

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5 JUNE 2001**

### **NATURAL HERITAGE ZONES PROGRAMME – ZONE 17: WEST CENTRAL BELT**

#### **Report by Director of Development Services**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the content of Scottish Natural Heritage's Draft Local Prospectus for the Natural Heritage of the West Central Belt which has been identified as Zone 17 of the Natural Heritage Zones Programme and to recommend what formal response on the above prospectus should be made to Scottish Natural Heritage by the Head of Planning and Building Control before the deadline of 31 July 2001.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 At its meeting on 26 September 2000 the Development Services Committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services which set out the aims and objectives of the new system of Natural Heritage Zones proposed by SNH.

2.2 It should be emphasised that the status of Natural Heritage Zones is visionary rather than prescriptive. They are intended to provide a framework against which Local Biodiversity Action Plans in particular, and other initiatives, can be effected within the context of development Plans and Government guidance on nature conservation and other related matters.

2.3 The main aim of Natural Heritage Zones is to develop long term goals for the natural heritage for use by SNH and others, which take into consideration local, social and economic aspirations. The new system proposed that future decisions about the natural heritage are taken collectively by a range of organisations which will set the vision for the future and agree how this is to be achieved.

2.4 The East Ayrshire Council Area is covered by two Natural Heritage Zones, Zone 17, which is the subject of this report and Zone 19 covering the Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway, which was the subject of a separate report, presented to the Development Services Committee at its meeting on 13 February 2001.

### **3. CONTENTS OF DRAFT LOCAL PROSPECTUS FOR NATURAL HERITAGE ZONE 17**

3.1 The consultation document puts forward for comment a vision for the natural heritage of the West Central Belt in the year 2025. It describes the natural heritage as it presently exists, how it has come to take this form, how and why it is changing, and sets out objectives for achieving the proposed vision through sustainable development.

3.2 NHZ 17, The West Central Belt, takes in the western part of Scotland's midland valley and includes the extensive lowlands of Ayrshire, the central Clyde Valley and the Lothian basin as well as the uplands of the Ayrshire rim. A map showing the extent of NHZ 17 is appended to this report.

3.3 The above prospectus summarises the character of NHZ 17 and with regard to East Ayrshire highlights in particular the value of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

3.4 In addition the prospectus identifies the major changes that have affected and are affecting NHZ 17. These changes are set out in the Appendix to this report. In view of the above changes the prospectus provides a vision of what the natural heritage of the West Central Belt could look like in 2025 based on the principles of sustainability. This vision is based on an integrated approach to the management of the local economy, environment and the promotion of social well-being. The approach requires an enhanced community appreciation and understanding of the local environment strengthened by opportunities to contribute to planning and developing local access initiatives, and the protection and enhancement of local biodiversity.

3.5 The natural heritage priority objectives set out in the above prospectus are to:

1. ensure that developments complement and enhance local landscapes and wildlife, and use open space to create environments of value to the natural heritage.
2. achieve sustainable re-use of vacant and derelict land.
3. maintain and enhance urban green space.
4. create opportunities for managed access to, and enjoyment of, the countryside and coast, close to where people live.
5. develop understanding and awareness of the natural environment within the community.
6. allow freshwater and coastal systems to function as naturally as possible.
7. improve the biodiversity of the managed landscape.

8. protect and enhance important biodiversity and other natural heritage interests by increasing awareness of and involvement in, the management of the natural heritage.
9. promote sustainable use of natural resources and reduce contribution to the causes of climate change.

The prospectus identifies a series of possible actions relating to each of the above objectives that could be used as a starting point for developing action plans to take these objectives forward at a local level.

#### **4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The contents of the draft prospectus for NHZ 17 is consistent with Council policy as identified in the East Ayrshire Local Plan and the draft Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

#### **5. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 While the NHZ 17 draft prospectus is a very useful document in setting out in a comprehensive way methods by which nature conservation issues can be tackled within its subject area, the approved Ayrshire Structure Plan, the East Ayrshire Local Plan and the Opencast Coal Subject Plan will remain the primary documents in providing the statutory policy framework.

5.2 The majority of the objectives set out in the prospectus for the proposed NHZ 17: West Central Belt are already being addressed through the existing policies and proposals of the Council's East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan, East Ayrshire Opencast Coal Subject Plan, the approved Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan, the draft Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the emerging Indicative Forestry Strategy for Ayrshire. In addition there is clearly an important role for the Department of Community Services, especially the new Access Officers, together with SNH to become involved in delivering some of these objectives and in promoting particular aspects of NHZ 17 in collaboration with the Head of Planning and Building Control. SEPA will also have a central role in managing changes to local water systems. The continuing role of the Roads Division with regard to flooding matters will also be an important contribution in seeking to achieve particular objectives within East Ayrshire and in assisting other neighbouring authorities through relevant proposals in this respect.

5.3 It is clear that the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan has a central role to play in achieving the above objectives set out in the NHZ 17 draft prospectus particularly in meeting the requirements for wide consultation and participation. Both the draft prospectus and the draft Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan also recognise that the enhancement of existing and recovery of lost habitats within the NHZ 17 area in

Ayrshire is a long term process to which planning policy can make an important contribution.

## **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**8.1 It is recommended that the Committee authorise the Director to:**

**(a) respond to SNH in terms set out in Section 5 above; and,**

**(b) to continue to liaise with SNH on future initiatives which may emerge through the Natural Heritage Zone programme.**

**Stephen Chorley**  
**Director of Development Services**

28 May 2001  
(JT/MMM)  
(FV/AN)

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. The Natural Heritage of West Central Belt – Natural Heritage Zones Local Prospectus for Zone 17, Consultation Draft (SNH, April 2001).
2. Report by Director of Development Services to Development Services Committee 13 February: Natural Heritage Zones Programme – Zone 19: Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway.
3. The Natural Heritage of the Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway – Natural Heritage Zones Local Prospectus for Zone 19, Consultation Draft (SNH December 2000).

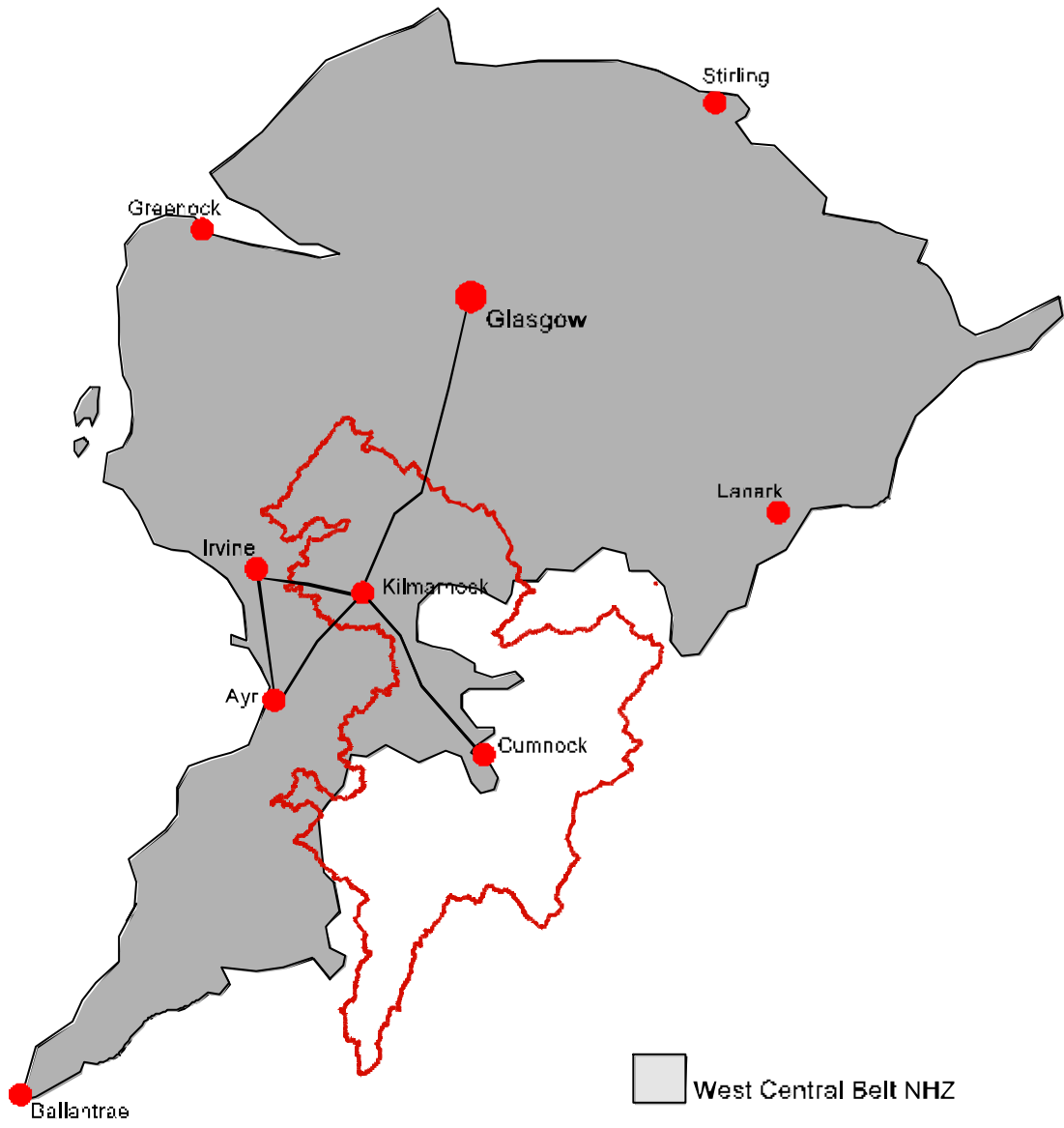
Anyone wishing to inspect the above papers please contact Julian Thorp on 01563 576789.

**Implementation Officer: Alan Neish**

## APPENDIX: MAJOR CHANGES AFFECTING NHZ 17

- Fragmentation of the natural heritage resource into relatively small pockets of habitat by built development.
- An increase in the amount of derelict land some of which has developed a semi-natural appearance and flora.
- The increasing visual impact of telecommunications masts in the landscape.
- The significant adverse effect on landscapes and habitats, particularly raised bog, of opencast coal extraction.
- The demand for rural and urban fringe housing which has resulted in the loss of green space.
- Pressure for development has had an adverse effect on river systems exacerbating flood risk and increasing pollution.
- Native flora has become threatened by invasive species.
- Increasing use of rivers, lochs and canals for recreation may conflict with their natural resource so that sensitive management of these areas is required.
- Agricultural intensification has result in loss of woodland, permanent pasture, traditional field boundaries, heath land and wetland and reduced the intimate nature of the lowland, farmland landscape and its biodiversity notably in respect of bird life.
- 'Industrial' scale farm buildings have had considerable visual impact on the countryside.
- Large commercial forestry plantations have made a major and long-term impact on the landscape.
- Climate change may be having a significant effect on species at the limit of their geographical range.

# West Central Belt NHZ



**AGENDA**