

Aberdeenshire Council Biodiversity Duty Reporting 2015 to 2017

This report follows the format provided by the 'Biodiversity duty reporting template' produced by Scottish Natural Heritage in October 2016.

Section 1: Introductory information

a) Give an overview of your organisation's regulatory role.

As a Local Authority, Aberdeenshire Council has a broad regulatory remit. Of particular relevance to biodiversity is our role as the Planning Authority for Aberdeenshire. Included within this role is the preparation of a Local Development Plan which outlines plans and policies which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity. As a Local Authority we also administer the Tree Preservation Order process and have a role in the management of public access.

b) Outline how biodiversity feeds into your organisation's decision-making structure, including any initiatives or groups in which your organisation and its staff, board members, etc. are active.

The Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2013 to 2017 identifies protection and enhancement of natural heritage as key priority. This feeds into the plans of the various Council services, for example Economic Development and Infrastructure Services where objectives relating to natural heritage are identified.

Many aspects of Aberdeenshire Council's work contribute to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. For example, the work of Infrastructure Services through its roles in development management (Planning), flood risk management, roads management, the Rangers service and greenspace management. The Education Service and the schools of Aberdeenshire develop and administer educational programmes which promote engagement with and awareness of biodiversity. The work of Economic Development promotes Aberdeenshire's natural heritage both within and out with the region. Further detail on these examples and more are given in the responses which follow.

Within Aberdeenshire Council's organisational structure, a number of committees and groups have particular relevance in relation to biodiversity. In particular we'd highlight:

- Sustainability Committee – this committee reports to Full Council and has a remit for issues related to environment, sustainable development and climate change
 - Forestry, Biodiversity, Water and Landscape Cross Team Working Group - allows for discussion on relevant issues and ensures consistent approach across Aberdeenshire Council areas and services.
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c) Include examples where staff and/or board members have promoted biodiversity initiatives.

In 2015 Aberdeenshire Council introduced Councillor Biodiversity Champions. Council Members were nominated to champion a range of key biodiversity issues and iconic species for the region. The Champions raise awareness and provide support in the Council's work in relation to the biodiversity issues. The issues championed are diverse, from invasive non-native species, ponds and pollinators to champions for specific species such as the Scottish Wildcat, Pine Martin and Red Squirrel.

Section 2: Mainstreaming

- a) Identify the steps your organisation has taken to incorporate biodiversity measures into other areas of policy, strategies or initiatives.

Aberdeenshire Council contributes to the production of a Strategic Development Plan for the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region. Produced in 2014, the current Strategic Development Plan identified the quality of the regions environment as a key issue and outlines that future development should not lead to the loss of natural assets.

The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017 identifies a range of policies that aim to protect and enhance environmental quality in the local development plan area. Notably Section 15 of the Plan covers policies which specifically relate to Natural Heritage and Landscape. The Local Development Plan will guide future development within the area.

Aberdeenshire Council have prepared a Forestry and Woodland Strategy as Supplementary Guidance to the Local Development Plan. The strategy aims to have a range of social, environment and economic benefits. Environmental enhancement and protection are key elements of the strategy. Specific opportunities in relation to habitats and species protection are outlined in the document. The strategy includes a map of preferred areas for new woodland creation which aims to steer new woodland development to areas which delivers multiple benefits and minimise impacts.

The Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot reported and closed in March 2015. This was a Scottish Government funded project which explored on-the-ground implementation of the integrated land use approach identified in the national Land Use Strategy.

Through the 2017 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan, 99 Local Nature Conservation Sites have been identified. These sites will be protected in the planning process.

Aberdeenshire Council Landscape Services section is exploring options for reduced greenspace maintenance at certain sites. The aims are to benefit biodiversity through reduced grass cutting and/or tree planting while cutting maintenance costs.

All 172 schools in Aberdeenshire have signed up to the Eco-schools programme. The programme aims to make environmental awareness and action an intrinsic part of the life and ethos of the school for both pupils and for staff and to engage the wider community.

Section 3: Actions taken to improve biodiversity conservation

a) Identify any actions that your organisation has undertaken on the ground, on your own land or elsewhere as part of a contribution to a wider project and how these benefit biodiversity.

Landscape Services have created 118ha of wildflower meadow and 21ha of reduced grass cutting for conservation benefit since 2012. Over 10,000 trees planted have also been planted on Council owned land in recent years

The Alford Schools access road project included 3 SuDS ponds with permanent pools, low-nutrient soil and aquatic benching along with 0.74 Ha of native tree planting. New road verges created in the area were also sown with a specific Aberdeenshire species rich verge mix.

Amphibian gully ladders were installed at 20 sites in Portlethen in 2017. These will be monitored by a local conservation group

Works have taken place at Gauchhill, Kintore to remove non-native tree species so as to maintain the native pinewood habitat to the benefit of resident species, notably Red squirrel.

At Council offices in Aberdeen and Inverurie, staff have planted wildflower meadows on areas of grassland previously cut for amenity.

We have led on the creation of Pollinator Action Plan for the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan area which covers planting in grounds of offices but also awareness raising work we are doing with banners and leaflets going round libraries and smaller garden centres, and ID leaflet to encourage recording.

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service run a programme of events which focus on practical conservation works on both Council and non-Council land. In summary, in;

- 2014-2015 there were 10 public events, 20 sessions with schools and 32 sessions with community groups undertaking practical conservation or biodiversity enhancing work.
- 2015-2016 there were 27 public events, 15 sessions with schools and 15 sessions with community groups undertaking practical conservation or biodiversity enhancing work.
- 2016-2017 there were 15 public events, 16 sessions with schools and 41 sessions with community groups undertaking practical conservation or biodiversity enhancing work.

In 2015 NESBReC commissioned 60 days of habitat survey and plant recording (13,067 new records) with 30 days of data editing for GIS. They provided daily support and guidance for volunteer recording for NESBReC's Mammal Atlas project. Overall, 82,205 species records added to NESBReC database.

In 2016 NESBReC commissioned 60 days of habitat survey and plant recording (15,003 new records) with 30 days of data editing for GIS. Overall, 71,913 species records were added to NESBReC database.

Section 4: Partnership working and biodiversity communications

a) Describe and illustrate your organisation's involvement in partnership working on biodiversity.

Dee Catchment Partnership <http://www.theriverdee.org/>

The Council is a partner in the Dee Catchment Partnership (DCP), assisting the DCP Project staff to deliver a variety of projects throughout the catchment to improve water quality, morphology and in raising awareness of the need to protect and enhance the water environment.

Outdoor Access Trust Scotland <http://www.cairngormsoutdooraccess.org.uk/>

The Council has worked with the Outdoor Access Trust Scotland and its predecessors, Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust and the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) since 1997 to develop sustainable access both in the upland and lowland areas of the Cairngorms.

Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/energy/AberdeenshireLandUseStrategyPilot.asp>

The Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot was delivered in partnership between Aberdeenshire Council and the James Hutton Institute. The pilot explored on-the-ground implementation of the integrated land use approach identified in the national Land Use Strategy

North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership

<http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/>

The LBAP undertakes a wide range of projects to raise the profile of locally and nationally important species and habitats, encourage data recording and facilitate joint working on LBAP priorities across the region. Aberdeenshire Council continues to be a key partner.

North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)

<http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/>

NESBReC works to gather, process, store and disseminate information on local habitats and species. Continued use of NESBReC species and habitat data in Development Management, Development Planning and Infrastructure project decisions to ensure impact on biodiversity is considered. Aberdeenshire Council now employs and manages NESBReC staff and has made a long-term commitment to the Records Centre.

One of the key projects for NESBReC in 2015 and 2016 was data collation in preparation for the production of a Mammal Atlas of North East Scotland and the Cairngorms. This was a strongly partnership based project with partnership funding from Aberdeenshire Council, SNH, RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Cairngorms National Park and Scottish Ornithological Club.

LNCS Panel and Review

As part of the Local Development Plan 2017, a full review of our local nature conservation sites was undertaken. A LNCS panel was created inviting various partners to aid this process. They identified 99 sites which meet the criteria – these are identified in new LDP. The panel now comment on applications and other proposals affecting these areas and a programme of monitoring is being discussed.

Scottish Wildcat Action

The Council are a partner in the Scottish Wildcat Action project and assist by disseminating information on responsible cat ownership through schools, libraries and council offices. Roads Officers also help by looking out for dead wildcat on roads and contacting project officer. We have also assisted with training session on wildcat and development.

b) Describe any biodiversity communication that your organisation has undertaken to help raise awareness of and communicate about biodiversity conservation, including any partners that you worked with on communication and awareness raising activities.

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service carry out a range of events which focus on biodiversity. In summary, in;

- 2014-2015 there were 68 public events, 280 sessions with schools and 109 sessions with community groups on biodiversity.
- 2015-2016 there were 89 public events, 225 sessions with schools and 105 sessions with community groups on biodiversity.
- 2016-2017 there were 94 public events, 191 session with schools and 141 sessions with community groups on biodiversity.

The Aberdeenshire Council website provides a range of biodiversity related guidance for Planning <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/planning-advice/>

In 2015, NESBReC carried out 9 public species identification training events; 1 public Recorders Forum meeting for 102 attendees; 8 presentations on NESBReC to community groups and other organisations and manned NESBReC stall at 7 public events organised by other organisations.

In 2016, NESBReC carried out 8 public species identification training events; 1 public Recorders Forum meeting for 93 attendees; 7 presentations on NESBReC to community groups and other organisations and manned NESBReC stall at 6 public events organised by other organisations.

c) Identify any opportunities that your staff are given to take part in practical action such as volunteering, e.g. with John Muir Trust, British trust for Conservation Volunteers, RSPB.

At Council offices in Aberdeen and Inverurie, staff have planted wildflower meadows on areas of grassland previously cut for amenity.

Section 5: Biodiversity highlights and challenges

a) Describe you organisation's main achievements for biodiversity over the reporting period and what you are most proud of (this can include processes, plans, projects, partnerships, events and actions).

- Councillor Biodiversity Champions – the creation of biodiversity champions has raised awareness of biodiversity issues with Council Members
- Targeted effort to reduced landscape maintenance on Council owned land has reduce costs and will also benefit the biodiversity of these areas through reduce grass cutting and the planting of trees.

- The Council's hosting of the North East Scotland Biological Records centre (NESBReC) means there is a centralised repository/source of biological information for the region, not just for use internally but for external users also.
- In 2015, we completed the Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot on behalf of Scottish Government. This project explored integrated land use issues across the region and fed into the revised national Land Use Strategy which was released in 2016.
- Aberdeenshire Council has a very active Ranger Service which delivers a full programme of events throughout the year to schools, community groups and the wider public. They are strongly involved in biological recording, site management and environment education.
- The review of Local Nature Conservation Sites as part of preparation of the 2017 Local Development Plan
- Aberdeenshire Council Property staff are carrying out a desk based review of the Council's entire stock to assess for potential suitability for bat roosting. This will allow for potential bat presence to be flagged up when maintenance activities are carried out on Council buildings.

b) Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main challenges over the next three years?

Pressure on Council budgets has the potential to impact on activities which benefit biodiversity. Our non-statutory duties, which deliver much for biodiversity as this report highlights, are likely to be under greater threat than statutory ones.

Despite some slowdown in the North East economy, there will still be pressures on biodiversity resulting from built development. Indeed, drives to diversify the economy could result in increased development in some sectors, such as tourism or renewable energy for example.

The impacts of climate change on communities, businesses and the Council will increase over time. Climate change itself will impact on biodiversity of the north east directly, however the choices we make as an organisation and also a society in mitigating and adapting to climate change will also have knock on environmental effects.

Section 6: Monitoring

a) What follow-up actions or monitoring have you undertaken to assess the impacts of the actions you have taken? How have you measured this? If you do not carry out any monitoring activities, please explain why.

We contribute to monitoring for National Level reports such as the 'State of nature' reports by supporting NESBReC

We monitor the success of some training, events and awareness raising exercises through event evaluation

b) Have you added your data to the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (NBN) or Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS)?

Yes, NESBReC data is supplied to the NBN

Section 7: Contribution to targets

Use the following tables to indicate the biodiversity targets to which your organisation has contributed. You may wish to insert additional targets from the [2020 challenge for Scotland's biodiversity](#) (the Biodiversity Strategy), the [Six Big Steps for Nature](#) or the [Aichi Targets](#).

Targets/key steps from Chapter 1 (Healthy ecosystems) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(1.1) Encourage and support ecosystem restoration and management, especially in catchments that have experienced the greatest degradation	Yes	Working with Dee Partnership on various restoration projects including the management of invasive species Also working with Ythan Biodiversity Volunteers on INNS control in the Ythan catchment.
(1.2) Use assessments of ecosystem health at a catchment level to determine what needs to be done	No	
(1.3) Government and public bodies, including SNH, SEPA and FCS, will work together towards a shared agenda for action to restore ecosystem health at a catchment-scale across Scotland	Yes	Various public bodies, including SEPA, SNH and FCS contributed to the Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot
(1.4) Establish plans and decisions about land use based on an understanding of ecosystems. Take full account of land use impacts on the ecosystems services that underpin social, economic and environmental health	Yes	Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot explored integrated land use planning which took account of economy, society and environment
Targets/key steps from Chapter 3 (Biodiversity, health and quality of life) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(3.1) Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups	Yes	Aberdeenshire Council Rangers programme of events and engagement
(3.2) Support local authorities and communities to improve local environments and enhance biodiversity using green space and green networks, allowing nature to	Yes	Various activities on greenspace and Development Management

flourish and so enhancing the quality of life for people who live there		
(3.3) Build on good practice being developed by the National Health Service (NHS) and others to help encourage greenspace, green exercise and social prescribing initiatives that will improve health and wellbeing through connecting people with nature	Yes	Rangers Service events with public, schools and community groups on health promotion
(3.4) Increase access to nature within and close to schools, and support teachers in developing the role of outdoor learning across the Curriculum for Excellence	Yes	Work of Rangers, support from Education Service, Eco schools, Forest Schools
(3.5) Encourage public organisations and businesses to review their responsibilities and action for biodiversity, and recognise that increasing their positive contribution to nature and landscapes can help meet their corporate priorities and performance	Yes	LBAP Champions seminar 2016 Chief Executive attendance at Edinburgh 20 years LBAP event We have provided support to a Business and Biodiversity toolkit what has been developed by the North East Scotland LBAP
Targets/key steps from Chapter 4 (Wildlife, habitats and protected places) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(4.1) Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits	Yes	Management of LNCS, LNR's, Country Parks, Woodland sites
(4.3) Integrate protected areas policy with action for wider habitats to combat fragmentation and restore key habitats	No	
(4.5) Involve many more people than at present in this work and improve understanding of the poorly known elements of nature	No	
Targets/key steps from Chapter 5 (Land and freshwater management) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification

(5.1) Promote an ecosystem approach to land management that fosters sustainable use of natural resources and puts biodiversity at the heart of land-use planning and decision-making	Yes	Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot explored this issue specifically
(5.2) Ensure that measures taken forward under the Common Agricultural Policy encourage land managers to develop and retain the diversity of wildlife habitats and landscape features	No	
(5.3) Support 'High Nature Value' farming and forestry	Yes	Aberdeenshire Forestry and woodland Strategy supports and promotes forestry which maximised social, environmental and economic benefits
(5.4) Put in place the management necessary to bring Scotland's protected areas into favourable condition and improve the ecological status of water bodies	No	
(5.5) Ensure that biodiversity and ecosystem objectives are fully integrated into flood risk management plans, and restore wetland habitats and woodlands to provide sustainable flood management	Yes	Work of Flooding team includes exploration of natural flood management. Studies conducted at identified sites into potential for natural flood management
(5.6) Restore and extend natural habitats as a means of building reserves of carbon and to help mitigate climate change	Yes	Local Nature Conservation sites include a number of peatland habitats. The Local Development Plan has a protective policy for carbon rich soils
(5.7) Provide clear advice to land and water managers on best practice	Yes	Aberdeenshire Forestry and woodland Strategy supports and promotes forestry which maximised social, environmental and economic benefits
Targets/key steps from Chapter 6 (Marine and coastal) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification

(6.4) Achieve good environmental status for Scottish seas	No	
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APPENDIX 2

Aberdeenshire Council Biodiversity duty reporting 2015 to 2017 infographic

