

Appendix 1 - Aberdeenshire Council biodiversity work collation 2024

Every three years, Aberdeenshire Council reports to Scottish Government on its works in relation to the ‘public sector biodiversity duty’. The biodiversity duty was introduced in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and states ‘It is the duty of every public body and officeholder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.’

We last reported on the period 2021 to 2023. However, rather than wait a further three years to collate relevant information, we will collate every year and report to the Sustainability Committee via a bulletin.

Below is a collation of biodiversity related work in 2024.

Work Area	Topic/Objective	2024 Work
Engagement	Ranger Service Programme - Objective 10 - Provide volunteer opportunities for communities and organised groups in biological recording, practical conservation, biodiversity enhancement and climate change actions.	119 sessions, 2421 attendees. Examples include sessions on invertebrate surveying, creation of invertebrate habitats and homes, planting pots for pollinators, community group training in Lepidoptera surveying and recording, community session on woodland maintenance.
Engagement	Ranger Service Programme - Objective 11 - Enhance the condition of natural and historic features through site and countryside management; raise awareness of climate emergency and biodiversity loss at Ranger Service public and group sessions.	145 sessions Examples include, maintenance of B-lines, meadows and woodland areas, removing invasive species, tree planting in local woodlands and wildflower and bulb planting in school grounds and community spaces.
Engagement	Ranger Service Programme - Objective 12 - Encourage and support positive action by the	81 sessions, 1306 attendees Examples include sessions on indicator species, nest box building and non-native species removal, programmes for young people including

	public to address the climate emergency and biodiversity loss.	the Buchan Bog buddies initiative (in partnership with Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB)) and Junior Ranger Programme.
Engagement	Ranger Service Programme - Objective 13 - Support partner organisations to combat biodiversity loss and climate change and support the enhancement of biodiversity	46 sessions, 1063 attendees Examples include sessions in partnership with Landscape Services, Social Work, Education Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB and North East Biodiversity Partnership
Engagement	Ranger Service programme	The Ranger Service also responded to 143 requests from individuals, schools, local businesses and community groups seeking advice and guidance biodiversity topics, including protecting and enhancing biodiversity.
Engagement	Ranger Service programme	During this period the Ranger Service promoted awareness of biodiversity on subjects such as fungi, birds, invertebrates, amphibians, mammals, pollinators, non-native invasive species jellyfish and wildlife gardening through social media channels.
Engagement	Sustainability Champions Programme	The Aberdeenshire Council Sustainability Champions programme was launched in the summer of 2022. The programme aims to lead and support teams and Services in understanding and aligning with the Council's various sustainability aspirations and commitments, including biodiversity. The Champions meet informally every month to discuss ideas, opportunities and challenges. They have also engaged in a number of litter picks and some native/wildflower planting on Council grounds.
Engagement	Internal messaging	Throughout 2024 internal biodiversity messaging and discussions have continued through our internal online tools Engage, Viva Arcadia and the monthly Sustainability Newsletter. A 'Biodiversity and natural heritage' section can also be found on the Council's external facing

		'Climate change and sustainability' web page with a link to the Council's Natural Heritage web information.
Engagement	Climate Ready Aberdeenshire	In 2024 Climate Ready Aberdeenshire published their Strategy. Enhancing and protecting biodiversity is very much a core theme of the Strategy. The group are now continuing the development of their Activity Log which is capturing activity across Aberdeenshire by the different member groups of CRA.
Engagement	Schools	All schools in Aberdeenshire have signed up to the Eco-Schools Programme. 123 schools have achieved the bronze award, 14 schools have silver awards and 69 have Green Flag awards.
Engagement	Natural Environment Team Internship	An Aberdeen University student spent 7 weeks working with the Council as an Intern and assisted with the review of Local Nature Conservation Sites, collating information on local biodiversity enhancement options for developers and helping with various Forum meetings.

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Trees and woodland	Woodland management	<p>Woodland management throughout 2024 has been more limited than recent busy years following extensive storm damage in 2021 and 2022 particularly. Preparations have been ongoing with planned management works due to commence in 2025.</p> <p>Two sites still have areas of wind blow because of storm damage totalling 3.5 ha at Banff and Huntly, this harvesting work is planned for 2025, 27 ha have been harvested so far.</p> <p>Planting was carried out at Aden of 2.5 ha with native pine and broadleaves. Due to adverse weather at the end of 2024, 2 ha of</p>

		planting at Haddo and 3 ha at MacDonald Wood in Ellon will be planted in early 2025.
Trees and woodland	Woodland management	Following the storm events Aberdeenshire Council have taken the opportunity to review woodland management plans adhering to the principles of sustainable woodland management. This has tried to capture woodlands across all of Aberdeenshire that belong to the council across all Services. Woodland compartments have been mapped with areas of sub-compartments of different species and woodland types mapped have also been measured. This data will help guide future management and prioritise areas for future management, particularly areas of no native species that will be prone to windthrow. Gathered data has enabled us to calculate the carbon uptake and storage potential of our woodland resource and will contribute to future carbon emission in-setting. The comprehensive plan for all woodland owned and managed by Aberdeenshire Council seeks to ensure woodlands are managed in a sustainable manner which protects and enhances the environment, biodiversity and local culture, benefits and supports the local economy, provides value and enjoyment to residents and visitors and are resilient to the effects of climate change.
Trees and woodland	Protected trees	Eight new Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) have been served during 2024, together protecting 53 individual trees, 6 groups of trees and 15 areas mixed woodland. While the TPO designation is primarily utilised to protected trees and woodland areas in the interests of visual amenity, the resultant impact of long-term protection of these mature trees and areas of woodland is a biodiversity gain.
Trees and woodland	Sma Wids scheme	During 2024, a successful pilot for the Aberdeenshire Sma Wids Scheme was undertaken within Buchan, Aberdeenshire. The pilot was achieved through partnership working that included Scottish Forestry,

		<p>The Woodland Trust, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Aberdeenshire Council and six landowners from Buchan. The Sma Wids scheme was designed to encourage tree planting in small pockets of underutilised land, at a scale which would not normally attract grant support. While each site may be small in area, significant gains can be made from increasing tree cover, particularly where a cumulative effect can be achieved from planting on multiple sites within a geographic area. Just under 4000 trees were planted as part of the pilot scheme, creating 12 new woodland areas within seven landholdings.</p> <p>Following the success of this pilot, the Aberdeenshire Sma Wids Scheme is being developed further. A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation is in the process of being established and the trustees and advisory panel are actively seeking funding to enable the creation of up to 40 new woodlands over the next two years.</p>
Trees and woodland	Ash dieback	<p>Work is continuing on the development of an Ash Dieback Action Plan in response to the identification of corporate and strategic risks arising from the impact of the disease. The action plan will include actions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantify extent and spread of disease through on the ground tree surveys. • Develop a strategy for managing privately owned roadside trees. • Develop a comprehensive communication plan. • Develop a prioritisation strategy for tree management. • Develop a recovery plan focussed on effective establishment of replacement trees.

Trees and woodland	Aberdeenshire Towns for Nature	<p>A canopy cover analysis of Inverurie using the 3-30-300 rule for urban greening was completed as a pilot project in partnership with Blue Sky International. Using spatial imaging technology each building and ward within the settlement was analysed to determine whether it meets the three rules; 3 trees being viewable from each property, 30% canopy cover in each ward and all properties being no more than 300m from a usable area of public greenspace. This information is being shared with local community interest groups and will form part of the baseline data for the Inverurie Place Plan.</p> <p>A project plan for undertaking a similar analysis in each of the 17 academy towns has been developed. It is hoped that funding can be secured to enable delivery of the Aberdeenshire Towns for Nature project. In addition to securing tree equity data and canopy cover assessments of the towns, the project has three strands (i) to develop links with the Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership, investigating the use of green prescriptions and securing access to greenspace which can be used to improve outcomes for physical health and mental wellbeing, (ii) to create opportunities for skills development and training, engaging with academy schools, Foundation Apprenticeship team and the Excelerate schools to enhance learning of and engagement with natural spaces in towns, (iii) to investigate opportunities for community leadership and management of natural spaces, providing communities with required skills and empowering them with the necessary governance.</p>
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Work Area	Topic/objective	2024 Work
Estate enhancement works	Public sites	The Natural Environment Team, supported by the Ranger Service, carried out blocking of ditches at Portlethen Moss to raise water level, aid bog habitat restoration and reduce fire risk. The process uses plastic sheeting, hammering in by hand, to create dams which hold back water. Some clearance of scrub and removal of tree seedling growing on the bog was also undertaken.
Estate enhancement works	Public sites	Aden hedge planting – A total of 300m of mixed native species hedging was planted at Aden Country Park with support from The Woodland Trust More hedges scheme. Planting event was run by Aberdeenshire Ranger Services in partnership with North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership and involved local volunteers and members of the local Mens shed.
Estate enhancement works	Public sites	The Natural Environment Team installed 40 bat and bird boxes in Cleanhill woods, Aberchirder.
Estate enhancement works	Property	Gordon House meadow – A wildflower meadow at Gordon House Council offices in Inverurie was established in 2016 has since then continued to develop. The office is closing, and the meadow area will be lost during proposed demolition. To allow continued use of this resource the meadow has been cut into turfs and transported to various suitable local projects including Kellands Primary School, Sir Arthur Grants Outdoor Centre, the Beltie Burn carpark area, Renaissance Care home in Peterhead and several smaller projects and gardens.
Estate enhancement works	Public sites	Insch Meadows – the wildlife pond at Insch meadows was restored in January 2024 and the pond dipping platform was replaced to allow

		Rangers to run pond dipping events. Willow coppicing work also undertaken to allow access to this important community wildlife site.
Estate enhancement works	Housing	Nesting boxes for swifts put up at 6 roof replacement projects in Council housing with previous swift records, Inverurie, with a total of 36 boxes and nest entrance holes provided into corner soffits at 12 locations, 9 of the new boxes and one corner soffit hole were already in use during the 2024 breeding season.
Estate enhancement works	Aberdeenshire Greenspace enhancement	<p>In 2024 the Nature Restoration Fund was used to deliver projects promoting perennials, bulbs, native trees, shrubs and mini-orchards. We launched a new iteration on Perennials for Pollinators, which included native wildflowers, culinary herbs, heathers, climbers and hanging plants. 152 applications were submitted for 120 plants each.</p> <p>We created several new areas of native wildflowers and increased the planting of native trees and shrubs within our towns and villages.</p> <p>One major project was the installation of a native cherry tree avenue (56 Prunus avium) underplanted with a wildflower strip in Aboyne.</p>
Estate enhancement works	Aberdeenshire Greenspace enhancement	We worked extensively with school groups and community organisations to create and improve biodiversity within towns and village greenspaces. Initiatives included offering mini-orchard packs to 13 groups in Banff and Buchan, and planting heritage fruit trees and bushes in Echt (13), Pitscurry (12), Aboyne (63), Stonehaven (12), Portlethen (21). We created two new urban native tree areas in Fraserburgh, two in Banff, and two in Peterhead. In Marr, the Aboyne Green Spaces group planted 1,830 native trees and shrubs to replace the damaged woods from the recent storms, while Huntly's Greemyres group planted a new native tree hedge with 403 native saplings. In Kincardine and Mearns, the Portlethen Allotment Group planted a new

		hedge at their new site with 800 native trees/saplings, and the Portlethen Moss groups improved their sites for biodiversity with 259 saplings. In Garioch, Kemnay Academy planted 110 native trees as part of their John Muir Trust Award project with S1 classes.
Estate enhancement works	Aberdeenshire Greenspace enhancement	Wildflower pockets were created in Banff St Mary's Car Park and at Roanheads in Peterhead. Other work included maintenance of native tree areas with help of schools, at recently planted sites, by cutting back the grass and adding bark mulch to the base, in St Combs and Hatton.
Estate enhancement works	Aberdeenshire Greenspace enhancement	In the autumn of 2024, we launched a Mini-orchard initiative, which led to 39 new mini-orchards planted across Aberdeenshire. A mini-orchard consists of either 8 fruit trees or 4 fruit trees and several fruit bushes, and in most cases, the grass beneath will remain uncut.
Estate enhancement works	Aberdeenshire Greenspace enhancement	In September 2024, the Greenspace Team attended Holyrood Apple Day, a celebration event for Scottish Heritage Orchards. We left with a 'Wee Apple Award' for our dedication to promoting and growing the Scottish Heritage fruit network.

Work area	Topic/objective	2024 work
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Wildlife records	466,981 new species records added to the database in 2024.
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Engagement and promotion	Recorders' Forum event held in person in March with 85 attendees

North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Engagement and promotion	Promoting wildlife recording through nine wildlife recording training events focusing on identification skills and how to submit records. These were mixture of online and face to face events with good attendance.
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Engagement and promotion	Participation in bioblitzes and other group sessions promoting wildlife recording.
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Data requests	LNCS habitat monitoring carried out in Aberdeenshire
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Data requests	2689 data searches carried out for planning applications (2545), environmental consultants (93), organisations (20), students (1) local authorities (22) and the general public (8).
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Engagement and promotion	Regular postings on the NESBReC Facebook page to highlight issues and events concerning local biodiversity.
North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	Partnership working	Participation in NE Scotland Biodiversity Partnership and Climate Ready Aberdeenshire

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Funding	Nature Restoration Fund	The first few months of 2024 up to 31st March saw the completion of projects funded by our July 2023 Nature Restoration Fund allocation. This is a direct capital grant provided to all Local Authorities and National Parks from Scottish Government. Our allocation in 2023 Aberdeenshire Council was £445,000. The grant is 'capital funding to

		be spent in 2023-24 to support new, or to enhance existing, approaches to restoring biodiversity, complemented this year by an additional ... specific focus on creating Nature Networks’.
Funding	Nature Restoration Fund	<p>The full extent of 2023 projects were reporting in last year’s biodiversity work collation. However, early 2024 saw completion of spending on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Landscape Services modification and improvements to greenspace management for biodiversity by purchasing new equipment • Supporting community groups and schools to improve public greenspace by purchasing bulbs, trees and herbaceous perennials for them to plant • Supporting further roll out of green roofs on new bus shelters across Aberdeenshire • Supporting Denman Park Ponds Westhill water treatment wetland project to filter the central Westhill area surface water drainage outfall into the park’s ponds and downstream into the Elrick Burn to prevent contaminated discharges wiping out the biodiversity in the ponds and downstream burn.
Funding	Nature Restoration Fund	<p>We had anticipated a further allocation from the fund in 2024 and had been planning for this for several months with a range of projects and spends being prepared. An allocation of £223,000 was confirmed in July and received in August. However, Scottish Government subsequently offered the opportunity for Councils to use the money to fund pay awards. This option was taken meaning our allocation was re-routed. Some internal monies were found within Landscape</p>

		Services to continue some committed elements of greenspace enhancement and monies are still being sought to complete elements of the Denman park works. All other planned works were postponed until 2025 when we hope there will be an allocation.
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Partnership projects	Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species project	Continued support was provided to community groups to allow them to undertake INNS control work through assisting with advice, insurance and the supply of equipment.
Partnership projects	Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species project	Continued working with the community to progress the control of Japanese knotweed on sensitive coastal sites and giant hogweed on the River Ury. The latter has involved sheep grazing, cutting and some spraying.
Partnership projects	Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species project	Promoted awareness of harm caused by pirri pirri bur and how it can spread. Undertook some control of pirri pirri bur with contractors and with volunteers in Deeside. Volunteer effort to survey this species.
Partnership projects	Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species project	Meeting of the North East INNS Forum held to update members on progress on various local INNS control projects, and on advances in methods of control and monitoring of INNS. Provide newsletters at intervals to update members of the NE INNS Forum on related news and topics of interest.
Partnership projects	Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species project	Collation of information on the presence of invasive species through a reporting form on the Aberdeenshire Council website and through NESBReC.
Partnership projects	Dee Catchment Partnership	We continue to support the Dee Catchment Partnership. 2024 saw the partnership carry out a wide engagement exercise with stakeholders

		from the Dee. An event was held with over 100 attendees and workshops focussed on the next steps for the Partnership.
Partnership projects	Ugie Peatland Partnership	Aberdeenshire Council continues to support the work of the Ugie Peatland partnership and in particular advising on issues relating to planning and the protection of important peatland sites through identification as Local Nature Conservation Sites.
Partnership projects	Ury Riverside Park	Aberdeenshire Council and the NEINNS Project have continued to work with the SCIO in 2023 to deliver control of giant hogweed within the park using a variety of means including grazing.
Partnership projects	North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP)	<p>North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing development of funding proposals to secure resources for taking forward the 2022-25 Strategic Plan.. • Delivery of the spring seminar focussing on taking action for pollinators and related wildflower seed collecting workshops • Development of NESBiP Awareness Network discussion events to explore topics in detail, wildflower areas and ponds were first topics. • Website, social media and newsletter re-fresh with addition of video clips to promote action and blog posts. • Camera trap loan scheme focussing on loan to and support for schools and community groups.

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Strategy and Policy	Nature Recovery Strategy	<p>The Natural Environment Team and the Climate & Sustainability Team began preparation of a Nature Recovery Strategy for the Council. This Nature Recovery Strategy outlines the Council's approach to tackling the ecological emergency and supporting Scotland's goal to be nature-positive by 2030, restore biodiversity by 2045, and be Net Zero by 2045. The strategy will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the work across the Council to date which has and continues to support nature recovery, adaptation and supporting sequestering/insetting our residual emissions • Identify further opportunities for nature recovery which focuses on the implementation of nature-based solutions such as reduced land management intensity, reforestation, renewable energy, regenerative agriculture, etc. supporting net zero. Actions should link to other key Council strategies, plans and targets where appropriate, such as transformation programmes, Placemaking, community resilience and community wealth building. • Identify nature recovery opportunities across Aberdeenshire currently external to Council boundaries that the Council can contribute to and/or influence
Strategy and Policy	Nature Networks	<p>The natural Environment Team began the development of Nature Network mapping in Aberdeenshire. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy identifies that 'By 2030 each Local Authority in Scotland will have a spatially defined Nature Network'. National Planning Framework 4 identifies that 'Local Development Plans should facilitate the creation and conservation of Nature Networks'. Nature Networks are described as 'connecting nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors and stepping-stones. As well as supporting regional</p>

		and national approaches to protect and restore nature, they provide local benefits to wildlife and people.’. Development and consultation will continue through 2025 in conjunction with the Planning Policy Team and with Nesbrec.
Strategy and Policy	Development Management	The Natural Environment Team continued to provide input to planning applications in 2024, commenting on issues ranging from protected species and sites, woodland and trees, greenspace enhancement and protection of the water environment.
Strategy and Policy	Local Nature Conservation Sites	A review of the Councils existing Local Nature Conservation Sites continued in 2024 with 7 biological sites and 3 geological sites surveyed and reviewed. Data from previous habitat survey was assessed to identify further potential LNCS.
Strategy and Policy	Climate and Sustainability	The Climate Change Risk Register was updated after a Local Climate Impact Profile (LCLIP) was completed for 2019-2022 and published in 2024. The outputs of the LCLIP helped to enhance the Risk Register. Biodiversity sits within the Risk Register as ‘Damage to ecosystems and damage to and loss of biodiversity due to climate change and extreme weather events’. https://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/risk-registers
Strategy and Policy	Climate and Sustainability	The Council’s Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) includes Climate Change and Sustainability. Within this assessment there are several questions requiring a response on the impacts in relation to Biodiversity. Positive, neutral and/or negative impacts are assessed on the quality of environment, quantity of the environment, wildlife and biodiversity. Guidance has been prepared to support officers in completing IIAs to ensure due regard is considered to the impacts on biodiversity. Updated guidance for the Sustainability and Climate

		Change IIA was developed in 2024 alongside a new internal training module on ALDO available to all employees and Members.
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