



Small copper by Matt Berry



Cheshire

People taking action for wildlife

**Cheshire Wildlife Trust**

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Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**RESPONSE TO THE CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the above plan and in general are pleased to see the council taking a positive and practice approach to the climate crisis. Cheshire Wildlife Trust is a large locally based conservation organisation with a turnover of more than £2m, 38 staff and a membership of more than 14,000 across the Cheshire region, including a considerable membership base in Cheshire West and Chester.

We are experts in nature-based solutions, with over 50 years' experience of managing land and working with land owners to get the best for nature. It is perhaps worth stressing the importance of nature-based solution for climate change. The evidence suggests that natural based solutions can provide a third of the cost-effective climate mitigation needed between now and 2030 to meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, approximately 70% of the nature-based solutions to climate that are needed are low impact – they can come from strengthening protections for existing natural ecosystems or from improving practices in managed woodlands and farmlands. I am conscious that fixing the climate crisis requires more than nature-based solutions, but since this is our area of expertise I will focus our comments only on the relevant Section 8 of the plan – Land Use, Adaptation, Climate Repair.

**Section 8.1**

This section reads well. Nature-based solutions to climate change can be divided into two parts: mitigation – this is around management interventions affecting the natural carbon budget; and adaptation – the ability of nature to respond to the weather extremes predicted as a result of the climate crisis.

**Section 8.2**

Having started well the discussion then heads off down something of a rabbit hole in this section deviating away from mitigation and adaptation to natural capital. This section sounds like a response for the ecological crisis, not the climate crisis. Statements like, 'This depletion needs to be reversed to support natural and economic prosperity' (page 41) are true, but are not directly addressing the climate crisis. Natural capital is broader than climate change and to say the two are synonymous is disingenuous. In our minds it would be better to admit the scale of the ecological crisis alongside the climate crisis and to also amend your existing declaration to reflect this and make it a 'Climate and Ecological Emergency' as other local authorities have successfully done

<sup>1</sup> <https://nature4climate.org/about/>  
Working for wildlife across Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester,  
Halton, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington & Wirral.

**Patron** Richard Walker

**President** Felicity Goodey CBE DL **Chairman** Bill Stothart

**Chief Executive** Charlotte Harris



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(<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/emergencies-severe-weather/climate-emergency/documents/climate-and-ecological-emergency-strategy.pdf>). If this happened it would then make more sense to reference natural capital as an indicator of condition, although biodiversity measures would naturally be the best indicators. Acknowledging the significance of the ecological emergency would also align better with your plans for a biodiversity strategy, which is mentioned in this section. This aspiration, which we welcome, seems to ignore the elephant in the room if it only applies in the context of the climate emergency.

In respect to land use change, adopting and implementing a robust biodiversity net gain policy would provide a strong driver for nature-based solutions that could address both the climate and ecological crisis. This then will result in sustainable land use changes that increase both the natural capital and biodiversity value of the land. In response to the ecological crisis, best practice councils such as Cambridge are introducing a 20% 'net gain' commitment in biodiversity on their land and Cheshire West should seek to adopt a similar commitment if it wants to be a leading council on championing biodiversity.

Coupling livestock emissions with land-use in this section also has the risk of hiding a bigger problem. Your report highlights that livestock emissions are responsible for 8% of the area's emissions. There is then this statement on page 44, 'Doubling the area of planted forest within the CW&C region could reduce emissions from livestock and land by approximately 25 per cent as compared to current gross emissions', suggesting the issue of livestock emissions should be solved by planting trees. I would have thought that the issue of livestock emissions would be better dealt with by reducing livestock emissions and then using any gains from land use change to offset other areas where emissions reduction is not possible. Livestock emissions are such a significant contributor to climate change I would have thought they would be better served with a separate section, possibly linked to Section 8.3 rather than left where they are.

In summary the discussion in Section 8.2 on natural capital is distracting from the main point of nature-based solutions to climate change, but would be relevant if the ecological emergency was incorporated. This section should focus on the potential for biodiversity net gain to accelerate nature-based solutions to climate change, of which there are many (woodland planting, wetland creation, improved soil management, heathland creation, grassland creation). Furthermore, the issue of livestock emissions should be moved into a separate section or joined with Section 8.3. We would also recommend including livestock emissions from CWAC farms within your carbon management plan.

If you are interested in pursuing the idea of incorporating an ecological emergency alongside the climate emergency we would be happy to assist with this.

### **Section 8.3**

We agree that changing diets could make a significant contribution to fixing the climate crisis and would support measures around this. As part of this the council should indicate organic diets and farming as a desirable outcome and promote organic farming on its land. Pesticides and artificial fertilisers not only damage soils, pollute waterways and devastate local ecology, but also emit a considerable amount of carbon through their production and application.

The council should also consider promoting community orchards in parks and on council land. This would not only provide food for residents, but also provide nectar sources for insects, store carbon and support healthy eating initiatives.

### **Section 8.4**

We are concerned with the apparent emphasis on woodland planting at the expense of other nature-based solutions for climate. Restoration, recreation and management of a broad range of habitats secures natural carbon and should be a focus for the council in this plan. Statements like, 'Grassland is assumed to be replaced by woodland' (page 45), show a lack of understanding about habitats and disturbing naivety about the priority for restoration of carbon-rich habitats. The



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presence of an accepted measure for carbon saving from tree planting does not justify its exclusive use in climate response plans.

We are part of a team of Wildlife Trust developing a carbon offsetting which seeks to incorporate other habitats alongside woodland and create metrics for their calculations. We are already working with Cheshire East Council to see how this work might help diversify the types of habitat created to offset carbon and would be happy to work with CWAC in a similar way to achieve 'actions that offer adaptation co-benefits alongside mitigation effects', which you cite as an aspiration in Section 8.6.

We recommend moving this section into the revised Section 8.2 and incorporating woodland planting into nature-based solutions for climate to be carried out where appropriate.

### Section 8.5

The table here should be modified to include an estimate reductions from nature-based solutions as a whole and not just from planting woodland. This would remove the bias towards tree planting simply because data exists.

### Section 8.6

We agree that climate adaptation is a key land use response to the climate crisis. I am not sure what 'Climate Repair' means and would suggest sticking to established terminology in an official document of this stature. More could be said here about the benefits of building natural resilience to feed climate adaptation. This section also increases the relevance of incorporating an ecological emergency as a depleted nature provides poor climate adaptation. Only when we admit that nature is also in a state of emergency will we begin to invest in its resilience sufficiently for it be able to adapt to the climate crisis.

### Section 8.7-8.9

The council should amend its declaration to a Climate and Ecological Emergency and extend the remit of the Taskforce and Advisory Panel to encompass this additional scope.

### Section 8.8-8.9

No comment.

### Section 8.10

We would be happy to be involved in all areas of local action to aid the council in any way we can to help it achieve its climate response aspirations in relation to land use.

The council's wildflower verge policies are welcome and should commit to the use of native wildflower species and priorities the use of perennials over annuals. It should be noted that some road verges may simply benefit from reduced mowing due to already being high in biodiversity.

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**Section 8.11**

We would be happy to be added to the list of partners in relationship to this plan and feel that we have much expertise in this area.

**Section 8.12**

The council should encourage residents to support peat free gardening and avoid the use of pesticides.

**Section 8.13**

We recognised that measures for this area are necessary, but they are also difficult to define and therefore progress may also be measured qualitatively and well as quantitatively (case studies etc.) We feel that the annual tree planting target of 150ha by 2024 is challenging and potential unrealistic.

**Section 8.14-8.15**

No comment

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Varley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martin Varley  
**Director of Operations**