



## **BIODIVERSITY REPORTING DUTY**

**2015-2017**



**Seaton Park Wetland Project**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, further requires public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report, every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty. The following report provides details on what Aberdeen City Council has done to fulfill their legal duty to further the conservation of biodiversity. This report covers from the beginning of 2015 up to the end of 2017.

## 2.0 ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL & BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity is a cross cutting theme for all relevant work that Aberdeen City Council does. To assist in achieving this outcome and the biodiversity duty, the Council's Nature Conservation Strategy is the main driver for the council to further the conservation of biodiversity in the City of Aberdeen along with the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026.

### 2.1 **Nature Conservation Strategy**

In 2010, the council updated its Nature Conservation Strategy to include working with local communities within the city. As well as the council, this strategy considers all groups including individuals, community groups, voluntary groups, partnerships, developers, businesses and private landowners enabling them to get involved and help to improve biodiversity in the city.

The strategy recognises the importance of biodiversity on the provision of the natural resources required for our survival – ecosystem services. It also states that a diverse environment is the foundation for the growth of Aberdeen's economy. Overall, the focus of the strategy is on nature conservation for the sake of biodiversity and our natural heritage plus the natural resources that we depend on.

Biodiversity provides both social and cultural benefits through the provision of good quality open spaces which are biodiverse. These benefits include recreation, education, scientific and aesthetic beauty from our landscapes, overall positively contributing to a quality of life. Projects implemented through the Nature Conservation Strategy include opportunities to improve access as well as biodiversity enabling people to enjoy nature.

The strategy considers the future impacts of climate change and highlights the links between biodiversity and climate change. Specifically, the strategy recognises that biodiversity loss and climate change are interlinked and that both threaten the availability of the natural resources. The strategy recommends that the council continues to conserve nature using current best practices and to adapt procedures based on the influences of climate change and associated appropriate guidance.

## **2.2 Other Strategies, Plans and Programmes**

The council continues to implement other strategies, plans and programmes which help to further the conservation of biodiversity, and compliment the Nature Conservation Strategy.

**Open Space Strategy** – this strategy is currently being updated and the open space audit required to inform it is planned to take place in 2018. The strategy will help the council to have a vision for new and improved open spaces in the city with an objective to improve biodiversity for current and future generations.

**Local Transport Strategy** – the refreshed Local Transport Strategy, which covers the period 2016 to 2021, continues to focus on, amongst others, to improve air quality and the environment through major infrastructure improvements for example, including the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR).

**Aberdeen Adapts** – the council is working with Adaptation Scotland and the University of Aberdeen to develop a climate adaptation strategy for the city. The work has involved holding 5 stakeholder workshops between November 2016 and June 2017, attended by 41 local organisations. In January 2017, a natural environment themed workshop was held at the University to look at priorities and opportunities for climate adaptation, as well as relevant resilience actions for the city.

During this reporting period work has also taken place to assess climate risks for Aberdeen City Council, including strategic level risks for the natural environment.

**Powering Aberdeen** – the council approved a Sustainable Energy Action Plan in 2016, a programme towards a low carbon city. The work to coordinate the previous Carbon Management Plan (as noted in the 2012-2014 report), ceased to concentrate on activity on the delivery of Powering Aberdeen. The plan has a target to reduce city wide emissions by 50% by 2030 (from a 2005 baseline) and aims to encourage greater use of alternative energy, developing low carbon transport and infrastructure, reducing natural resource use and improving energy efficiency. The plan is meeting city emission reduction commitments, as a signatory of the Covenant of Mayors.

**Climate Change Reporting** – the council submits an annual climate change report to show progress against Public Bodies Duties under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. These duties relate to reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions, adapting to the impacts of a climate change and having sustainable development as a core value.

The report follows a standardised reporting methodology to allow the collection of consistent and accurate information. It requires organisations to demonstrate a commitment to tackling climate change, managing climate risks and improving performance reporting. An interim year of reporting took place in 2015 before the first statutory report was produced in 2016. The Climate Change Report replaces previous voluntary reporting under the Scottish Climate Change Declaration.

**Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen** - Aberdeen was the first local authority in Scotland to develop a Deer Management Plan as required under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland Act) 2011. This plan has been in place since 2015 and is starting to make a difference. Annual surveys of woodland areas have been completed to look for deer impacts, the results of the first year informed the decision making process for deer management as well as the management of newly planted areas within the woodlands to keep the deer population and impacts at a sustainable level. This is also helping to improve the health and well-being of the roe deer population in the city which has been above sustainable levels for many years. Previous issues included poor diet, potential in-breeding along with bone and antler deformities.

### 3.0 INCORPORATING BIODIVERSITY MEASURES

#### 3.1 Land Use Development

**National Planning Framework (NPF3)** – the vision for Scotland’s NPF3 is for a successful sustainable place; a low carbon place; a connected place; and a natural resilient place. Along with the Nature Conservation Strategy, the council has adopted a number of measures in a land use context to further the conservation of biodiversity.

**Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan** – this 2014 plan sets out the aims and objectives for the growth of the north east. Some of the main aims are to tackle climate change as well as protect valuable resources including the natural environment. Targets include making sure that development improves rather than leading to the loss of or damage to natural heritage along with helping water bodies achieve ‘good ecological status’ under the Water Framework Development.

**Local Development Plan** – the council adopted it’s latest Local Development Plan in January 2017. It helps to implement the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan 2014 at a local level. It recognises that a well cared for environment and its ecosystems are important for community and economic benefits. Specifically it aims to make Aberdeen an attractive place to live, work and invest in, improving the health and wellbeing of its citizens. Further to that, protecting natural resources will improve air and water quality, allowing the city to mitigate against and adapt to climate change. The new plan continues to focus on policies covering Green Space Networks; Green Belt; Urban Green Spaces; Trees and Woodland; Flooding, Drainage and Water Quality; Coastal Planning; Open Space Provision in New Development; Landscape; and Natural Heritage.

**Supplementary Guidance** – guidance through the Local Development Plan is still available and has been updated in line with the latest plan. Policy NE8: Natural Heritage focuses on protected habitats and species, including designated sites. It does also recognise the importance of non-designated habitats and provides guidance on principles for protecting and enhancing natural heritage, and advises on planning conditions. The Supplementary Guidance also covers Environmental Impact Assessments and Habitat Regulations Appraisals. Along with Natural Heritage, further supporting individual Supplementary Guidance is available for

Trees and Woodland; Flooding, Drainage and Water Quality; and Green Space Network and Open Space.

**Planning Advice** – the Environmental Policy Team has been actively working on internal procedures to help increase the amount of expert advice given on potential effects of and mitigation measures for development on terrestrial and marine habitat and species. The advice is provided on environmental assessments, masterplans, development frameworks, planning applications, marine licences, and council projects. The team is also working to improve on the level and type of advice associated with developer contributions which could help to further conserve biodiversity.

**Open Space Audit** - the Open Space Audit will take place in 2018 and will survey the extent, type, function and quality of open spaces in urban and peri-urban parts of Aberdeen. This will inform and update the current Open Space Strategy and will influence the next Local Development Plan. Surveys will be carried out by staff and volunteers and led by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC).

**Woodland Connectivity Mapping** - NESBReC, with the assistance of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), produced maps of existing and potential woodland connectivity across Aberdeen and into a 5km buffer of Aberdeenshire. A Geographical Information System (GIS) based, least-cost method was used, and coniferous and broadleaved woodland connectivity has been mapped separately. The maps are being used for a wide range of purposes, including the emerging Tree and Woodland Strategy, identifying green space network projects, and expanding green space and habitat networks into rural areas. It is expected that the maps will be a consideration in the next Local Development Plan.

**Tree and Woodland Strategy** – the council are developing a Tree and Woodland Strategy in collaboration with partners, including SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland. The strategy objectives are themed around five topics including climate change and natural assets. The strategy will support grant applications for woodland expansion and tree planting, as well as a wide range of actions for delivering better woodland and tree protection and management. A range of biodiversity pressures in Aberdeen have been identified which the Tree and Woodland Strategy can help to address, including protection of woodlands, enhancing connectivity of woodlands, riparian planting to improve water quality, and avoiding inappropriate planting on vulnerable habitats such as wetlands and peatlands.

#### 4.0 ACTION TAKEN TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY

As well as implementing projects that enable local communities to get involved, the council is continuing to adopt initiatives that help to improve current maintenance or management practices of green spaces so that in turn, helps to conserve biodiversity.

#### **4.1 Grounds Maintenance**

Grounds maintenance within the council's Environmental Services team continues to look for opportunities to increase biodiversity in the city. This has been achieved through changes to maintenance regimes such as less grass cutting which allows more natural areas to develop and changes to weed control which are more environmentally friendly. The number of 'Friends of' groups also continues to grow with the full support of the council. These groups help to look after their local public spaces through organising volunteering events and attracting funding for projects such as wildflower and tree planting.

#### **4.2 Working with Schools and Local Communities**

Environmental Services regularly work with local communities and schools, for example, the 'In Bloom' theme for 2017 was butterflies, bees and trees. This saw work with community groups, 'Friends Of' groups and schools to encourage more insect friendly and sustainable planting. The award winning 'In Bloom' campaign includes biodiversity and sustainable planting work.

Plans are in place for 2018 to work very closely with the Early Years Team looking at establishing outdoor nurseries and developing 'Wee Green Spaces' as outdoor teaching spaces.

In the last three years, the Countryside Ranger Service has conducted over 90 public events, guided walks and volunteer events. They have also organised almost 400 school sessions where education on biodiversity is the main theme.

#### **4.3 Projects**

The council continues to work on projects which have helped to improve biodiversity. These projects have either been managed by the council or have been implemented through relevant partnerships. Many of the completed projects along with details of awards won are highlighted in section 7.0. Some projects which have begun but not yet completed are as follows: -

***Food Growing Strategy*** – as a result of the Community Food Growing Programme, work has begun on developing a food growing strategy for Aberdeen City. An action plan will be provided to help implement the strategy and will include opportunities to increase biodiversity through community orchards, crop trees in parks and hedgerows, spaces for bee hives and the inclusion of food plants which will also support local biodiversity.

***Green Walls Project*** – the aim of the project is to develop Green Walls in Aberdeen for its environmental, social and economic benefits. Three pilot projects are currently being explored.

The first pilot project is investigating different potential types of green walls including moss, lichens and fungi.

The second pilot project involves adapting two wooden pallets in Duthie Park and planting a variety of hardy alpines and succulents.

The third pilot project is to test out Edible Green Walls for a school gardening project within regeneration areas. Using recycled plastic bottles, edible options including a variety of small fruits, herbs and vegetables, will present a hands-on approach to vertical gardening in schools. It aims to provide an interactive resource for an outdoor garden that is easy to access and maintain, creating new food growing spaces, increase biodiversity while helping to support learning about gardening and nutrition. Four schools have been selected to take part in this pilot project running until August 2018.

**BEGIN Project** – the council’s Flooding and Coastal Team is currently leading on the EU funded BluE-Green Infrastructure through social inovatioN (BEGIN) project. In partnership with 5 other countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Norway), the project seeks to improve city climate change and flooding resilience through the use of blue-green infrastructure, the delivery of which is to be enhanced through social innovation with communities. One of the aims is to look to deliver biodiversity enhancement where blue-green infrastructure projects are constructed. Another project aim is the opportunity to learn and share knowledge between all of the countries involved in the project. <http://northsearegion.eu/begin/>

**Tullos Community Wildlife Garden and Growing Space Project** - local tenants and residents have been working in partnership with the council through a Participatory Budgeting process to gather ideas and develop a plan to improve a local unused overgrown greenspace in the Tullos area of Torry. The aim is to help transform and develop the piece of land behind Tullos Place, Tullos Crescent and Mansfield Place into an exciting new area that will be of benefit to the whole community.

This project will compliment back garden improvements which have been undertaken by the council in Tullos Place adjacent to the green space.

From the initial ideas gathered a draft plan has been developed along with a local residents group for a unique ‘Community Wildlife Garden and growing space’.

Lots of exciting ideas have been drawn from the community into the plan which includes new pathways through the trees and bushes, low level wooden structures, bird houses, seating areas, outdoor classroom seating with bug mansions and a community growing area.

Works on the project to reshape the space are due to take place during March 2018.

**Invasive and Non-Native Species** – the council is continuing to develop links and work in partnership with the River Dee Trust, River Don Trust and Aberdeenshire Council to control the invasive non-native plant species that have become a major issue in both the river Dee and Don catchments. The projects will target Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed. By being part of the project the city will benefit from the collaborative and coordinated approach, especially with both river catchments covering the city.

## 5.0 PARTNERSHIP WORKING & COMMUNICATION

### 5.1 Partnerships

**North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBP)** – the council continues to recognise the value of being in partnership with the NESBP, the aim of which is to work with others to protect and enhance local biodiversity through the delivery of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). This is done through a range of mechanisms including education, outreach, training, development of demonstration projects, capacity building, and contribution to local and national policy. The partnership covers Moray, Aberdeenshire as well as Aberdeen City councils.

The partnership is in the process of updating its structure to help improve how local authorities work to meet their statutory duties. <http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/>

Projects that the partnership has delivered includes: -

- Pooling Our Ponds
- Small Blue Butterfly
- Wildflower Meadow; and the
- Woodland Mammal Camera Trap Project

The council is also helping the partnership develop a Biodiversity Toolkit which will provide an information resource for businesses which will in turn help them to take action to conserve biodiversity.

**River Dee Catchment Management Partnership** – the council supports, along with other public, private and academic sectors, the delivery of the River Dee Catchment Management Plan. The aim of the plan is to focus on existing and future issues relating to habitat quality, diffuse pollution, morphology and flood management throughout the catchment.

A project is currently being developed which will aim to connect city residents with the River Dee and raise awareness of the ecosystem services it provides.

**River Basin Management Plan** – this plan covers the Scotland river basin district and the council along with other partners, are working together to protect and improve the water environment. The plan cover the period 2015 to 2027 and focuses on the sustainable use of the water environment including opportunities to improve resilience to climate change, flood risk management, forestry, fisheries, sustainable land use, and biodiversity.

**North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)** – NESBReC collects, stores, manages and disseminates biological data for all types of organisations including local authorities. The council continues to support NESBReC ensuring that its data is up-to-date and reliable. In return, NESBReC continues to provide information that will assist the council make decisions in a nature conservation and land use context, and for contributing to and implementing biodiversity action plans.

**East Grampian Coastal Partnership (EGCP)** – the council has been a partner of the EGCP for more than a decade, supporting Integrated Coastal Management in the north east of Scotland. The council are working with the EGCP on the preparation of a Regional Marine Plan (as per the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010) which will help protect marine and coastal habitats and species.

**North East Green Network (NEGN)** – NEGN is a network of organisations including Aberdeen City Council working together to strategically connect green spaces which allows many benefits including recreational, educational, tourism and environmental. The council are in the early stages of developing ideas for regional and city networks which connect city dwellers with the hinterland.

**Lowland Deer Network Scotland** – as one of the two local authority representatives in the area, the council are a member of the Executive Committee for the Lowland Deer Network Scotland group. An active role is played within this group and links have been created with a number of other local authorities in the north and east of Scotland to highlight the work of the Network and share knowledge of deer management across the country.

## **5.2 Communication**

**North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBP)** – the council contributes to an Awareness and Involvement Group which is the key mechanism for communicating issues of local and national biodiversity importance to a range of stakeholders, from Scottish Government to local schools and individuals. Raising awareness of key biodiversity issues among councillors and MSPs is also a prominent role for the partnership. For example, in 2016, the partnership coordinated a Parliamentary Reception, to highlight the work of Biodiversity Partnerships over the last 20 years. The Partnership also produced a booklet detailing the key achievements which included Aberdeen Red Kites and Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel projects, as well as the award winning East Tullos Burn Environment Improvements Project which was led by the council.

**Green Times** – the Green Times is a quarterly publication issued to over 7,000 people in Aberdeen. This includes all schools, council staff, elected members, partner organisations and subscribers. Green Times covers information on Aberdeen's environment and sustainable development initiatives and events taking place across the city. Each edition includes information relating to biodiversity, and the following are some examples that have been published over the last 3 years: -

**Spring 2015** – Northfield Academy making bird feeders to attract birds to the school gardens; Community Garden at Duthie Park; article on woodland work including Tullos Hill volunteers and the development of an outdoor learning space; article on invasive non-native plants; Countryside Rangers events.  
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=63536&slD=4497>

**Summer 2016** – Gardens in Bloom; article on mac the duck – following sitings of a male mandarin duck that had taken up residence at

Aberdeen's Johnston Gardens; article on pine marten recorded at Hazlehead Woods; article on works starting on the Seaton Park Wetland; article on the bees butterflies and trees campaign - a project seeking to encourage schools and communities around Aberdeen to get involved in providing homes and food plants for pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies; article on Trees, Bees and Butterflies school garden project; Duthie Park farming project; Countryside Rangers events.

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=71696&slD=4497>

**Autumn 2016** –Finishing touches to Seaton Park Wetland Project; article on how best to feed birds; article on East Tullos Burn; Hazlehead Woodland thinning works; further article on mac the duck at Aberdeen's Johnston Gardens; Countryside Rangers events.

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=72778&slD=4497>

**Winter 2016** - Countryside Rangers Events; Volunteer Ranger Service update; article on Fungi and Kingdom of Fungi event; article on Hazlehead Woodland thinning event; article on Countryside Rangers becoming a John Muir provider; article on Duthie Park Rangers holiday workshops for children building a hedgehog hotel and a bug hotel; school bulb planting event; Hazlehead School achieving a John Muir award; 'It's Your Neighbourhood' achievements.

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=73770&slD=4497>

**Summer 2017** – 'It's Your Neighbourhood' update; Duthie Park Farming project; Ferryhill Primary help with bee bed planting at Duthie Park; workshops celebrating Fascination of Plants Day 2017 at Duthie Park; Brighter Bucksburn group work with pupils from Bucksburn Academy to build bird and bat boxes; winner of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Awards; update on Mac the Duck; update on Hazlehead Woods including squirrel safari events and footage of a pine marten at the site; Seaton Park Wetland Project update; Countryside Rangers Events.

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=76286&slD=4497>

**Autumn 2017** – An Environment Day hosted by Duthie Park Rangers included Opal, NESBReC, Aberdeen City Council Countryside Rangers, the Royal Horticulture Society of Aberdeen, SRUC and the Aberdeen Beekeepers Society; article on the Mammal Atlas of North-East Scotland and the Cairngorms, compiled and published by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC); article on litter responsibility in the countryside; Local Nature Reserve Committee updates; Feed the Birds event update; Countryside Rangers Events.

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=76738&slD=4497>

### **5.3 Training Courses & Volunteering Opportunities**

**Internal Training** - to support the Local Development Plan's Supplementary Guidance, the Environmental Policy Team arranged a calendar of training sessions for council staff so that they gained a better understanding of the importance of natural heritage as well as the council's legal duty to further the conservation of biodiversity.

A number of staff from the team covered training sessions on Trees and Woodland; Green Space Network and Open Space; Habitat Regulations Appraisal; and Natural Heritage. The team also arranged for an external group, Scottish Badgers, to provide training on the species in a development context.

The team has received positive feedback on the benefits of the training and are continuing to plan training sessions in the future for areas associated with biodiversity not yet covered, but also to continue including topics already covered which would act as reminder sessions.

**External Training** – the council are currently working with SNH to develop a training programme which would benefit council staff.

In January 2017, the council also initiated and organised training via the CIEEM Scottish Conference under the title 'Creating Sustainable Cities using an Ecosystem Services Approach'.

**Building Capacity** - the council has a team which focuses on building capacity within local communities. One such example involves the Tullos Community Wildlife Garden and Growing Space Project where the aim is to encourage a range of volunteer groups including local businesses where they can learn to help with the maintenance and up-keep of the wildlife garden once it has been completed.

The Countryside Ranger Service delivered a presentation on how Aberdeen City Council developed a Deer Management Plan from a local authority perspective at an SNH Sharing Good Practice workshop. This was attended by around 60 people from a range of local authorities and other public bodies. The presentation was well received and there were several follow up opportunities to pass on knowledge and share the experience gained.

**Volunteering** – the council has encouraged Corporate Social Responsibility by organising beach cleans and gorse clearing events with local companies.

The Countryside Ranger Service has worked with several groups to achieve John Muir Awards with 55 discovery awards and five achieving explorer awards. The team has facilitated input to over 150 other individuals working towards their awards which encourages people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places.

## 6.0 MONITORING

**Data Collection** – The North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) holds records of wildlife which is gathered for the whole of Aberdeen City. Records are submitted from individual members of the public, local groups, organisations and visitors to the city. Data collected from organised surveys are also passed to NESBReC and added to the database.

The data provides the council with information of what species have been recorded in a particular location, and helps to assist decision makers address any potential environmental impacts as a result of any proposed change of land use.

The database also consists of habitats including those that are part of the Integrated Habitat System (IHS) which was produced in 2005. A project is currently underway to update the IHS which will assist the council in identifying any significant losses in habitats, as well as highlight areas that would be suitable for enhancement including improving and increasing green networks.

**Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS)** – BARS was the main reporting and monitoring system used by the NESBP, and the council highlighted in the last report that this system was no longer in operation. NESBP is still waiting on guidance on the development of a new replacement system. Meantime the partnership's Steering Group which meets twice a year, oversees progress on the partnership's objectives. Monitoring on specific projects will be carried out by the Habitats and Species Group which has been newly formed as part of the reorganisation of the partnership's structure. All data collated through citizen science initiatives are also forwarded to NESBReC.

**Habitat Loss** - NESBReC undertook an analysis of the direct loss of habitat as a result of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR). This was a desk based exercise using the land take data and the 2005 IHS map. The results found that large swathes of woodland habitat had been lost due to the development. This has highlighted the need to have up-to-date mapping information and establish areas that are suitable for improving habitat networks.

In 2017, students from the Robert Gordon University undertook a project on behalf of the council which tested a method for measuring the loss of open space in the city. This proved very useful and will be used for future monitoring of habitat loss and opportunities for enhancement.

Monitoring of the impacts of deer on woodlands around the city has been undertaken for the last two years to inform the ongoing Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen. Measures as a result of the monitoring have included the installation of taller tree tubes on some sites and a more focussed approach to deer population reduction where required on other sites.

**Site Protection Systems** – the council has a number of site protection systems or designated sites which are protected through the Local Development Plan policy NE8: Natural Heritage. The council has 1 Special Area of Conservation; 4 Sites of Special Scientific Interest; 4 Local Nature Reserves; and 45 Local Nature

Conservation Sites. While every effort is taken to protect these sites, these designations are not a barrier to development and impacts can occur. It is the plan of the Environmental Policy Team to conduct surveys to establish any impacts or fragmentation of any of the sites in a bid to measure how effective (along with the Local Development Plan policies) these site protection systems actually are.

## 7.0 HIGHLIGHTS BETWEEN 2015 - 2017

### 7.1 Projects and Working with Groups

***North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBP)*** – a 20 Years of Action for Biodiversity in North East Scotland seminar was organised by the partnership and attended by three MSPs and a former Environment Minister. The seminar celebrated some of the successes of community groups, individuals, conservation organisations, local authorities and agencies and awards presented to those that had made an exceptional contribution to biodiversity in the North East over the last 20 years.

A community BioBlitz involving the council's Countryside Ranger Service brought together more than 20 organisations to encourage biological recording and outdoor learning. Around 300 people attended the event, with a local MSP presenting prizes for the lunchtime challenge which was to record as much biodiversity as possible over one hour.

The National Schools Camera Trap Project with the involvement of the council's Countryside Ranger Service was rolled out across Scotland in 2017 and received critical acclaim from the Cabinet Secretary. The initiative has and continues to engage children, through the innovative use of camera traps in exploring biodiversity in and around their school grounds. The second round of the national project has recently begun with 22 schools, including a number of North East Scotland primary schools taking part.

A pilot green wall project to trial the implementation and maintenance of a low-cost low-maintenance green wall has been setup at Inverdee House in Aberdeen. The Inverdee Green Wall Project is using the existing rock filled gabion basket wall in the car park and filling up the gaps with native plants. These plants which are suitable for the coastal environment are adapted to minimal soil and periods of water stress, which reduces the need for maintenance. Two planting sessions have been carried out, one in the warmer and drier conditions in June, and cooler, wetter conditions in August of this year (2017). A comparison between the two planting sessions and the survival of seedlings will be carried out in 2018.

***Seaton Park Wetland Project*** - near to the entrance of Seaton Park, which is located to the north of the city of Aberdeen, the area used to be flooded for most of the year despite many attempts to drain it. After heavy periods of rain, the entrance road would flood too. The Seaton Park Wetland Project involved landscaping of the existing flooded area to create a number of small deeper pools and produce shallow slopes as well as planting these areas with native plants that are adapted to wet conditions. On the other side of the park, the drainage was upgraded to help improve

the sports pitch and make the paths accessible all year round. After the success of the award winning East Tullis Burn Environment Improvements Project, working with nature to help manage flooding rather than fighting it was seen as the way forward for the city.

The wetland is designed so that after heavy rainfall, it will fill up and the water will slowly evaporate or percolate into the ground. During normal weather conditions the previously flooded areas should remain dry. During dry periods of weather, water will remain in the deeper pools while other areas will dry out. This creates a mix of different habitats that is good for the wildflowers that were planted as a part of the project and to provide places for a range of birds and insects and even deer to live in.

**Woodland Connectivity Mapping** – The North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) carried out a woodland connectivity mapping exercise for the council in 2017 using a Geographical Information System (GIS). The method used highlighted where woodland (both coniferous and broadleaved) can best be encouraged and planted to benefit the city and to establish connectivity between existing woodland.

**Scatterburn Flood Alleviation Scheme** - along with implementing a design to help prevent future flooding of the burn, opportunities to increase biodiversity has been taken through careful landscaping of local native plants that help to attract wildlife in the area.

**Saving Scotland Red Squirrel Project** - the council's Countryside Ranger Service continues to work in partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust on the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel Project. Red squirrels are now regularly seen across the city with good populations in Hazlehead Woods. Red squirrels have recently been seen closer into the city centre and in formal parks such as the Victoria and Westburn Parks where grey squirrels (which are detrimental to the survival of the reds) were common before the project undertook intensive trapping of the invasive non-native species.

**Hazlehead Woodland Management Works** - over the winter of 2016-2017, Anderson Wood which is part of the larger Hazlehead Woods, was thinned to promote the native Scots pine and other biodiversity friendly species whilst removing Sitka spruce and other non-native species. The timber extracted was sold for woodfuel pellets. This is part of a long-term management plan to manage the woodlands for continuous cover. This reduces the visual impact and habitat impact on the woodlands and also protects the soil from erosion. The management plan is also designed to promote good habitat for red squirrel and other species, so in areas where there has been a need to replant trees, a mix of species is used to increase the diversity of seed sources. The result in years to come when one species does not produce a good seed crop, more seeds from other species should be available. The woods are attracting good numbers of red squirrels, and pine marten have been recorded on a camera trap on several occasions. Crossbills, long-tailed tits, bullfinches and sparrowhawks are regularly seen along with many other more common species which are likely breeding in the woods.

**Tree For Every Citizen Project** - the ongoing management of the woodlands created through the Tree for Every Citizen Project (planted in 2010 and 2012) continues with volunteers helping to remove the tree tubes once the trees are above deer browsing height. The trees are well established on most of the sites and are attracting a good range of birds, insects and mammals. Most of these sites are within the urban heart of Aberdeen so are on the doorstep of many residents who enjoy walking in the woodlands.

**Scotstown Moor Local Nature Reserve** - volunteers have been working with the Countryside Rangers to create a network of open water channels in a wet area to the north of the reserve to attract more dragonflies and damselflies. This site has been designated as a Dragonfly Hotspot by the British Dragonfly Society. Of the 23 species recorded in Scotland, eight have been recorded at Scotstown Moor: - Common Darter, Common Hawker, Four-spotted Chaser, Large Red Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Emerald Damselfly and Blue-tailed Damselfly.

**Scotstown Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest** - extensive gorse clearance has been undertaken by volunteers within the area to promote the wet heath/mire habitat that it is designated for. This area holds a population of small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies and many rare or unusual wetland plants including black bog rush, bog bean, ragged robin, cottongrass, bog asphodel, northern marsh orchids and many others. The diversity of species for a designated site in the middle of a large housing estate is very remarkable. The site is very popular with local people and well used for informal recreation and outdoor learning with local school groups.

**Working with Schools and Local Community Groups** – Environmental Services have worked with over 100 groups this autumn (2017) alone to plant over 200,000 bulbs across the city of Aberdeen.

Environmental Services has also continued to work with local agencies and local communities to help reduce wilful fire raising. The problem brings safety and environmental issues and this has been tackled at minimal cost to the council and has generated large savings in time and resources particularly for the fire service. The programme of talks and walks with the primary schools in Kincorth, Cove, Torry, Northfield, Bucksburn and Kingswells have continued with input from the Fire Service and Countryside Ranger Service.

**Brighter Bucksburn Group** – the council has helped the Brighter Bucksburn group deliver works to improve the Auchmill Nature Walk. This has included path improvements and wildflower planting. Some interpretation panels are currently being developed for the site as a part of the project.

**Dolphinwatch Project** – the council are a partner in the RSPB led Dolphinwatch project. This project highlights to visitors the dolphins and other marine wildlife that can be seen in Aberdeen Harbour from the Torry Battery car park. In 2017 between May and August, over 5400 people spoke to the staff and volunteers on site about dolphins and other marine wildlife. Dolphins were seen on 81% of the days staff were on site (Thursday – Sunday each week). As part of the project the team held beach cleans for members of the public to join in with and for local businesses to do

some Corporate Social Responsibility time. At these events the staff discussed issues around marine litter and the impact it has on marine species.

**Hazlehead Park** - bee and pollinator friendly plants and wildflower areas were placed within the formal gardens of Hazlehead Park. One of these wildflower areas was planted by pupils from Airyhall Primary School and Hazlehead Primary School with the Countryside Rangers. The Aberdeen and District Beekeeping Society came along to show the children honey bees in a demonstration hive and to talk about bees and their importance as pollinators.

## **7.2 Awards**

The East Tullos Burn Environment Improvements Project has won a number of awards since its completion.

- Herald Society Awards 2015 – Winner; Environmental Initiative of the Year.
- Nature of Scotland Awards 2015 – Highly Commended; Sustainable Development.
- UK River Prize 2017 – Highly Commended Project.

The Seaton Park Wetland Project has also recently won the Herald Society Best Environmental Initiative Award for 2017. This prestigious award was presented by TV weather man Sean Batty at an awards ceremony in Glasgow in early November.

For the Aberdeen City Council EcoCity Awards, the council has encouraged and supported schools and nurseries to submit projects which help to increase biodiversity. The overall winner for 2017 was Hanover Primary School for their nationally recognised bee project.

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Britain in Bloom UK presented a number of awards to the council including Aberdeen winning the Gold Medal in the Champion of Champions category, and Seaton Park winning the Parks and Green Spaces award for Best Park which recognised, amongst others, the flood mitigation measures through the Seaton Park Wetland Project.

## **7.3 Lectures**

In early 2017, a number of officers from the Planning and Sustainable Development service contributed to the curriculum for the Masters course 'Planning, Land and Environmental Law' at the University of Aberdeen. Lectures were conducted covering Environmental Law as well as the preparation of exam questions and marking. This was an opportunity for Environmental Planners at Aberdeen City Council to educate students on the importance of biodiversity and what actions are being taken to conserve biodiversity at a local level and in a planning context.

## **8.0 FUTURE CHALLENGES**

The future challenges that were reported on three years ago remain mainly unchanged. These include: -

- Ongoing loss and fragmentation of habitats due to development, including protected and unprotected sites.
- Incorporating connectivity concepts into decision making and design for new development.
- Climate change, including the impact of flooding on habitats, species and water quality.
- Managing Invasive and Non-Native Species (INNS).
- Appropriate monitoring systems for progress on improving biodiversity.

Further to these challenges is the uncertainty surrounding the outcome from 'Brexit', particularly given that many protected habitats and species including designations are influenced through EU Directives.

At a local level, the city has lost a couple of partnerships which it had close workings with, relying on them to help implement and fund local projects which benefited biodiversity. These partnerships were able to tap into Landfill Tax credits and fund projects locally. Changes to how Landfill Tax credit is managed meant that these partnerships were unable to continue as they were originally setup, and ceased to operate as a result. Landfill Tax credit can, however, still fund projects through Approved Bodies.

Lack of funding and the subsequent pressures on local and agency budgets as well as being able to achieve biodiversity aims and objectives is an increasing challenge. This includes funding to be able to continue maintaining council owned open spaces and habitats.

This has been exacerbated by the down turn in the oil industry where it has hit the local economy including funding availability from oil companies which has previously supported local projects for environmental improvements.

The unavailability of up-to-date mapping data, as mentioned previously, is having an impact on the data required for evidence-based policy and action, as well as monitoring. The council are, however, looking at ways to have up-to-date data and use this to inform future plans and policies such as the Local Development Plan.