



BIODIVERSITY REPORTING DUTY

2012-2014



East Tullos Burn Environment Improvements Project 2014

© Crown Copyright Reserved License No. 100023401 (2014)

CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	1
2.0	ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL & BIODIVERSITY	1
2.1	Nature Conservation Strategy	1
2.2	Other Strategies, Plans and Programmes	2
3.0	INCORPORATING BIODIVERSITY MEASURES	2
3.1	Land Use Development	2
3.2	Site Protection Systems	3
3.3	Environmental Assessments	4
4.0	ACTION TAKEN TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY	4
4.1	Grounds Maintenance	4
4.2	Working with Schools and Local Communities	4
4.3	Projects	5
4.4	Initiatives	5
5.0	PARTNERSHIP WORKING & COMMUNICATION	5
5.1	Partnerships	5
5.2	Training Courses & Volunteering Opportunities	6
5.3	Raising Awareness.....	6
6.0	MONITORING	6
6.1	Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS)	6
6.2	Other Monitoring Mechanisms	7
6.3	North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	7
7.0	HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2014	7
8.0	FUTURE CHALLENGES	9

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 2012 up to the end of 2014.

2.0 ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL & BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity is a cross cutting theme for all relevant work that Aberdeen City Council does and the Council's Single Outcome Agreement includes an outcome that focuses on being a greener city. To assist in achieving this outcome and the biodiversity duty, the Council's Natures Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 is the main driver for the Council to further the conservation of biodiversity in the City of Aberdeen.

2.1 Nature Conservation Strategy

In 2010, the Council updated it's 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 we require 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 has adopted other strategies, plans and programmes that have some positive impact on biodiversity, and work linked to the Nature Conservation Strategy to improve biodiversity is being carried out in tandem with their objectives. Some of these other strategies, plans and programmes include: -

Open Space Strategy - this sets out a vision for new and improved open spaces in the city. The strategy contains a key objective to “protect, enhance and value our environment for current and future generations”. Through the creation, protection and enhancement of a network of green spaces, a number of benefits can be achieved such as social, health, economic and environmental.

Local Transport Strategy – This strategy includes a high level aim to “minimise the environmental impact of transport on our environment and specific objectives to reduce carbon emissions from road transport. The strategy aims to ‘lock in’ environmental benefits as part of large infrastructure projects, such as the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and other improvement schemes.

Carbon Management Plan - The Council has set a carbon reduction target of 23% by 2015. The plan details a baseline of carbon emissions and projects aimed at achieving this target. It covers a reduction in emissions from public buildings, street lighting, business travel, ICT equipment and waste which has a positive impact on the level of natural resources required for supplying energy as well as reducing the level of emissions which can equally have a negative impact on biodiversity.

Scottish Climate Change Declaration - The Council signed the Scottish Climate Change Declaration in 2007 making a commitment to take action on climate change. This was underlined in 2009 when the Council became a signatory to the Covenant of Mayors. As a signatory to this European movement of local and regional authorities, the Council has made a pledge to increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources.

Property Asset Management Plan – this plan aims to provide property, which supports the Council in the delivery of quality services by being fit for purpose, accessible, efficient, suitable and sustainable. The plan states that all Council assets must be environmentally sustainable and that asset decisions take into account both the local and global environment and make a positive contribution to a sustainable community.

3.0 INCORPORATING BIODIVERSITY MEASURES

3.1 Land Use Development

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan – includes an objective to make sure new development maintains and improves the region’s important built, natural and cultural assets. Through this plan, biodiversity will be protected and improved particularly where there are plans for development. Considerations include wildlife habitats, landscape, green networks and other sensitive areas.

Local Development Plan – helps to implement at a local level, the aims of the Strategic Development Plan. In it, the need for a high quality natural environment and access to good quality open spaces is recognised as playing an important role in making Aberdeen a place where people want to live, work and invest. The Plan further recognises that the natural environment and open spaces are important for landscape, natural heritage and wider social, health, economic and environmental reasons, such as adapting to climate change and helping to improve air quality. There are a number of policies to help protect and improve the natural environment in the Plan and these include NE8: Natural Heritage; NE4: Open Space Provision in New Development; NE5: Trees and Woodland; NE6: Flooding and Drainage; NE7: Coastal Planning; NE3: Urban Green Space; NE2: Green Belt; and NE1: Green Space Network.

Supplementary Guidance - to help support the Local Development Plan policies, supplementary guidance has been written to assist developers and planning officers in terms of what the relevant considerations should be such as surveys for habitats and species. Subjects covered include Bats and Development, Buffer Strips Adjacent to Water Courses and general guidance on Natural Heritage. Additional information has been provided for planning officers to help them decide whether bat surveys are required or not. This is supported with the provision of a geographical information map which highlights habitats suitable for bats plus known sightings of bats, highlighting the potential for bats roosting in an area. Similar additional information for planning officers is being developed to support the Natural Heritage supplementary guidance.

Masterplans - are created for new largescale developments, and part of the process include provisions to improve biodiversity through the consideration of habitats, open spaces, and green networks which helps to attract people and businesses to the area.

Green Space Network – the Council has implemented its own green space network policy which maps out a strategic network of woodland and other habitats, active travel and recreation routes, greenspace links, watercourses and waterways, providing an enhanced setting for development and other land uses and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation, nature conservation and landscape enhancement. The Green Space Network, overlays other policies including Open Space, Green Belt, and Natural Heritage, and indicates where greenspace enhancement projects could be focused.

3.2 Site Protection Systems

Designated sites – the Council takes into consideration a number of statutory designated sites at interational, national and Local level. Within the Council’s remit there is 1 Special Area of Conservation (the River Dee), 4 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and 4 Local Nature Reserves. The Council also recognises the importance of areas within the City for their nature conservation value at a local level. There are 45 Local Nature Conservation Sites where protection is afforded through the Local Development Plan.

Management Plans – Local Nature Reserves are further protected and enhanced through individual Management Plans. These plans describe the main habitats, significant species that are present, past uses and management regimes for the area. These give key aims and objectives to promote their continued value for nature conservation, education and recreation. Each Local Nature Reserve also has a committee made up mainly of members of the public from the area with an interest in the reserve and its management.

3.3 Environmental Assessments

As a competent authority, the Council carries out relevant environmental assessments on projects, plans and programmes. Assessments include Strategic Environmental Assessments and Habitat Regulations Appraisals.

4.0 ACTION TAKEN TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY

The Council is continuing to adopt initiatives to change its maintenance or management of green spaces as well as implementing projects to enable local communities to get involved in helping to improve biodiversity.

4.1 Grounds Maintenance

The Council recognises the benefits of increasing biodiversity and has continued to make changes to help improve biodiversity in the City. Grounds maintenance practices have changed such as reduced number of grass cuts made per year. Areas of greenspace have been left uncut creating a mix of wild and formal areas. Seasonal bedding has been replaced with permanent planting using wildlife friendly species and varieties in some areas of the city.

4.2 Working with Schools and Local Communities

The Council's Countryside Ranger Service regularly works with local schools. In 2014 the Countryside Ranger Service worked with approximately 4,400 young people either on one of the countryside sites or in their school grounds. The Countryside Ranger Service also have a seasonal calendar of activities allowing members of the public of all ages to get involved with biodiversity related subjects such as pond dipping, minibeast hunts, birdwatching and tree studies. In 2014 there were 22 Ranger led public events attended by nearly 700 people.

'Friends of' groups have been set up at a number of the City's parks. These community groups work with the Council to develop projects and attract external funding to improve the quality and content of the parks. As well as fund raising and refurbishment of play areas, 'friends of' projects have helped with routine site management such as weed-a-thons and litter picks, planting to benefit biodiversity and nest box building.

4.3 Projects

The Council has led many projects which have been designed to improve biodiversity. Some are managed directly from the Council, whereas others have been implemented through relevant partnerships.

4.4 Intiatives

In 2010, Aberdeen City Council signed up to the International Year of Biodiversity and the Special Year of Natural Scotland in 2013 and included a programme of events throughout the relevant years.

There have been a number of initiatives and projects including wildflowers in verges, wildflower meadows, a Tree for Every Citizen, as well as the Return of Aberdeen's Red Squirrels.

5.0 PARTNERSHIP WORKING & COMMUNICATION

5.1 Partnerships

North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership - the Council is a partner in the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (<http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/>) , and the aim of the partnership is to work with other partners to protect and enhance local biodiversity through the delivery of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). To help implement this plan, there are a number of ecosystems groups (Freshwater and Wetland; Lowland and Farmland; Woodland and a Marine group) which are represented on by a number of Council officers.

The Council's Nature Conservation Strategy's 5 year action plan included the need to create a new ecosystem group to focus on biodiversity in urban environments. The Urban and Communities group has now been established and works to encourage local people to get involved with improving biodiversity in their area.

Aberdeen Greenspace Trust – in partnership with and support from the Council, Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage, turns urban spaces into places that are people friendly, safe and nature friendly within the city of Aberdeen.

Aberdeen Forward – as with Aberdeen Greenspace Trust, the Council is a partner and supporter of Aberdeen Forward. The organisation funds many types of projects linked to sustainability including those that promote biodiversity.

River Dee Catchment Management Partnership – the Council with other partners, provides continuous support in the delivery of the plan and focuses on the current and emerging issues related to habitat quality, diffuse pollution, morphology and flood management in the catchment.

5.2 Training Courses & Volunteering Opportunities

The Countryside Ranger Service run a programme of volunteering events mainly over the autumn and winter period where anyone can come along to help with practical habitat management. The Woodlands Community Ranger also works with volunteers throughout the year to deliver habitat management tasks and to develop outdoor learning areas for nurseries, schools and community groups and other projects around the City. In total, 1900 hours of volunteer time was given to this service in 2014.

The Countryside Rangers also helped deliver continuing professional development for teachers and early years practitioners to help build their confidence and skills to take more more learning outdoors without Ranger support. These have been well received.

5.3 Raising Awareness

The main form of biodiversity communication is conducted via the NELBAP's Awareness and Information group. This group shares and promotes the work of the individual ecosystems groups as well and the aims of the Partnership.

The Council does have a number of pages on its website dedicated and linked to biodiversity. These range from pages on Natural Heritage; Green Space Network; Countryside Ranger Service; individual pages for each Local Nature Reserve; Open Spaces; allotments; and Aberdeen in Bloom.

During the lifecycle of a project, press articles are also released informing the local public of progress.

The Council attend various events and share information about the type of work that it carries out in relation to biodiversity. Events include the Aberdeen Highland Games where relevant officers including the Countryside Ranger Service meet the public and provide information on what they do, what events they run and how members of the public can get involved to help improve biodiversity.

6.0 MONITORING

6.1 Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS)

The Council has previously provided data to the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) through the NELBAP Partnership. The systems had recently been updated and both Council and the NELBAP Partnership are currently awaiting advice on how to use the new system for reporting purposes.

6.2 Other Monitoring Mechanisms

Other forms of monitoring include yearly reports on: -

- The Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015;
- The Open Space Strategy 2011-2016;
- Scottish Climate Change Declaration; and
- Countryside Ranger Service Annual Report.

6.3 North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)

NESBReC collects, stores, manages and disseminates biological data for all types of organisations and groups including local authorities. The Council continues to support the records centre (NESBReC) to ensure 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.

NESBReC were involved with the review of and assessment of Local Nature Conservation Sites to establish if they met the required criteria for such sites as per the Scottish Planning Policy. Out of the 80 reviewed, 15 did not meet the required criteria. This equated to the City of Aberdeen losing 19 per cent of its total local designated sites since they were first surveyed in the nineties. There were a number of reasons for why they did not meet the criteria: -

- Stricter criteria set by Scottish Planning Policy;
- Encroachment from new development;
- Fragmentation of habitats and isolation of species due to new development; and
- Poor management of designated sites, all of which were on private land.

7.0 HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2014

East Tullos Burn Environment Improvements Project - situated to the South of the City in a priority area, the aim of the project was to improve the burn so that it was more natural looking, helped to improve water quality, increased biodiversity, improved access, as well as improve an area of green space for the local community and beyond, improving their quality of life. With the help of the local community, the final design was implemented and the project completed in June 2014. The burn has now been transformed from a straight steep sided muddy ditch that was used as a dumping ground, into a meandering water feature with a large pond and wetland area with suitable wildflower plants and trees. The site has been a success for the local community with access around the site much more improved. The site has also been a success for wildlife with the RSPB reporting an increase in bird species, common darters and other species of dragonfly being seen. There is now interest from the local bird ringing group to start ringing on the site.

Granite City Forest - on-going management of 100ha of new, mainly native woodlands planted in 2010 and 2012 across 11 locations in Aberdeen. One site, Tullos Hill, is a pilot site for the Forestry Commission UK Carbon Code which is looking to measure the carbon sequestration delivered over the life of the woodland in an auditable manner.

Return of Aberdeen's Red Squirrels – a project which is working to reverse the decline of the red squirrel population in the City through restoring local habitat and managing grey squirrel numbers won the RSPB Nature of Scotland Species Champion Award in November 2014.

Regeneration of Woodlands – Aberdeen has had a high population density of roe deer for many years. As a result many of the woodlands were suffering from a lack of natural regeneration. Following the introduction of deer management work in some areas of the City over the last three years, young seedling trees are starting to establish with the reduction in grazing/browsing pressures from the deer. The deer management programme demonstrates that the Council is taking steps to manage the deer populations sustainably as required under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011.

Meadow Creation - areas with native and non-native species, to attract and support pollinator insects over an extended summer season. These have included areas of native wildflowers and ones incorporating non-native species to create 'pictorial meadows'. With the warm sunny weather in summer 2014, these attracted a wide range and large number of bees, hoverflies, butterflies and other less visible insects. These in turn attracted birds and small mammals that feed on the insects and seeds produced.

Nest Boxes - building and installation of nest boxes by school children for Westburn Park.

Successes through the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership include: -

- The Mammal Atlas - the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) to which the Council is also a partner, has been collecting records of mammals provided by members of the public so that a better picture of species distribution throughout the north east of Scotland can be obtained.
- Camera Trap – with the help of volunteers, the project's aim is to capture more secretive mammal species living in woodlands in the North East of Scotland. Valuable information has been gained on species such as wood mouse, red squirrel, badger, otter and pine martin. The project is being expanded to hopefully capture images of the Scottish Wildcat.
- Pooling our Ponds – a community/citizen science project setup to gather information on the amount of life in our local ponds. The future plan is to develop an interactive map so that those that took part in the project can see their pond on the map.

- Demonstration Wildflower Meadow - wildflower plugs were planted using plants grown from local provenance seed which are beneficial to a range of invertebrates. The demonstration project was the first project to show businesses how green spaces next to commercial buildings can provide a haven for wildlife.
- North East Big 5 campaign - where 5 species important in the North East of Scotland (common toad, bottlenose dolphin, pine martin, small blue butterfly and hedgehog) were promoted at events.
- Seminar - the partnership holds seminars each year where relevant stakeholders and members of the public can attend to find out about specific topics. This year Invasive and Non-Native Species (INNS) was the subject where a range of issues including the economic cost of managing INNS, the importance of Biosecurity Plans, and work to control/eradicate specific species were discussed.

8.0 FUTURE CHALLENGES

Future challenges include: -

- Managing habitat and species loss through suitable mitigation as part of development.
- Preventing further loss of designated sites by encouraging private land owners to adopt practices that improves biodiversity.
- Managing Invasive and Non Native Species (INNS).
- Encouraging a joined up and collaborative approach to roe deer management with neighbouring land managers to Council owned sites to deliver a sustainable deer population in the area.
- Climate change proofing the management regimes of the Council's parks and countryside sites.
- Appropriate monitoring systems for progress on improving biodiversity.