

# South Ayrshire Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2013 -2015



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## **1. Nature Conservation, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development**

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.

Biodiversity is the term which describes all varieties of life on the Earth. This provides the support that humans require to survive. Whether it is the essentials of life or the pleasures that can be gained from nature's beauty, biodiversity is of significant value.

There is an increasing threat to biodiversity - within the United Kingdom more than 100 species have disappeared over the last century, the majority of which has been during the post war period. This is mainly due to increasing urbanisation and intensive land management, causing a loss of living areas for species. If no action is taken it is predicted that many important global processes will be seriously impaired. This will in turn affect the economic and social well-being of our society and have profound consequences for our future as we know it.

Sustainable Development is defined as, *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”* (Bruntland Report, 1987). Biodiversity is an integral part of this, as it enhances human quality of life, provides natural assets from which the economy benefits and indicates an ecosystem in good health. Society and biodiversity are interdependent, and therefore sustainable development requires the protection of biodiversity in order to occur.

### **Biodiversity, Sustainability and an Ecosystem Approach**

Together, these form the living systems, called ecosystems, which sustain nature and upon which our own survival depends. Healthy sustainable ecosystems are the basis for sustaining people and biodiversity. An ecosystem is a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit.

A commonly used definition of ecosystems comes from the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>4</sup> (CBD) 1994. This defines the Ecosystem Approach as, *“a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, and which recognises that people with their cultural and varied social needs are an integral part of ecosystems”*.

The natural environment is one of Scotland's greatest assets. For a country of its size, Scotland has a great diversity of landscapes, habitats and wildlife. Much of it is thriving, and in some areas past damage has been restored, such as previously polluted rivers in some cities or birds of prey, like the red kite.

As Scotland seeks to increase economic growth in a sustainable way, in the face of a changing climate and other pressures, for example on land use, it is important to find ways to sustain, and where necessary restore, the health of Scotland's ecosystems: to build a sustainable future for people and nature.

### **The Scottish Government lists three key steps to using an ecosystem approach**

- Nature connects across landscapes, so we need to consider the broad scale as well as the local. Ecosystems are dynamic so we must recognise that change will happen, but, by using up-to-date information, adaptive management and by aiming to sustain nature's multiple benefits, we can ensure that nature continues to contribute to Scotland's growth.
- Take account of services that ecosystems provide to people, such as regulating floods and climate, breaking down waste, providing food, fuel and water, and contributing to quality of life, culture and wellbeing.
- Involve people in decision-making, especially those who benefit from the ecosystem services and those who manage them. This means valuing people's knowledge, helping people to participate, and giving people greater ownership and responsibility.



***An ecosystem approach requires co-ordinated action across entire landscapes, as here in the Galloway Biosphere***

## An Ecosystem Approach



## The Legislation

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. Local authorities have a role to play to support biodiversity from simple direct actions, through to educating others and raising awareness. The act states, *"It is the duty of every public body and office holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions"*.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/6/contents>

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (commonly known as the WANE Act) came into force on 01 January 2012 and further required all public bodies to report every three years on how they comply with this duty. This first report is required by, 1 January 2015, to cover activity for the period 1 January 2012 to 1 January 2015. The next report is due in January 2018.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/contents>

## 2. About South Ayrshire Council

South Ayrshire Council is a medium sized Scottish Local Authority with a staff compliment of 5,423 staff (4509 full time equivalent) and a budget of £246m in financial year 2013/14. The Council area has a population of approximately 112,000 and a land area of 1222 km<sup>2</sup>. The south of the Council area is rural in nature and the Council area is characterised by rolling countryside and a long coastline. Approximately 70% of the population lives in the towns of Ayr, Prestwick and Troon in the north of the Council area. The settlements of South Ayrshire contain just under 4750Ha of open space, with just under a third of this being maintained open space held by the Council.

## 3. Governance, Leadership and Management

South Ayrshire Council is committed to the protection and conservation of the area's biodiversity. As a main partner in the development of the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan, the Council commits to preserving and enhancing its natural environment.

South Ayrshire Council consists of 30 elected Councillors representing eight wards. The Councillors are responsible for policy decision-making on all aspects of Local government services which South Ayrshire Council is responsible for. Councillors attend committee meetings throughout the Council's cycle of formal meetings. They attend the full meetings of South Ayrshire Council held every eight weeks. They also represent the people of South Ayrshire on a wide range of bodies and trusts.

Councillor John McDowall, as portfolio holder for Sustainability and the Environment, is the lead Councillor on biodiversity. Councillor McDowall is also Chair of the South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership, one of the five themed



partnerships which make up South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, (Appendix 1.) and biodiversity is regularly discussed at this forum which has membership from partners such as Scottish Natural heritage (SNH) and Scottish Environmental protection Agency (SEPA). Councillor McDowall also represents the Council on the board of the Southern

Ayrshire and Galloway Biosphere. The Council is a signatory to the Central Scotland Green Network Declaration and the Climate Change Declaration.



As part of their Sustainable Development Team, the Council employs an Environmental Strategy Officer with the joint remit of biodiversity and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Although the Council does not directly employ a ranger service, it is in partnership with the National Trust for Scotland in relation to the provision of Culzean Country Park, which was Scotland's first Country Park and is the Country Park for South Ayrshire. As part of that agreement the Council part funds the provision of the park ranger service. This comprises of a senior ranger who manages a team of three full time rangers with an additional six seasonal staff that join the team between April and October each year.

Recent Heritage Lottery Funded development at Belleisle Park in Ayr will lead to the provision of 1.5 temporary ranger posts in the park, with a focus on community engagement and involvement.

#### **4. Mainstreaming**

The South Ayrshire Single Outcome Agreement, created by the South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership led by South Ayrshire Council, includes 'protecting and enhancing our environment' as one of six partnership priorities. Within this it is stated that within 10 years *'South Ayrshire should be 'clean, attractive and delivering a low-carbon future', with specific intermediate and long term outcomes of the local environment of urban and rural areas improved, our impact on the environment is enhanced, due to lower carbon emissions' and 'South Ayrshire has attractive build and natural environments, appreciated by our residents and visitors'*. When reporting on these outcomes activity in relation to biodiversity in South Ayrshire is reflected, and it is acknowledged that the environment provides the essential context for social and economic activity within the area.

Environmental objectives are also outlined in several other key strategy documents of the Council. These include the South Ayrshire Council Local Development Plan, the South Ayrshire Council Openspace Strategy and the forthcoming Sustainability Strategy.

These and other strategies are translated into the Service Plans and Personal Development Reviews of teams and staff across the organisation, and in this way the protection and enhancement of biodiversity is mainstreamed across the organisation.

Examples of lower level actions delivered through this process include working towards parks quality standards for our main parks and Green Flag Award standards for Belleisle Park.

## **5. Monitoring**

Through Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) there is monitoring in place for key strategies which have undergone the process and scoped in consideration of biodiversity, flora and fauna. These include South Ayrshire Council Core Paths Plan, Openspace Strategy and Local Development Plan.

The policies set out in the South Ayrshire Local Development Plan support the principles of sustainable development by making sure that all development respects, protects the integrity, and where possible enhances natural heritage resources, including those of International, National and Local Designated status. The policies of the Local Development Plan also seek to ensure the protection of European Protected Species, and the enhancement of biodiversity throughout the built and rural landscape. It further reflects the overarching aims of the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) of delivering connected green corridors, and protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

South Ayrshire Council does not formally collect biological monitoring data. The Council however has access to a network of local specialist groups as and when appropriate and refers to specialist consultation organisations, such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and Historic Scotland.

Ayrshire Biological Records works in partnership with the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and recorders to display local records within Ayrshire. An online data portal allows users to interrogate recorded information and to display these spatially. The web facility integrates recorded information with a range of other Geographical Information System (GIS)



tools which allow the display of mapping, satellite imagery, habitat types and natural heritage designations.

The system was developed in conjunction with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan group and the Ayrshire Joint Planning Unit. It is hoped that the web resource will contribute to raising awareness of biodiversity issues within Ayrshire.

Invasive non-native species (INNS), which are a threat to natural habitats and species, are controlled on Council land. Information on non-native invasive plant eradication is collated and held on file by the Councils Neighbourhood Services grounds maintenance section.



## **6. Partnership working, including action taken to improve biodiversity conservation on the ground**

Working as part of the South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership the Council aims to encourage and engage with a wide range of interested parties on the subjects of climate



change, the promotion of green travel, the promotion of local biodiversity and natural environment and the promotion of sustainable design and construction. The Partnership sits within the South Ayrshire Community Planning Structure and meets on a regular basis to share best practice on climate change and other environmental issues, including compiling reporting

information in relation to the Single Outcome Agreement. It can hear reports on biodiversity and can recommend these to the Community Planning Partnership Board.

South Ayrshire Council strives to incorporate biodiversity into many of our activities through partnership working. Participation in a wide range of projects delivers specific biodiversity benefits and establishes a culture where our officers are able to network with other stakeholders both giving and gaining advice and support.

South Ayrshire Council is a member of The Ayrshire Green Network (AGN). The AGN aims to enhance the quality of the manmade and natural environment for the benefit of the economy, society and nature. The background to the AGN is the National Planning



Framework 2 which designates an area of the Central Belt of Scotland from Ayrshire to Fife as the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). The aim of the CSGN is to make 'a significant contribution to Scotland's sustainable economic development' through restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.

As a Council we also continue to champion and support the Galloway & South Ayrshire Biosphere as a vehicle to accelerate the engagement of local communities and businesses with their natural environment. This work is adding value to business product (tourism/branding/quality) and delivering many improvements and changes in land uses that strengthen native habitat networks in the area, e.g. native woodland habitat improvement and peat restoration.

The planning service continues to reflect the objectives of the CSGN within their decisions on major applications, requesting compensation for woodland loss and green network improvements, e.g. footpath improvements to core path networks where appropriate, housing and windfarm proposals. Timescales are still to be established for devising overall openspace standards, however in the meantime the Council continues to operate successful standards for the amount and nature of open space in new developments.



## Partnerships and Engagement

- Working with volunteers in our parks to erect bird boxes, undertake bat surveys and identify areas for specific planting or management to improve biodiversity
- Running briefing sessions for professional grades, to raise awareness of sustainability issues including biodiversity. This includes in-house continual professional development (CPD) training provided to our arboriculture staff in order to ensure a full awareness of all relevant biodiversity topics
- Working with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Forestry Commission and other partners in the creation of a new Biosphere Reserve in the Galloway Forest Park
- Working with Conservation Volunteers and Friends of Belleisle groups to clear overgrown Rhododendron bushes, while planting native wildflowers to enhance wildlife value
- Working with our golf courses to resolve environmental issues such as burns maintenance, future planting and grounds maintenance
- The Nectar Network – helping to reinstate our smallest butterfly the Small Blue back into the western coast of Scotland
- Encouraging and supporting South Ayrshire schools to become Eco Schools. Many schools have now developed their grounds to encourage biodiversity
- Working in partnership with the Ayrshire Rivers Trust on the reintroduction of water vole and removal of invasive non-native species (INNS), such as giant hogweed, and Himalayan balsam in riparian catchment areas. The Council routinely eradicates all stands of Japanese Knotweed on Council land
- Coastal Habitats Action Plan - The Girvan “Make it Happen” community group working in partnership with the Council, using used Christmas trees, to stabilise the sand on Girvan beach for the purposes of coastal protection
- ‘Running Bats’ - successful bat walks have been held in Rozelle and Belleisle estates in Ayr



## 7. Biodiversity Highlights of the Past Year

One of our specific commitments in our Central Scotland Green network (CSGN) declaration was that the draft Core Path Plan should be adopted by 2014. This was successfully achieved as the Council adopted the Core Paths Plan via the Leadership Panel on 4 November 2014. The Scottish Ministers', by letter of July 2014, directed the Council to adopt the Plan following a 19 months' inquiry.

<http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/documents/core%20paths.pdf>

The Ayrshire and Arran Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2014 has been launched this year. The strategy is intended to provide a policy and spatial framework to guide woodland management and expansion in Ayrshire and Arran in an effort to maximise the contribution of woodland and forestry to the people, environment and economy of the region.



A range of South Ayrshire Council forestry and woodland works has been carried out in the past two years. All trees in Belleisle Park have been surveyed and work has now started on the maintenance and sustainability recommendations. In addition the Council has a programme of replanting incorporated into a 25 year woodland management plan specifically for Belleisle Park. It is anticipated that a further Council wide Woodland Management Plan will be produced by March 2016.

Our trees have recently been surveyed in Rozelle, Craigie and Castlehill parks, and these surveys will form the basis of future woodland works. Woodland work undertaken within Rozelle includes; clearing undergrowth, minor arbor works and path works, all of which enhance current biodiversity. Rozelle also saw the felling of the commercial monoculture plantation in Oct 2014, and this is now being replanted with native woodland – enhancing both the landscape and biodiversity. The woodlands of Fullarton and Annbank will go out to survey in April 2015. In 2014 approximately 850 trees were planted by the Councils Neighbourhood Services.

## **8. Looking Ahead and Future Action**

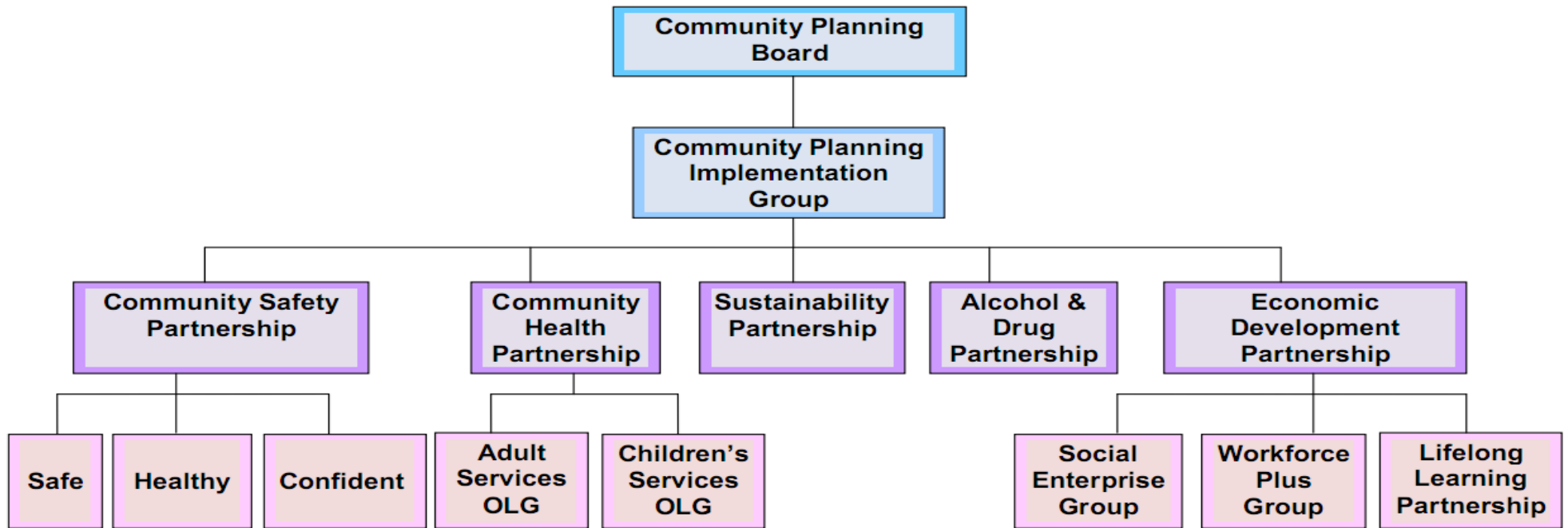
The Council will continue to promote the biodiversity of South Ayrshire and ensure that the aims and objectives of the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) where appropriate are delivered through its services.

The Council aspires to:

- continue to promote Biological Diversity
- continue to support the delivery of the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) as a framework for biodiversity action in South Ayrshire
- continue to support the Ayrshire Green Network Partnership
- continue to support the delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Action Plan
- support and contribute towards the objectives and targets of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity
- continue to support and promote the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere in order to protect and enhance biodiversity in Ayrshire and South Ayrshire specifically
- ensure the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process considers biodiversity in all future plans, policies, programmes and strategies
- continue supporting local action groups, and 'Friends of' groups

9. Appendix 1

South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership Structure



## **Appendix 2. List of Abbreviations**

<b>SEA</b>	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<b>NBN</b>	National Biodiversity Network
<b>CSGN</b>	Central Scotland Green Network
<b>AGN</b>	Ayrshire Green Network
<b>SBS</b>	Scottish Biodiversity Strategy
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>SNH</b>	Scottish Natural heritage
<b>INNS</b>	Invasive non-native species
<b>SEPA</b>	Scottish Environmental protection Agency
<b>GIS</b>	Geographical Information System
<b>WANE</b>	Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011
<b>CPD</b>	Continual Professional Development

## **Appendix 3. Useful links**

### **Scottish Biodiversity Strategy**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/16118/BiodiversityStrategy>

### **National Biodiversity Network:**

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

### **The Scottish Government Ecosystem Approach:**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/5538/4>

### **Central Scotland Green Network:**

<http://www.centalscotlandgreennetwork.org/>

### **Ayrshire Green Network:**

[http://www.ayrshire-jsu.gov.uk/ayrshire\\_green\\_network.html](http://www.ayrshire-jsu.gov.uk/ayrshire_green_network.html)

### **Scottish Natural heritage:**

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/>

### **Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011**

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/contents>

### **South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership**

<http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/sustainability-partnership/>