

The Benefits of B-Lines to Local Authorities in Wales



White Rock, Swansea © Rose Revera

What are B-Lines?

B-Lines are 3 km wide linear pathways “insect superhighways” composed of stepping stones of flower-rich habitats which link together existing important flower-rich areas (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, nature reserves and Priority Habitats). They have been mapped on a county by county basis through a process of data collation, connectivity analysis and workshops with local stakeholders. Within B-Lines, together with partners and individuals, we are creating additional flower-rich stepping stones, big and small, to help pollinators and other insects travel safely through our landscapes.

B-Lines is a landscape-scale biodiversity initiative, developed and mapped by Buglife across the UK in partnership with local nature partnerships, statutory agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other conservation partners. B-Lines is creating a UK-wide network of flower-rich habitats in line with commitments made in the Lawson review 2010 “Making Space for Nature”; identifying and creating linkages between flower-rich habitats. B-Lines is a landscape-scale framework within which we can all make a major contribution towards the Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales.

UK B-Lines network. Interactive map accessible at buglife.org.uk



Climate Action Northeast, natural regeneration by reduced cutting
© Rachel Richards

Local authorities are a key part of delivering B-Lines

Here are 6 actions for local authorities to support B-Lines and help local pollinator populations:

- 1 **Check the B-Lines map** to see where they run through your local authority and prioritise wildflower habitat enhancement and creation work within the B-Lines network where possible.
- 2 **Ensure that local wildlife sites and nature reserves** in B-Lines are being well managed to maintain a favorable condition of habitats and species.
- 3 **Review the management of green infrastructure** to create more flower-rich, pollinator friendly natural habitats of value to both wildlife and local residents.
- 4 **Create flower-rich areas** in parks, school grounds, roundabout, carpark, etc.
- 5 **Encourage local people** to manage gardens and community greenspaces to benefit pollinators and other wildlife as well as the local community.
- 6 **Create and adopt** a Pollinator Strategy within your local authority.

How can you use B-Lines and how can they help you?

Supporting and helping to deliver B-Lines will help local authorities meet their commitments to biodiversity, whilst also contributing toward delivery of key objectives outlined in the Wales Action Plan for Pollinators. This will also help local authorities comply with the section 6 biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty introduced under the



Brown-banded Carder Bee (*Bombus humilis*), Margam Moors SSSI
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Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The duty requires public authorities to “maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems” in exercising their functions.

B-Lines provides a very simple framework within which local authorities can deliver their obligations; benefiting both their wildlife and their local communities.

B-Lines maps can assist in prioritising and delivering Green Infrastructure and other wildlife initiatives, in targeting action on your own estates and in strategic development planning work.

Using the B-Lines in strategic planning and green infrastructure work

Local authorities can use B-Lines as part of the biodiversity ‘evidence base’ to support biodiversity and green infrastructure mapping by including B-Lines in the mapping of habitat and landscape connectivity. This will help to ensure that pollinators are properly considered in emerging Local Plans. They can also help to drive the creation and restoration of individual Priority Habitat types and action plans for local species priorities. B-Lines is a simple yet effective approach to green infrastructure, which is highly attractive to local communities and simple to understand. Local authorities should identify synergies between B-Lines and existing green infrastructure mapping, and then use the B-Lines messages to promote and take forward action on the ground.



Pollinator garden © Kate Jones



Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*) © Tanya St. Pierre/Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Supporting local planning

It is important that wildlife habitat is properly considered within all planning decisions, including the potential impacts on the connectivity of flower-rich habitats. Although not a statutory consideration, B-Lines can help to identify where important wildflower networks exist within the landscape. The stepwise approach (avoid, minimise, mitigate and as a last resort compensate) should always be strictly adhered to in planning decisions to help protect flower-rich habitats.

B-Lines are also a useful lever to encourage developers to make their green spaces truly multi-functional and to deliver for pollinators, rather than creating traditional species-poor amenity grassland areas. Flower-rich habitats can support local place making and can be focal points for community activity in well planned developments.

The B-Lines are also an ideal mechanism for prioritising wildflower delivery in B-Lines through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), with net biodiversity gains through the planning system mandated in the Environment Act (2021). B-Lines are a prioritised and connected landscape so should be considered a local biodiversity priority.

Supporting improved land management

Local authorities can make a significant contribution by implementing positive management regimes on any flower-rich habitats and Local Wildlife Sites which form a key part of the B-Lines network. Many local authorities have significant land holdings, which have the potential to be managed more sympathetically for wildlife. Small changes to management regimes, such as reducing cuts and removing cuttings, carried out on roadside verges, parks and other amenity space can have a huge impact on the value of land to insect pollinators and other wildlife, and added together can make a major contribution towards the enhancement of the environment at a landscape-scale. By creating more accessible, natural greenspace, B-Lines will bring nature into more people's lives, with benefits to both physical and mental wellbeing.

Guiding habitat restoration ambitions

Restoring pollinator populations within B-Lines will depend on a large number of habitat restoration and creation projects being implemented across the UK. If local authorities focus their habitat restoration ambitions within the B-Lines network, the biodiversity benefits of their actions can be increased. B-Lines can be a useful driver of both local support and funding for habitat restoration objectives.

Enthusing and educating others to take action

Significant parts of the B-Lines network can be developed by enthusiastic individuals and groups often just taking action on small areas of land. Schools, businesses, local communities and private individuals can all help to develop the flower-rich habitats needed within B-Lines. We would encourage local authorities to use B-Lines to enthuse and work with local people to help conserve our insect pollinators and other wildlife.



Seed harvesting on Fonmon verge, Vale of Glamorgan Council
© Emily Shaw



Tiger Hoverfly (*Helophilus pendulus*) © Liam Olds



False Blister Beetle (Oedemeridae) © Lucia Chmurova

Policy background

Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales

The Welsh Government's Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales was launched in 2013. The plan sets out the strategic vision, outcomes and areas for action to halt and reverse pollinator decline in Wales. A Pollinator Taskforce comprising key stakeholders across Wales updated the Action Plan for Pollinators in 2018. The plan identifies four main outcomes to support and protect the many pollinating insects which contribute to our food production and the diversity of our environment. It is a shared plan of action which aims for everyone to work together and ensure pollinators' needs are addressed as an integral part of land and habitat. The plan expects local authorities to take a lead across many of their work areas and duties, including their role in local planning and also as managers of public and amenity spaces, brownfield sites, schools, car parks, roadside verges and roundabouts.

B-Lines play a valuable role in helping to identify core areas to target for the recovery of pollinators. They also offer a high profile and accessible delivery mechanism for flower-rich habitats.

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

The Environment (Wales) Act received Royal Assent in March 2016, having been developed following consultations in 2010. Developed in parallel with the Well-being of Future Generations Act, it complements and links with that Act; the sustainable management of natural resources being a fundamental part of sustainable development. The act puts in place a modern statutory process to plan and manage natural resources in a joined and sustainable way.

Section 6 and Section 7

Section 6 of the Act places a Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems duty on every public authority. The duty requires that public authorities must seek to "maintain and enhance biodiversity" in the exercise of their functions in relation to Wales, and in doing so "promote the resilience

of ecosystems", so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. Therefore, as a public authority, councils should embed biodiversity and ecosystems considerations into all their business planning, policies, programmes, projects, and day to day activities.

Section 7 of the Act replaces the duty in section 42 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Section 7 specifies a list of priority species and priority habitats that should be used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their biodiversity duty. This list contains many pollinators, including bumblebees, solitary bees, moths, butterflies, and many other plant species reliant on pollinators.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 presents an opportunity to deliver the aspirations of B-Lines to create and restore flower-rich habitats, improving the extent and connectivity of habitats to help reverse the historic declines in our pollinators. Improved management and restoration of Section 7 habitats within B-Lines can significantly benefit pollinators, including nationally threatened Priority Species.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Developed in parallel with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the Well-being of Future Generations places seven wellbeing goals into law, and requires public bodies to apply the sustainable development principle in five key ways. In particular, the Resilient Wales wellbeing goal will help with nature recovery objectives in Wales and focuses on maintaining and enhancing "a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change". The act acknowledges key ecosystem services that nature including pollinators provide, for example pollinators alone are worth £430m a year to UK agriculture.

Planning Policy Wales 11

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) edition 11 (February 2021) outlines the Government's planning policies for Wales. It improved the previous planning process to ensure that



Cut and Collecting, Vale Nature Partnership with Barry Town Council
© Emily Shaw

development is located in the right place. This includes specific references in paragraph 6.2.5 to conserving the natural environment and the ecosystem services it provides. B-Lines and flower-rich habitat creation and restoration overall provide a range of ecosystem service benefits, not just through restoring pollinators, but through carbon capture, supporting predators of agricultural pests, and improving health and wellbeing.

To address the Section 6 Duty through the planning system PPW 11 sets out that “planning authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. This means that development should not cause any significant loss of habitats or populations of species, locally or nationally and must provide a net benefit for biodiversity” (para 6.4.5 refers and 6.4.21 outlines the step-wise approach).

PPW 11 refers to the five aspects of ecosystem resilience in paragraph 6.4.9, highlighting the importance of “functional habitat and ecological networks within and between ecosystems and across landscapes; building on existing connectivity and quality and encouraging habitat restoration and appropriate management” as well as encouraging “the creation of ‘stepping stones’ which will strengthen the ability of habitats and ecological networks to adapt to change, including climate change”.

Further to this, in section 6.2.11, PPW 11 recognises “planning authorities must encourage the appropriate management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna in order to complement and improve the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network”. Section 6.2.11 also highlights that “‘stepping-stones’ or ‘wildlife corridors’, are essential for migration, dispersal or genetic exchange”. B-Lines is not only an existing prioritised and connected network, but its north-south and east-west connections will help pollinators to adapt to the changing landscape and climate.

Paragraph 6.2.11 says “the development of networks of statutory and non-statutory sites and of the landscape

features which provide links from one habitat to another can make an important contribution to ecosystem resilience and the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the quality of the local environment, including enabling adaptation to climate change”.

This highlights not just the importance of recognised protected sites of biodiversity importance, but the wildlife corridors and stepping-stones that provide valuable landscape connectivity - such as the mapped B-Lines.

Paragraph 4.1.33 says “Planning authorities should seek opportunities to increase habitat connectivity, mitigate habitat fragmentation, and secure wider green infrastructure benefits along transport networks”. When developing Green Infrastructure Assessments, PPW 11 recognises the need for “a strategic and proactive approach to green infrastructure and biodiversity” (para 6.2.6 refers). Paragraph 6.2.7 of PPW 11 says the Green Infrastructure Assessment “should be used to develop a robust approach to enhancing biodiversity, increasing ecological resilience, and improving well-being outcomes, and should identify key strategic opportunities where the restoration, maintenance, creation or connection of green features and functions would deliver the most significant benefits”. More specifically, this includes “identifying ways to minimise or reverse the fragmentation of habitats, and to improve habitat connectivity through the promotion of wildlife corridors and identifying opportunities for land rehabilitation, landscape management and the creation of new or improved habitats” (para 6.2.10 refers). B-Lines can be utilised as a strategic tool to help target the delivery of wildflower habitats for pollinators to where they can have the greatest benefits, increasing connectivity and resilience across the landscape.

Paragraph 6.2.5 says “with careful planning and design, green infrastructure can embed the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services into new development and places”. B-Lines provide a further driver for wildflower habitat delivery within development plans and flower-rich grasslands provide exceptional opportunities for the public to access and engage with nature. Paragraph 4.5.1 states explicitly that “networks of high quality, accessible green spaces and recreation spaces will also promote nature conservation, biodiversity and provide enjoyable opportunities for residents and visitors to participate in a wide range of physical activities.”

Nature Recovery Action Plan and Local Nature Partnerships

The Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan was first published in 2015 and consists of Part 1 (Our Strategy for Nature) and Part 2 (Our Action Plan). Part 2 was refreshed in 2020-21 to provide focus and prioritisation within a fast changing policy context and the emerging ecological crisis. The NRAP is currently going through another refresh to align with targets and goals set out in the Global Biodiversity Framework as well as defining actions required to deliver our proposed domestic statutory targets, ensuring we reverse the decline in biodiversity whilst delivering wider benefits to society.

The 2015 Strategy for Nature will remain in place until it is realigned to address the targets ratified at COP15.

Each Local Authority in Wales has a Local Nature Partnership (LNPs), there are 24 LNPs across Wales including 3 National Park Authorities which together form a pan-Wales nature recovery network.

Each LNP is responsible for the development and implementation of a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (LNRAP), a strategic document, set in the context of national and regional legislation and policy drivers, aiming to halt and reverse negative biodiversity trends identified across each county. LNRAPs cover a 10 - 15-year period providing guidance for public bodies and organisations, as well as helping to drive action on a local level within communities to promote biodiversity and ensure widespread involvement in nature recovery activities.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (Section 6 Duty). This duty applies to public authorities in the exercise of their functions in relation to Wales and will help maximise contributions to achieving the wellbeing goals. The Nature Recovery Action Plan supports this legislative requirement to reverse the decline in biodiversity, to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by putting nature at the heart of decision-making and increasing the resilience of ecosystems. Action taken to help biodiversity should be guided by the six objectives of the Nature Recovery Action Plan, which include embedding biodiversity in decision making at all levels, increasing the resilience of the natural environment through habitat creation and restoration, and safeguarding the future of species and habitats.

As a prioritised and connected network, B-Lines can play a valuable role in the LNRAP evidence base, helping to identify core areas to prioritise for the recovery of pollinators and to best restore resilient populations. They also offer a high profile and accessible delivery mechanism for flower-rich habitats.

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

The regulations require development plans to include policies encouraging the management of features of the landscape “by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems of marking field boundaries) or their function as “stepping stones” (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species”. The regulations enact the European Union’s (EU) Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) in the UK. Following the UK’s exit from the EU, changes in 2019 to the Conservation of Habitat and Species regulations (2017) transferred functions from the European Commission to the appropriate authorities in Wales.

Area Statements

Natural Resources Wales have developed Area Statements covering seven separate parts of Wales. Each Area Statement outlines the key challenges facing natural resources in that particular locality, what we can all do to meet those challenges, and how we can better manage our natural resources for the benefit of future generations. Delivery of B-Lines can help to address some of the key challenges highlighted within each of the seven Area Statement including linking our landscapes, building resilient ecosystems, and enhancing biodiversity.



Road verge © Tanya St. Pierre/Cumbria Wildlife Trust

References

[The Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales](#)

[Section 6 Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#)

[Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty \(section 6\): guidance for public authorities](#)

[Wales Nature Recovery Action Plan](#)

[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)

[Planning Policy Wales 11](#)

[Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#)

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