduction and management of flood risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the reduction and management of flood risk? • Encourage and support effective management of the area's drainage system? • Encourage new development to be climate change resilient? • Support or improve the resilience of existing and proposed development to flood risk? • Promote the benefits of GI in sustainable flood risk management? • Promote opportunities to safeguard the dynamic interface and intertidal area of the Gwent Levels that is subject to flood risk? 	A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Globally Responsible Wales
--	---	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support opportunities to address challenges in agricultural productivity from flood risk? • Help to consider appropriate risk for development in Flood Zone 2 and development be avoided in Flood Zone 3, subject to the limited exceptions. 	
7. To contribute to the management and maintenance of the Gwent Levels drainage system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the management and maintenance of the Gwent Levels drainage system? • Maintain the area's distinctive landscape features of drainage ditches, grips and reens? • Maintain supporting habitat and increase connectivity between (and within) the area's drainage system and core sites of ecological value? 	A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Globally Responsible Wales

Health and Well-being

8. To contribute to an improvement in physical, mental and social health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote opportunities for and improvement in physical, mental and social health and well-being? • Contribute towards healthy lifestyles and promote well-being through active travel? • Contribute towards improving access to biodiversity and open green space for its amenity, play, leisure and recreation value? • Create opportunities for access to a clean and unique wetland habitat? 	A Healthier Wales A Resilient Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture
---	---	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute towards an increase in green infrastructure? • Encourage opportunities for local communities to reduce health risks from poor air quality and climate change? • Support opportunities to reduce health inequalities, including in children? 	<p>and Thriving Welsh Language</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>
Population		
9. To encourage opportunities within which social cohesion and equality can be improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage opportunities within which social cohesion and equality can be improved? • Support opportunities within which socio-economic disadvantage can be improved? • Promote opportunities within which age inequality (from children to older people) may be reduced? • Promote opportunities within which inequalities based on disability can be improved, including in children? • Promote opportunities within which inequalities based on pregnancy and maternity can be improved? • Encourage opportunities for the development of stronger and more cohesive communities? 	<p>A More Equal Wales</p> <p>A Prosperous Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p> <p>A Wales of Cohesive Communities</p> <p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>
Crime		
10. To promote opportunities for the reduction of fly-tipping and littering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote opportunities for the reduction of fly-tipping and littering on or adjacent to the Gwent Levels? • Support opportunities to raise awareness and reduce environmental damage and degradation caused by fly-tipping and littering? • Support opportunities to reduce the fear and nuisance caused by fly-tipping and littering within local communities? 	<p>A Wales of Cohesive Communities</p> <p>A Resilient Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p> <p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture</p>

		and Thriving Welsh Language A Globally Responsible Wales
Welsh Language		
11. To contribute towards the future well-being of the Welsh Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the use of the Welsh Language in rural communities across the Gwent Levels? Encourage an increase in Welsh speakers? Promote bilingual signs, literature, resources and events? 	A Prosperous Wales A More Equal Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language
Landscape Character		
12. To create opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the Gwent Levels' unique and distinctive landscape and seascape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the Gwent Levels landscape and seascape? Create opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the area's unique landscape character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality? Create opportunities to guide and control new development proposals, in land use planning terms? Create opportunities to promote sustainable development and key place-making principles on the Gwent Levels? Create opportunities to reduce noise and light pollution? Create opportunities to maintain the landscapes visual and sensory qualities, 	A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities

	<p>including its strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to maintain the distinctiveness of the landscape and seascape for the benefit of local communities and visitors? • Create opportunities to maintain the distinctiveness of the Gwent Levels 'lingo'? • Create opportunities for the landscape and seascape to become more resilient to the effects of climate change? • Support the maintenance and development of a thriving and sustainable agricultural sector on the Gwent Levels that works in harmony with the natural environment? 	A Globally Responsible Wales
13. To create opportunities to protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment of the Gwent Levels at a landscape scale, including its heritage assets, their settings, and the area's cultural significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for the protection, conservation and enhancement of designated historic assets, their settings and the cultural significance of the Gwent Levels landscape? • Create opportunities to promote the significance of historic assets across the Gwent Levels, so there is greater access, understanding and enjoyment for all of the landscape as a whole? • Create opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of the historic landscape across the whole of the Gwent Levels? • Recognise, protect and promote the area's historic assets at a landscape scale? • Create opportunities to protect and promote the cultural significance of the Gwent Levels at a landscape scale? • Create opportunities to promote the Welsh language whilst seeking to conserve the culture and heritage of the Gwent Levels? 	<p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language</p> <p>A Resilient Wales</p> <p>A Healthier Wales</p> <p>A Wales of Cohesive Communities</p> <p>A Globally Responsible Wales</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to identify buried archaeological sites and protect them”. 	
Greenhouse Gas Emissions		
14. To protect and enhance opportunities for greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced, stored and sequestered across the Gwent Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on the Gwent Levels? • Promote opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (from transport) within and around the Gwent Levels? • Promote opportunities for sustainable design in new developments and promote key place-making principles? • Support opportunities to reduce energy demand and increase energy efficiency? • Recognise, protect and enhance the ability of the Gwent Levels to store and sequester carbon? • Encourage opportunities to meet national renewable energy targets whilst protecting the overall character and integrity of the Gwent Levels landscape as a whole? 	A Globally Responsible Wales A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities
Water		
15. To protect and improve water quality and water resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and support the improvement of the ecological and chemical status of waterbodies? • Encourage and support the reduction of point source and diffuse pollution? • Promote water efficiency? • Ensure the sustainable management of water resources for ecosystems, abstraction and recreation? • Promote the use of nature-based solutions? 	A Prosperous Wales A Resilient Wales A Healthier Wales A Wales of Cohesive Communities A Globally Responsible Wales

Soil and Land Management	
16. To protect geology and soil and promote the sustainable use and management of land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the sustainable use and management of land? • Protect and enhance high quality agricultural soils and recognise them as a finite resource? • Support the protection and restoration of peatlands? • Promote opportunities to conserve and enhance soil health and function? • Promote opportunities to reduce land contamination? • Create opportunities to protect and avoid damage to geologically important sites? • Optimise educational opportunities that geological sites offer as natural learning resource.

5.4 Internal Compatibility of ISA Objectives

5.4.1 The 16 ISA objectives have been tested for their compatibility with each other.

The internal compatibility of the objectives was generally assessed as compatible or no clear impact and/or impact unknown as they seek to improve the quality of the environment and sustainability of the Gwent Levels. Objective 1: 'To promote sustainable economic growth and strengthen the resilience of the rural economy across the Gwent Levels' was the least compatible objective, as growing the rural economy has the potential to impact local biodiversity, the distinctive landscape of the Gwent Levels and impact physical and mental well-being by eroding the remoteness and tranquillity of the Levels landscape.

Table 5-2 Internal Compatibility of ISA Objectives

Internal Compatibility of ISA Objectives																
ISA Objectives	1 Sustainable Economic Growth	+	+	-	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	+	+	?	?	
	2 Sustainable Tourism	+	-	+	?	?	?	+	+	-	+	?	+	?	?	?
	3 Educational Attainment	+	+	-	?	?	?	+	+	?	+	?	+	?	?	?
	4 Air Quality	-	-	?	-	+	?	?	+	-	?	+	?	+	+	?
	5 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	?	?	?	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	?	+	+	+	+
	6 Flood Risk	?	?	?	?	+	-	+	+	+	?	?	+	+	+	+
	7 Drainage System	?	?	?	?	+	+	-	?	?	?	?	+	+	+	+
	8 Health and Well-being	?	+	+	+	+	+	?	-	+	+	+	?	+	+	+
	9 Social Cohesion and Equality	?	+	+	-	-	+	?	+	-	+	+	?	+	?	?
	10 Fly-tipping and Littering	?	-	?	?	+	?	?	+	+	-	?	+	+	?	+
	11 Welsh Language	?	+	+	+	?	?	?	+	+	?	-	+	+	?	?
	12 Landscape and Seascape	?	?	?	?	+	+	+	?	?	+	+	+	+	+	+
	13 Historic Environment	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	14 Greenhouse Gas Emissions	+	?	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	?	+	+	+	+
	15 Water Quality and Quantity	?	?	?	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+
	16 Soil and Land Management	?	?	?	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
ISA Objectives																
Key																
Objectives are compatible		+														
No clear impact and/or impact unknown		?														
Objectives are mutually incompatible		-														
1 Sustainable Economic Growth		1 Sustainable Economic Growth														
2 Sustainable Tourism		2 Sustainable Tourism														
3 Educational Attainment		3 Educational Attainment														
4 Air Quality		4 Air Quality														
5 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna		5 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna														
6 Flood Risk		6 Flood Risk														
7 Drainage System		7 Drainage System														
8 Health and Well-being		8 Health and Well-being														
9 Social Cohesion and Equality		9 Social Cohesion and Equality														
10 Fly-tipping and Littering		10 Fly-tipping and Littering														
11 Welsh Language		11 Welsh Language														
12 Landscape and Seascape		12 Landscape and Seascape														
13 Historic Environment		13 Historic Environment														
14 Greenhouse Gas Emissions		14 Greenhouse Gas Emissions														
15 Water Quality and Quantity		15 Water Quality and Quantity														
16 Soil and Land Management		16 Soil and Land Management														

5.5 Coverage of the Integrated Impact Assessments by ISA Objective

5.5.1 Table 5-3 below demonstrates how the requirements of the impact assessments have been included in the ISA Framework of objectives:

Table 5-3 IIAs and Main ISA Objectives

Coverage of the other integrated impact assessments by ISA Objective		
Impact Assessment	Main ISA Objective(s)	Screened in?
Children's Rights	1, 2, 3, 8 and 9	Yes
Equalities	1, 2, 3, 8 and 9	Yes
Rural Proofing	1, 2, 5, 6 10, 12 and 16	Yes
Sustainable Land Management (SLM)	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16	Yes
Health	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 13, 14, 15 and 16	Yes
Economic	1, 2, 3, 14 and 16	Yes
Welsh Language	1, 2 and 11	Yes
Biodiversity	4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 15 and 16	Yes
Climate Change	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15 and 16	Yes

5.6 Coverage of the SEA Directive Topics by ISA Objective

5.6.1 Table 5-4 below demonstrates how the requirements of the SEA Directive have been included in the ISA Framework of objectives:

Table 5-4 SEA Directive Topics and Main ISA Objectives

Coverage of the SEA Directive Topics by ISA Objective	
SEA Directive Topics	Main ISA Objective(s)
Biodiversity	4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 15 and 16
Population	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 13 and 15
Human Health	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14 and 15
Fauna	5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15 and 16
Flora	5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15 and 16
Soil	5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16
Water	5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15 and 16
Air	4, 5 and 14
Climatic Factors	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15 and 16
Material Assets (inc. infrastructure, land resources, public assets, buildings and property)	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 16
Cultural Heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage	2, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13
Landscape	2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15 and 16

6. Next Steps

6.1 General

6.1.1 This Scoping Report has set out the assessment framework and outlined how we intend to undertake the ISA of the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance. A draft of the document was subject to a five-week statutory consultation period during September and October of 2025. A summary of responses received is published alongside this final Scoping Report.

6.1.2 The next stage for the Gwent Levels planning guidance is to prepare and consult on a draft of the guidance, which is currently anticipated in Winter 2025/26. A draft ISA report will be consulted on alongside the draft guidance. The consultation draft of the ISA report will:

- Demonstrate how the ISA process has shaped the development of the planning guidance to date
- Set out the methodology for the appraisal
- Set out the options (including reasonable alternatives), how they were identified and any mitigation measures
- Set out environmental, social, cultural and economic effects of the options and reasonable alternatives
- Describe the monitoring proposals.

APPENDIX A

Plans, Programmes and Environmental Protection Objectives Reviewed

The table below summarises the outcomes of the review of local, regional and national plans, policies and environmental protection objectives. This identifies the implications and key themes for the ISA and planning guidance with links to the ISA Framework.

National Plans and Policies (in Green)
Regional Plans and Policies (in Orange)
Local Plans and Policies (in Blue)

Plan, Programme or Sustainability Objective	Objectives or Requirements	Implications for the Guidance / ISA	Key Themes
THEME 1: Fauna (species)			
Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Policy 9)	<p>The national development plan setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040.</p> <p>Deliver the requirements of Policy 9 to enhance biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems.</p>	<p>Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as ecological networks for, amongst other things, species protection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatially identify and safeguard resilient ecological networks (REN's) to maintain and enhance biodiversity • At the heart of REN's is the protection and management of statutory and non-statutory designated sites and species
Environment (Wales) Act 2016	Helps to meet the challenge of finding a way to secure healthy,	Promote (and not reduce) biodiversity.	

	<p>resilient and productive ecosystems for the future whilst still meeting the challenges of creating jobs, housing and infrastructure.</p> <p>Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a duty on public authorities to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity where it is within the proper exercise of their functions.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity conservation and enhancement is more effective through increased engagement, communication and knowledge transfer in all levels of decision making. • Understanding the impact of inappropriate management, and developments on species and defined features of SSSI
<p>Natural Resources Wales (2015) LIFE Natura 2000 Programme for Wales</p>	<p>A strategic plan which sets out the requirements for the management and restoration of the Natura 2000 network.</p>	<p>Enhance habitat and connectivity within the Gwent Levels which will in turn help support features of the River Usk, River Wye and Severn Estuary SAC and SPA to restore the Nature 2000 network.</p> <p>There is a Severn Estuary SPA adjacent to the Gwent Levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance habitat and connectivity within the Gwent Levels which will in turn help support and restore features of the River Usk, River Wye and Severn Estuary SAC and SPA (the Nature 2000 network).
<p>Wales Biodiversity Partnership (2010)</p>	<p>Explains the roles, remits and processes essential to biodiversity</p>	<p>A more co-ordinated, effective and integrated approach to</p>	

Wales Biodiversity Framework	conservation and enhancement in Wales.	<p>biodiversity conservation and enhancement across Wales.</p> <p>Increased opportunities for a wider range of individuals/stakeholders to become involved.</p> <p>Increased and more widespread awareness of biodiversity and how everyone can play their part in protecting and enhancing it.</p> <p>More effective communication between everyone involved in biodiversity conservation and enhancement.</p> <p>An increase in collaborative working for example on landscape scale projects.</p>	
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	<p>National planning policy to create distinctive and natural places that, amongst other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity, increase the 	<p>Support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity.</p> <p>Ensure statutorily and non-statutorily designated sites and habitats are properly protected and managed and their role at the heart of REN's is safeguarded.</p>	

	<p>resilience of ecosystems and our natural environment.</p>	<p>Safeguard protected species and species of principal importance, existing biodiversity assets and the components which underpin them from direct, indirect or cumulative adverse impacts</p> <p>Secure the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystem resilience and resilient ecological networks.</p>	
Welsh Government (2020) The Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) for Wales	<p>This is the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Wales setting out the commitment to reverse the loss of biodiversity in Wales and the objectives for action.</p>	<p>Apply spatial action to maintain and enhance Resilient Ecological Networks</p> <p>Apply transformative action to increase knowledge, knowledge transfer and mainstreaming, governance and reporting progress.</p>	
Welsh Government Future Trends Report: 2021	<p>A report to assist Welsh citizens and policy makers in understanding the big trends and drivers that are likely to shape Wales's future.</p> <p>One of the four big drivers of change is</p>	<p>Improve the resilience of ecological networks.</p>	

	<p>Planetary Health and Limits with biodiversity loss accelerating in Wales at an unprecedented rate. While populations of some species in Wales have improved, serious declines have been reported in other species (butterflies, moths, invertebrate species, and many plant species) with biodiversity loss having a direct impact on Wales's ecosystems, which currently have low resilience.</p>		
<p>Nature Positive 2030 Evidence Report by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.</p>	<p>Identifies how the UK can succeed in achieving its commitments in response to biodiversity loss. Most notably through the Leaders' Pledge for Nature launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020, and the 30by30 commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature</p>	<p>Of the nine changes that can be delivered rapidly with high impacts on reversing biodiversity loss, the guidance should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring wildlife thrives within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Marine Protected Areas Better conserve wildlife habitats outside SSSIs, 	

	<p>by 2030. These commitments need to be considered whilst ensuring that nature recovery plays its critical role in achieving net zero.</p>	<p>in particular those areas identified as parts of nature networks or as important blue/green infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in habitat restoration and creation to strengthen nature networks that deliver for biodiversity and climate change • Ensure outcomes for nature are integrated in development plans on land and at sea • Develop the market for green finance • Develop the UK's evidence base so that it is ready to support the larger, transformative changes underway • Adopt targets to become Nature Positive. 	
<p>CIEEM (2022) Welsh Government's Approach to Net Benefits for Biodiversity and the DECCA Framework</p>	<p>This briefing paper sets out the broad terrestrial planning policy landscape in Wales, the Welsh Government's approach to delivering net benefits for</p>	<p>Promote the resilience of ecosystems and maintain and enhance biodiversity.</p>	

in the Terrestrial Planning System	biodiversity and key considerations for ecologists and developers in submitting planning proposals.		
The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.	This Act ensures that reasonable steps are taken public bodies and statutory undertakers to conserve and enhance the special features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the exercise of their functions.	To provide safeguards for SSSI and promote the protection and management of the special features of SSSIs	
A Conservation Strategy for the Shrill carder bee <i>Bombus sylvarum</i> in England and Wales, 2020-2030	Reports on the current status and trends in relation to this species. It also sets goals for increasing the shrill carder bee population.	Expanding on shrill carder bee knowledge and understanding. Look to increasing resilience for Shrill carder bee with no net loss of its required habitat or its populations	
Natural Resource Wales (2023) Priority Ecological Networks	Priority Ecological Networks (PENs) in the terrestrial environment are versions of the all-Wales habitat networks that show areas of connectivity between Protected Sites.	Promote habitat improvement, restoration, or creation, located within the boundaries of the Gwent Levels PEN (Severn SAC), or situated at its margins to consolidate, extend, or link different PENs.	

<p>Natural Resource Wales (2025) Terrestrial and Freshwater Species in Peril in Wales</p>	<p>This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the most vulnerable terrestrial and freshwater species in Wales as it was understood in 2024. For the purposes of this work, NRW have focussed on spatial rarity as the measure of vulnerability with all species occurring at five or fewer sites in Wales</p>	<p>It is recommended that a prioritised action plan is developed for SSSIs and NNRs and other sites to support sympathetic management for Species in Peril, thereby reducing the risk of extinctions and localised extirpations. Consideration should also be given to providing protection and securing appropriate management through further SSSI designations as part of a prioritised framework in Wales.</p> <p>The seven SSSIs on the Gwent Levels – 5000ha of reclaimed, mostly agricultural land and 870 miles of ditches (reens) – collectively support 54 species in Species in Peril, with the adjoining Magor Marsh supporting 50 species. The majority of these are aquatic and semiaquatic insects associated with the reens.</p>	
<p>Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan (2022)</p>	<p>A strategic document with a regional approach to nature recovery across</p>	<p>Engage and support participation and understanding to embed</p>	

	<p>the Greater Gwent Area. The plan provides guidance and recommendations on nature recovery actions to halt biodiversity decline and promote the recovery of nature across Greater Gwent.</p>	<p>biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels</p> <p>Safeguard species of principal importance and improve their management</p> <p>Tackle key pressures on species.</p>	
<p>Technical Ecology (2021) Greater Gwent State of Nature</p>	<p>This report aims to describe what is known about the status and trends of a selection of species within Greater Gwent, and the threats affecting them, including species on the Gwent Levels.</p>	<p>Deliver policy change and action to support species on the Gwent Levels.</p>	
<p>The Monmouthshire Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (Local NRAP)</p>	<p>A guide to help protect and restore nature in Monmouthshire. It was created by the Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and works alongside other plans at both regional and national levels.</p>	<p>Implications for the Guidance / ISA:</p> <p>The Key objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halt biodiversity loss • Improve ecosystem resilience • Embed nature recovery in decisions making • Engage and empower communities 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver nature-based solutions 	
Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network (REN) core zones and nature recovery zones (2025) <u>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</u> <u>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</u>	This report (and its mapping) evidences the Gwent Levels REN core zones and nature recovery zones, as identified and mapped spatial units to inform nature recovery interventions. The purpose is to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape.	Support/ promote habitat improvement, restoration, or creation in networks of habitat linking protected sites and other biodiversity hotspots across the wider landscape and identifying areas of ecological opportunity with the aim of providing maximum benefit for biodiversity and human well-being.	
Your Special Site and It's Future (Various)	This is part of a commitment to improve the way NRW works with SSSI owners and occupiers. In it, NRW explain what is special about the wildlife on each SSSI in the Gwent Levels and what care is	The Site Management Statements are specifically about the SSSI features only, the issues the SSSIs face and management options. It is a high-level document.	

	needed to look after its wildlife into the future.		
Paul Whitehead (2019) Gwent Levels Traditional Orchard Invertebrate Study 2019-2021	Invertebrate surveys were undertaken of traditional orchards on the Gwent Levels and on the foreshore of the nearby River Severn.	Help to reclaim, restore and manage orchards.	
Severn Estuary Recreation Pathway Actional Plan	The action plan supports protection to avoid contaminations from recreational activity. In the marine environment, recreation is recognised as a key pathway for INNS introduction and spread. This is attributed to animals (as eggs and in their larval, juvenile and adult life stages) or seaweed (as fragments or spores) being transferred by recreational users and/or their equipment between locations. The action plan supports improving awareness of and in educating with regards the impacts that	Recreational activity should follow the biosecurity actions in the Pathway action plan, including the thorough Check, Clean and Dry of kit and equipment, setting up biosecurity protocols for their clubs or group and carrying out proper boat maintenance, including anti-fouling and preventing biofouling.	

	recreation activity could have.		
Graham and Hammond (2022) Investigating ditch biodiversity in the Gwent Levels	<p>The study investigates ditches at five farm sites within the Gwent Levels SSSIs for plants and aquatic macro-invertebrates.</p> <p>The study found the vast majority of ditches across all sites with open water were dominated by a very high cover of duckweed (often to 100% surface cover). A high cover of duckweed inhibits growth of submerged aquatics by shading and can, in some cases, negatively impact on fauna by causing sudden low oxygen levels in late summer.</p>	<p>Support management of the traditional water network, including the restriction of hedges to one side only of ditches to allow light penetration.</p>	

THEME 2: The Natural Environment and its Resources

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015	The Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of	To deliver on the national well-being goals, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Resilient Wales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as ecological
---	---	---	---

	<p>Wales. The Act defines sustainable development and places a duty on public bodies to carry out sustainable development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Healthier Wales • A Globally responsible Wales • A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language. 	<p>networks to build the resilience of natural systems over the long term and help address the climate and nature emergencies</p>
Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Policy 9)	<p>The national development plan setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040.</p> <p>Deliver the requirements of Policy 9 to enhance biodiversity, the resilience of ecosystems and GI provision.</p>	<p>Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as ecological networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the green growth agenda and resource efficient economy by building on the success of renewable energy and recycling • Protect and restore nature to ensure the provision of ecosystem services and benefits now and into the future
Environment (Wales) Act 2016	<p>Helps to meet the challenge of finding a way to secure healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems for the future whilst still meeting the challenges of creating jobs, housing and infrastructure.</p>	<p>Safeguard and build the resilience of natural systems to continue to provide benefits over the long term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels. • Support and promote a sustainable
Programme for Government - Update	<p>A commitment to embed the Government response to the climate</p>	<p>Help to address the climate and nature emergency.</p>	

	and nature emergency in everything we do.		approach to food production, ensuring that such practices contribute towards addressing the climate and nature emergency.
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	<p>National planning policy to create distinctive and natural places that, amongst other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value the quality of our landscapes and historic environment • Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity, increase the resilience of ecosystems and our natural environment • Promote low carbon and appropriate resource choices which address the causes of climate change • Provide cost effective ecosystems services such as 	Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity, increasing the resilience of ecosystems and our natural environment.	

	clean air and water.		
Welsh Government (2017) Natural Resources Policy	<p>The focus of the policy is on improving the way we manage our natural resources. The policy, amongst other things, identifies three national priorities for the management of our natural resources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivering nature-based solutions 2. Increasing renewable energy and resource efficiency 3. Taking a place-based approach. 	<p>Deliver nature-based solutions, such as the development of resilient ecological networks, supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation and improve infrastructure (including green infrastructure), land and water management</p> <p>Build on the success of renewable energy and recycling to develop a more resource efficient economy and support green growth</p> <p>Focus on collaborative working to deliver better results at a local level.</p>	
Welsh Government (2019) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: guide	The guide sets out what the SMNR is, why it is important and the actions we can take to develop sustainably.	Deliver nature-based solutions, such as the development of resilient ecological networks, supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation and improve infrastructure (including green	

		<p>infrastructure), land and water management.</p> <p>Build on the success of renewable energy and recycling to develop a more resource efficient economy and support green growth.</p> <p>Focus on collaborative working to deliver better results at a local level.</p>	
Welsh Government (2022) Biodiversity Deep Dive: Recommendations	<p>Develops a set of collective actions we can take to support meaningful delivery of the '30 by 30' goal to protect at least 30% of the land and 30% of the sea by 2030.</p> <p>One of the Objectives is to continue to reform land and marine management and planning (including spatial) to deliver more for both protected sites and wider land / seascapes. Under this</p>	<p>Develop guidance for Policy 9 of Future Wales via the Gwent Levels pilot project.</p>	

	<p>Objective immediate action is required by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing strengthened guidance for Policy 9 of Future Wales via the Gwent Levels pilot project for mainstreaming biodiversity, ecosystem resilience and GI into planning policies within National Natural Resource Management Areas in Wales. 		
<p>Natural Resource Wales (2021) Terrestrial and freshwater Resilient Ecological Networks: a guide for practitioners in Wales</p>	<p>The guide provides a three-step decision support framework for designing REN's based upon the principles of the SMNR.</p>	<p>Give consideration to utilising and sign-posting the guide for designing Resilient Ecological Networks.</p>	
<p>Natural Resource Wales (2024) State of Natural</p>	<p>An assessment of the extent to which Wales is achieving the SMNR.</p>	<p>Improved protected area management</p>	

Resources Report (SoNaRR) Interim Report	<p>The report focuses on the main challenges to our natural resources, which are nature loss, climate change, and pollution and waste.</p>	<p>Habitat conservation outside of protected areas</p> <p>Habitat restoration to create and strengthen nature networks.</p>	
Sustainable Farming Scheme – Last updated 2025	<p>The scheme aims to support sustainable food production while addressing the climate and nature emergency.</p>	<p>Support and promote a sustainable approach to food production, ensuring that such practices contribute towards addressing the climate and nature emergency.</p>	
South Central Area Statement (Natural Resource Wales) <u>Statement Link</u>	<p>The statement sets out to address the legacies of the past along with the challenges and opportunities of the future, exploring ways we can work together to protect, value and embrace the natural environment while also putting it at the heart of the decision-making process.</p> <p>One of the five themes is to build resilient ecosystems.</p>	<p>Protect and restore nature to ensure the provision of ecosystem services and benefits now and into the future.</p>	
Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient	<p>The RENs are joint South East Area</p>	<p>The purpose of designing and mapping the RENs was to</p>	

<p>Ecological Network core zones and nature recovery zones (2025)</p> <p>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</p>	<p>Statement and South Central Area Statement products and contribute to describing the priorities, risks and opportunities for SMNR.</p> <p>This report (and its mapping) evidences the Gwent Levels REN core zones and nature recovery zones, as identified and mapped spatial units to inform nature recovery interventions. The purpose is to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape</p>	<p>contribute spatial evidence to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape.</p>	
<p>Gwent Levels Strategic Enhancement Plan (SEP) 2023</p>	<p>The plan provides a framework for delivering NBB for the M4CAN sites situated across the Gwent Levels. The site assessment is based on the DECCA framework and allows for a</p>	<p>Build the resilience of ecosystems and deliver a NBB.</p>	

	<p>comparison between sites in terms of their potential ecological value and forms an evidence base to prioritise sites for strategic enhancement.</p>		
Monmouthshire Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Deposit (2024)	<p>A policy document that allocates land for development, designates areas for protection and contains policies against which future planning applications will be assessed.</p>	<p>Safeguard and protect the Gwent Levels and its environmental designations.</p>	
Cardiff Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Deposit (2025)	<p>A policy document that allocates land for development, designates areas for protection and contains policies against which future planning applications will be assessed.</p>	<p>Enhance biodiversity (net benefit) and promote the resilience of ecosystems and GI provision for the Gwent Levels.</p>	
Newport Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Preferred Strategy (2023)	<p>The Preferred Strategy forms the basis of the replacement LDP. The strategy, amongst other things, contains a Vision and Objectives and is</p>	<p>To promote and safeguard the functions and opportunities provided by the Gwent Levels.</p>	

	<p>underpinned by a number of strategic policies and proposed sites to deliver the strategy.</p>		
Gwent Levels Our Vision for the Future (2022)	<p>Sets out the role of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLP), its achievements to date, its Vision for the Levels and actions to help deliver the Vision.</p> <p>One of the actions is:</p> <p>'The historic, cultural and ecological integrity of the Gwent Levels are conserved and enhanced' through the development and application of harmonised and consistent planning and economic development policies across all local authority areas.</p>	<p>Develop consistent planning policies across all local authority areas on the Levels.</p>	

THEME 3: Green Infrastructure

Programme for Government - Update	A commitment to embed the Government response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do by, amongst other things, expanding arrangements to create or significantly enhance green spaces.	Create or significantly enhance green spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise the protection and provision of GI and its networks Increase GI in, around and between urban areas with improved access and linkages.
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	<p>National planning policy to create distinctive and natural places that, amongst other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect and make provision for multi-functional green infrastructure, which can make a significant contribution to the SMNR, and in particular to protecting, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems. 	Maximise the protection and provision of GI assets and networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify areas of opportunities to increase GI and maximise the benefits to resilient ecological networks.

Welsh Government (2017) Natural Resources Policy	<p>The focus of the policy is on improving the way we manage our natural resources. The policy, amongst other things, identifies three national priorities for the management of our natural resources, one of which is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivering nature-based solutions. 	Increase GI in and around urban areas.	
Welsh Government (2019) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: guide	<p>The guide sets out what the SMNR is, why it is important and the actions we can take to develop sustainably.</p>	Deliver more biodiverse urban green infrastructure, which includes the links between our urban areas and their surroundings so they 'join up'.	
Gwent Green Grid (2024) Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy	<p>The strategy sets out a high-level, regional framework to support public bodies in discharging their duties through a regional approach to GI reflecting the Welsh Government's natural resources and planning policy.</p>	Safeguard, expand and enhance GI in the Gwent Levels.	

	The Gwent Levels has been identified in the strategy for strategic GI planning, management and delivery.		
Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network core zones and nature recovery zones (2025) <u>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</u> <u>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</u>	This report evidences the Gwent Levels REN core zones and nature recovery zones, as identified and mapped spatial units to inform nature recovery interventions. The purpose is to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape.	The purpose of designing and mapping the RENs was to contribute spatial evidence to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape and green infrastructure.	
Chris Blandford Associates (2017) Gwent Levels Green	The aim of the Strategy is to help inform the positive management of GI within the Gwent	Help to deliver the key priorities of:	

Infrastructure Strategy	<p>Levels for the benefit of local communities and wildlife.</p> <p>The objectives of the GI Strategy are twofold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify and map existing GI assets, assess the ecosystem services or benefits that these assets provide and to identify needs and opportunities for improving the area's GI assets. • To develop an overarching long-term vision, principles and framework for the planning and delivery of GI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing existing GI assets • Maximising opportunities for GI • Improving access, linkages and facilities relating to greenspace • Reversing the erosion and fragmentation of natural and semi-natural habitats • Promoting high quality and sensitive design of new development. 	
Monmouthshire Green Infrastructure SPG (April 2015)	This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) supports the interpretation and implementation of GI policies S13 and GI1 of the Monmouthshire	Support the integrity and connectivity of the GI network to ensure it is maintained, protected and enhanced in a planned and managed way.	

	adopted Local Development Plan.		
Monmouthshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2019) Volume 1 and 2	<p>The strategy promotes an integrated and joined up approach to delivering GI that takes into account the needs of Monmouthshire's communities, environment and economy.</p> <p>Volume 2 of the strategy provides the Council's delivery plan for GI in Monmouthshire.</p>	Conserve, protect and enhance Monmouthshire's GI assets.	
Cardiff Green Infrastructure SPG (November 2017)	<p>Provides planning advice on a number of areas relating to development and the environment, including protection and provision of open space, ecology and biodiversity, trees, soils, PROW , and river corridors. It also refers to sustainable drainage (SuDS) which forms part of green infrastructure.</p>	Protect the identified features of the Gwent Levels Rumney and Peterstone SSSI.	

	<p>Identifies features of the Gwent Levels Rumney and Peterstone SSSI for supporting a number of important plant species including Flowering-rush, Brackish Water-crowfoot, Frog-bit and Hair-like Pondweed.</p> <p>The aquatic invertebrate fauna is very diverse and contains many rare and notable species.</p>		
Cardiff Strategic Green Infrastructure Assessment (January 2025)	<p>The report highlights the Wentloog/Gwent Levels as a nationally important landscape of reens and wetland habitats that form a key part of Cardiff's green infrastructure network. It emphasises the need to protect and strengthen habitat buffers, improve management of ditches and reens, expand suitable habitats for species such as the shrill carder bee, and enhance connectivity between the</p>	<p>Identifies the Gwent Levels as one of its resilient ecological networks. The document needs to be reflected by The Guidance.</p>	

	Levels, river corridors and surrounding green spaces to support biodiversity, flood management and ecological resilience.		
Newport Green Infrastructure Assessment (May 2022)	<p>Provides a strategic approach to the planning of GI networks.</p> <p>GI opportunities are identified on the c.1200km of field ditches that criss-cross the Levels need to be maintained to support the rich variety of plants and associated populations of invertebrates found here and where the watercourses have become overgrown, the flood storage capacity of the drainage system is reduced, which could lead to localised flooding.</p>	Maintain both field ditches and reens.	
THEME 4: Flora (habitats)			
Environment (Wales) Act 2016	Helps to meet the challenge of finding a	Acknowledge the Gwent Levels as Section 7 habitat,	

	<p>way to secure healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems for the future whilst still meeting the challenges of creating jobs, housing and infrastructure.</p> <p>Public authorities, in complying with the Section 6 duty must have regard to the Section 7 lists, which provides a focus on species and habitats of principal importance.</p>	<p>which is of principal importance to maintain and enhance biodiversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as RENs to support habitat protection, restoration or creation Increase resilience of our natural environment and its statutory designations by restoring and managing habitats and tackling key pressures
<p>Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Policy 9)</p>	<p>The national development plan setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040.</p> <p>Deliver the requirements of Policy 9 to enhance biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems.</p>	<p>Identify areas that should be safeguarded and created as ecological networks for, amongst other things, habitat protection, restoration or creation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support habitats and wildlife unique to the Gwent Levels with a focus on the establishment and management of grasslands, hedgerows and orchards.
<p>Natural Resource Wales (2015) LIFE Natura 2000</p>	<p>A strategic plan which sets out the requirements for the management and restoration of the Natura</p>	<p>Use the River Usk, River Wye and Severn Estuary SAC boundaries and features on the Gwent Levels to help</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the spread of invasive non-native species.

Programme for Wales	2000 network. The network consists of threatened habitats and species protected by Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and SPA's.	manage and restore the Nature 2000 network. There is a Severn Estuary SPA adjacent to the Gwent Levels.	
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	National planning policy to create distinctive and natural places that, amongst other things: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that development should not cause any significant loss of habitats. 	Improve, or enable the improvement, of the resilience of ecosystems.	
Natural Resource Wales (2023) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)	This dataset contains the boundaries of SSSIs that cover a wide range of habitats from small fens, bogs and riverside meadows to sand dunes, woodlands and vast tracks of uplands.	To ensure consistent, favourable long-term management of the SSSI features that span the Gwent Levels	
Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan (2022)	A strategic document with a regional approach to nature recovery across the Greater Gwent Area.	Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degrading habitats and habitat creation.	

	<p>The plan provides guidance and recommendations on nature recovery actions to halt biodiversity decline and promote the recovery of nature across Greater Gwent.</p>	<p>Safeguard habitats of principal importance and improve their management.</p> <p>Tackle key pressures on habitats.</p>	
Severn Estuary Biosecurity Action Plan	<p>The Severn Estuary Biosecurity Action Plan sets out measures to help prevent and manage the spread of invasive non-native species (INNS) across the estuary. It adopts a pathway-based approach, focusing on activities such as recreation, angling, commercial operations, marinas, habitat restoration, research, and events.</p>	<p>Key actions include promoting the “Check, Clean, Dry” protocol, nominating biosecurity leads within organisations, and raising awareness among users. These measures aim to protect biodiversity, reduce maintenance costs, and ensure compliance with environmental obligations.</p>	
Indicative Site-Level Feature Condition Assessments (Severn Estuary SAC, 2018)	<p>The 2018 SAC report provides a baseline assessment of the condition of key habitats and species within the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation. It</p>	<p>The report identifies pressures affecting these features and sets out conservation objectives to maintain ecological integrity</p>	

	<p>evaluates Annex I habitats such as estuaries, mudflats, and saltmarsh, alongside Annex II species including lamprey and shad. These findings are critical for understanding habitat connectivity and informing restoration priorities.</p>		
<p>Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network (REN) core zones and nature recovery zones (2025)</p> <p>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</p>	<p>This report evidences the Gwent Levels REN core zones and nature recovery zones, as identified and mapped spatial units to inform nature recovery interventions. The purpose is to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape.</p>	<p>Support/ promote habitat improvement, restoration, or create networks of habitat linking protected sites and other biodiversity hotspots across the wider landscape and identifying areas of ecological opportunity with the aim of providing maximum benefit for biodiversity and human well-being.</p>	

<p>Gwent Levels Post Construction Monitoring Report (2024)</p>	<p>The report details the Post Construction Monitoring Study of large developments built within and adjacent to the Gwent Levels SSSIs with the aim of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing whether biodiversity impacts, and those relating to the SSSIs features, were successfully identified, and avoided and/or mitigated • Consider whether action and measures taken at the time could potentially be compatible with present day requirements in relation to the objectives and the principles of Policy 9 (of Future Wales) to deliver 	<p>Potentially deliver on the following recommendations in the guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance and/or a check list developed from the DECCA Framework criteria-based assessment • Specific planning guidance for the Gwent Levels • Further investigation to determine the factors which have influenced habitat creation and restoration on the Levels to be successful or to have failed. • Planning condition standards and consistent wording for the security and delivery of NBB and adaptive long-term management and monitoring • Detailed delivery, management and 	
--	--	--	--

	<p>net benefits for biodiversity (NBB) and if not compatible or unlikely, to consider why this may be the case.</p>	<p>monitoring plans for NBB considered to be part of the planning application rather than through a planning condition and/or commitments through a S106</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of NBB bonds/‘non-performance bonds’, levies, penalties or incentives into policy and regulation to improve delivery of NBB. • Further protection for habitats that provide ecosystem resilience to Protected Areas and/or new nature conservation measures to avoid loss of nature networks. 	
<p>Reading Agricultural Consultants (2022) Wetland Landscape Restoration and Maintenance in the Gwent Levels – Costings</p>	<p>This document sets out an analysis of likely costs to farm businesses associated with the application of the Welsh Government’s policies regarding the SMNR with particular regard to: the management of</p>	<p>Support the maintenance and enhancement of wet grasslands for their associated habitats by pollinators and other beneficial insects.</p>	

<p>grassland and wider habitats for pollinators; the management of hedgerows for wildlife; and the restoration of orchards.</p> <p>The report recognises the value of wet grassland for provision of benefits over and above its conservation value. Carbon sequestration, flood alleviation, nutrient and pollution absorption and groundwater recharge are all services delivered by the habitat.</p> <p>Hedgerow planting was identified as often not appropriate in the Levels landscape and most often good management and even removal is required to protect surface water features.</p> <p>Orchards have played a significant role in the cultural history of the Gwent Levels.</p>	<p>Support hedgerow management for wildlife and to avoid shading water.</p> <p>Support the restoration and reestablishment of orchards.</p>	
---	---	--

<p>Level Advice: Sustaining the Gwent Levels project (Living Level Partnership, 2022)</p>	<p>This report sets out key management actions for sustainable land management on the Gwent Levels. Two of the key actions relates to grassland management and trees and hedgerow management.</p>	<p>To support the management of grasslands:</p> <p>Maintaining, creating and linking flower-rich grassland with each other across the Levels, is beneficial to many species.</p> <p>Limit use of pesticides, and other inputs as these decrease the diversity of the sward and can be detrimental to the bee and other insects.</p> <p>Help maintain shallow wet and damp areas i.e. grips.</p> <p>Keeping an open sward to keep the vegetation open and short.</p> <p>Clearance of scrub and parts of hedges to restore the ditches also helps ground nesting birds.</p>	
---	---	---	--

THEME 5: Cultural heritage and landscape

<p>Natural Resource Wales LANDMAP</p>	<p>LANDMAP is a mapping tool to help sustainable</p>	<p>Use to help guide development or land</p>	
---------------------------------------	--	--	--

	<p>decision-making and natural resource planning based on five nationally consistent spatial datasets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geological Landscape - Landscape Habitats - Visual and Sensory - Historic Landscape - Cultural Landscape. 	<p>management changes to less sensitive landscape locations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance the Gwent Levels historic and cultural landscape for the benefit of local communities and to promote the Gwent Levels as a visitor destination • Conserve and enhance the unique landscape and biodiversity of the Gwent Levels by identifying and safeguarding RENs with a focus on maintaining the areas traditional drainage systems, semi-natural grassland, wooded areas, soil carbon storage and farming. • Mapping opportunities to further safeguard and enhance the historic and cultural landscape for the
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	<p>National planning policy to create distinctive and natural places that, amongst other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for the conservation and, where appropriate, enhancement of local landscapes. 	<p>Provide for the conservation and, where appropriate, enhancement of local landscapes.</p>	
Register of Landscape of Historic Interest in Wales	<p>The Gwent Levels is identified as an Historic Landscape in Wales.</p>	<p>To have the least possible adverse impact on the Gwent Levels historic landscape area.</p>	
South East Wales Area Statement	<p>The statement has been undertaken at a landscape scale by</p>	<p>Improve resilience of our ecosystems across Gwent</p>	

<p>(Natural Resource Wales)</p> <p><u>Statement Link</u></p>	<p>considering where and why we want to build ecosystem resilience in terms of the special and distinctive landscape area.</p> <p>One of the four themes is to link the landscapes.</p>	<p>Increased understanding of the need to safeguard and enhance core habitat networks and support ecological connectivity on and between our 'best sites' across Gwent.</p> <p>Increased capacity of organisations and individuals, ensuring that they have the tools, skills and guidance necessary to safeguard and enhance our core habitat networks across Gwent.</p>	<p>benefit of local communities and visitors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the implications of light pollution and ensure that the tranquillity and remoteness of the Gwent Levels landscape character is maintained and enhanced.
<p>Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network (REN) core zones and nature recovery zones (2025)</p> <p><u>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</u></p> <p><u>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and</u></p>	<p>This report evidences the Gwent Levels REN core zones and nature recovery zones, as identified and mapped spatial units to inform nature recovery interventions. The purpose is to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape.</p>	<p>The purpose of designing and mapping the RENs was to contribute spatial evidence to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape. This includes recognising the opportunities which the Gwent Levels cultural and heritage assets provide.</p>	

<u>research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</u>			
Tranquillity and Place – Dark Skies – Natural Resources Wales (2025)	A breakdown of the light pollution for each local authority area, NRW operational areas, Future Wales Policy 9 areas, and NLCAAs in Wales with an interactive map. It also outlines how information from this study should be incorporated into strategic plans to deliver tranquillity and place through dark skies and reducing light pollution. A key finding of this study was that while the light emitted in cities appears to be decreasing, the areas around cities seem to be getting brighter.	Promotes that light pollution should be treated as a landscape character and as a natural resource to consider for the Gwent Levels and associated Local authority areas.	
Gwent Levels Management Plan (Living Levels Partnership, 2022)	The plan reviews the achievements of the LLP, assesses the policy contexts that are relevant to the management of	Conserve and enhance the historic, cultural and ecological integrity of the Gwent Levels.	

	<p>the Gwent Levels, summarises the key features of the Levels landscape and provides a vision and a set of aims for its management. Finally, it sets out an action plan of objectives and actions in a five-year programme, identifying lead agencies, resources and risks.</p> <p>One of the aims the guidance can help drive is:</p> <p>The historic, cultural and ecological integrity of the Gwent Levels are conserved and enhanced through the development and application of harmonised and consistent planning and economic development policies across all local authority areas.</p>		
Chris Blandford Associates (2017) Gwent Levels	The purpose of the LCA is to help inform the positive management	Protect, conserve and enhance the Gwent Levels.	

<p>Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)</p>	<p>and planning of the Gwent Levels by assessing the distinctive character and special qualities of the area that is desirable to protect, conserve and enhance.</p> <p>The objectives of the assessment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting, conserving and enhancing the distinctive characteristics of the areas • identifying opportunities for improving GI assets within the landscape character areas (LCA) • Bring the story of the Gwent Levels historic evolution and current character to life to help improve people's understanding of 	<p>Improve green infrastructure.</p> <p>Highlight the history of the Gwent Levels.</p>	
---	---	--	--

	the landscape and their connections to it.		
Cardiff Landscape Evidence Base Update Local Landscape Designations (January 2025)	The report identifies and maps the Wentloog Levels as Candidate Special Landscape Area (SLA) 4, confirming it merits continued local landscape designation based on its nationally rare reen drainage network, internationally protected habitats (SAC/SPA/Ramsar), and its recognition as part of the Registered Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales.	Planning and management must safeguard the area's open and flat coastal character, tranquillity, long views, historic reen and field systems, and internationally important ecological features, while preventing further urban or industrial encroachment.	
South East Wales Area Statement Gwent Levels Landscape Profile <u>Statement Link 2018</u>	Identifies the key landscape profiles of the Gwent Levels, three of which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassland and farmland • Woodland • Urban environment. 	Keep as much of the levels in agricultural use as possible. Existing areas of semi-natural grassland should be managed and reversion or creation of further areas of semi natural grassland facilitated.	

		<p>Improve woodland resilience and connectivity.</p> <p>Ensure resilient choices are made for new and existing infrastructure and built development.</p>	
Natural Resources Wales (2014) National Landscape Character Assessment 34: Gwent Levels	Identifies the key landscape characteristics of the Gwent Levels based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual and sensory profile • Geological landscape • Landscape habitat • Historic landscape • Cultural landscape. 	Conserve the unique landscape and biodiversity of the Gwent Levels with a key focus on maintaining the distinctive pattern of drainage ditches and reens.	
2018-2025 Seven Estuary Management Scheme- ASERA	The Management Scheme aids decision making and continually evolves to take account of changing issues and the policy landscape. It endeavours to reflect the local conditions of the site (i.e. size, cross-boundary) and take into	The key requirements for the Severn Estuary EMS are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be managed to achieve the 'favourable conservation status' of the habitats and species for which it is designated; 	

	<p>account good practice from other European Marine Sites in the UK. ASERA first launched the Management Scheme for the Severn Estuary EMS in 2004</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate steps should be taken to avoid deterioration or significant disturbance of the habitats and species; Activities and plans or projects that are likely to have a significant impact on the conservation habitats and species for which the site is designated must be subject to assessment. 	
<p>Living Level Partnership (2017) Landscape Conservation Action Plan</p>	<p>The plan provides a narrative of the landscape, describing what gives this area its unique character, while assessing the risks, threats and opportunities that it faces. The plan includes aims and objectives to achieve the long-term vision of the LLP.</p> <p>The two main threats to the Levels are identified as:</p>	<p>Support the programme on Natural Heritage Restoration by conserving, protecting and enhancing the Gwent Levels' natural heritage and GI assets and raising awareness of the importance of the continuous management of this unique landscape for the benefit of the communities living and working within the Levels and also in the surrounding area.</p> <p>Support the programme on Destination Management, Access and Interpretation to increase footfall, economic</p>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An increasing disconnection from the landscape by growing sections of the community, resulting in loss of heritage features due to a reduction in traditional land management of the Levels. 2. An under-developed “vision” and “sense of place” for the long-term future of this landscape. This is leading to inappropriate development; missed opportunities for tourism and inward investment; and increased negative impacts from local conurbations. 	<p>value and enjoyment of the Gwent Levels by improving access, awareness and the visitor experience and help reconnect the local community with the Gwent Levels landscape and its heritage by engaging and involving people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities with their local green spaces, sites of heritage interest and the stories of its people.</p>	
--	--	---	--

<p>Cynidr Consulting (2021) PES and the Gwent Levels: Local opportunities for paying for Ecosystem Services</p>	<p>Explores new ways of encouraging and paying for the SMNR by Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES).</p> <p>The report looks at the opportunities, benefits and constraints of PES that includes farm products, carbon capture, water level and quality, wildlife habitats, tourism and education.</p>	<p>Support farming products for the benefit of the environment, wildlife, culture and economy.</p> <p>Support traditional drainage systems for biodiversity and habitats and help prevent flooding.</p>	
<p>Living Level Partnership, 2020 A Resilient Future for the Gwent Levels Interim Summary</p>	<p>Sets out the process and results of participant engagement linked to better utilising the ecosystem on the Gwent Levels. Some of the opportunities identified were linked too:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting walkers and visitors • Reens • Soil fertility and maintenance • Habitats • Water management. 	<p>Support the areas of greatest significance to deliver ecosystem resilience on the Gwent Levels by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water management linked to the maintenance of reens and ditches to benefit the economy, society and the environment • Enhance biodiversity, connectivity of habitat, grass and trees. 	

<p>Environment Systems (2021) Monitoring Sustaining the Gwent Levels</p>	<p>This document comprises the mapped outputs of the Sustaining the Gwent Levels Project. Seven themes were identified for spatial analysis and within each theme is four models.</p> <p>The modelling is based on SENCE (Spatial Evidence for Natural Capital Evaluation), which uses spatial data to grade the importance of any area of land into a simple categorisation of suitability/quality, based on expert knowledge and scientific rule-bases.</p> <p>The themes identified for spatial analysis were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wader habitats (Lapwing) • Pollinator habitats (Shrill Carder Bee) • Landscape connectivity (bat species) 	<p>Support lapwing habitat</p> <p>Support shrill carder bee habitat</p> <p>Support bat habitat</p> <p>Manage reens and ditches and support gripped fields.</p> <p>Issue of diffuse pollution from farms impacting water quality</p> <p>Increase surface roughness to support semi-natural habitat</p> <p>Support wooded features</p> <p>Increase networks and join native habitats</p> <p>Support soil carbon storage.</p>	
--	---	--	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquatic habitat • Landscape structure • Water quality, and • Carbon storage. 		
The Gwent Levels Sense of Place Toolkit (Living Levels Partnership, 2021)	<p>This booklet provides lots of information and suggestions about how to explore the unique landscape of the Gwent Levels linked to its:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Handcrafted by human activity • Water • Wildlife • Conservation • Leisure • Culture. 	Capitalising on what's special and distinctive about the area.	

THEME 6: Marine and Coastal Environment

Welsh Government (2019) Welsh National Marine Plan	A 20-year plan for the sustainable management of our seas, helping ensure they are healthy and resilient. The plan, amongst other things, focuses on the coastline	<p>Help deliver the plan's coastal objectives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise and safeguard the significant value of coastal tourism and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and promote the valuable marine environment and coastline of the Gwent Levels to support coastal tourism and
--	--	--	--

	<p>for tourism, recreation, economic growth, well-being and promoting resilient coastal communities.</p>	<p>recreation to the Welsh economy and well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to supporting the development of vibrant, more equitable, culturally and linguistically distinct, cohesive and resilient coastal communities. • Encouraging equitable and safe access to a resilient marine environment, whilst protecting and promoting valuable landscapes, seascapes and historic assets. • Highlight the importance of the Severn Estuary marine environment adjacent to the Gwent levels for its biodiversity. 	<p>recreation opportunities and create resilient communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To highlight the importance of the biodiversity of the coastline and the Severn Estuary marine environment adjacent to the Gwent levels.
<p>Welsh Government (2024) Planning</p>	<p>National planning policy to create distinctive and</p>	<p>Protect or enhance the natural or historic character</p>	

Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	<p>natural places that, amongst other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires being aware of, and appropriately responsive to, the challenges resulting from the dynamic interaction of natural and development pressures in coastal areas. 	<p>and landscape of undeveloped coastlines.</p>	
Blue Carbon Potential of Welsh Marine Protected Area Network	<p>This study highlights the significant role of marine protected areas in storing and sequestering carbon within Welsh waters. Habitats such as saltmarsh, seagrass beds, and sediments are shown to provide valuable climate mitigation benefits alongside biodiversity protection.</p>	<p>The report recommends integrating blue carbon considerations into marine planning and restoration strategies, positioning Marine Protected Areas as a key component of Wales's response to climate change.</p>	
Natural Resource Wales (2024) State of Natural	<p>An assessment of the extent to which Wales is achieving the SMNR.</p>	<p>The report emphasises nature-based solutions, adaptive coastal</p>	

<p>Resources Report (SoNaRR) (2024) Interim Report</p>	<p>The report focuses on the main challenges to our natural resources, which are nature loss, climate change, and pollution and waste.</p>	<p>management, and integrated marine planning to safeguard biodiversity and support sustainable resource use. Collaborative action across sectors is critical to halt degradation and build resilience for communities and ecosystems along Wales' coasts.</p>	
<p>Natural Resource Wales (2020) Marine Area Statement</p> <p>Statement Link</p>	<p>The Marine Area Statement covers the inshore waters of Wales and identifies the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support work that can help to 'reconnect' people with Welsh seas • Engage at a local level to explore what people in Wales value about our coasts and seas • Work more closely through Public Service Boards to identify and address marine 	<p>Provide for the sustainable management of the coastline for biodiversity and environmental importance, recreation and tourism linked to well-being and local economies.</p>	

	<p>and coastal issues and opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the profile of marine and coastal areas and their role in supporting local well-being. 		
<p>Natural Resource Wales Oaten et al (2024) - Understanding the likely scale of deterioration of Marine Protected Area features due to coastal squeeze: Volume 2- Results and discussion</p>	<p>This project aimed to improve the understanding of the location, timing and likely scale of habitat loss occurring in Welsh Marine Protected Areas due to coastal squeeze. This is required to plan effectively for restoration and re-creation of habitat features lost through coastal squeeze, and as such maintain the coherence of the MPA network.</p>	<p>Recognise the impact of Coastal squeeze and that it constitutes the loss of natural habitats or deterioration of their quality arising from man-made structures, or actions, preventing landward transgression of habitats in response to sea level rise.</p> <p>The report highlights the following as specific habitats under threat on the Gwent levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saltmarsh Loss: Significant losses predicted under all scenarios, especially if existing defences are maintained. SMP2 policy (managed realignment) reduces 	

		<p>losses but does not eliminate them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mudflat/Sandflat: Similar trend predicted losses under sea defence-maintenance scenarios, with potential gains only where accommodation space (<i>land available for coastal habitats</i>) exists. • Accommodation Space: The Gwent Levels' extensive reclaimed land behind sea walls means very limited space for inland habitat migration, making it highly susceptible to coastal squeeze. 	
Welsh Government Future Trends Report: 2021	A report to assist Welsh citizens and policy makers in understanding the big trends and drivers that are likely to shape Wales's future.	Strive for a reduction in agricultural nitrogen emissions in a move towards more sustainable farming methods.	

	<p>One of the four big drivers of change is Planetary Health and Limits with the quality of water in Wales, whether in seas, rivers, streams or the ground, generally improving, nitrogen-based pollution from agriculture is severely damaging biodiversity and ecosystems, leading to eutrophication and acidification of waterways and soils.</p>		
<p>Severn Estuary Coastal Group (2017) Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan Review (SMP2)</p>	<p>The SMP2 has been developed taking account of predicted changes to sea level rise caused by climate change. The SMP2 is an important tool / guide to make sure that future land use on the shoreline does not put future generations at risk or impose unmanageable financial burdens in terms of coastal defence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that in the Wentlooge Area the policy response is to Hold the Line in the long term up to 2105. • Note that in the Newport and Usk Area the policy response is to Hold the Line in the long term up to 2105. • Note that in the Caldicot Area the policy response is to 	

		<p>Hold the Line in the long term up to 2105.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold the Line means keeping the line of the defence in approximately its current location. Hold the line' policies will have significant consequences for the Severn Estuary SAC, SPA, Ramsar and SSSI as a result of habitat loss due to coastal squeeze. Loss of these habitats is also an important consideration for blue carbon. 	
Natural Resource Wales (2017) Marine Character Area 29: Severn Estuary	Sets out the location, characteristics, influences and qualities of this marine character area (MCA) stretching from the national border with England to the western fringes of Barry.	Protect the marine habitat, history and open views and vistas of the Gwent Levels	

	<p>In this stretch, the Gwent Levels is recognised for its importance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tidal flats, saltmarshes and the extensive wet grasslands are of international importance for wintering waterfowl and migratory birds • Long history of coastal reclamation, embankments and ditches, notably the extensive Gwent and Wentlooge levels • Views to major commercial, port and industrial development at Cardiff and Avonmouth, as well as the two road bridges, contrasting with the open, empty vistas 		
--	--	--	--

	characterising the Gwent Levels.		
The Seven Estuary: A cross-border marine planning guide	The objective of the plan is providing clarity and guidance for planning in the Severn estuary specifically on cross border implications. The report re-enforces stronger integration of marine and land planning, habitat protections and climate adaption.	The implications for the Gwent levels are that the planning guide provides stronger environmental protection from development pressure. The planning guide document also reinforces the use of SMP2 in understanding the cross-border effects of development within the region	
Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network (REN) core zones and nature recovery zones (2025) <u>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</u> <u>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on</u>	This report evidences the Gwent Levels REN core zones and nature recovery zones, as identified and mapped spatial units to inform nature recovery interventions. The purpose is to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape.	Support/promote habitat improvement, restoration, or creation of networks of habitat linking protected sites and other biodiversity hotspots across the wider landscape and identifying areas of ecological opportunity with the aim of providing maximum benefit for biodiversity and human well-being. The core zones of the REN include the Special area of conservation which are designated zones along the Severn Estuary. There is a	

<u>freshwater and terrestrial habitats</u>		strong interdependence between these NATURA 2000 sites and the Gwent Levels.	
Severn Estuary Conservation Advice Package for the European Marine Site (The Severn Estuary / Môr Hafren) Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA)	The ASERA Management Scheme provides a mechanism for Relevant Authorities to set the framework within which their activities will be managed to achieve the nature conservation objectives of the site. It considers whether activities are causing adverse effects and, if so, how such activities can be regulated by Relevant Authorities to prevent damage to the designated features of the European Marine Site.	The Severn Estuary Conservation Advice Package is critical for managing the Gwent Levels as it sets statutory obligations under the Habitats Regulations. The estuary's SAC, SPA and Ramsar designations require local planning and land management to avoid adverse impacts on its integrity. For the Gwent Levels, this means maintaining hydrology through reens, enhancing habitat connectivity and biodiversity, and integrating nature recovery into development decisions.	
South East Wales Area Statement Gwent Levels Landscape Profile <u>Statement Link</u>	Identifies the key landscape profiles of the Gwent Levels, one of which is coastal and marine.	Build resilience of intertidal habitats.	

THEME 7: Climate Change			
Natural Resource Wales (2024) State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) Interim Report	An assessment of the extent to which Wales is achieving the SMNR. The report focuses on the main challenges to our natural resources, which are nature loss, climate change, and pollution and waste.	Areas of action to build resilience to climate risks include adapting nature and the rural economy and protecting seas and coasts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resilience to climate change by tackling the nature and climate emergencies together. Improving the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels will maximise the ability to protect, prevent and reduce climate impact with a focus on connecting and restoring natural habitats, flood risk management, protecting carbon stores and exploring renewable energy opportunities.
Nature Positive 2030 Evidence Report by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.	Identifies how the UK can succeed in achieving its commitments in response to biodiversity loss. Most notably through the Leaders' Pledge for Nature launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020, and the 30by30 commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030. These commitments need to be considered whilst	Of the nine changes that can be delivered rapidly with high impacts on addressing climate change, the guidance should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in habitat restoration and creation to strengthen nature networks that deliver for biodiversity and climate change • Deploy nature-based solutions • Adopt targets to become nature positive and 	

	<p>ensuring that nature recovery plays its critical role in achieving net zero.</p>	<p>tackle the crises of biodiversity loss and climate change together.</p>	
<p>General comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change: United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 22 August 2023</p>	<p>General Comment No. 26 (2023) affirms children's right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment under the UNCRC. It calls on states to prevent environmental harm, adopt precautionary measures, and integrate child-sensitive approaches into climate and biodiversity policies. Key principles include participation, access to information, and intergenerational equity. The guidance urges urgent action on climate change, pollution, and ecosystem protection, framing environmental health as essential for fulfilling all children's rights.</p>	<p>Policies for the Gwent Levels should embed children's right to a healthy environment, prioritising climate resilience, biodiversity, and pollution prevention. They must adopt a precautionary approach, ensure intergenerational equity, and provide opportunities for young people to participate in decisions.</p>	

<p>The UNCRC: Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 22 June 2023</p>	<p>The UNCRC Concluding Observations (2023) urge stronger protection of children's rights, highlighting climate action, poverty reduction, education access, mental health support, and justice reform. It calls for inclusive policies, safeguarding vulnerable groups, and ensuring meaningful child participation to promote equality, well-being, and resilience in the face of global challenges.</p>	<p>The Concluding observations urge the UK to strengthen protections for children's rights across key areas. It calls for urgent action on climate change and environmental harm, ensuring children's right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Recommendations include reducing child poverty, improving access to inclusive education, and expanding mental health services. The report stresses safeguarding vulnerable groups, reforming child justice systems, and ending harmful practices. It also emphasises meaningful child participation in decisions affecting them.</p>	
<p>Welsh Government (2022) Biodiversity Deep Dive: Recommendations</p>	<p>Develops a set of collective actions we can take to support meaningful delivery of the '30 by 30' goal to protect at least 30% of the land and 30% of the sea by 2030.</p>	<p>Strive to tackle the nature and climate change emergencies together and identify actions individuals and organisations can take.</p>	

	<p>One of the Objectives is to build a strong foundation for future delivery through capacity building, behaviour change, awareness raising and skills development. Under this Objective immediate action is required by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including actions to tackle the nature emergency into the overall climate change behaviour change programme, and • Improve education and awareness of the nature and climate emergency and actions individuals and organisations can take. 		
Welsh Government Future Trends Report: 2021	A report to assist Welsh citizens and policy makers in understanding the big trends and drivers that are likely to shape Wales's future.	Increase resilience to climate change.	

	<p>One of the four big drivers of change is Planetary Health and Limits with global temperatures steadily increasing linked to a rise in climate related disasters and a reduction in global crop yields.</p>		
Technical Advice Note 15 : Development, flooding and coastal erosion 2025	<p>Climate change increases the risk and severity of flooding for communities. Climate change should therefore be fully considered when developing flood risk management strategies.</p>	<p>There should be full consideration on the impacts of climate change on the Gwent Levels as a factor when it comes to flood risk management and increasing ecosystem resilience.</p>	
Welsh Government (2019) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: guide	<p>The guide sets out what the SMNR is, why it is important and the actions we can take to develop sustainably.</p>	<p>Support climate change adaptation and mitigation by protecting carbon stores in soil and trees, promoting GI and increased biomass from GI for renewable energy opportunities.</p>	
Welsh Government (2017) Natural Resources Policy	<p>The focus of the policy is on improving the way we manage our natural resources. The policy, amongst other things,</p>	<p>Support climate change adaptation and mitigation, and flood risk management.</p>	

	<p>identifies three national priorities for the management of our natural resources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivering nature-based solutions. 		
Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024 (Welsh Government)	<p>Nature-based solutions are important to alleviating flood risk, natural habitat restoration and the protection of carbon stores such as peatlands and wetlands as part of climate change adaptation. This requires collaboration from the Welsh Government, NRW and other coastal groups to increase resilience to climate change.</p>	<p>Highlights the importance of collaboration on nature-based solutions for flood risk management, protection of wetlands and peatlands, and restoring natural habitats which increase resilience to climate change.</p>	
Programme for Government – Update	<p>A commitment to deliver on Climate Change by, amongst other things, supporting restoration of seagrass and saltmarsh habitats along our coastline and supporting communities to create</p>	<p>Restore seagrass and saltmarsh habitats and create new woodlands and connecting habitats.</p>	

	<p>new woodlands and connect habitat areas.</p>		
Prosperity for All: A Climate conscious Wales	<p>Climate change poses significant risks to communities, infrastructure, businesses, agriculture, forestry, water supplies, health and well-being and services due to increased flooding, coastal erosion and extreme weather. Research and actions towards building national resilience to climate change should be nationally prioritised.</p>	<p>Flooding due to increased climate change presents risks to national services and industries. The Welsh Government is taking action towards building resilience to climate change and therefore this should include the Gwent Levels as an area at risk to sea-level rise due to climate change.</p>	
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	<p>National planning policy aims to ensure the countryside is resilient to the impacts of climate change and plays a role in reducing the causes of climate change through the protection of carbon sinks and as a sustainable energy source.</p>	<p>Improve resilience to climate change.</p>	

Environment (Wales) Act 2016	Contains a duty to set targets for reducing greenhouse emissions and also to set carbon budgets. This will help to accelerate progress against headline targets and will help build resilience in our environment to extreme weather events.	Build resilience into the environment.	
Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Policy 9)	The national development plan setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040. Deliver the requirements of Policy 9 to create ecological networks for their importance for adaptation to climate change.	Safeguard, create and enhance ecological networks.	
South East Wales Area Statement (Natural Resource Wales) <u>Statement Link</u>	The statement has been undertaken at a landscape scale by considering where and why we want to build ecosystem resilience in terms of the special and	Improve health and resilience of our ecosystems to maximise their ability to protect, prevent and reduce climate impact across Gwent.	

	<p>distinctive landscape area.</p> <p>One of the four themes is to get climate ready.</p>	<p>Increase understanding of the climate change risks and opportunities across Gwent.</p> <p>Increase capacity of organisations and individuals, ensuring that they have the tools, skills and guidance necessary to allow them to adapt to the impacts of climate change across Gwent.</p>	
<p>Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network (REN) core zones and nature recovery zones (2025)</p> <p>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</p>	<p>The purpose of designing and mapping the RENs was to contribute spatial evidence to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape</p>	<p>Safeguard, create and enhance ecological networks to ensure that they have resilience to climate change.</p>	

Severn Estuary Coastal Group (2017) Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan	<p>The SMP2 has been developed taking account of predicted changes to sea level rise caused by climate change. The SMP2 is an important tool / guide to make sure that future land use on the shoreline does not put future generations at risk or impose unmanageable financial burdens in terms of coastal defence.</p>	<p>Proposing a shared strategic approach for managing the coastline sustainably from coastal flooding and erosion risks into the long-term (to 2105). The SMP aims to reduce the risks to people, the developed, historic and natural environments over the next century.</p>	
Gwent Levels Management Plan (Living Levels Partnership, 2022)	<p>The plan reviews the achievements of the LLP, assesses the policy contexts that are relevant to the management of the Gwent Levels, summarises the key features of the Levels landscape and provides a vision and a set of aims for its management. Finally, it sets out an action plan of objectives and actions in a five-year programme, identifying lead agencies, resources and risks.</p>	<p>Understand the importance and urgency of adapting to climate change.</p>	

	<p>One of the aims the guidance can help drive is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Gwent Levels supports healthy, resilient ecosystems, its footprint is carbon negative and people understand the importance and urgency of preparing for and adapting to climate change. 		
--	---	--	--

THEME 8: Water

Welsh Government Future Trends Report: 2021	<p>A report to assist Welsh citizens and policy makers in understanding the big trends and drivers that are likely to shape Wales's future.</p> <p>One of the four big drivers of change is Planetary Health and Limits with nitrogen-</p>	<p>Improvements to water quality with a reduction in agricultural nitrogen emissions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle diffuse and acute water pollution and improve water quality of the traditional drainage network on the Gwent Levels supported by sustainable farming methods.
---	--	---	--

	<p>based pollution from agriculture severely damaging biodiversity and ecosystems, leading to eutrophication and acidification of waterways and soils.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve land and water management of the traditional drainage systems on the Gwent Levels to reduce flood risk and improve aquatic habitats.
Nature Positive 2030 Evidence Report by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.	<p>Identifies how the UK can succeed in achieving its commitments in response to biodiversity loss. Most notably through the Leaders' Pledge for Nature launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020, and the 30by30 commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030. These commitments need to be considered whilst ensuring that nature recovery plays its critical role in achieving net zero.</p>	<p>Of the nine changes that can be delivered rapidly with high impacts on addressing water pollution, the guidance should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling atmospheric and diffuse water pollution, especially from nitrogen and ammonia. 	
Welsh Government (2022) Biodiversity	<p>Develops a set of collective actions we can take to support</p>	<p>Improve freshwater habitats.</p>	

<p>Deep Dive: Recommendations</p>	<p>meaningful delivery of the '30 by 30' goal to protect at least 30% of the land and 30% of the sea by 2030.</p> <p>One of the Objectives is to Continue to reform land and marine management and planning (including spatial) to deliver more for both protected sites and wider land / seascapes. Under this Objective immediate action is required by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing the Sustainable Farming Scheme to ensure farmers are rewarded both for providing appropriate management of protected sites and for actions that improve the prospects of nature in the wider landscape and 		
---------------------------------------	---	--	--

	freshwater habitats.		
Welsh Government (2019) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: guide	The guide sets out what the SMNR is, why it is important and the actions we can take to develop sustainably.	Improve land and water management, such as natural flood management as well as water quality and continued productivity by, for example, streamside corridors and strategic hedge planting on farms.	
Welsh Government (2017) Natural Resources Policy	The focus of the policy is on improving the way we manage our natural resources. The policy, amongst other things, identifies three national priorities for the management of our natural resources, one of which is: 1. Delivering nature-based solutions.	Improve water quality and supply. Improve water treatment systems, such as reed beds. Improve land and water management.	
Welsh Government (2024) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 (Chapter 6)	National planning policy to create distinctive and natural places that, amongst other things: • Protects water features and	Protect water features and ensure sustainable water management.	

	<p>fosters sustainable water management as key attributes of attractive and resilient places.</p>		
Programme for Government - Update	<p>A commitment to deliver on Climate Change by, amongst other things, beginning to designate Wales's inland waters for recreation and deliver nature-based flood management in all major river catchments to expand wetland and woodland habitats.</p>	<p>Maintain the area's natural flood management and wetlands and explore recreation opportunities linked to reens and ditches.</p>	
Natural Resource Wales (2024) State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) Interim Report	<p>An assessment of the extent to which Wales is achieving the SMNR. The report focuses on the main challenges to our natural resources, which are nature loss, climate change, and pollution and waste.</p>	<p>Help to tackle water pollution to be nature positive.</p>	
Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Policy 9)	<p>The national development plan setting the direction for</p>	<p>Safeguard areas that contribute towards the sustainability of key</p>	

	<p>development in Wales to 2040.</p> <p>Deliver the requirements of Policy 9 to create ecological networks, which provide key ecosystem services.</p>	<p>ecosystem services such as flood water regulation.</p>	
<p>South Central Area Statement (Natural Resource Wales)</p> <p><u>Statement Link</u></p>	<p>The statement sets out to address the legacies of the past along with the challenges and opportunities of the future, exploring ways we can work together to protect, value and embrace the natural environment while also putting it at the heart of the decision-making process.</p> <p>One of the five themes is working with water.</p>	<p>Maintaining, enhancing and restoring floodplains and hydrogeological systems to reduce flood risk and improve water quality and quantity.</p> <p>Increasing blue and GI in and around urban areas.</p> <p>Reducing the risk of flooding.</p>	
<p>Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient Ecological Network (REN) core zones and nature recovery zones (2025)</p>	<p>The purpose of designing and mapping the RENs was to contribute spatial evidence to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build</p>	<p>Water is fundamental to the biodiversity of the Gwent levels, reens, wetlands, grazing marches and the special areas of conservation along the coast are integral part reliant on good ecological</p>	

<p>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats)</p>	<p>ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape</p>	<p>networks being maintained with the terrestrial area of the Gwen Levels.</p>	
<p>Severn River Basin Management Plan 2021-2027</p>	<p>Describes the challenges that threaten the water environment and how these challenges can be managed and funded.</p> <p>Two of the overarching aims is that by 2027 pollution from rural areas is managed as well as changes to the natural flow and levels of water.</p>	<p>Help support a sustainable agricultural sector that protects the water environment.</p> <p>Appropriate new woodland creation and forestry management that benefits, amongst other things, the water environment.</p> <p>Encourage sustainable land use patterns in urban and rural environments that reduce runoff from rainfall including nature-based solutions.</p>	

<p>South East Wales Area Statement Gwent Levels Landscape Profile <u>Statement Link</u> <u>2018</u></p>	<p>Identifies the key landscape profiles of the Gwent Levels, one of which is water.</p>	<p>Build resilience across the entire reen and ditch network to improve quality of aquatic and buffer habitats and the ecosystem services they provide.</p>	
<p>Reading Agricultural Consultants (2022) Wetland Landscape Restoration and Maintenance in the Gwent Levels – Costings</p>	<p>This document sets out an analysis of likely costs to farm businesses associated with the application of the Welsh Government's policies regarding the SMNR with particular regard to: the restoration and management of surface water features.</p> <p>The report identifies the traditional drainage systems of the Levels is ineffective through years of neglect and advises, amongst other things, that support in the form of advice to be provided for farmers in the Levels in order that decision-making regarding</p>	<p>Support the management of traditional drainage systems on the Levels.</p>	

	wetland management is properly informed.		
Level Advice: Sustaining the Gwent Levels project (Living Levels Partnership, 2022)	This report sets out key management actions for SLM on the Gwent Levels. One of the key actions relates to water management.	<p>Support the key management of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffer strips of unmanaged grassland along the side of a reen to create additional foraging habitat and provide connectivity within the landscape • Reen and ditch management by keeping the reens open and flowing. 	
Reading Agricultural Consultants (2022) Sustaining the Gwent Levels Underdrainage and Farming: Current State – Future Management	<p>The report sets out the relationships between agriculture and water management in the Gwent Levels and the likely impact of changes in water management on farm businesses and the local environment.</p> <p>The report identifies that the direction of farming</p>	<p>Improve understanding of the traditional drainage network and recognition of limits will encourage the implementation of sustainable, nature-friendly farming and diversification into low intensity agriculture and the growing of crops better suited to the local environment.</p>	

	<p>practices in the Levels will have to take account of and enhance the traditional drainage network in order to protect the biodiversity it supports and conserve historical landscape features to improve the area's resilience and sustain it for the benefit of future generations.</p>		
<p>Rigare Ltd (2022) Ecohydrological Studies of the Gwent Levels</p>	<p>Conception of this study was driven by the RSPB and NRW having concerns about the possible hydrological and ecohydrological effects of draining fields using under-drains, and associated infrastructure, within the Gwent Levels, rather than the traditional field drainage practices.</p> <p>The primary conclusion of this study is that installation of under-drainage within the Gwent Levels would have no direct effect on</p>	<p>Understand the limitations of under-drainage linked to agricultural intensification and indirect impacts on SSSIs.</p> <p>Note the impacts of climate change on the hydrological management of the Levels.</p>	

	<p>the hydrological supporting conditions of the ditch SSSI interest features when compared with the case of traditionally drained fields. However, there will be indirect effects on the SSSI as the loss of standing water in grips (as a result of under-drainage) will impact functional linkages, supporting habitat and lead to over grazing.</p>		
--	---	--	--

THEME 9: Health and Well-being

<p>South East Wales Area Statement (Natural Resource Wales)</p> <p>Statement Link</p>	<p>The statement has been undertaken at a landscape scale by considering where and why we want to build ecosystem resilience in terms of the special and distinctive landscape area.</p>	<p>Nature based solutions to health inequalities delivered across Gwent.</p> <p>Increase understanding of how nature-based solutions can deliver better health and well-being outcomes across Gwent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that our natural resources promote nature-based solutions to improve health and well-being by promoting active travel links, educational
---	--	--	---

	<p>One of the four themes is to be healthy, active and connected.</p>	<p>Increase capacity of organisations and individuals, ensuring that they have the skills, tools and knowledge necessary to deliver nature-based solutions for health and well-being for people across Gwent.</p>	<p>opportunities and markets for farm produce from the Gwent Levels.</p>
<p>South Central Area Statement (Natura Resource Wales)</p> <p><u>Statement Link</u></p>	<p>The statement sets out to address the legacies of the past along with the challenges and opportunities of the future, exploring ways we can work together to protect, value and embrace the natural environment while also putting it at the heart of the decision-making process.</p> <p>Two of the five themes are to connect people with nature and improving our health.</p>	<p>Ensure that our natural resources, and the benefits they provide for well-being and economic prosperity, are valued in decision-making.</p> <p>All public bodies demonstrating recognition of the opportunities that our natural resources provide for well-being in their own plans and strategies.</p> <p>Increase GI in and around urban localities.</p> <p>Increase canopy cover and well-located woodland to improve the service value of ecosystems.</p>	
<p>Gwent Levels. Mapping Resilient</p>	<p>The Gwent Levels REN is a joint South East Area</p>	<p>The purpose of designing and mapping the RENs was to</p>	

<p>Ecological Network core zones and nature recovery zones (2025)</p> <p>Gwent Levels - Resilient Ecological Networks DataMapWales</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales / Publications, evidence and research on freshwater and terrestrial habitats</p>	<p>Statement and South Central Area Statement product and contributes to describing the priorities, risks and opportunities for SMNR. It is a technical document that maps RENs in the Gwent levels and provides an evidence base to consolidate natural resource.</p>	<p>contribute spatial evidence to influence land management objectives and actions, to maintain and build ecosystem resilience in the Gwent Levels landscape. Safeguarding and creating opportunities for GI will have benefits for the health and well-being of its communities and that of adjoining communities.</p>	
<p>Cynidr Consulting (2022) Sustaining the Gwent Levels Sustainable Management Scheme: Summary Report</p>	<p>This report describes the Sustaining the Gwent Levels Sustainable Management Scheme project, summarising its activities and outputs, and making recommendations for future actions and policy directions.</p>	<p>To support one of the recommendations to engage with the wider community to support projects that work for Levels' farmers and residents, as well as their urban neighbours, including markets for farm produce, improvements to transport links (i.e. develop safer cycle and foot paths, particularly close to and connecting with</p>	

		built-up areas), educational and health opportunities.	
--	--	--	--

THEME 10: Air

South Central Area Statement (Natural Resource Wales) <u>Statement Link</u>	<p>The statement sets out to address the legacies of the past along with the challenges and opportunities of the future, exploring ways we can work together to protect, value and embrace the natural environment while also putting it at the heart of the decision-making process.</p> <p>One of the five themes is to improve air quality.</p>	<p>Enhance the resilience of ecosystems to allow NRW and partners to deliver nature-based solutions that benefit our air quality.</p> <p>Nature-based solutions include enhanced canopy cover and strategically placed woodland, together with an increase in GI that covers a wide range of natural and semi-natural features, spaces, rivers and lakes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels to deliver nature-based solutions that benefit air quality by supporting the management and provision of woodland and green and blue infrastructure.
--	--	---	---

THEME 11: Population

Cardiff Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Deposit (2025)	A policy document that allocates land for development, designates areas for protection and contains policies against which future planning	The plan projects an increase in population by 39,742 persons (or +10.7%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the impacts and needs of this potential increase in population within these authorities on
--	--	--	---

	applications will be assessed.		the Gwent Levels landscape.
Monmouthshire Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Deposit (2024)	A policy document that allocates land for development, designates areas for protection and contains policies against which future planning applications will be assessed.	The plan projects an increase in younger and working age groups by 9,480 persons (or +10.9%).	
Newport Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Preferred Strategy (2023)	The Preferred Strategy forms the basis of the replacement LDP. The strategy, amongst other things, contains a Vision and Objectives and is underpinned by a number of strategic policies and proposed sites to deliver the strategy.	The plan projects an increase in population by 18,224 persons (or +11.6%).	

APPENDIX B

Full Baseline Data Including Issues, Opportunities and Data Gaps

This appendix provides the baseline economic, social, environmental and cultural data for the Gwent Levels that is being used to help undertake the following aspects of the ISA:

- Identify the current economic, social, environmental and cultural situation against which the likely effects of the Gwent Levels planning guidance will be predicted;
- Identify key trends and opportunities for the ISA and planning guidance to consider
- Develop the ISA Framework to use for the appraisal of the guidance
- Assist with the development of a monitoring framework to monitor the significant effects of the guidance on the economic, social, environmental and cultural characteristics of the Levels.

The appendix has been structured around each of the seven well-being goals. Within those goals, the baseline data has been sub-divided into a series of ISA topics.

Each section is structured as follows:

1. Well-being Goal and identification of relevant ISA topics within it
2. Overview of baseline conditions for each topic, which comprises:
 - The relevance of that topic to the planning guidance
 - Baseline conditions and trends structured around the data sets
 - Data gaps
3. Key issues (derived from the above) that are relevant to the planning guidance and potential opportunities for the guidance to address them, if appropriate.

Purpose of the Baseline Data Sets and limitations

The integrated sustainable appraisal needs a baseline to set expectations and a context for the assessment of the emerging planning guidance against the ISA objectives. The baseline assists us with predicting how the planning guidance could affect environmental, social, cultural and economic factors. By understanding the current state of each of these factors and it is possible to examine their likely evolution with and without the implementation of the guidance.

The baseline data sets used are specific facts and figures gathered by different organisations and statutory bodies, amongst others. These have been carefully selected to give an appropriate overview of baseline conditions and trends over time at a local authority and area-specific scale (i.e. the Gwent Levels landscape).

Many of the data sets were only available at local authority scale, and this had to be relied upon, in the absence of area specific data pertaining to the Gwent Levels that is collected consistently and at regular intervals. Some of the local authority data won't fully reflect the rural Gwent Levels landscape as it encompasses information and trends for heavily populated and urbanised areas in Cardiff and Newport, specifically.

Notwithstanding this, the data itself remains relevant because of the sphere of influence between the Gwent Levels and larger surrounding conurbations, for example, the health and well-being benefits that the Gwent Levels brings to adjoining urban communities.

It is intended that the baseline data can be used as factual yardsticks to support the appraisal of the likely effects of the planning guidance over time against each of the relevant ISA Framework Objectives.

Given the narrow focus of policy to be covered in the Gwent Levels guidance, that is being based only on Policy 9 of Future Wales, not all of the ISA topics have resulted in opportunities for the guidance to address.

Well-Being Goal: A Prosperous Wales

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.'

The data relates primarily to:

- Economy, employment and income
- Education.

The Economy, Employment and Income

Relevance to the guidance:

A strong local economy is important for securing people's wealth, jobs and incomes. This has a large contribution to the quality of life and the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of people and communities across the Gwent Levels.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is unlikely to play a key role in developing the local economy but may indirectly support the economy through, for example, increasing visitor footfall to the area.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Economic Activity

Cardiff is the main driver of the south Wales economy with employment levels above the Welsh (76.8%) and British (78.9%) averages in 2019 at 79.6%. Moving east across the landscape and into Newport the number of economically active decreases slightly to 77% (in 2019). More recent ONS figures (2021/22) identify that Monmouthshire has a higher percentage of its working age population economically active (79.9%) than most surrounding authorities (excluding Cardiff). Overall, the economic activity rates in the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape are high (*All figures obtained from the latest local authority Local Development Plan (LDP) Scoping Reports*).

Employment Sectors

In the more urbanised authorities of Cardiff and Newport the most dominant employment sectors are in finance, education and public administration accounting for + 27% of all employment. As a more rural authority within the Gwent Levels landscape, Monmouthshire has a significant shift in its employment sectors with 16.2% of all employment in wholesale and rental trade and more people employed in farming and forestry than south-east Wales and Wales as a whole. Overall, there is a mix of employment sectors in the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

On the Gwent Levels itself, around 6,000 hectares are farmed, and this supports around 125 individual farms. In this predominantly agricultural landscape, the land is mainly used for dairy, beef and sheep farming, some arable farming and occasional equestrian use. The grasslands of the Gwent Levels form one of the largest areas of grazing marsh in the United Kingdom and contribute a significant amount to food production, particularly in the form of dairy and meat.

Employment Land

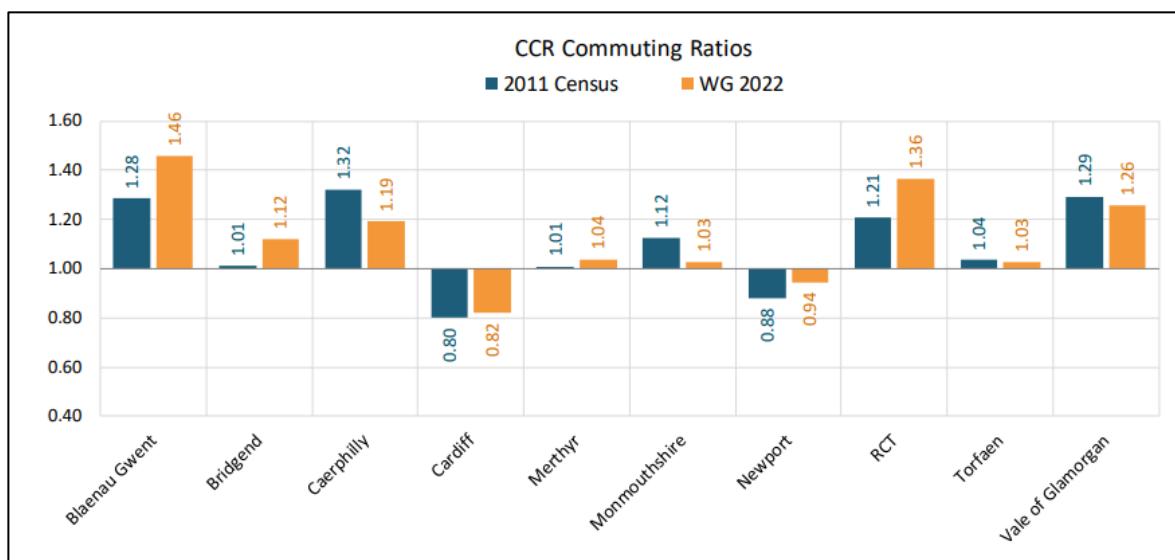
There has been a slow take-up of employment land within the main conurbations across the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape, which is typical of most other authorities across Wales. There has been pressure, particularly in Monmouthshire and Cardiff, for employment land to be used therefore for alternative uses, namely housing and retail. Notwithstanding this, employment land take-up since adoption of the LDP has been highest in Cardiff (80ha) and in Newport (50ha) in 2023 and 2024 respectively with take-up in the rural authority of Monmouthshire much lower at 6.64ha with little further development over the past 5-years to 2021/22. Overall, the take-up of employment land in the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels differs significantly

between the urban and more rural authority of Monmouthshire (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Commuting

Commuting ratios from 2011 and 2022 show that commuting flows, generally into the main urban areas, have decreased in Monmouthshire (from a ratio of 1.12 to 1.03) with Cardiff and Newport net importers of labour. When combined, the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape are net importers of labour at 0.73 in 2022, which is attributable to the removal of the Severn Bridge Tolls and opportunities associated with the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (*All figures obtained from Regional Assessment of Future Growth and Migration for the Cardiff Capital Region, May 2024*).

Figure B-1 Cardiff Capital Region Commuting Ratios



Source: Regional Assessment of Future Growth and Migration for the Cardiff Capital Region (May 2024)

Earnings

Average weekly earnings in authorities across the Gwent Levels landscape is around the Welsh average of £32,693. This average is exceeded in Monmouthshire only as the authority with the highest average gross annual wage (£34,012) of all the authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Tourism

Tourism and the visitor economy is an important sector for all authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape generating £244.99 million for Monmouthshire in 2019 and £396.56 million for Newport in 2017 pre-CV-19. Many of the visitor attractions gaining high footfall are located on the Gwent Levels and include the Wentlooge Levels, Tredegar House, Newport Wetlands and Caldicot and Chepstow Castles. Overall, the

stone churches, Norman castles, historic houses and network of wildlife and active travel routes are vitally important for each of the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Education

Relevance to the guidance:

Education is fundamental to developing people's skills for future employment and life in general. Improvements in educational attainment are directly linked to an increase in incomes, employment and economic growth with education and training required to grow and support the local economy across and around the Gwent Levels.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is unlikely to play a key role in improving educational attainment but may indirectly support this through, for example, volunteering opportunities, school trips and using the Levels landscape as a valuable learning resource for organised events and excursions.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Educational Attainment

In Monmouthshire, and particularly Cardiff, a higher percentage of the population is qualified to NVQ4 and above in these two authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape. The population of Cardiff consistently outperforms the Wales and UK averages partly because of its younger demographic and the existence of several universities providing a working age population with >4 NVQs at 46.4% in 2019. Conversely, Newport residents which span the Gwent Levels, generally have lower levels of higher qualifications when compared to the rest of Wales and a higher proportion of residents with no qualifications that is much higher than the Wales average. Overall, educational attainment varies significantly in each of the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Data Gaps:

There are no data gaps.

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them:

Key Issues

- Post CV-19 the tourism industry, and its associated economic benefits, have declined significantly across the Gwent Levels landscape.
- In line with national trends, the development of employment land has been low in authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape and because these three authorities are generally more viable (in land value) than most other authorities

across Wales, this has resulted in employment land being used for alternative uses, such as housing developments.

- Educational attainment, particularly in Newport, is much lower compared to the other authorities of Cardiff and Monmouthshire that span the Gwent Levels landscape.

Opportunities

- The guidance may seek to promote the tourism industry across the Gwent Levels landscape to increase the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of local communities
- The guidance may provide opportunities to assist with the promotion of economic resilience across the Gwent Levels landscape
- The guidance may seek to help improve local skills and knowledge by identifying the Gwent Levels landscape as a natural learning resource.

Well-Being Goal: A Resilient Wales

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change)'.

The data relates primarily to:

- Air quality
- Biodiversity, flora and fauna
- Climate and flood risk
- Water environment
- Geology and soils.

Air Quality

Relevance to the guidance:

Clean air is important for both human health and the health of the natural environment. Air pollution can directly affect vegetation or indirectly affect the wider environment through pollutant deposition. Deposition of pollutants can adversely affect the acid and nutrient status of soils and waters, which, in turn, can affect habitat integrity and the fauna and flora they support.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance may have a direct role in improving air quality across the region and may indirectly contribute to a reduction in air pollution by helping to minimise pollution from transport by encouraging more sustainable modes of travel and implementing landscape and environmental land-use policies.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Air Quality Management Areas

Newport has the highest number of 11 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in the Gwent Levels landscape, compared to 4 AQMA in Cardiff and 2 AQMA in Monmouthshire and are mainly in the urban areas but are likely to impact the adjoining rural areas of the Gwent Levels. AQMA are designated because air quality in those areas exceeds the legal Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels, particularly in the urban authorities of Cardiff and Newport with high vehicle emissions. Monitoring has shown that air quality has improved across the Levels but exceeds the thresholds in some AQMA in Monmouthshire (at Chepstow), Cardiff (in the City Centre, Llandaff, Ely Bridge and Stephenson Court) and Newport (at Caerleon, Caerphilly Road, Cefn Road and Chepstow Road). All AQMA are available to view on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website [List of Local Authorities with AQMA - DEFRA UK Air - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/list-of-local-authorities-with-aqmas) (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Relevance to the guidance:

Biodiversity refers to the variety of all living organisms and it can be seen at many levels, from diversity within and between species to the diversity of different ecosystems. High levels of diversity ensure flora (habitats) and fauna (species) are more resilient and able to cope with changes in the environment to support their long-term survival.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance will play a key role to ensure the protection and enhancement of biodiversity on marine and terrestrial habitats and its associated ecosystem services. This, in turn, will improve the economic and social health of the Levels and the quality of life for residents within and adjoining the Levels, whilst increasing its attraction as a place to live and visit.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Habitats of Principal Importance

The Gwent Levels contain several Section 7 habitats of principal importance for biodiversity in Wales, as defined by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. These habitats are crucial for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and support a range of species adapted to the unique environment of the Gwent Levels (*Information obtained from Living Levels Landscape Partnership documents*).

The key Section 7 habitats on the Gwent Levels are:

- A significant area of **grazing marsh**, which is one of the largest in Britain
- **Semi-improved grassland**, which provides valuable habitat for different species

- A network of **open water, wetlands and floodplains**, which support a variety of wetland species
- **Coastal habitats** with the sea wall stretching for 28km and the intertidal areas influenced by the Severn Estuary
- The **linear hedgerows and green lanes**, which provide connectivity and habitat for various species.
- The **intertidal saltmarsh and mudflaps** provides vital habitats for fish species and like eels; and vascular plants *Bupleurum tenuissimum*

Figure B-2 Example of a Habitat of Principal Importance on the Gwent Levels



Source: Sustainable Management Scheme Project, LLP

Species

There is a huge diversity of invertebrates on the Gwent Levels, with over 260 species of wetland invertebrates recorded. Several of these species are found nowhere else in Wales and include the soldier fly, the water beetle and the great silver beetle. The ditch banks and rough grassland of the Gwent Levels also provide a habitat for the shrill carder bee and other protected species including otter, water vole and grass snakes as well as the harvest mouse, dormouse and lapwing, all of which have declined on the Gwent Levels and elsewhere in Wales. There is also a plethora of other birds that breed on the Levels including redshank, avocet, water rail and rarities such as Cetti's warbler and cranes (*Information obtained from the Sustainable Management Scheme Project, Living Levels Landscape Partnership*).

The rare shrill carder bee, a feature of the SSSI currently has a strong hold on the Gwent Levels. It remains one of the most threatened species in the country with dramatic declines in its UK range and local extinctions. Ongoing assessment is needed but the numbers are currently thought to be stable in the Gwent Levels. In contrast the Shrill carder bee on the Somerset Levels where there is comparable habitat are in low numbers and has declined. Losses in other areas and the compaction of their range with climate change makes it especially important to maintain and increase the Gwent Levels populations.

Statutory Protected Sites

The estuarine environment of the Severn Estuary plays a vital role in shaping the Gwent Levels and is ecologically interdependent with them, serving as a supporting habitat in its own right. The following statutory protected sites apply to The Severn Estuary:

- **Special Protection Area (SPA)** classified as such for its rare and vulnerable birds
- **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** designated for its habitats and/or species of European importance
- **Ramsar site**, which are wetlands considered of international importance
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for its biological and geological features, underpinning the SAC and SPA designations.

Many features of estuary are supported by habitats outside the defined boundaries of these designations. The reens, ditches and grassland habitats of the Gwent Levels all have functional linkage providing supporting habitat for essential life cycle processes of some or all the features of the Severn Estuary SPA, SAC and SSSI. Birds of the estuary will use areas of land and coastal waters outside the boundaries of Estuary designated sites. The supporting habitats provided by the Gwent Levels for the Estuary designated features should be addressed in the planning guidance as functionally linked land, and the guidance should explore the opportunities through the planning system for their protection and enhancement.

The terrestrial environment of the Gwent Levels has the following statutory protected sites:

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)** on the River Usk and River Wye, which are fed by or affected by parts of the Gwent Levels
- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** to conserve and protect the best of the nation's wildlife, geological and physiographical heritage (see list of individual sites below).

The River Severn is designated as a SSSI and much of the Gwent Levels is covered by a further eight nationally designated SSSIs most of which have the same primary notifying features that include the reen and ditch habitat (freshwater drainage system), plant species, insects and other aquatic invertebrates and the shrill carder bee.

The eight terrestrial SSSIs on the Gwent Levels are:

1. Rumney and Peterstone SSSI
2. St Brides SSSI
3. Nash and Goldcliff SSSI
4. Whitson SSSI
5. Redwick and Llandevenny SSSI
6. Magor and Undy SSSI
7. Magor Marsh SSSI
8. Newport Wetlands SSSI

The reens and ditches across the 8 SSSI units support plant species and communities that are rare. There are a series of Performance Indicators (PIs) that are used to determine the condition of the Gwent Levels SSSIs features. The condition assessments of main reens and IDD reens are found to be in generally favourable condition. Conversely, field ditches condition (relating to shading by scrub and hedges) and the extent of water are unfavourably maintained or recovering.

Factors that affect the condition include scrub encroachment due to lack of appropriate management, habitat fragmentation from changing land practices, encroachment by development, loss of field ditches through creation of larger fields, hydrological disruption, and both point source and diffuse pollution.

These factors are impacting key species on the Levels, such as the shrill carder bee. NRW have been working to alter timings of reen and sea wall management, progress s16 land management agreements including late hay cuts and working with industrial sites in Gwent Levels to avoid removal of foraging habitat or herbicide use in key habitats. The Gwent Levels SSSIs are reduced in terms of favourable condition and flood storage, contributing to an overall loss of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, as well as contributing to reduced long-term climate resilience

Seven of the SSSIs on the Gwent Levels collectively support 54 species identified by NRW to be Species in Peril (see NRW's 2025 report: Terrestrial and Freshwater Species in Peril in Wales). The eight SSSI, Magor Marsh, support 50 of the identified Species in Peril. The majority of these are aquatic and semiaquatic insects associated with the reens. Given the development pressures facing the Gwent Levels, there are regular botanical and invertebrate surveys including assessments of the condition of the reen invertebrate assemblages (e.g. Boyce, 2024) to help monitor these species and any effects that further development may have.

Table B-1 Species in peril other than dune systems

Species in peril other than dune systems	
Group	Gwent Levels
Spider & allies	1
Insects	44
Birds	9
Total	54
Restricted to single locality	9

Source: Terrestrial and Freshwater Species in Peril in Wales (NRW 2025).

A IUCN threatened species included on the Species in Peril list which is restricted to just a single locality is that of the Grus. Habitat for Grus breeding (common cane breeding), is only found in one locality, in a peatland area located within the wetlands of the Gwent Levels.

- **National Nature Reserves** are sites designated to conserve and allow people to study their wildlife, habitats or geological features of special interest.

Part of the Gwent Levels is a designated National Nature Reserve at Newport Wetlands

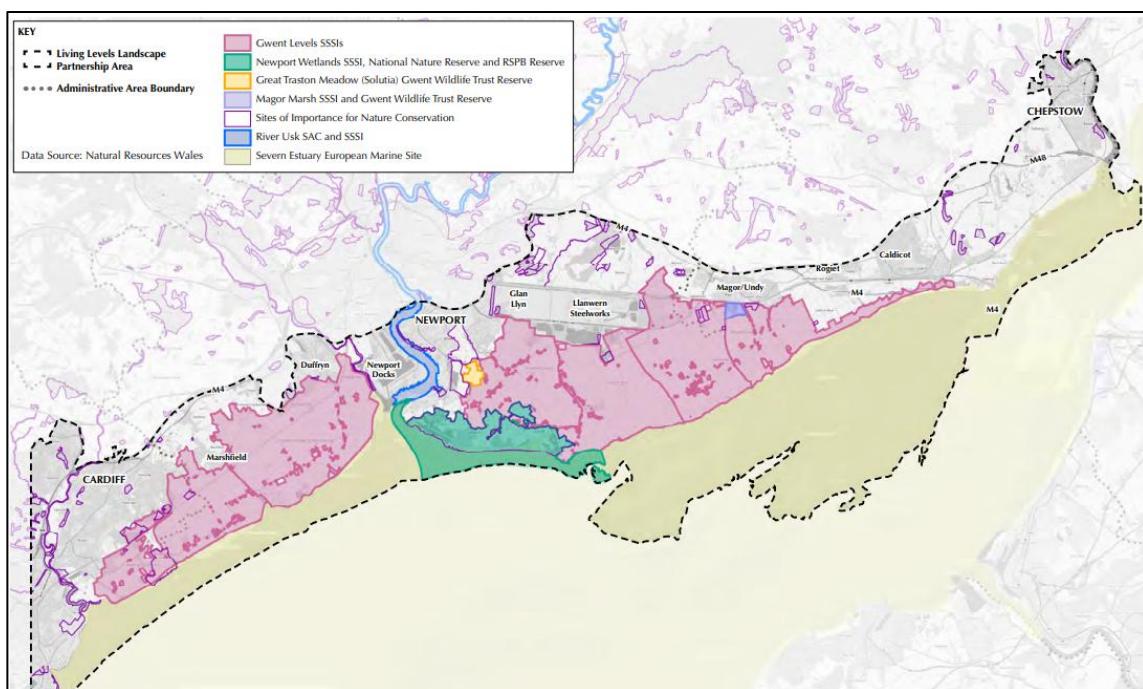
Non-statutory Protected Sites

The Gwent Levels also has the following non-statutory designations:

- **National Natural Resource Area (NNRA)** an area which includes the whole of the Gwent Levels and has been identified in Future Wales (Policy 9) for its nationally important ecological networks, biodiversity hotspots, ecosystem services and opportunities for habitat creation.
- **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)** which are a designation used by local planning authorities across Wales to identify areas of substantive ecological value that are important at a local level, with circa. 63 SINC's covering the Gwent Levels landscape

- **Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)**, whilst less in number, are found within and adjoining the Gwent Levels, most notably at Magor Marsh and Great Traston Meadows. The main habitat at Great Traston Meadows is grazing marshes, with associated ditches, reens and grips. Conversely, much of the habitat at Magor Marsh Nature Reserve is marshy and neutral grassland, swamp, standing water and wetland invertebrate assemblage.
- **Special Landscape Areas (SLAs)** which are recognised landscapes of scenic, cultural or ecological value and cover parts of the Levels identified in Local Authority development plans

Figure B-3 Some of the Ecological Designations on the Gwent Levels



Source: Gwent Levels Landscape Character Assessment, April 2017

Biodiversity Pressures

The Gwent Levels faces a range of environmental pressures that threaten the area's ecology and biodiversity. Some of those key pressures include:

- **Diffuse and point source water pollution:** This comes from a number of sources, which includes, but is not limited to, agriculture, rural land management, built developments, development and industry and contributes to the degradation of water quality within the reen network, impacting aquatic habitats and species
- **Habitat fragmentation:** Is a result of development pressure and proposals, particularly for residential, employment and energy schemes on the Gwent Levels, which break up this historic landscape and reduces connectivity between supporting habitats and therefore negatively impacts and reduces ecosystem resilience. In particular, fragmentation, and the cumulative effects of this fragmentation across the

landscape, reduces appropriate and available habitat for key species like the Shrill Carder Bee and ground-nesting birds, such as Lapwings, Skylark, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Avocet and Bittern on the Levels. Ecosystem resilience relates to diversity, condition, extent and connectivity, all of which combine and contribute in various ways to the overall health and adaptability of any particular ecosystem.

Invasive non-native species

Non-native invasive species are mainly spread through hull fouling and ballast water from ships and boats, contaminated gear and clothing from recreational activities like angling, commercial operations and the movement of equipment or materials during habitat restoration. Marinas and ports are key hotspots because of frequent vessel traffic.

Climate and Flood Risk

Relevance to the guidance:

Flooding is one of the main outcomes by which the effects of climate change are experienced locally within the Gwent Levels. Flood risk, both in the present day and future, is a significant issue across Wales and includes coastal, fluvial and surface water flooding. It is predicted that climate change will result in increased sea levels, increased annual average temperatures, warmer wetter winters, hotter drier summers, and an increase in extreme weather events.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance should play a key role in helping to manage flood risk on the Levels and should support the Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan (SMP), to make sure that future land use on the shoreline does not put future generations at risk or impose unmanageable financial burdens. The guidance should recognise the significance of the outstanding historic landscape and the area's overall high nature conservation value, together with the fundamental role that water management plays in sustaining these interests.

Baseline conditions and trends:

The network of main rivers and reens is a very important part of the existing flood defences on the Gwent Levels, with the whole drainage system relying upon the 35km sea wall. The Gwent levels are reclaimed from Roman times, with much of the land below Mean High-Water Springs and so the Gwent Levels exist because of the sea defences. Seasonal and unseasonal flooding and drought, which has been impacted by climate change, present great challenges to agricultural productivity, species and habitats on the Levels, as well as people's homes and livelihoods. Indeed, flood risk management is fundamental to the existence of the Gwent Levels, its communities, freshwater habitats and key infrastructure, including the rail line to London, electricity infrastructure and the M4 motorway. The importance of this infrastructure to Wales and the need to maintain the sea defences to protect this infrastructure is significant.

Rising water levels (both tidal and fluvial) are threatening the roosts of waterfowl and waders causing the phenomena of 'coastal squeeze' whereby rising sea levels push natural coastal habitats toward the land, but man-made structures, such as the sea wall, block their path. With nowhere to go, habitats on the Gwent Levels intertidal zone are getting 'squeezed' and may shrink or disappear altogether with limited opportunities for a managed retreat of the coastline due to the sea wall and its 'Hold the Line' position as set out in the SMP, keeping the defence in its current location for the long-term up to 2105. That said, the Welsh Government and Natural Resource Wales (NRW) have compensatory mechanisms in place across Wales through the National Habitat Creation Programme to ensure that coastal habitat losses are offset through managed realignment or no active intervention to allow coastal habitats to migrate inland. (*All information obtained from the Gwent Levels Landscape Character Assessment, April 2017 and Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan, 2017*).

Water Environment

Relevance to the guidance:

Water is central to life and Wales relies on considerable quantities of good quality water to produce resources, transport goods, provide recreational benefits, as a drinking resource and to grow food.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance will play a key role in guiding decisions through the planning process relating to development on the Gwent Levels that may impact the area's water quality and quantity and distinctive landscape with its integrated network of waterways.

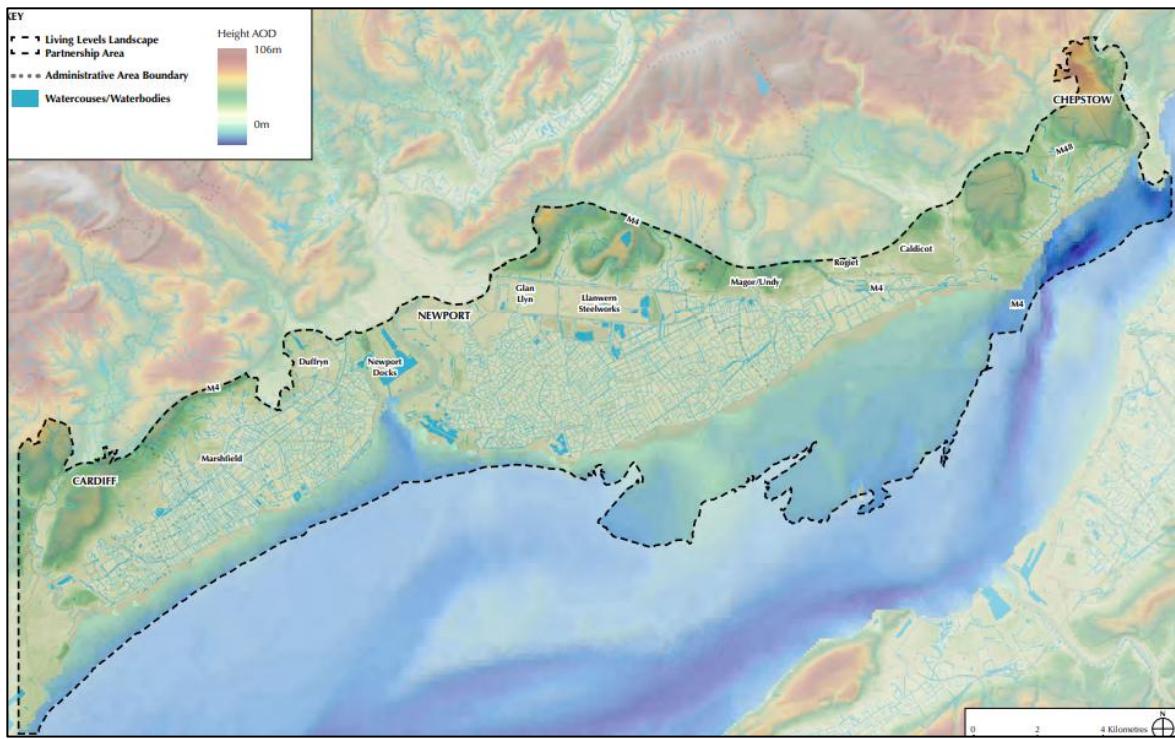
Baseline conditions and trends:

The unique and hand-crafted landscape of the Gwent Levels lies largely below the high-water mark. Its water management system still functions today as it was intended historically to drain the land and prevent flooding of important agricultural land and properties in and around the Levels in the winter and in maintaining water levels during the summer ('penning') to ensure good grass growth.

The Gwent Levels unique landscape and crucial water management systems include the:

1. **Seawall** between the major tidal rivers of Rhymney, Ebbw, Usk and Wye
2. **Major rivers**, which prevent flooding of the farmland
3. **Reens**, which are large manmade artificial ditches that drain the wetlands of water to protect communities that live there and the farmland
4. **Ditches**, which surround every field to control water flow and give the area its distinctive drainage pattern
5. **Grips**, which are shallow ditches within fields that speed up the drainage of rainwater into the ditches.

Figure B-4 Hydrology of the Gwent Levels



Source: Gwent Levels Landscape Character Assessment, April 2017

Generally, the water quality across the Levels has declined as a result of agricultural run-off, urban development and poor management of the drainage and water infrastructure. This has resulted in increased levels of acute and diffuse pollution, particularly from nutrients and sediment and more recently untreated sewage from illegal discharges.

Parts of the Gwent Levels drain into or have ability to impact the River Usk and River Wye Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Both SACs are failing to meet phosphorus targets. As a result, development on the Levels that discharges directly or indirectly into the River Usk or River Wye must use the NRW Nutrient Budget Calculator to demonstrate nutrient neutrality as any increase in phosphorous can severely threaten sensitive habitats and species within each SAC (*information obtained from Nutrient Budget Calculator Guidance, May 2025*).

Geology and Soils

Relevance to the guidance:

Wales has some of the most varied geology in the world and this in turn underpins the country's rich and diverse biodiversity, landscape and mineral resources.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance could potentially play a role in the protection and sustainable use of the area's geological diversity and soil resources, by identifying and safeguarding irreplaceable habitat, such as peat, to ensure it is not compromised by future development and changes in land use practices.

The geology of Gwent Levels is special and has implications for guidance and opportunities. The non-porous substrate and impermeable nature of the clay found in the SSSI means that the bacteria in the soil is not able to form part of any treatment to break down pollutants found in the effluent. Therefore, it is generally not possible to discharge to ground. Additionally, for discharging to surface water there are specific requirements to follow. Water quality guidelines have been drawn out specifically for the Gwent levels SSSI which provides the minimum standards needed to ensure no detriment to the features of SSSI (see <https://publicregister.naturalresources.wales/Search/Download?RecordId=163095>). The planning guidance could have positive impacts if it recognises that any further development on the Gwent Levels must demonstrate that it has fully considered and understood the current water quality of the area and that it can successfully assist with maintaining and/or restoring water quality to levels agreed with NRW.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Geological Conservation Review Sites

There are many Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites across Wales, including a small number of sites in and around the Gwent Levels. Such sites are identified and protected for their national and international importance for geology and geomorphology, which on the Levels is specific alluvial and peat deposits.

Agricultural Land Classification

Whilst the Gwent Levels produces notable volumes of meat and dairy produce, agricultural activity is dependent on the management of water levels and flooding. Most of the Levels is low quality agricultural land (Grade 4) due to the heavy textured subsoils and poor drainage. There are, however, pockets of higher quality agricultural land that support arable fields in drier parts of the landscape (*All information obtained from the Gwent Levels Landscape Character Assessment, April 2017*).

Carbon Store

The Gwent Levels is a significant carbon store because of the area's extensive wetlands, peat soil and rich vegetation. These features naturally sequester and retain carbon making the Levels important, at a national level, to help mitigate climate change.

Drainage

The drainage system in the Gwent Levels has been considerably modified and engineered over time. Climate change impacts will likely increase the need for further interventions such as pumping and upstream attenuation of water during high tide/stormy sea conditions when tidal outfalls may be submerged/locked and unable to freely discharge.

Data Gaps:

- There are gaps in knowledge in relation to rare and protected species present on the Gwent Levels including in relation to invertebrates, dormice and Shrill Carder Bees. Whilst there is UK wide focus on foraging shrill carder bees, there remains limited knowledge on their nests. Furthermore, rare aquatic invertebrates are very hard to detect and are transient across sites.
- There are also gaps in geology and habitat classification (particularly for grasslands).

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them:

Key Issues

- Air quality is poor in urban areas adjacent to the Gwent Levels because of high vehicle emissions.
- Key Section 7 habitat, as well as statutory, non-statutory designations and protected sites on the Gwent Levels, is at risk from development, fragmentation, flooding and the impacts of climate change particularly due to the effects of cumulative fragmentation of habitats caused by these factors. With habitats at risk, the unique range of species they support is also vulnerable to significant loss. Fragmentation poses a risk to the wider ecosystem resilience of the Gwent levels.
- The Gwent Levels and intertidal zone is vulnerable to flooding caused by rising sea levels from climate change, fluvial flooding and sub-optimal management of the area's drainage systems. The Gwent Levels' water levels are negatively impacted by water storage capacity during periods of tidal lock and water availability during prolonged dry periods
- Due to the inter-connectivity of the reen and field ditch network and associated grasslands the impacts to the condition and functionality of the hydrology of the SSSI (in terms of water quality as well as quantity) if changed can be far reaching.
- Non-native invasive species being caused by shipping activity, contaminated gear and clothing from recreational activities like angling, commercial operations and the movement of equipment or materials during habitat restoration.

Opportunities

- The guidance may have the potential to contribute towards improving air quality by encouraging active travel on PROW, promoted trails and cycle network routes across the Gwent Levels and between adjoining urban areas.
- The guidance should protect, and safeguard identified habitat, ecological networks and improve connectivity between supporting habitats to enhance biodiversity and provide strategic direction for their enhancement on the Gwent Levels.
- The guidance should support the protection and enhancement of statutory nature conservation designations including the features for which they were designated/notified and the qualifying features which underpin them, and protected species. The

guidance must support Gwent level adaptation to climate change and promote key ecosystem services.

- The Guidance should support ecosystem resilience (Diversity, Extent, Condition and Connectivity) and ecosystem functions provided across the Gwent Levels.
- The guidance should look to assist with reducing flood risk by managing the drainage system on the Gwent Levels.
- The guidance should ensure that land management and development proposals are informed by sound evidence which has fully considered the interconnectedness of the hydrological system across the Gwent Levels and any potential impact upon it.
- Look for opportunities through the guidance to help reduce the spread of invasive non-native species

Well-Being Goal: A Healthier Wales

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.'

The data relates primarily to:

- Human health
- Well-being.

Human Health and Well-being

Relevance to the guidance:

Better health is central to happiness and well-being and makes an important contribution to economic progress as healthier populations live longer and are more productive. The health and well-being of communities in and around the Gwent Levels is important to enable people across the region to achieve their potential and deliver a more equal society.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is likely to play a moderate and indirect role in supporting health and well-being. The guidance will support decisions through the planning process on our natural resources and ecological networks that will also likely encourage improvements in physical and mental health and promote healthy and active lifestyles outdoors.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Life Expectancy

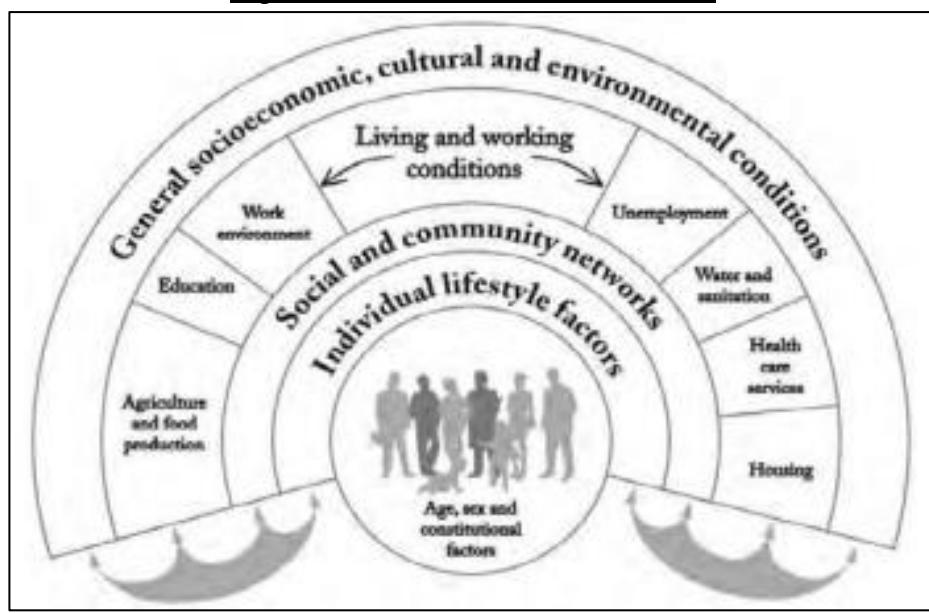
Life expectancy is influenced by a range of factors such as lifestyle, income, employment, access to services and the wider environment. In the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape, life expectancy is very similar to the Welsh average with around 78-years for males and 82-years for females in both Cardiff and Newport.

Life expectancy is higher in Monmouthshire and is above the Welsh average at 81-years for males and 84-years for females (2017/19). Overall, life expectancy is average or above average in the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

General Health

Health and health inequality is impacted by many different factors, which can include education, employment, access to services and greenspace and housing quality.

Figure B-5 Determinants of Health



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead

General health is in line with the Welsh average in the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape. Between 71 to 78% of residents in Monmouthshire and Newport report being in 'good' or 'very good' health in 2021/22 and 2011 respectively. Only a small proportion of residents in these two authorities report 'bad' or 'very bad' health at around 7% and this figure is broadly replicated in Cardiff in line with the Wales average. Overall, general health is in keeping with the Wales average in the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Amenity Space

The amount of amenity space differs between the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape. Cardiff has a general level of poor air quality and a lack of green spaces within its core. In Newport, there is a deficit of 21ha of open green space with a shortfall in 13 out of 20 electoral wards. Conversely, this deficiency does not appear to

be replicated in the more rural authority of Monmouthshire where most residents have access to the landscape and open countryside and with 425.6ha of amenity space specifically designated for protection and its amenity value. Overall, the amount of amenity space increases as you move east across authorities in the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

The Gwent Levels is host to many places of interest and has a significant amount of green infrastructure (GI) assets, which includes, but is not limited to, the thousands of hectares of interconnected reens, grasslands, hedgerows and PROW for walking and cycling that includes the Wales Coastal Path.

Figure B-6 Map of the Gwent Levels Amenity Space



Source: *Living Levels Partnership*

Data Gaps:

There are no data gaps.

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them:

Key Issues

- There is a significant lack of amenity and open green space for residents and local communities to access in the urbanised authorities west of the Gwent Levels landscape which is likely to be impacting on life expectancy, health and general well-being
- Fragmentation and climate change may put more pressure on local food system within the Gwent levels.

Opportunities

- The guidance may seek to identify, promote and safeguard recreational space, green space and blue space which form part of ecological networks within and adjoining the Gwent Levels landscape to ensure that they are accessible to all. Safeguarding these areas for their amenity value could in turn positively impact the health and the well-being of residents within and adjoining the Gwent Levels along with improving overall access to nature.

Well-Being Goal: A More Equal Wales

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances.'

The data relates primarily to:

- Population.

Population

Relevance to the guidance:

An equal society across the Gwent Levels landscape can help to ensure that public services and employment are fair and accessible to all and that the communities in and around the Gwent Levels are inclusive.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is unlikely to play a key role in contributing towards a more fair and inclusive society but may indirectly support this through, for example, improving equal opportunity to access open green spaces across the region and by

allowing communities to influence decisions affecting the Gwent Levels landscape through engagement and consultation on the draft guidance and other GI opportunities.

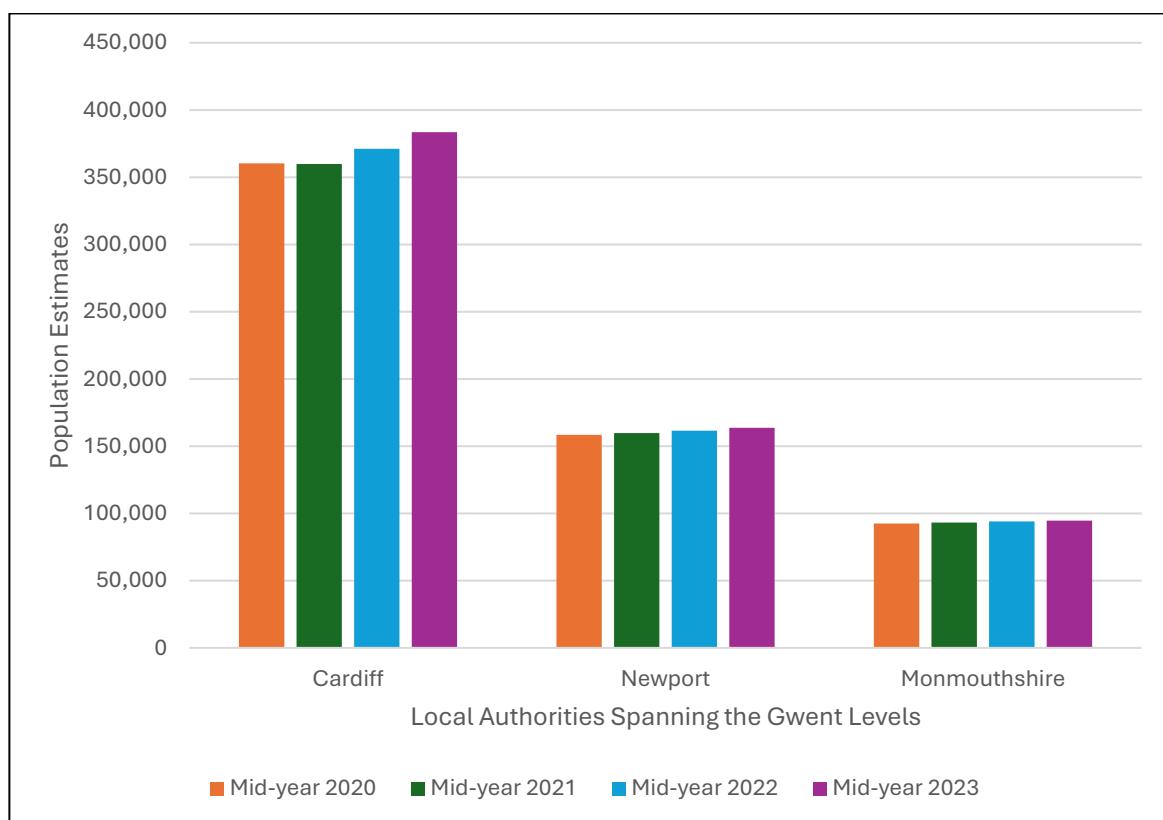
Baseline conditions and trends:

Population Estimates

Population estimates for the resident population in each of the three authorities that spans the Gwent Levels landscape identifies that Cardiff has approximately four times the resident population of rural Monmouthshire at 383,536 residents in June 2023.

Between 2020 and 2023, the population across all three authorities that span the Gwent Levels has grown, most notably in Cardiff by circa. 23,000 persons, with Cardiff one of the fastest-growing cities in the UK and growing faster than any other Welsh local authority area (*All figures obtained from Stats Wales*)

Figure B-7 Local Authority Population Estimates (2020-2023)

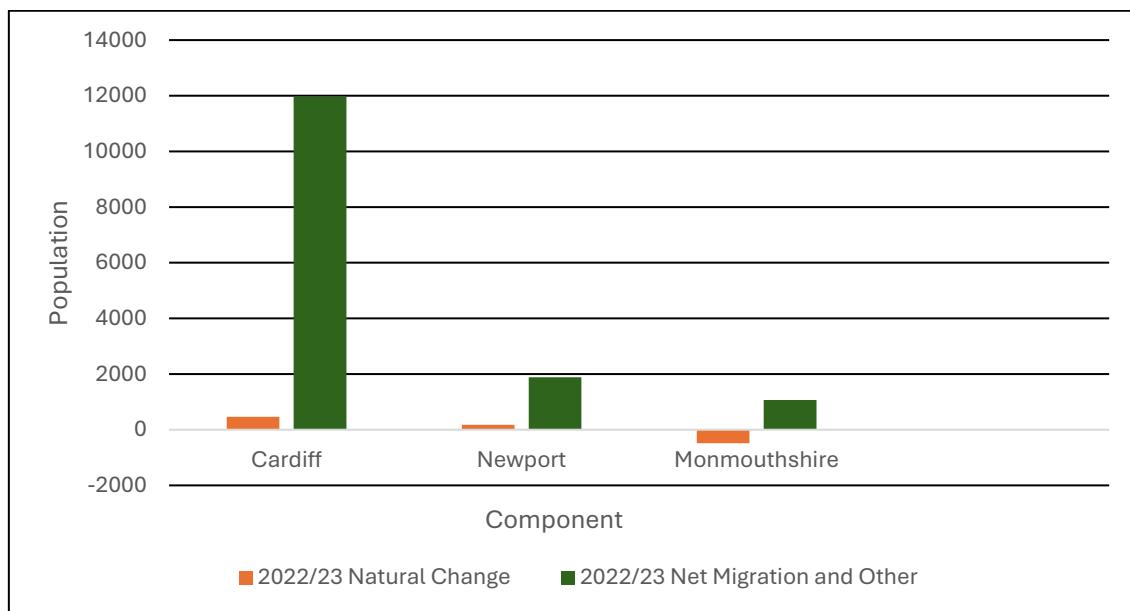


Source: Stats Wales

Components of Change

In all three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape net migration (inflow less outflow) is the biggest component of population change, particularly in Cardiff, where the population increased by 11,966 persons in 2022/23 through in-migration from other countries. Conversely, natural change in the population (births minus deaths) is a much smaller contributor to the population increase across all three authorities and especially in Monmouthshire, which saw more deaths than births (-482) in 2022/23 (*All figures obtained from Stats Wales*).

Figure B-8 Local Authority Components of Population Change (2022/23)

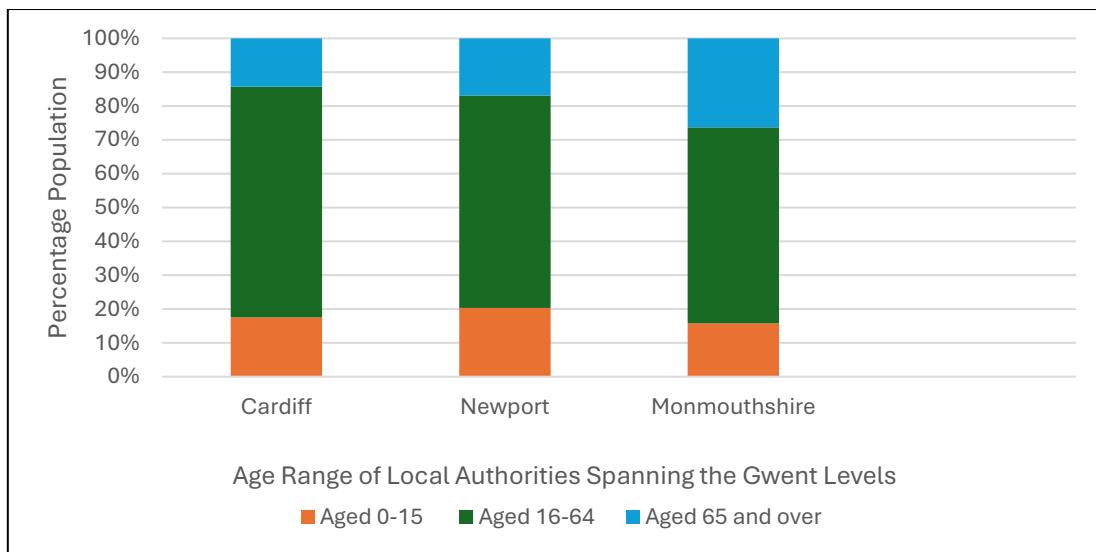


Source: *Stats Wales*

Age

The economically active population (aged 16-64 years) is the largest age group in each of the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape. This age group is the greatest in Cardiff and is attributable to (in part) its large student population. Across the Gwent Levels, Monmouthshire has a significantly higher proportion of older age groups (65+), and this is increasing more than the Welsh average (*All figures obtained from Stats Wales*).

Figure B-9 Age of the Population by Local Authority (2023)



Source: Stats Wales

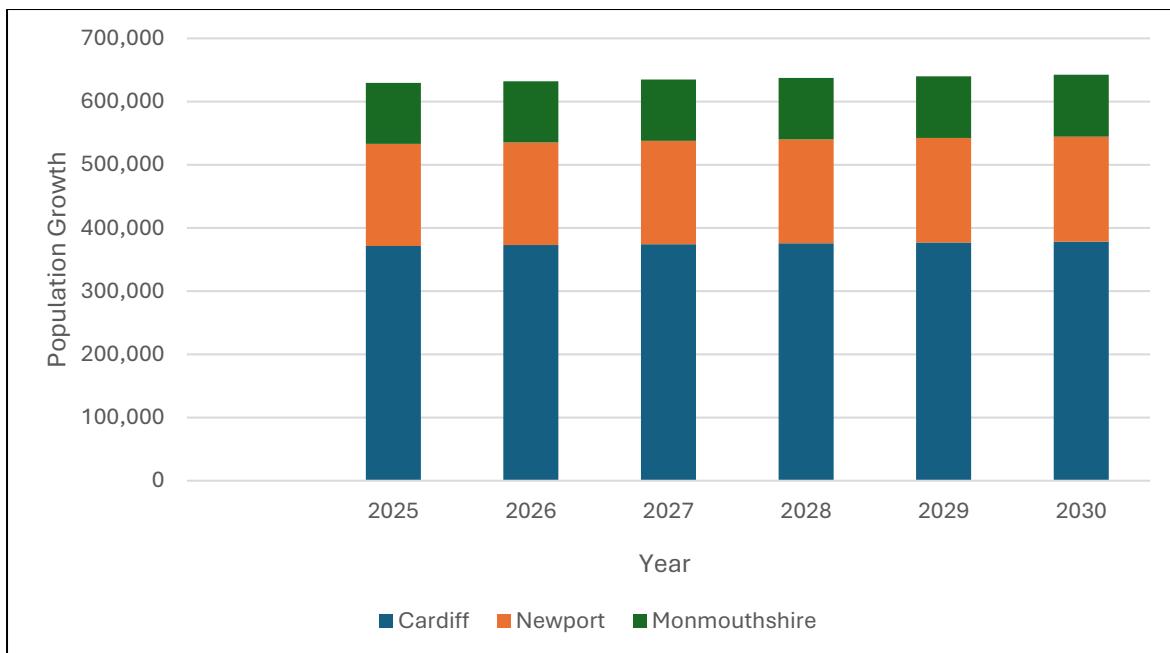
Ethnicity

Ethnic minority groups as a proportion of the population in each of the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape is greatest in Cardiff (18.5%) and Newport (13.2%). Both figures are much higher than the Welsh average (5.4%) making Cardiff and Newport the Welsh authorities with most Black, Asian and minority ethnic populations, relative to Monmouthshire and all other local authorities in Wales (*All figures obtained from local authority Scoping Reports*).

Population Projections

Over the next 5 years (2025-2030) the population is projected to grow in each of the three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape. This growth is anticipated to be greatest in Cardiff (+6,790 people) and least in Monmouthshire (+1,427 people) (*All figures obtained from Stats Wales*).

Figure B-10 Local Authority Principal Population Projections (2018-based)



Source: Stats Wales

Data Gaps:

There are no data gaps.

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them

Key Issues

- The local population in authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape is expected to continue to grow over the next 5 years which will also result in an increase to the ageing population 65 years and over.

Opportunities

- The guidance should seek to safeguard the Gwent Levels landscape as a 'green lung' in the increasingly urbanised and built-up areas of Cardiff and Newport.
- The guidance should seek to promote the status of the Gwent Levels landscape, and its associated benefits, that includes, but is not limited to, supporting older people's health, providing equality of opportunity for all ages and disabilities and improving social connections.

Well-Being Goal: A Wales of Cohesive Communities

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.'

The data relates primarily to:

- Deprivation
- Housing
- Crime
- Transport

Deprivation

Relevance to the guidance:

The creation of cohesive communities which are attractive, well-connected, safe and meet the needs of the resident population are vitally important.

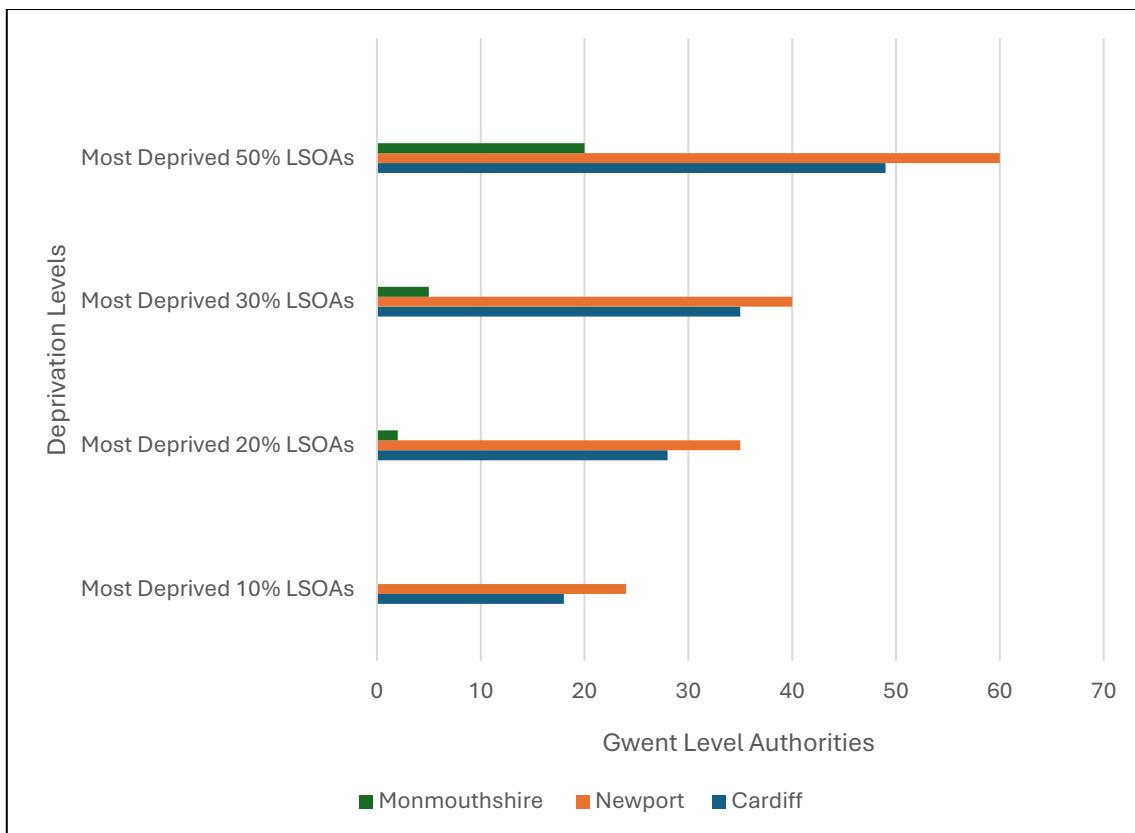
The Gwent Levels planning guidance is unlikely to play a key role in guiding decisions through the planning process relating to the development of space that can help to reduce deprivation, but may indirectly support this, by helping to deliver a more sustainable living environment for communities on the Gwent Levels.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the Welsh Government's official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales. It identifies areas with the highest concentrations of deprivation from 1 (most deprived) to 1,909 (least deprived) Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). In 2019, Newport was the local authority in the Gwent Levels landscape with the highest proportion of LSOAs in the most deprived (top 10%) deprivation category (at 24 LSOAs), which was also the highest in Wales. Conversely, none of the LSOAs in Monmouthshire were in the most deprived (top 10%) deprivation category, with Monmouthshire averaging much lower levels of deprivation when compared to other authorities in the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from Stats Wales*).

Figure B-11 Local Authority Deprivation Levels (2019)



Source: Stats Wales

Housing

Relevance to the guidance:

The development of housing to meet population needs is important for local communities and provides a strong link to support the local economy, wealth and well-being.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance may play a key role in guiding decisions through the planning process relating to the design and placemaking of housing developments to support the resilience of ecosystems on the Gwent Levels. This approach is likely to enhance the charm, individuality and desirability of the Levels as a place to live with new developments benefiting from key ecosystem services in the area.

Baseline conditions and trends:

House Prices

In 2022, the average house price in Monmouthshire was £398,859, which is significantly above the Welsh average (of £236,439) and the highest of all three authorities across the Gwent Levels, with the largest proportion of sales for detached dwellings. Cardiff has the second highest house price of all authorities spanning the Gwent Levels at £217,804, with the price of detached properties also growing rapidly. Newport is the

most affordable authority to live in the Gwent Levels with property prices averaging £201,627 in 2021 (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Housing Need

All authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape have a high affordable housing need, which is greatest in the City of Cardiff at 737 affordable units per annum (calculated using the 2018-based principal projection) over the LDP period to 2036. The second highest level of affordable housing need is in Newport, with the emerging evidence (in support of the LDP) identifying a need for 530 affordable units per annum (calculated using the 2018-based principal projection) The lowest level of affordable housing need across the Gwent Levels landscape is in Monmouthshire at 453 affordable units per annum over the first 5-years of the plan period falling to 82 affordable units per annum for the remaining 10-years of the LDP to 2033. (*All figures obtained from the respective Local Development Plan and its supporting evidence*).

Housing Completions

Historic housing completions have fluctuated considerably in all three authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape. Over a 10-year period (from circa. 2010-2020) average housing completions have been greatest across the Gwent Levels in the more urbanised City of Cardiff at 835 dwellings per annum and lowest in rural Monmouthshire at 311 dwellings per annum (*All figures obtained from the respective Local Development Plan and its supporting evidence*).

Table B-2 Local Authority Housing Completions

Gwent Levels Local Authorities	Housing Completions Per Annum (circa. 2010-2020)
Cardiff	835 dpa
Newport	638 dpa
Monmouthshire	311 dpa

Housing Projections

At the time of writing, the Welsh Government 2018-based projections are the latest projections to inform each authority's emerging revised LDP that spans the Gwent Levels landscape. All the authorities have proposed a level of housing growth that is above the 2018-based principal projections to help deliver on their housing need and economic ambitions. This could result in increasing pressure for new housing developments within and adjoining the Gwent Levels landscape (*All figures obtained from the respective Local Development Plan and its supporting evidence*)

Table B-3 Local Authority Housing Provision proposals in emerging Revised LDPs

Authority	Plan Period	Current Stage	Housing Provision
Cardiff	2021-2036	Deposit	26,400 homes
Newport	2021-2036	Preferred Strategy	10,530 homes
Monmouthshire	2018-2033	Deposit	6,210 homes
Total housing provision:			43,140 homes

Crime

Relevance to the guidance:

The sustaining and creation of cohesive communities which are attractive, well-connected, safe and meet the needs of the resident population are important.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is unlikely to play a key role in guiding decisions through the planning process relating to the development of space that can help to reduce crime, but may indirectly support this, by raising awareness of fly-tipping and littering on the Gwent Levels and by also encouraging placemaking to be at the heart of all development.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Incidences of Crime

Due to the dense urban areas that adjoin the Gwent Levels landscape, the incidences of crime are higher when compared to Wales as a whole and are mainly attributable to those urban areas than to the Gwent Levels themselves. This is most notable in Cardiff with 48,000 notifiable offences in 2019 with the highest proportion being violence and sexual offences (at 25%) and anti-social behaviour (at 19%). Newport has the second highest incidences of crimes reported across the authority with 19,800 crimes (averaging 1,650 cases each month) post 2021/22. Conversely, Monmouthshire has much lower crime rates with just 5,702 crimes recorded in 2021/22 with the highest proportion being violence against the person (at 38.9%) and theft offences (at 20.7%). On the Gwent Levels itself, the negative impacts from fly-tipping and littering are the main key issues in relation to incidences of crime (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Transport

Relevance to the guidance:

The development of good transport links within and between local communities is important for the freedom of movement between and within areas and is closely linked to supporting the local economy, wealth and well-being.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance may play a role in guiding decisions through the planning process relating to transportation. The guidance may assist with improving,

extending or creating opportunities for new active travel routes and PROW across the Gwent Levels landscape and linkages to and between adjoining urban settlements.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Traffic Volumes

Due to the dense urban areas that adjoin the Gwent Levels landscape, the volume of traffic, congestion and greenhouse gas emissions is high, particularly in Cardiff and Newport and despite both cities having generally good access to services, bus and rail links. Traffic growth hit its highest level in Cardiff in 2018 with over 1.8 billion vehicle km's recorded that year compared to 0.98 billion vehicle miles in Newport and 0.56 billion vehicle miles in Monmouthshire over the same period (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Travel to Work

There is a high level of commuting in and around the urban areas that adjoin the Gwent Levels landscape. Prior to the CV-19 pandemic, almost 100,000 people commuted into Cardiff every day with 80% travelling by car. The residents of Cardiff also undertook 190,000 commuter trips every day, of which circa. 30,000 trips (or 16%) were to work outside the city. This figure is far higher in Newport with almost 40% of residents commuting out of the city for work. In Monmouthshire, almost 20% of the economically active population travelled further than 30km to work by car, supported by its relative proximity to Newport, Bristol and Gloucestershire (*All figures obtained from the latest LDP Scoping Reports*).

Data Gaps

At the time of writing, there was no consistent and robust data on PROW and active travel routes in each authority area and how this is used for leisure and recreational purposes.

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them

Key Issues

- Fly-tipping and other forms of littering are major problems on the Gwent Levels and pose significant challenges to the environment and local communities. Litter is also a problem for the Severn Estuary
- Traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions are high in the authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape and is caused, for the most part, by high levels of commuting in and around south-east Wales, which may be impacting the Gwent Levels landscape.

Opportunities

- The guidance may identify and raise awareness of the environmental damage caused by littering and fly-tipping on the Gwent Levels to help authorities, local partners and residents tackle the issue.
- The guidance should seek to assist in maintaining and improving air quality in and around the Gwent Levels by enhancing the area's open green space and promoting non-car modes of transport, particularly safe active travel routes for walking and cycling.

Well-Being Goal: A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.'

The data relates primarily to:

- Welsh Language
- Landscape
- Cultural and heritage assets.

Welsh Language

Relevance to the guidance:

Reinforcing Welsh national identity by promoting the use of the Welsh language is important to maintain and enhance a vibrant culture in local communities across Wales.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is unlikely to play a key role in guiding decisions through the planning process relating to promoting the Welsh language, but may indirectly support this, by encouraging the provision of education opportunities through the medium of Welsh. This could be in relation to biodiversity and ecosystem services and through any additional bilingual signage generated in response to considerations undertaken in relation to the application of the guidance.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Welsh Language Speakers

For the authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape the level of Welsh speakers were 22.8% in Cardiff, 17.6% in Newport and 21.4% in Monmouthshire. All three local authorities are below the all-Wales average of 27.7%. (*data obtained from [Annual Population Survey, January 2025](#), Survey on 30 September 2024*)

Landscape

Relevance to the guidance:

Landscapes across Wales reflect our range of natural resources and ecosystems against the complexity of human influence and land-use decisions. Notably, the man-made environment of the Gwent Levels and its strong interrelationship with the seascape, provide many cultural benefits for both the terrestrial and marine environments.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is likely to play an important role in supporting and enhancing the character and quality of the landscape on the Gwent Levels to help create a strong sense of place and cultural identity with close links to the tourism industry.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Landscape Quality

LANDMAP is an all-Wales landscape resource where landscape characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded and evaluated. A brief overview of key features on the Gwent Levels under the LANDMAP aspect are as follows: (*All information obtained from the Gwent Levels Landscape Character Assessment, April 2017*)

Geological Landscape:

- The Gwent Levels is a distinctive topographic zone comprising of a low lying, flat and expansive coastal plain up to 6km wide that extends up to the Severn Estuary. The coastal plain comprises three discrete areas: the Wentlooge Level, the Caldicot Level and a third smaller area known as the Matheron Level.
- The northern edge of the Gwent Levels is marked by the boundary between the slightly higher ground in the north and the lower, flatter land on reclaimed estuarine alluvium to the south.
- The only surviving peat bog on the Levels is found on Caldicot Level south of Magor, although there are also some localised areas of peaty soils found across the back fen.
- An estimate that 11% of the saltmarsh habitat will be lost due to coastal squeeze by 2055

Historic Landscape:

- The Gwent Levels is an outstanding example of a landscape ‘hand-crafted’ by people, preserving clear evidence of distinctive patterns of settlement, enclosure and drainage systems and is recognised by its inclusion on the Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales.

- The area contains a wealth of archaeological and heritage assets of national importance, much within the waterlogged soils across the area.
- In addition to the distinctive and characteristic field patterns, other key surviving features of the historic landscape on the Gwent Levels are its:
 1. Water Management and Drainage System
 2. Access and Bridges
 3. Historic Settlement Patterns, Buildings and Structure
 4. Historic Orchards.

Cultural Landscape:

- Motorways, other major highways and railways dominate the northern fringes of the Levels landscape, providing both a means of rapid access to and bypass of the region.
- The key principle cultural forces for landscape change are:
 1. **Management of the drainage systems** as watercourses are vulnerable to neglect through lack of appropriate maintenance, changes in drainage and land use.
 2. **Management of flooding and adapting to climate change** because of rising water levels, both tidal and river (fluvial).
 3. **Changes in agricultural land management practices** to more intensive agricultural regimes, fragmentation of farm businesses and an increasing number of smallholders.
 4. **Expansion of settlements and new built development** is resulting in a considerable loss of the historic Gwent Levels to urban development leading to fundamental landscape change, fragmentation and dilution of character.
 5. **Infrastructure development and improvements**, which include industrial and renewable energy schemes, have left the Levels cut-off and isolated with significant landscape, biodiversity and visual impacts.

Landscape Habitats:

LANDMAP generally defines Landscape Habitats as the semi-natural habitats and vegetation cover that influence landscape and biological diversity, land cover and the way that land is used and enjoyed at a broad landscape-scale. An overview of Landscape Habitats in the Gwent Levels, identifying the special features of the extensive designated sites of European, national and local importance and value for wildlife has already been set out in detail in the Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna section above, under the section on the Well-Being Goal: A Resilient Wales.

Visual and Sensory:

- The Gwent Levels have many key visual and sensory qualities that give the area its unique sense of place and some of these are:
 1. Level topography
 2. Strong linearity and distinctive geometric pattern of enclosure, drainage, watercourses, lanes and historic route-ways
 3. Distinctive drainage pattern of canalised rivers, drains, reens and ditches
 4. The seawall
 5. The large assemblages of waterfowl and waders that visit the coastal mudflats and wetlands, and the vast flocks of starlings
 6. A sparse settlement pattern
 7. Vibrant cities and towns around the edge of the Levels reinforce its strong sense of tranquillity, remoteness and wildness away from human occupation in many places.

Marine Character Area

Marine Character Area (MCA) 29 comprises the Welsh part of the Severn Estuary, stretching from the national border with England to the western fringes of Barry. Some of the key characteristics found within the area of the Estuary in Welsh waters are the:

- Soft Triassic and Jurassic rocks exposed along the shore, creating a wide rocky intertidal area. Elsewhere the shore is defined by extensive tidal flats.
- Tidal flats, saltmarshes and the extensive wet grasslands that are of international importance for wintering waterfowl and migratory birds.
- Long history of coastal reclamation, embankments and ditches, notably the extensive Gwent and Wentlooge levels.
- Flat coastline backed by the Wales Coastal Path, affording long views into the Bristol Channel. Cars travelling along the M4 via the Severn Bridge also overlook the area.
- Views to major commercial, port and industrial development at Cardiff and Avonmouth, as well as the two road bridges, contrasting with the open, empty vistas characterising the Gwent Levels.

Leisure and Recreation

- There are many distinctive places and destinations, key gateways and primary access routes that provide opportunities for people to engage with, experience and appreciate the special qualities of the Gwent Levels landscape.
- The Gwent Levels landscape is used by local communities and visitors for a range of outdoor leisure and recreation activities, in particular walking, cycling and birdwatching. Facilities and destinations include promoted recreational

routes (such as the Wales Coastal Path), country parks (such as Tredegar House Country Park), nature reserves (such as Newport Wetlands), villages, Hendre Lake and the Transporter Bridge.

Cultural and Heritage Assets

Relevance to the guidance:

The historic environment comprises archaeological remains, structures and relict landscapes associated with past human activity. The Gwent Levels has many historic assets reflecting the area's long history of human occupation and this supports the area as an attractive place to live, as a tourist destination and is central to Welsh cultural identity.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is likely to play an important role in supporting the protection and enhancement of the area's historic environment and assets. New development on the Levels may directly and indirectly effect the historic environment, heritage assets and their settings.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Historic Landscape

The national importance of the Gwent Levels is recognised by its inclusion on the Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales as a Historic Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest, which includes the area's Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Redwick conservation area.

Historic Parks and Gardens

Whilst the Gwent Levels is identified as an area of Outstanding Historic Interest, it only has 4 formal historic parks and gardens. These parks and gardens include Tredegar House and Park, which is a well-known historic estate with beautiful gardens.

Listed Buildings

There are 37 (7 of which are Grade 1) statutory listed buildings on the Gwent Levels that are designated as being of special architectural or historic interest. There is also a considerable number of other historic buildings and structures that have been recorded on the Levels, but which are not included on the national statutory or local lists. These buildings range from farmhouses and farm buildings to mills, cottages, bridges and railway sidings.

Scheduled Monuments

There are 14 scheduled monuments on the Gwent Levels that are designated archaeological sites and monuments of national importance. These monuments include the Goldcliff moated house site, the Grangefield moated site and relict sea banks in Rumney and Undy.

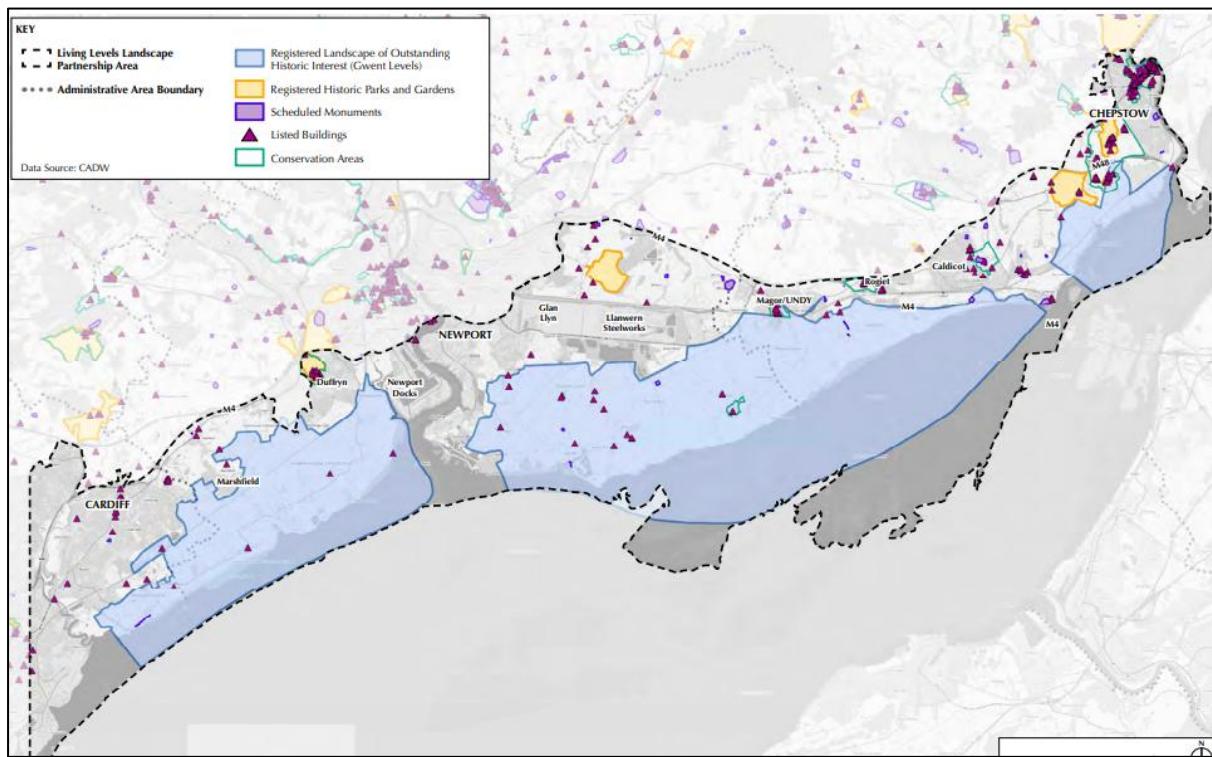
Conservation Areas

There are 4 conservation areas on the Gwent Levels that are designated as being of special architectural or historic interest. Redwick, the largest nucleated village on the Levels, is a designated Conservation Area. Conservation areas can also be found in parts of Chepstow, Mathern and Rogiet.

Place Names

The Gwent Levels landscape has its own local 'Levels Lingo' or vocabulary that provides an insight into the origins of the landscape over 1800 years ago and how it continues to be managed today. Some examples of the lingo include 'back-fen', 'gout', 'grips' and 'stank'.

Figure B-12 Designated Heritage Assets on the Gwent Levels



Source: *Gwent Levels Landscape Character Assessment, April 2017*

Data Gaps:

There are no data gaps.

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them

Key Issues

- New urban development and infrastructure schemes on the Gwent Levels are significantly impacting the area's historic landscape, ecological designations and visual and sensory qualities, particularly the area's strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness.
- The distinctive landscape features of drainage ditches and reens on the Gwent Levels is vulnerable through lack of appropriate management and maintenance, changes in drainage, climate change/ extreme weather, development pressures and land use changes and practices.
- Rising sea levels and seasonal and unseasonal flooding linked to climate change is resulting in 'coastal squeeze', challenges in agricultural productivity and is a risk to homes and livelihoods. An estimate that 11% of the saltmarsh habitat will be lost due to coastal squeeze by 2055
- The activities of the agricultural sector are contributing to changing the Gwent Levels landscape resulting in more intensive agricultural practices and overgrazing on the saltmarsh, increased flood risk (through a lack of ditch management) and reduced water quality

Opportunities

- The guidance should identify opportunities to guide and control new development proposals on the Gwent Levels to help safeguard the area's historic and landscape qualities, promote the Welsh language and protect the area's ecological designations for, amongst other things, the benefit of local communities and visitors.
- The guidance should seek to protect drainage ditches, reens and supporting habitat on the Gwent Levels to increase connectivity with core sites of ecological value. This could include a requirement for appropriate management and maintenance of the drainage system to be part of the consideration of any land use management and proposals going forward.
- The guidance should highlight that the distinctive landscape features of drainage ditches and reens on the Gwent Levels are vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather events. Land management and development proposals should consider how they might help address the implication of climate change
- The guidance should promote and protect the long-term sustainability of the Gwent Levels and its adjoining and interdependent protected marine environment to address the challenges of climate change and the pressures from potential development proposals

- The guidance may identify opportunities to help facilitate a viable and vibrant agricultural community and economy on the promotion of a local food supply system in the Gwent Levels that works in harmony with the promotion, maintenance and management of the area.

Well-Being Goal: A Globally Responsible Wales

This section provides baseline data relating to the following well-being goal:

'A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being'

The data relates primarily to:

- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Energy production.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions:

Relevance to the guidance:

Energy consumption and greenhouse emissions occur at the local level through homes, businesses and transport but contribute to global consequences.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is likely to play a key role in reducing energy consumption and greenhouse emissions by protecting carbon stores, facilitating appropriate green energy solutions in appropriate locations and reducing vehicle emissions by encouraging walking and cycling in and around the Gwent Levels.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In 2020, the emissions in Monmouthshire totalled 501.4 ktCO₂ with over half of all emissions (51.9%) coming from transport. Total emissions in other authorities that span the Gwent Levels landscape was higher in both Cardiff and Newport at 1647 kt and circa. 7.4 t-capita respectively (in 2018). This equates to approximately 4.5 to 5.3 tonnes of CO₂ per resident across the wider Levels landscape. The primary cause of air pollution in all authorities is road traffic emissions (*All figures obtained from recent LDP Scoping Reports*).

Energy Production:

Relevance to the guidance:

Whilst the primary traditional value of the land on the Gwent Levels lies in biodiversity, agriculture and flood management, there is increasing pressure on the landscape to

deliver opportunities for renewable energy production, particularly from solar farm applications and developments.

The Gwent Levels planning guidance is likely to play a key role in managing and guiding decisions on planning applications to ensure ecological networks are safeguarded and not unduly compromised by future development, including that of energy developments.

Baseline conditions and trends:

Solar Developments:

There are six applications for new solar farms on the Gwent Levels that are currently being considered, or are potentially due to be considered, as part of the planning process. When combined, all six applications total 1,679 acres, in addition to the 260 acres on the one existing solar farm already built on the Levels south of Llanwern. The Gwent Levels are attractive to developers for solar schemes for many reasons, but mainly it's because of the areas:

- Flat and open landscape
- Proximity to the national grid
- Proximity to the M4 motorway
- Perceived compatibility of co-locating solar farms and grazing animals.

Whilst solar farms will help contribute towards Wales's renewable energy targets for 70% of our electricity consumption to be from renewable energy by 2030, the evidence is indicating that development, including solar development, is negatively impacting the Gwent Levels landscape. Development on this ecologically sensitive landscape is resulting in habit loss, degradation and fragmentation and is leaving sites in a poorer state post-construction when compared to pre-construction condition when assessed using DECCA attributes (*Information obtained from Gwent Levels Post Construction Monitoring Report, July 2024*).

Wind Developments:

The Gwent Levels is not generally attractive to large-scale wind farms because it is a low-lying area with low average wind speeds. It is also considered a less suitable location in general due to its open topography; any turbines would have a high visual impact across the landscape.

Data Gaps:

There has been difficulty identifying data at the local authority level on current energy generation figures by fuel type.

Key Issues relevant to the Gwent Levels Planning Guidance and Opportunities to Address them

Key Issues

- To support national priorities and strive to reduce carbon emissions across the Gwent Levels landscape.
- Carbon stores on the Gwent Levels are at risk from drainage, development and land-use change.
- The Gwent Levels landscape is vulnerable to potential further large-scale renewable energy development, particularly from solar schemes but also from wind and tidal range developments.

Opportunities

- The guidance may support the reduction of carbon emissions across the Gwent Levels by promoting a mix of conservation efforts, community action and sustainable land management.
- The guidance may support the management, protection and enhancement of carbon stores across the Gwent Levels landscape.
- The guidance may need to identify whether there are opportunities that could balance renewable energy development with protecting the special qualities and features of the Gwent Levels landscape.

Bibliography

Documents not already listed in Appendix A but which have been referenced within the document:

- ***Cardiff Council and Levett-Therivel*** (2021). Draft Integrated Sustainability Appraisal of the Cardiff Local Development Plan Review: Scoping Report. Cardiff Council. <https://www.cardiffldp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Draft-ISA-Scoping-Report-May-2021-English.pdf>
- ***Cardiff Council and Levett-Therivel*** (2021). Updated Integrated Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report – August 2021. Cardiff Council. <https://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s51553/Appendix%202%20Integrated%20Sustainability%20Appraisal%20Scoping%20Report.pdf>
- ***Cardiff Capital Region*** (2024). Regional Assessment of Future Growth and Migration for the Cardiff Capital Region – May 2024. Cardiff Capital Region.
- ***Monmouthshire County Council*** (2022). Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Appendix 1 – Review of Plans, Policies, Programmes and Strategies. Monmouthshire County Council. <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2022/12/Appendix-1-PPPS-Nov-2022.pdf>
- ***Newport City Council*** (2021). Integrated Sustainability Appraisal – Scoping Report. Newport City Council. <https://newportldp.co.uk>