

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**CABINET MEETING – 9 DECEMBER 2020****Report by Depute Chief Executive, Safer Communities**

SUBJECT: BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT 2020

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an update on the implementation of the 2018-2020 Biodiversity Delivery Action Plan and to seek Cabinet approval for the publication of the Biodiversity Duty Report 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS**2. It is recommended that Cabinet:-**

- (i) **Approve the publication of the Biodiversity Duty report 2020 from 1st January 2021;**
- (ii) **Otherwise note the contents of the report.**

INTRODUCTION

3. 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. East Ayrshire Council's Third report is required to be published by 1st January 2021. The value of activities such as tourism and recreation for the economic development of the area is recognised, it is essential that we continue to protect the quality of the landscape so that this and future generations can enjoy the rich and diverse habitats and species which exist in East Ayrshire today. The Biodiversity Duty Report is required to provide information on the following:

- Mainstreaming
- Monitoring
- Partnership Working
- Biodiversity Action, Communication and Engagement
- Biodiversity Highlights
- Looking Ahead

INTERNATIONAL AND SCOTTISH POLICY CONTEXT

4. 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 Scottish Biodiversity Programme 2020 covers all aspects of biodiversity work in Scotland: policy, strategy, reporting, international work, evidence base, communications and public engagement, mainstreaming and funding and will secure common understanding of priorities and an agreed approach to delivering them

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
5. In response to the 'Aichi targets' the European Union launched 'Our Life Insurance, our natural capital: An EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020" in 2011. This is a supplementary document to the main 2004 Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in your hands'. The new Scottish Biodiversity programme 2020 will recognise the importance of the natural environment to our prosperity as a nation and to people's health and well-being, as well as our responsibility to address the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.
 6. Whilst, the Aichi targets have not being fully achieved which is internationally disappointing, Scotland has made real progress in achieving them. The Edinburgh Declaration, a new high level document has been agreed between subnational, regional and local governments across the world calling on the Convention on Biodiversity to take bold/smart and achievable action to halt biodiversity loss. A post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be agreed at the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to support the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) looking at The zero draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and the 2050 vision of "living in harmony with nature" which is due to take place in 2021.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

7. 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.
8. 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.

The first Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan was produced in 2001 with a further revision in 2007. This whole Ayrshire wide report was looked at again in 2011 but with the challenges each local authority faced an Ayrshire wide partnership fell through. The first East Ayrshire Biodiversity Delivery Plan was published and covered the period 2015-17 and was revised for the period 2018-20. The 2018 – 2020 progress report is included as appendix 1.

MAINSTREAMING

9. East Ayrshire Council delivers a range of public services across the local authority area. The Council is made up of 32 elected members representing 9 wards and operates through a Cabinet system with officers reporting to Cabinet and Full Council on relevant matters.
10. East Ayrshire Council is a key partner is a signatory to the Central Scotland Green network Declaration, the Climate Change declaration, the Scotland Geodiversity Charter and Scotland's Landscape Charter. East Ayrshire Council has also contributed to the development of the Edinburgh Agreement. The Edinburgh agreement is about local, national and international collaboration to protect biodiversity loss.
11. 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 was approved in December 2017 relating to Green Infrastructure.
12. The Local Development Plan is further supported by the Green Infrastructure Strategy 2015. The Green Infrastructure Strategy includes an audit of all open spaces throughout East Ayrshire. Each site has been 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. This audit and strategy will be updated in 2021 to reflect changes in land management, planning policy and community action plans.

13. Guidance from the European Protected Species (EPS) Mitigation Report has become consistently used in the management of East Ayrshire's Council Housing Stock and the implementation of the Capital Programme. In the period of this plan, bat surveys, tree Surveys, breeding bird surveys and protected mammal surveys have been carried out to inform East Ayrshire Council's planned maintenance and capital programme.
14. East Ayrshire has 1 Country Park, Dean Castle Country Park and 1 Local Nature Reserve, Catrine Voes Local Nature Reserve.
15. East Ayrshire Council provides third party funding to East Ayrshire Woodlands, the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership and the Coalfield Environment Initiative. The Council also has a Service Level Agreement with East Ayrshire Leisure. East Ayrshire Leisure operates a Leisure 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 Service and Green Infrastructure Team sit within this Service.

MONITORING

16. The development of the local record centre in South West Scotland has evolved to use the publically available i-records for maintaining and monitoring records throughout the region. I-record is customer friendly and allows quick recording. The next stage in developing the records base for the area will require data entry of existing records into the i-record system. Existing records in East Ayrshire are 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. Work has been set up through the Dean Castle Country Park Parks for People Project to record all new records onto i-records.
 - 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 planning and economic development.
17. The status of biodiversity and the activity on biodiversity conservation is monitored through the following reporting streams:
 - Annual review of the East Ayrshire Leisure Development Service Plan

- Internal and external quality assessments of parks and open spaces

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

18. East Ayrshire Council with the support of East Ayrshire Leisure and East Ayrshire Woodlands contribute to a number of partnerships. These included:

- The Scottish Wildlife Trust manage 2 nature sites in East Ayrshire and sit on the steering group of East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Coalfield Environment Initiative
- 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. Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is the first 'new style' Biosphere in Scotland and one of 6 Biosphere Reserves 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.
- 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.
- 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. They provide advice, research and practical skills to protect and enhance the freshwater river systems and their surrounding habitats.
- East Ayrshire Leisure has a formal arrangement with Ayrshire College to deliver their horticulture and arboriculture courses from Dean Castle Country Park. This partnership has led to the inclusion of rural skills training

into the college curriculum and for sustainable projects to be delivered as part of the Country Park management plan.

- The Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership (CCLP) is a five-year project led by East Ayrshire Council and working with communities and organisations to deliver projects in the coalfield area of East Ayrshire that. The project aims to:
 - Address the threats to the natural, built and cultural heritage through conservation, enhancement and promotion, capitalising on the area's assets for the benefit of people in the landscape
 - Create opportunities for learning, recreation and wellbeing within the landscape for people with a range of abilities and backgrounds
 - Reveal the past lives of the communities, drawing upon their close relationship with the land, thereby connecting people with their heritage and inspiring stewardship
 - Equip people with the skills and knowledge to manage their landscape sustainably, building capacity and making it a successful place for residents and visitors alike

- The Where's Wildlife in Ayrshire project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and North Ayrshire Council was established in 2016 to engage with people throughout Ayrshire and encourage them to get involved in learning about their local wildlife, recording sightings and collecting information about where different plants and animals live. East Ayrshire Leisure represents East Ayrshire Council on this partnership to ensure consistency across all natural heritage reporting throughout East Ayrshire. This project has access to over 130,000 records for Ayrshire from an old Recorder 2002 database, which we are gradually being imported into a new system. The project has also recruited a volunteer to assist with digitising paper records.

- East Ayrshire Council has led the way in supporting local communities in developing their own action plans for their own area. There are currently 22 Community Led Action Plans throughout the local authority area with another 6 updates from specific communities. Each of these action plans include a number of priorities to improve the local environment including improved sustainable transport, community gardens, green networks, flood management and a range of actions to contribute to the environmental improvement of the area.

BIODIVERSITY ACTION, COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

19. East Ayrshire Leisure Development Service continues to provide a high quality outdoor learning offer to schools throughout East Ayrshire. The East Ayrshire Countryside Ranger Service are based at Dean Castle Country Park and work with

all schools/Colleges in the area with projects ranging from 12 week environmental education programmes to John Muir Discovery award courses.

20. East Ayrshire Council's Learning Outdoor Support Team (LOST) supports and promotes the use of outdoor spaces for learning. Outdoor Learning is an integrated part of the Scottish Curriculum and LOST provide proactive and innovative support to schools across East Ayrshire. This has been particularly important as part of the COVID19 response and recovery.

21. As part of the Heritage Lottery Funded Parks for People Project at Dean Castle Country Park, a number of added value natural heritage projects have been developed. These include:

- Wild About the Farm: A demonstration project to show how farming and wildlife can be managed simultaneously. Management of this project continues and is maintained by the DCCP estates team, Countryside Ranger service and Friends of the Dean volunteer group
- Bat Bothy: A purpose built bat hibernation site with integrated wildlife surveillance cameras to monitor bats numbers and to allow visitor engagement with minimal disturbance to the bats.
- Growing Memories: A remote volunteering project in partnership with Alzheimer's Scotland to encourage people suffering from dementia to plant wildflower seeds within their home environment to be used to create a meadow at the Country Park.
- Rural Life Skills: A project to provide training in traditional rural skills to volunteers, students and work placements. 2 Apprentices have been appointed through this project.
- Natural Heritage Volunteers: A group of volunteers have been working with the Natural heritage Development Co-ordinator and Countryside Ranger Service to survey, record and monitor key species throughout the Dean Castle Country Park. The majority of surveys are linked in with national citizen science initiatives. Surveys carried out regularly included:
 - Raptor Patch monitoring raptor nesting,
 - BeeWalks surveying bumblebees,
 - Butterfly transects through the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme,
 - Hedgerow transects as part of the Great British Hedgerow Survey,
 - River invertebrates through the Riverfly Partnership,
 - Pollinators through the Flower-Insect-Timed Count.
 - Hay-meadow species surveys,
 - Moth trapping
 - Newt breeding season surveys.

Data is recorded through iRecords, except where was a dedicated recording portal for specific citizen science initiatives.

- Friends of Dean Castle Country Park: This volunteer group has helped enable and maintain a number of externally funded conservation projects in the park, including Wild About the Farm, Growing Memories, Traditional Rural Skills and The Marvellous Margin. They have also facilitated a new programme of rhododendron removal in the park, taken part in hedge-laying around the park and carried out a programme of tree planting for the last 3 years. The work carried out by the Friends of the Dean contributed to the Habitat Action Plans by fulfilling tasks such as invasive species control through rhododendron removal, tree planting to diversify the woodland and pond clearance to maintain the ponds for wildlife.
- Woodland Management Plan: Forestry Commission Scotland have approved a 5 year woodland management plan for the Country Park.

22. A 5 year management plan for Woodroad Park, Cumnock has also been approved by Forestry Commission Scotland. The works within this management plan will be implemented as part of a training programme run by East Ayrshire Woodlands.

23. East Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Leisure have continued to work 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 100 students each year.

24. East Ayrshire Leisure 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.

BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS

25. 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:

- Continued implementation of the Parks for People project at Dean Castle Country Park
- Continued development of Community Led Action Plans
- The successful bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership Project
- Successful call for new projects within the CCLPS

- The Conservation volunteer role expanded to Rural skills trainees, survey volunteers and Friends of Group within DCCP
- Integrated approach to ensuring that biodiversity and European protected species are considered as part of the planning process
- Integrated approach to ensure that European protected species are considered as part of the maintenance of EAC assets.

LOOKING AHEAD

26. As the review of the Scottish Biodiversity Action Plan is being delayed, it is proposed that a detailed action plan for East Ayrshire is not produced at this stage and should be informed by the national strategy. However, there are a number of key priorities that will be implemented and taken forward between 2021 and 2023. These include:

- Implementation of the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership
- Implementation of Dean Castle Country Park Habitat and Biodiversity Action Plans
- Updated green space audit and a revised Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Provide support to Community Led Action Plans
- Continue to identify opportunities to work with new partners and develop new initiatives to raise awareness of biodiversity across East Ayrshire.

27. Biodiversity and nature-based solutions are critical to achieving net-zero actions by 2045. East Ayrshire has also recognised the importance of 'green recovery' as part of the response to covid19 and is actively auditing all community openspace to develop a strategy that will outline priorities for biodiversity and nature-based solutions that recognises that 'living in harmony' should be integrated into wider environmental solutions to address climate change and should adopt a place based approach that contributes to a regional, national agenda.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

27 This report have been developed collaboratively by East Ayrshire Leisure in partnership with East Ayrshire Council colleagues and third sector partners.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

28 There are no financial implications directly associated with this paper

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS

29 There is a requirement under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 for this report to be published on East Ayrshire Council's website by 1st January 2021.

POLICY/HR/EQUALITY

30 There are no implications directly associated with this paper

COMMUNITY PLANNING/TRANSFORMATION IMPLICATIONS

31 The projects and initiatives highlighted in this paper align with a number of Transformation Strategy themes through improving community activity and utilising our built assets more efficiently.

CONCLUSION

32 Whilst the formal biodiversity partnership for Ayrshire no longer exists, the Biodiversity Duty Report clearly demonstrates that there is significant activity across East Ayrshire. Biodiversity continues to be integrated and mainstreamed into policy and operations and has been recognised as a key objective within the community action plans and as part of the economic and wellbeing recovery.

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Appendix 1: 2018 – 2020 Biodiversity Delivery Action Plan Progress

Action	Description	Lead Partner	2018	2019	2020
Mainstreaming					
Green Network Plan	Implementation of the 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	Surveying, monitoring and maintenance of Strategic Routes within East Ayrshire	Review of core path plan, strategic network and local routes to create a Recreation Plan which includes the green network and active travel	Draft Recreation Plan produced for public consultation and publication in 2021
Service Biodiversity Action Plans	Development of service specific biodiversity plans to raise awareness of biodiversity and to introduce more sympathetic working practices specifically within Outdoor Amenities, Housing Asset Services, Facilities and property Management and the Ayrshire Roads Alliance	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	Partnership with EAL to continue EPS, DCCP BAP and Haps	Continued understanding and awareness of environmental issues Planning and EAC Methodology and mitigation support, DCCP HAPs	Green infrastructure, Green space audit, infinity loop, CCLPS,
Monitoring					
Local Record Centre	Work in partnership to establish a local records	East Ayrshire Leisure, SUP,	Where's wildlife in Ayrshire as part of the	SWiec project end over 130,000	Countryside Team using Irecord, training

	centre that will collate biological records and community sightings	Biosphere	South west Scotland Environmental Information centre collating and recording	records now on line.	individuals and groups to record
Annual Review of 2018 – 2020 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	Ongoing survey and maintenance work contribute to the Habitat Action Plans by providing continuous data on the habitats in the park to help inform Habitat and Biodiversity management decisions.	Ongoing survey and maintenance work contribute to the Habitat Action Plans by providing continuous data on the habitats in the park to help inform Habitat and Biodiversity management decisions.	Ongoing survey and maintenance work contribute to the Habitat Action Plans by providing continuous data on the habitats in the park to help inform Habitat and Biodiversity management decisions.
Partnership Working					
Implementation of the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership Scheme	Subject to funding, implementation of a Landscape Partnership Scheme which addresses some of the issues of the Coalfield Area and builds on identified actions within Community led Action Plans	East Ayrshire Council	Ongoing Funding works	Call for Projects within selected communities	Funding secured, project work began 2020
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Management of Nature sites within EA and steering group members	EAC, EAW, CEI	Management of Knockshinnoch lagoons and Dalmellington Moss	Management of Knockshinnoch lagoons and Dalmellington Moss	Management of Knockshinnoch lagoons and Dalmellington Moss
Biodiversity Action, Communication and Engagement					

Dean Castle Country Park Biodiversity Action Plan	Continued implementation of the BAP for Dean Castle Country Park focusing on the woodland, farmland and wetland habitats	East Ayrshire Leisure	Ongoing development	Habitat action plans created	Ongoing survey and maintenance work contribute to the Habitat Action Plans by providing continuous data on the habitats in the park to help inform Habitat and Biodiversity management decisions.
Kilmarnock Green Infrastructure Project	Develop and implement a project which connects key open spaces throughout Kilmarnock focussing on sustainable transport, biodiversity and community engagement	East Ayrshire Leisure	x	RIBA Stage 1 and 2 complete	£350k secured for RIBA stage 3. Next submission due in March 2021.
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	Environmental education projects with all east Ayrshire schools and groups	Environmental education projects with all east Ayrshire schools and groups	Environmental education projects with all east Ayrshire schools and groups
Development of Local Nature Reserves	Identify any areas with existing or potential community	East Ayrshire Leisure, Scottish		Natural Leaders Project, creation of 3 Nature	On hold due to Covid 19 restrictions

	interest or involvement which could be suitable as a Local Nature Reserve	Natural Heritage		Reserves working with Funding from (SNH)Nature Scot	
Guided Walks and Events	Deliver an annual programme of countryside events throughout East Ayrshire	East Ayrshire Leisure	3 Walking festivals, Ranger community events and holiday programmes and Love your Park event Pet show Rangers out and About	3 walking Festivals, bat walks, food for free, Bushcraft courses DCCP holiday events including Pond dips bird feeders	Holiday events around East Ayrshire and DCCP, all about Apple, Bird bothies, bird feeders, Nutty about Nature
Biodiversity Workshops	Develop a programme of awareness raising workshops with East Ayrshire Council staff	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	Ongoing work with HAS and F&PM	Ongoing work with HAS and F&PM	Ongoing work with HAS and F&PM
Ecological Surveys	Continue to contribute to national and local survey campaigns	East Ayrshire Leisure, East Ayrshire Council	Amphibian, surveys with Froglifeuk, bat and bird surveys. Butterfly transects, bee transects	Moth surveying mornings, Amphibian surveys, Bat and Bird surveys,	EPS Surveys