

Aberdeenshire Council - Biodiversity Duty Reporting – December 2014

Reporting Period: 2011-2014

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their duties. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 requires organisations to report, every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty, starting in January 2015. This report for Aberdeenshire Council covers actions taken during 2011-2014.

1. Organisation and Biodiversity

This section should outline the decision making structure and any distinct biodiversity initiatives/groups in which staff/members are active.

a) Internal working groups – provide name, purpose, outcomes.

- i) Area Committees – Biodiversity Duty Reporting is reported to all Area Committees on an annual basis.
- ii) Officers Sustainability sub group – Officers working group responsible for updating and reporting on biodiversity duty action. Includes Officers representing all Council Services.
- iii) Forestry/Biodiversity/Landscape Cross Team Working Group, allows for discussion on relevant issues and ensures consistent approach across Aberdeenshire Council areas and services (quarterly meetings).

b) External groups supported – name, purpose, outcome, nature of support

All Projects Covering Reporting Period

Aquarius <http://www.theriverdee.org/aquarius.asp>

Following the completion of the North Sea Commission Interreg IVb Aquarius Project the Council has continued to work with the James Hutton Institute, the MacRobert Estate and local farmers to develop small natural flood management schemes in the Tarland Catchment. In addition to securing natural flood management these schemes have included biodiversity enhancement.

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

The Council continues to be a major partner supporting the Dee Catchment Partnership (DCP), chairing the DCP Management Group and 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.

Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT)

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

The Council has worked with and its predecessor 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

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

The Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot is delivered in partnership between Aberdeenshire Council and the James Hutton Institute. The pilot focuses on issues related to land use change. It aims to operate at two geographic scales, the regional scale, and also in two local focus areas in the upper Dee and around Huntly, where views and opinions of the local community have been sought. Eco-system services has been a main focus of the pilot.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership (LBAP) <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 as 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.

2. Relevant Policies to Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

a) Broad policy documents produced in this reporting period

Production of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Main Issues Report with position papers on green networks and Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) – 2014.

http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/next_ldp.asp

Production of the Land-Use Strategy Pilot report for Aberdeenshire (2014)

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

Aberdeenshire Council Environmental Policy agreed 2013

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/energy/EnvironmentalPolicy.pdf>

b) Specific pieces of detailed policy and guidance produced in this reporting period.

Planning Advice -

http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/planning_advice.asp

1/2012 – Opportunities for Biodiversity Enhancement in New Development

3/2012 – Bat Survey Requirements

9/2012 – Baseline Ecological Survey

10/2012 – Bats and Development

11/2012 – Nature Conservation Sites

Policy on Intentional Balloon and Chinese/Sky lantern releases developed and approved.

3. Measures taken to ensure protection and enhancement of biodiversity in routine activities of the organisation (Planning, Roads, Flood prevention team, Structures, Property, Landscape Services, Economic Development).

NESBReC searches infrastructure projects against species and habitat database to ensure full account taken of potential impact on biodiversity.

4. Action undertaken on the ground – specific projects

a) By Aberdeenshire Council

- Local Nature Conservation Sites Review - Progress toward completion (completion during 2014/15) for the LNCS review for Aberdeenshire establishing a revised network of locally recognised sites for Nature Conservation.
- Project piloting species rich roadside verge mixes for new road developments initiated and trial site established.
- Partnership working with Community Groups to manage Local Wildlife Areas with sites in all areas of Aberdeenshire.
- An increased threat from Invasive non-native species is recognised and the initial stages of a programme for local co-ordinated action together with other relevant agencies has been initiated. First action involved a workshop for key agencies and stakeholders.

b) Through partnership working with other organisations and communities

- Portlethen Moss and Portlethen Community Woodland - gorse clearance and pond creation on Portlethen Moss LNCS in association with the local community.
<http://www.portlethen-moss.org.uk/>
- Native Woodland Planting and community management at Huntly woodlands.
- Local Nature Reserve Management with Community Advisory Group at Arnhall Moss in Westhill.

- Management of Community wildlife areas at Inch Meadows with Inch Community Action Network.
- Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service (ACRS) - Pond creation, Bennachie association with Forestry Commission Scotland.
- ACRS - Tree planting and wildflower seeding, Battlehill Huntly with Huntly community groups and members.
- ACRS - Invercauld and Balmoral Estates, scrub clearance for Lepidoptera species
- ACRS - Tree planting with church group Kirkton of Skene
- ACRS and Princes Trust - Wildlife garden creation, Fraserburgh

5. Education and awareness raising

a) **Measures within schools** - include biodiversity in the curriculum, school wildlife areas, Green Flag awards

- All 172 Schools in Aberdeenshire have signed up to the Eco-Schools Programme, 123 schools have achieved the bronze award, 14 schools and achieved silver awards and 69 schools have green flag awards with several achieving 5 green flags.
- Within Outdoor learning schools are engaging in Forest Schools Initiative training and early years settings are increasingly participating in the use of natural materials for imaginative and natural play.
- Schools are increasingly embedding the 10 topics within 'Eco Schools Scotland' into their overall Global dimension work and linking this with Health and Well-Being and Rights Respecting Schools work in addition to a varied programme of 'Together Time' and informing the wider community of their key actions.
- Many Aberdeenshire Schools have created wildlife garden areas and, flower beds and are growing vegetables for home and canteen use.
- Schools are increasingly using the outdoor environment to inform curriculum design.
- Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service (ACRS) delivered 245 school sessions covering biodiversity 2013-2014
- ACRS 6 sessions with Schools to support the Mammal Atlas Project 2014.
<http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/modules/mammals/index.php>

- ACRS Schools encouraged and supported to take part in Pooling our Ponds project 2014. <http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/projects/pooling-our-ponds>
- ACRS supported schools camera trapping project 2014. <http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/projects/woodland-mammal-camera-trap-project>
- ACRS delivered 239 schools sessions covering biodiversity 2012-2013

b) Events and external training

- ACRS 89 Public events to promote biodiversity awareness and understanding in 2013-2014. Including 23 events focused on Year of Natural Scotland 2014.
- ACRS 74 sessions with groups to promote biodiversity awareness and understanding in 2013-2014.
- ACRS recording workshop for moths and butterflies, Haddo 2014.
- ACRS recording workshop for moths and butterflies, Kincardine O'Neil 2014.
- ACRS events for Cairngorms Nature Festival 2014.
- ACRS 76 public events to promote biodiversity awareness and understanding in 2012-2013
- ACRS 82 sessions with groups to promote biodiversity awareness and understanding 2012-2013.

c) Internal training

- Training on bat ecology and survey assessment for officers assessing bridge works 2013.
- Six monthly briefings for Development Management Planners are carried out on biodiversity in relation to planning.

6. Monitoring and data collection – to include records collected, surveys, site monitoring

a) Integrated Habitat Survey (IHS) for Aberdeenshire Continues with a further 52585 ha being completed during the reporting period. Approximately 1/3 of Aberdeenshire now has up to date habitat coverage.

b) Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Involvement in Monitoring

- ACRS attendance at BioBlitz events to encourage biological recording by volunteers
- ACRS 12 days Scottish Mink Initiative direct raft monitoring and public promotion
- ACRS 15 days Saving Scotland's Squirrels direct monitoring and public promotion
- ACRS 10 days Mammal Atlas project submission of records and public promotion
- ACRS recording priority butterfly species and supporting volunteers in recording
- ACRS INNS direct action and work with local community volunteers
- ACRS 3 beached bird surveys

e.g. 6 red squirrel monitoring surveys undertaken

7. Future Aims – Goals for 2015 onwards

- Explored possibility of lowland peat bog restoration on identified bog LNCS .
- Establish a framework for the management of Council owned and managed woodlands to ensure these are maintained in positive management.
- Explore options for reduced maintenance/enhanced biodiversity of Council owned and managed open space.
- Finalise Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) Review.
- Include LNCS sites and Green Networks in Supplementary Guidance for new LDP.
- Complete Land Use Strategy Pilot for Aberdeenshire.
- Initiate and complete review of the Aberdeenshire Forestry Strategy.
- Establish co-ordinated Aberdeenshire wide action on Invasive non-native species.
- Habitat Networks and Woodland of key importance for biodiversity to be considered as part of the new Aberdeenshire Development Plan.
- Complete this reporting on an annual basis to facilitate compilation of 3 yearly report.
- Suitable projects identified and taken forward with Councillors as biodiversity 'champions' for these projects.
- Planning Advice on 'Landscape Design' completed to include information on how to deal with Invasive Non Native Plant Species (INNS).
- Combined Impact Appraisal to be developed for Committee Reports to include consideration of impact on natural environment and biodiversity.
- ACRS deliver 90 events to promote biodiversity awareness to residents and visitors 2015-2016.
- ACRS deliver 245 sessions with schools to promote biodiversity awareness and support for biodiversity initiatives 2015-2016
- ACRS deliver 80 sessions for community groups to promote biodiversity awareness and/or support for community biodiversity enhancement projects 2015-2016
- ACRS to encourage and support biological recording by volunteers.