

East Ayrshire Council
Biodiversity Duty Report
2012 – 2014

Introduction

1. Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their functions and responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 further requires public bodies to report every three years on how they comply with this duty. This first report, which covers the period 1st January 2012 to 1st January 2015 is required to be published by 1st January 2015. The next report is due in January 2018.

International and Scottish Policy Context

2. The work undertaken by East Ayrshire Council to further biodiversity conservation fits into a clear global policy hierarchy with international targets to halt global loss of biodiversity. The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity provides the original overarching target to halt global biodiversity loss. Through the 'Aichi targets' in 2010, new global targets were agreed for 2020. The strategic aims of the 'Aichi targets' are:
 - Strategic Goal A: To address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society
 - Strategic Goal B: To reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use
 - Strategic Goal C: To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity
 - Strategic Goal D: To enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services
 - Strategic Goal E: To enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building
1. In response to the 'Aichi targets' the Scottish Government launched '2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity – A Strategy for the Conservation and Enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland' in June 2013. This is a supplementary document to the main 2004 Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in your hands'.

The role of Local Authorities and Local Biodiversity Action Plans

4. Local Authorities are well placed to deliver biodiversity conservation. As land managers and planning authorities they can provide a significant positive impact

on biodiversity through protection and enhancement. Across the wide remit of local authorities, there are a range of opportunities for education, community engagement, sustainable resource management, as well as projects and initiatives which can have positive benefits for biodiversity.

5. In response to the original Convention on Biological Diversity, East Ayrshire Council worked in partnership with South and North Ayrshire Councils to establish a pan Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Partnership. Membership of the Partnership was broad, informal and inclusive and involved a wide range of relevant public and voluntary sector bodies.
6. The first Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan was produced in 2001 with a further revision in 2007. The aim of the revised action plan was to take account of the priority species and habitats within the original plan, whilst providing guidance to partners and on priorities, ongoing work programmes and progress. The priorities set out in the action plan were subsequently incorporated within the Council's Leisure Service Plans and continue to influence and inform activities delivered by the East Ayrshire Leisure Trust on behalf of the Council.

Mainstreaming Biodiversity

7. East Ayrshire Council delivers a range of public services across the local authority area. East Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Leisure Trust, have entered into a Service Level Agreement whereby the Trust is primarily responsible for developing and delivering strategies on behalf of East Ayrshire Council and for advising the Council on development of policy in relation to all aspects of cultural, countryside and sports provision in its broadest sense. This includes biodiversity duties as appropriate.
8. East Ayrshire Council is a key partner on the Ayrshire Green Network Partnership and is a signatory to the Central Scotland Green network Declaration, the Climate change declaration, the Scotland Geodiversity Charter and Scotland's Landscape Charter.
9. The Planning and Building Standards policy framework supports the protection and enhancement of nature conservation sites, protected species and biodiversity in the wider landscape. The Local Development Plan reflects the overarching aims of the Central Scotland Green Network in terms of delivering green infrastructure improvement and protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Supplementary guidance is currently being produced which specifically focuses on green infrastructure.

10. The Local Development Plan will be supported by a new Green Network Plan which is presently being developed for submission to Cabinet in early 2015 and which will replace the previous Open Space Strategy. The Green Network Plan will include an updated audit of all open spaces throughout East Ayrshire with each site assessed using a locally agreed assessment matrix which is based on the Greenflag Award system and which specifically includes biodiversity scoring criteria. This assessment of open space is used on all typology and provides guidance for their management.
11. East Ayrshire Council has produced European Protected Species Mitigation Measures for use by Housing Asset Services and Corporate Infrastructure. The measures provide guidance on how to take due regard for EPS in the development and maintenance of all Council property assets.
12. In 2012, East Ayrshire Council's Outdoor Amenities Services introduced a programme to convert areas of amenity grassland to wildlife meadow and to promote biodiversity management through a number of cemeteries and public parks. Biodiversity and sustainability is now integrated into the management of all key open spaces owned by the Council.
13. East Ayrshire has 1 Country Park, Dean Castle Country Park and 1 Local Nature Reserve, Catrine Voes Local Nature Reserve. Both of these sites are the subject of a 5 year management plan focusing on nature conservation and community engagement.
14. East Ayrshire Council provides third party funding to East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Coalfield Environment Initiative. As previously reported, the Council has a Service Level Agreement with, and provides funding to, East Ayrshire Leisure to deliver a range of cultural, countryside and sports services across East Ayrshire. East Ayrshire Leisure operates a Countryside Development Service with responsibility for Biodiversity, Outdoor Learning, Green Networks, Countryside Access and management of the East Ayrshire Core Path Plan and Dean Castle Country Park. The East Ayrshire Countryside Ranger Team and Countryside Access Officer sit within this Service.

Monitoring

15. Activity on biodiversity conservation in East Ayrshire is recorded in a number of formats:
 - Informal records kept by East Ayrshire Countryside team. These are kept locally or uploaded as part of national survey programmes including the National Bird Atlas, National Butterfly Monitoring Programme and the Scottish Badger Survey.

- Habitat Monitoring Programmes and Environmental Impact Assessments. These are collated through planning applications and have a required period of monitoring after consent.
- GIS based databases. A lot of information has been collated through the East Ayrshire Coal team and the former Joint structure Plan Team. This information is held within the Planning and Economic Development Service.

16. The status of biodiversity and the activity on biodiversity conservation is monitored through the following reporting streams:

- Annual review of the East Ayrshire Countryside Development Service Plan
- Internal and external quality assessments of parks and openspaces

17. There is a significant amount of data held within different services across the Council, as well as with separate external bodies. Looking forward, action will be progressed to establish a Local Records Centre to strengthen information collection and sharing across partnerships including the 'State of the Environment' report which has been commissioned to provide baseline data to inform the East Ayrshire Local Development Plan and Minerals Local Development Plan.

Partnership Working

18. East Ayrshire Council with the support of East Ayrshire Leisure and East Ayrshire Woodlands have developed a number of partnerships throughout the period of this report. These have included:

Ayrshire and Arran Woodland and Forestry Strategy

19. East Ayrshire Council is represented on the Steering Group for the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland and Forestry Strategy. The main aims of the Strategy are to protect areas of native woodlands, manage commercial plantations, and ensure public access to forests. The revised strategy was launched in 2014 after extensive stakeholder and public consultation and provides supplementary planning guidance to the three Ayrshire Local Development Plans. Therefore, it is a material consideration in planning decisions involving development proposals affecting woodland.

Ayrshire Green Network

20. The Ayrshire Green Network Partnership aims to enhance the quality of the built and natural environment for the benefit of the economy, society and nature by creating high quality landscape environments for business, increasing woodland cover, restoring and enhancing ecosystem services, creating attractive, well maintained green spaces and improving access and by increasing opportunities to improve health and wellbeing through physical activity, active travel routes and enjoying nature.

21. The Ayrshire Green Network Partnership covers East, North and South Ayrshire and works closely with the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership.

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership

22. Galloway and South Ayrshire has been designated as a new style UNESCO Biosphere because of its unique combination of special landscapes and wildlife areas, rich cultural heritage as well as communities that care about their environment and culture and want to develop it sustainably. The Biosphere designation will help understand, define, sustain and enhance those special qualities. As an internationally recognised marketing brand for superb natural environments Biosphere designation will offer new opportunities for individuals, businesses and communities to demonstrate how to live, work and play in a world class environment.
23. Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is the first 'new style' Biosphere in Scotland and only the third in the UK. Biospheres have three main functions; conservation, learning /research, and sustainable development. Biospheres are managed by a framework which divides the area into three complementary management zones; Core Area, Buffer Zone and Transition Area.

Coalfield Environment Initiative

24. The East Ayrshire Coalfield Environment Initiative (CEI) is a successful partnership between East Ayrshire Council and conservation bodies, working with the community over the last 10 years to enhance, conserve, and promote the environment in East Ayrshire. The aims of the project are:
- **Environment** – to enhance the natural environment and landscape within the CEI project area.
 - **Understanding** – to increase understanding and appreciation of East Ayrshire's wildlife and its value, providing and developing opportunities for learning about and experiencing wildlife.
 - **Engagement** – to increase community participation in wildlife conservation, enabling local people to contribute to environmental improvements and develop new skills.

Ayrshire Rivers Trust

25. The Ayrshire Rivers Trust within East Ayrshire works to promote and support initiatives designed to conserve, enhance and develop fisheries and rivers including the River Ayr, River Irvine and River Doon and their associated watercourses.
26. They provide advice, research and practical skills to protect and enhance the freshwater river systems and their surrounding habitats.

Ayrshire College

27. In 2012, East Ayrshire Council developed a partnership with Ayrshire College to promote practical conservation skills and to integrate rural land use into their Environmental Management curriculum.

Biodiversity Action, Communication and Engagement

Outdoor Learning

28. East Ayrshire Countryside Development Service has provided a high quality outdoor learning offer to schools throughout East Ayrshire for many years. With the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence, the team worked closely with the Education Department and with individual schools to develop a new outdoor learning pack that was distributed to every school in East Ayrshire. The pack includes individual lesson plans for a range of CfE experiences and outcomes and is closely linked to the 4 aspects of the curriculum. This approach was developed and implemented in partnership with schools throughout East Ayrshire and has since been adopted by a number of schools outwith East Ayrshire.

Back to Basics Programme

29. This was a community wildlife survey technique programme. 10 sessions were organised each year between 2012 and 2014 to train over 100 members of the community in a range of survey techniques and to engage them in biological recording.

Further Education / Higher Education Programme

30. Since 2012, East Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Leisure have been committed to working closely with Scottish Rural College, West of Scotland University and Ayrshire College to support student development including contributing to teacher training, environmental management and student mentoring. This has involved over 300 students to date.

Countryside Events Programme

31. East Ayrshire Countryside Development team organise a series of events every year to encourage people to get outdoors and to raise awareness of countryside issues. These range from large seasonal festivals to species specific guided walks. Over 14,000 people attend these events each year.

Local and National Biodiversity Campaigns

32. East Ayrshire Countryside Development Services have been involved in providing data for the following local and national surveys:
- Scottish Badger Survey
 - Owl Pellet analysis

- European Protected Species Surveys
- National Butterfly Transect
- Ayrshire Farmland Bird Survey
- Ayrshire Lowland Bog Survey
- Dean Castle Country Park extended habitat survey
- Catrine Voes LNR ecological surveys
- Kilmarnock Riparian Surveys

Wildflower Meadow Development

33. In 2013, East Ayrshire Countryside Development and East Ayrshire Outdoor Amenities introduced a pilot project with local schools to develop wildflower meadows in local greenspaces and parks. This has led to the change in management practices of identified grass verges.

Biodiversity Highlights

34. The preceding sections demonstrate the breadth of activities delivered by East Ayrshire Council and its partners in delivering biodiversity throughout the area. Particular strengths in East Ayrshire are the commitment to outdoor learning, the support to community involvement in greenspace projects and the extensive internal and external partnership working. Specific highlights over the last three years include:

- The award winning partnership with Ayrshire College
- Development of the stage 2 Parks for People bid for Dean Castle Country Park
- The publication of the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland and Forest Strategy
- The designation of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve
- The development of Community Led Action Plans

Looking Ahead

35. The following activities will be the key priorities for the next three years and have been incorporated within the 2015 – 2017 East Ayrshire Biodiversity Duty Action Plan:

- Establishment of a Landscape Partnership
- Implementation of Dean Castle Country Park Biodiversity Action Plan
- Publication of East Ayrshire Green Network Plan and Green Infrastructure Supplementary Guidance
- Review of all Provisional Wildlife Sites throughout East Ayrshire
- Support to Community Led Action Plans
- Publication of the 'State of the Environment' report
- Development of Biodiversity Action Plans across key services
- Development of a Local Record Centre
- Continued identification of opportunities to work with new partners and develop new initiatives to raise awareness of biodiversity across East Ayrshire.

1. 2015 – 2017 Action Plan

Action	Description	Lead Partner	2015	2016	2017
Mainstreaming					
Green Network Plan	Publication of an East Ayrshire wide Green Network Plan which provides an audit of greenspaces in each settlement and an action plan for improvement	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	x		
State of Environment Report	Publication of a State of the environment report which provides a comprehensive baseline of ecological data	East Ayrshire Council	x		
Service Biodiversity Action Plans	Development of service specific biodiversity plans to raise awareness of biodiversity and to introduce more sympathetic working practices specifically within	East Ayrshire Council		x	x

	Housing and Communities, Facilities and Property Management and the Ayrshire Roads Alliance				
Monitoring					
Development of a Local Record Centre	Work in partnership to establish a local records centre that will collate biological records and community sightings	East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	
Annual Review of 2015 – 2017 Action Plan	Carry out annual monitoring of action plan to ensure targets are being met and that there is a consistency of delivery	East Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	x
Partnership Working					
Development of a Landscape Partnership	Development of a Landscape Partnership Scheme to maximise opportunities for	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	x	x	x

	effective joint working to deliver Biodiversity objectives across East Ayrshire.				
Ayrshire Green Network Partnership	Continue to contribute to the Ayrshire Green Network Partnership	East Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	X
Ayrshire and Arran Woodland and Forest Partnership	Continue to contribute to the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland and Forest Strategy	East Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	x
Biodiversity Action, Communication and Engagement					
Dean Castle Country Park Biodiversity Action Plan	Implement the BAP for dean castle Country Park focussing on the woodland, farmland and wetland habitats	East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	x
Kilmarnock Green Infrastructure Project	Develop and implement a project which connects key open spaces throughout Kilmarnock	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	x	x	x

	focussing on sustainable transport, biodiversity and community engagement				
Outdoor Learning Pathway	Implement the East Ayrshire Outdoor Learning Pathway to raise awareness of biodiversity issues and encourage greater integration of conservation within the Scottish curriculum	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	x	x	x
Review of provisional Wildlife Sites	Carry out a review of provisional wildlife sites to update records and develop an action plan for each site	East Ayrshire Leisure, Scottish Natural Heritage		x	x
Development of Local Nature Reserves	Identify any areas with existing or potential community interest or involvement which could be suitable as a Local Nature	East Ayrshire Leisure, Scottish Natural Heritage		x	x

	Reserve				
Guided Walks and Events	Deliver an annual programme of countryside events throughout East Ayrshire	East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	X
Elected Member Seminars	Develop an annual elected member seminar to raise awareness of East Ayrshire's biodiversity, protected species and planning systems	East Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	x
Biodiversity Questionnaire	Develop an annual questionnaire to monitor and evaluate the levels of awareness and understanding internally and externally	East Ayrshire Leisure	x	x	x
Biodiversity Workshops	Develop a programme of awareness raising workshops with East Ayrshire Council staff	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	x	x	x

Ecological Surveys	Continue to contribute to national and local survey campaigns	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	x	x	x
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