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AND COMMUNITIES TO
MAKE LIFE BETTER



South Ayrshire Council Biodiversity Duty Report

2015 – 2017
January 2018



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About South Ayrshire Council

South Ayrshire is located on the south west coast of Scotland and is bordered by the council areas of North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway. It spans approximately 422 square miles (1,222 square kilometres) and contains a population of 112,799 (2011 Census). The main centres of population are located across five towns at Ayr, Girvan, Maybole, Prestwick, and Troon. (Figure 1.)

The key transport routes relevant to South Ayrshire include the A77, A71 and A76, providing connections to Glasgow to the north, Stranraer to the south, Edinburgh to the north east and Dumfries to the southeast. South Ayrshire is also served by rail links connecting to the central belt and Dumfries and Galloway. Prestwick Airport in the north of the council area is one of Scotland's main airports, offering national and international connections.

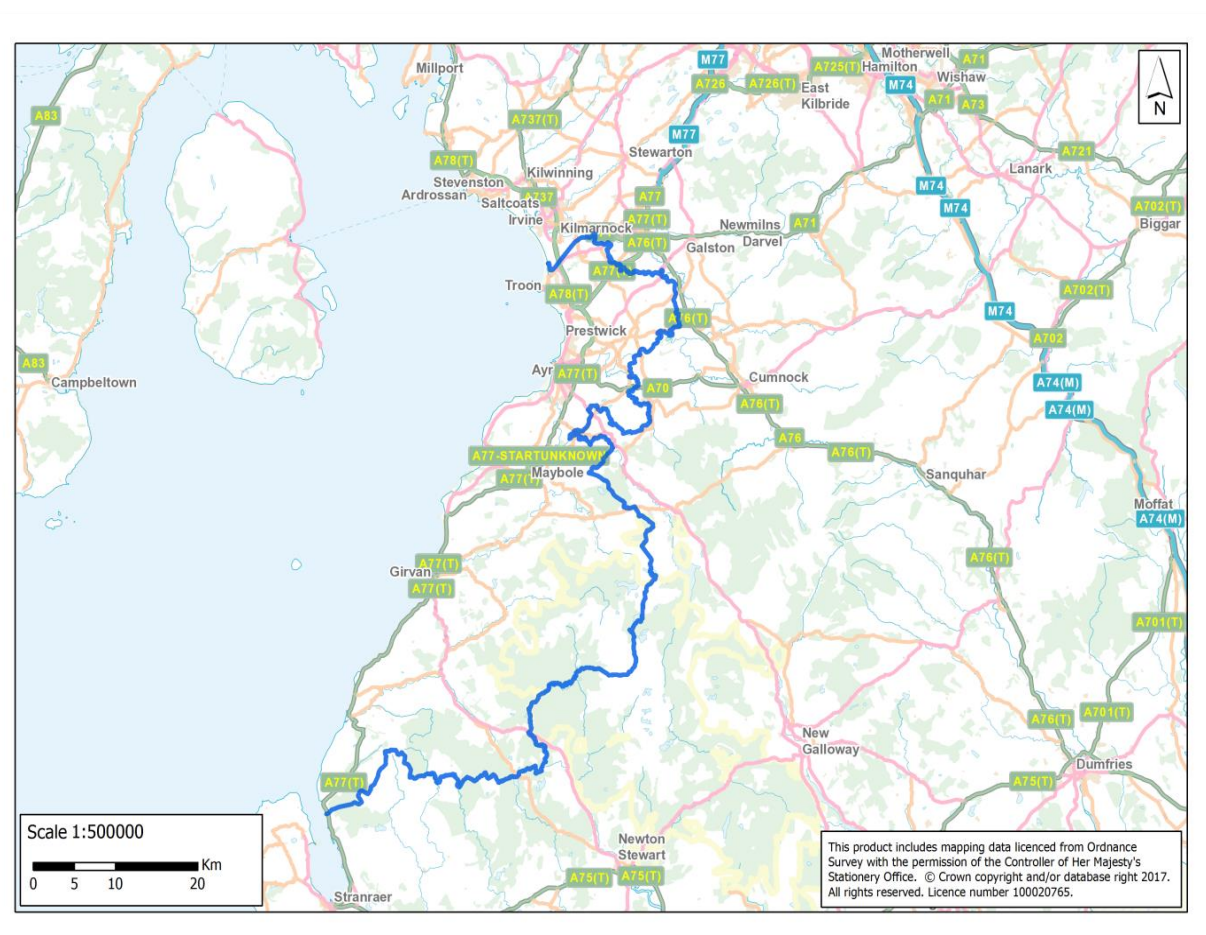


Figure 1: Map of South Ayrshire

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of living things around us. This includes plants, insects, fish and animals. The definition of biodiversity is: Biological diversity - or biodiversity - is a term we use to describe the variety of life on Earth. ([Convention on Biological Diversity](#)).

This provides the support that humans require to survive. Whether it is the essentials of life or the pleasures gained from nature's beauty, biodiversity is of significant value.

Biodiversity refers to:

- The wide variety of living organisms - animals, plants, fungi, bacteria and other simple microorganisms
- Genetic variation within species
- The variety of habitats and ecosystems - different ways that organisms interact with one another and their environment

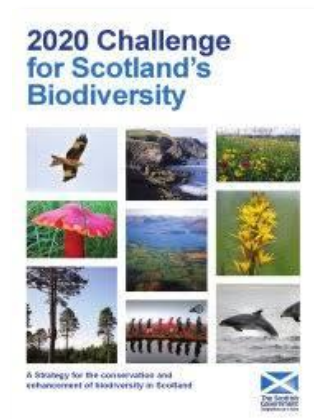
Scotland has a mosaic of habitats and scenery which make up a rich, complex and varied landscape, supporting some 90,000 species of plant, animal and microbes. They provide the ecosystem services that sustain life and underpin Scotland's economy.

Scotland's biodiversity continues to change. A number of species are doing well and others are extending their range across and into Scotland as a result of climate change, investment in habitat management and restoration, and a range of positive conservation measures for species. At the same time, the range and population of some species are declining as a result of a range of social, economic and environmental factors.

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.

Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands

Scotland's biodiversity strategy, [Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands](#), was published in 2004 and sets out how the government will conserve biodiversity for the health, enjoyment and wellbeing of the people of Scotland now and in the future. The strategy set out a vision for 2030 as well as objectives and desired outcomes leading us there. These are still valid today, however, the way the Strategy will be taken forward has changed from that set out almost ten years ago. (Appendix 1.)



Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

With the publication of the 2020 Challenge document the Scottish Government designates the two strategy documents '2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity' and 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands' together as comprising the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

The Legislation – why are we producing this report?

Under the [Nature Conservation \(Scotland\) Act \(2004\)](#), all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities.

The [Wildlife and Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Act \(WANE Act\)\(2011\)](#) further requires public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report, every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty. This report outlines what South Ayrshire Council is doing to fulfil this duty.

South Ayrshire's environment is rich and diverse containing a number of environmentally important sites designated at [international, national and local level](#). Given its high quality diverse landscapes and low population density, biodiversity is generally in a good state in South Ayrshire.



The Heads of Ayr

Sustainable Development

A range of teams and services contribute to fulfilling South Ayrshire Council's Biodiversity Duty, and have helped to produce this report. This included Officers in Planning, Open Space Strategy, Outdoor Access, Grounds Maintenance and Golf Services. [Sustainable Development](#) and [Open Space Strategy](#) officers promote biodiversity wherever possible. As part of Sustainable Development the Council has an Environmental Strategy Officer (ESO) who also has a remit as biodiversity officer. The officer is also responsible for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and ensuring that biodiversity considerations are appropriately addressed in SEA for Council 'plans, programmes and strategies', often

referred to in guidance as PPS. The ESO acts as non-statutory consultee on biodiversity and ecology for Council planning consultations. The ESO is also a member of the Scottish Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Officers network.



Volunteers helping to remove [Rhododendron ponticum](#) in Belleisle Estate

As part of Sustainable Development, the Council has two Park Rangers based at Belleisle Estate in Ayr, with a focus on community engagement and involvement.

The [Belleisle Park Ranger Service](#) organises and leads free biodiversity focused activities for local schools and community groups to increase awareness of biodiversity. The Rangers offer various activities including biological monitoring and recording, habitat improvement and tackling Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) such as [Rhododendron ponticum](#).



Woods within Belleisle Estate

Biodiversity and statutory designations

South Ayrshire has a sizeable land mass and the coastline exhibits a wide variety of biodiversity resources, reflected in the [numerous international, national and local sites](#) presently designated in the area for their biodiversity value. Foremost amongst these are the internationally designated Natura 2000 sites, of which South Ayrshire has two [Special Protection Areas \(SPAs\)](#) at Ailsa Craig and Glen App / Galloway Moors, and two [Special Areas of Conservation \(SACs\)](#) at Lendalfoot Hills and Merrick Kells.



Glen App / Galloway Moors SPA

These designations are important for a number of key habitats. The network of SPAs and SACs across the community is known collectively as the Natura 2000 series. Some Natura 2000 sites contain habitats or species which are classed as priorities as they are particularly threatened in global terms.

Priority habitats and species are defined under Article 1 of the Habitats Directive. The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) mandates the Council to ensure it will not adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites.

Numerous non-statutory wildlife sites and ornithological sites are also present within South Ayrshire, with wildlife and green corridors important for biodiversity passing through the main settlements. European protected species in South Ayrshire include bats, Great-crested newt, otters, dolphins and marine turtles. The [Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan \(LBAP\)](#) further identifies several UK priority habitats present in addition to 11 priority species.

Biodiversity, sustainability and an ecosystem approach

An ecosystems approach is a set of principles that can be applied to any plan or decision that positively or negatively affects the environment, whether directly or indirectly. It is about making sure that we recognise and sustain the benefits provided by the environment while delivering other economic and social goals.

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 the return of birds of prey, like the [Red Kite](#) in Galloway. The red kite is an 'Amber List' species because of its historical decline.

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



“The ecosystem approach is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way”. (The Convention on Biological Diversity, 1994)

Many public agencies are facing tough funding constraints with very limited resources for new or more resource intensive processes. Developing the skills public bodies will need to apply an ecosystems approach and addressing significant gaps in our knowledge of how ecosystems work will take time.

Mainstreaming

The South Ayrshire [Single Outcome Agreement](#), produced by the South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership led by South Ayrshire Council (Appendix 2.), contains two long-term outcomes:

- *Our impact on the environment is enhanced, due to lower carbon emissions*
- *South Ayrshire has attractive built and natural environments, appreciated by its citizens & visitors*

Environmental objectives are outlined in several other key strategy documents of the Council. These include the [Local Development Plan](#) (LDP), [Openspace Strategy](#) and the forthcoming Sustainable Development & Climate Change 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

Planning Development, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and biodiversity

Land use in South Ayrshire is predominantly rural, so there is a need to avoid loss of habitats and priority [Local Biodiversity Action Plan \(LBAP\)](#) species as a result of any conversion of farmland and semi-natural habitats to development. If this is not considered then there is the potential for developments to lead to fragmentation of habitats and wildlife corridors, resulting in isolation of populations of rare or threatened species.

The South Ayrshire [Local Development Plan](#) (LDP) was adopted on 23 September 2014. The LDP is a strategic land use plan that sets out strategic spatial priorities and policies for South Ayrshire and will secure land for specified uses (e.g. housing/industry etc.) to provide certainty for development. All planning applications are assessed against the policies in the South Ayrshire Local Development Plan. The proposed second South Ayrshire Council Local Development Plan (LDP2), like the adopted LDP, will be the subject of a Habitats Regulation Appraisal under the [Conservation \(Natural Habitats &c.\) Regulations 1994](#), as amended, and, if necessary as a result, an appropriate assessment will take place to mitigate any impact on [Natura 2000](#) sites.

The Natura 2000 Network is made up of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) which support rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats and species of plants or animals (other than birds) of European importance, and Special Protection Areas (SPA) which support significant numbers of wild birds and their habitats. SACs in Scotland are designated by Scottish

Ministers under the Habitats Directive and SPAs are classified by Scottish Ministers under the Birds Directive.

In addition, the South Ayrshire Council adopted LDP includes relevant policies that seek to protect such sites, together with Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), local wildlife sites, and protected species, as well as scenic areas and trees. These policies will be carried forward into LDP2. In determining planning applications, the impacts of the proposed development on protective nature conservation designations, protected species, the landscape and trees are taken into consideration in reaching a planning determination.

The South Ayrshire Council [Main Issues Report \(MIR\)](#) is a consultation document which represents the first major step in the process of reviewing the Council's existing Local Development Plan. Whilst the MIR represents an early point in the plan preparation process, and does not / will not constitute policy in and of itself, the priorities that its 'Main Issue' discussion points represent reflect a direction of travel for improving awareness and of policy priorities for biodiversity concerns.

The MIR sets out eight 'Main Issues' which are the key areas of change identified for South Ayrshire, with preferred options and alternatives set out for each. Some of these main issues relate directly to biodiversity concerns, specifically issue seven, the [Central Scotland Green Network \(CSGN\)](#) and issue eight, which considers Local Landscape Areas. The inclusion of these topics as main issues in this key document for public consultation should raise public consciousness and stimulate discussion on the biodiversity benefits that their potential elevated policy importance may offer.

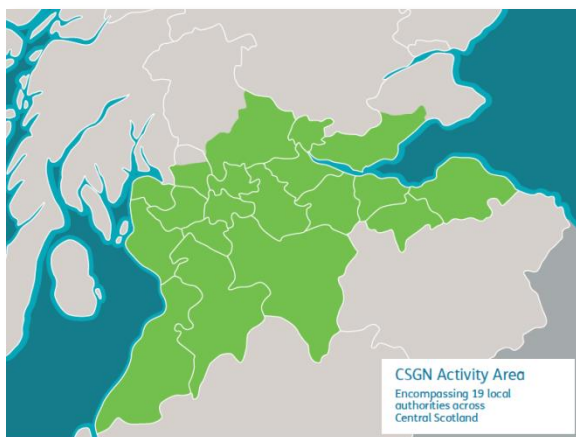


Glengennet Windfarm

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a systematic tool for considering the likely environmental effects of Plans, Programmes and Strategies (PPS). The purpose of any SEA environmental report is to identify and record the likely significant environmental effects of implementing Council plans such as LDP2.

Positive SEA implications are predicted for LDP2 SEA topics of biodiversity, flora and fauna, and human health, particularly in conjunction with its intended elevation of strategic priority afforded to the CSGN. The preferred option for CSGN advocates its stronger emphasis within masterplans as well as an overall framework for developing a green network in South Ayrshire, and an accreditation scheme for housing development to demonstrate good practice and encourage green infrastructure within future developments.

South Ayrshire Council is a member of The [Ayrshire Green Network](#) having signed the Local Authority Concordat in December 2012. The Ayrshire Green Network Partnership aims to enhance, protect and / or conserve green infrastructure features that make up the green networks in Ayrshire for the benefit of the economy, people and nature.



The purpose of the Ayrshire Green Network Partnership is to deliver CSGN priorities at a local level by working strategically to add value to the organisations which are already carrying out work to deliver green networks throughout the Ayrshire region. This ensures local activity fits in to the bigger CSGN picture and all projects contribute to making the Ayrshire Green Network happen.

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 Estate.

Action taken to improve biodiversity conservation

Dune restoration

South Ayrshire Council manages 15 beaches, many of which are major tourist attractions. Over the years the dunes at South Beach in Troon had become badly eroded and posed a potential flood risk. The Council identified the opportunity to apply to the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) to exempt the waste from being sent to landfill. The Waste Management service now recycles seaweed washed up on the shoreline to

stabilise, restore and fertilise the sand dunes. This prevents 1,000 tonnes of waste from being sent to landfill annually with the subsequent transportation costs. The restoration work has reinstated a natural barrier, providing the local area with greater protection from storm damage, while also nurturing natural habitats and encouraging wildlife. The project won Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) 'Best waste minimisation or prevention project' award and was also shortlisted for the 'Best new idea'. [The Troon Dune Restoration Project](#) also won a silver award at the COSLA Excellence Awards 2016, which celebrate the best in local government, in the 'Strong and Sustainable Communities' category.

The Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network (IGNN)

The Council is working in partnership with the [Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network \(IGNN\)](#) to improve Nectar Corridors and promote biodiversity. The IGNN is a landscape-scale conservation project on the Ayrshire coast, aiming to link conservation organisations, such as Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), with Local Authorities, local landowners and businesses, including golf courses and factories, who wish to improve their land for wildlife. The project focuses on improving vital habitat for pollinating insects like bees and butterflies, through initiatives including the



Devils-bit Scabious

creation of wildflower meadows and sandy nesting habitats.



Greenan Shore Information Panel

In 2016 the Sustainability Team designed an information panel to highlight the fragility of the dunes at Greenan Shore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Ayr.

SSSIs play a vital role in conserving Scotland's nature and many of the natural processes which benefit us in many ways – such as protecting and regulating water supplies, storing carbon, inspiring local people and visitors, and providing places for open-air recreation.

Grounds Maintenance

Our Grounds Maintenance Service has implemented many improvements to work patterns in order to promote biodiversity within the lands that South Ayrshire Council manages and maintains. This includes maintenance that will benefit biodiversity such as wildflower seed



Creation of wildflower areas

planting, wildflower plug planting, bluebell bulb planting, pond development, altered grass cutting regimes, tree planting and ensuring the correct choice of trees to promote biodiversity, hedge planting, control of non-native species, and consideration given to plant choice regarding their importance for invertebrates etc. The Grounds Maintenance Service also recycles green waste into compost for use on council green space areas and golf courses. In the Arboricultural Service biodiversity work includes leaving standing deadwood and log piles.

Golf Services

The Councils manages eight golf courses, and our Golf South Ayrshire is currently working on an action plan to achieve [GEO Certification](#) for its operations. This is a recognised voluntary sustainability standard and certification for golf facilities, developments and tournaments.

To date this work includes:

- Working with Ayrshire Rivers Trust to assist in the control areas of Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Ragwort and Giant Hogweed.
- Working with Grounds Maintenance and Forestry Services on woodland management in our courses to ensure that standing wood is left to create habitats for bats, birds and other wildlife.



- Creating wood piles throughout the wooded areas on courses to create habitats for insects and invertebrates.
- Throughout the eight courses have reduced the amount of managed areas (reduced mowing) to encourage wildlife. By reducing the maintained areas of the courses this has created areas for ground nesting birds as well as creating cover for small mammals. This has delivered savings in both labour and maintenance.



Green waste being turned into compost

- Our work here has produced more than 200 tonnes of green waste for recycling. This includes old turf, bunker sand and grass clippings for recycling. Approximately 90 tonnes of the finished recycled waste product has been used on courses for tee rebuilding, bunker repair, and general ongoing renovations. This has reduced the number of transportation miles and subsequent carbon emissions by negating the need to order in similar materials from commercial suppliers and has reduced fuel usage by a considerable amount per annum.
- Reduced the amount of maintenance on the banks of watercourses throughout Troon Links, Belleisle, Seafield and Girvan Golf Courses. This has encouraged the natural regeneration of wild flora and subsequently increased diversity.
- Worked in partnership with the Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network and RSPB 1800m² of greenspace was prepared and sown on Belleisle and Seafield Golf Courses to create pockets of wild flowers for migrating insects, in particular the Small Blue butterfly.

Partnership working and biodiversity communications

Working as part of the [South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership](#) the Council aims to encourage and engage with a wide range of interested [partners](#) 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.

South Ayrshire Council strives to incorporate biodiversity into many activities through partnership working. Participation in a wide range of projects delivers specific biodiversity



Path repairs and restoration is an important part of Sustainability

benefits and establishes a culture where officers are able to network with other stakeholders both giving and gaining advice and support.

As a council we continue to champion, support and promote the Galloway & South Ayrshire Biosphere as a vehicle to accelerate the engagement of local communities and businesses with their natural environment.

In 'Promoting Rural Economy and Tourism & Community Amenities', the Planning Service Local Development Plan (LDP) continues to reflect the objectives of the Central Scotland Green Network (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, but in the meantime continues to operate successful standards for the amount and nature of open space in new developments.

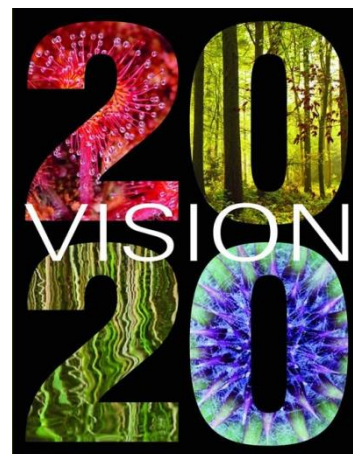


Community Safety working with communities to create a wildlife pond

Our Community Safety officers are involved in a number of community focused projects with biodiversity in mind. These include; an environmental project in conjunction with Nestle that includes building bee hotels, putting up bird feeders, pond and wetland creation and path creation.

2020 Vision Nature Photography Exhibition

From 8 Oct - 17 Dec 2015 South Ayrshire Council [Museum & Galleries](#) hosted the [2020 Vision Nature Photography Exhibition](#). This included a talk by the wildlife photographer Peter Cairns as he discussed his involvement in the project and the spectacular images produced; how to make bug hotels and pallet gardens by Girvan Community Garden; tree identification wild seed planting and autumn discovery walks by the Belleisle Park Rangers.



R&A Championship Garden – Fullarton Woods

In 2017 various projects were undertaken within [Fullarton Woods](#) in Troon in conjunction with the Royal & Ancient as the lead participatory funding stream. The projects have involved by a variety of stakeholders including South Ayrshire Council, The Scottish Wildlife Trust, Friends of Fullarton and the Fullarton Fairy Trail.



The projects goals are to create a woodland for all members of the community to enjoy, to develop educational aspects, highlighting the flora and fauna of the estate, to enhance biodiversity and encourage wildlife to flourish, to improve accessibility and provide an inclusive resource for all to use.

The Council is in the process of creating a ‘Championship Garden’ in Fullarton Woods, which has been funded by the Royal & Ancient (R&A) to celebrate the 145th Open Championship that was held in Troon in 2016. The garden will be at a central location in the estate, connected to the main paths for ease of access. It will provide seats, benches and a wheelchair-friendly table to ensure the area is accessible to all. When planted with choice species Rhododendrons, decorative trees and various other appropriate species befitting a woodland setting while enhancing biodiversity, it will provide a peaceful area for everyone to enjoy.

Friends of Fullarton Woods

The Council works closely with many 'Friends Of' groups to protect and enhance our green spaces and biodiversity. Since its inception in 2015, [Friends of Fullarton](#) volunteers have been involved with the following in relation to biodiversity. This has included:

- Organised litter pick campaigns with participants from throughout the community including youth groups.
- Liaised with Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), South Ayrshire Council and the local Scout group to re-open two over-grown paths and remove a large amount of Rhododendron Ponticum and other non-native invasive species (NNIS) such as Himalayan Balsam.
- Repaired and replaced fences.
- Organised major drainage improvement projects to alleviate historic flooding issues. Hydrological studies / work.
- 'Seed-bombing' with local children's groups (Cubs, Brownies, Girls Brigade).
- Installed a 'Go Explore' nature trail with brass rubbing posts throughout the woodland.
- Carrying out a continuous campaign against invasive species including Himalayan Balsam, Sycamore and Rhododendron Ponticum.
- Acquired a plot in the Troon Allotments for the cultivation of saplings (>100) which were supplied by the Woodland Trust in Nov 2017.
- Working with South Ayrshire Council and the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) to obtain a Forestry Commission Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) grant to produce a woodland / estate management plan.



The Provosts School Footprint Challenge (PFC)

The [Provost's School Footprint Challenge](#) (PFC) was created in 2014 to promote sustainability in secondary schools. The challenge is a competition between schools and encourages young people to develop and lead on sustainability projects in their own school environment. The challenge is based on the ecological footprint, so measurement of this

includes assessment of the buildings grounds, leading to some excellent projects being done on biodiversity and adaptive capacity including:

- Tree reclamation from soon-to-close buildings.
- Creation of a butterfly garden.
- Plans to develop a bog garden area.



The challenge continues to give young people access to the skills and experience required to improve the natural environment of their schools and communities with a bonus of efficiency saving for the schools. This year the Council won the [COSLA](#) Silver Award for the PFC.

Green Champions & Earth Hour

The South Ayrshire Council Green Champions are a sustainability network of over 100 council employees. The network is led by the Councils Climate Change Officer and works to improve awareness and change behaviour on target areas including energy and resource use, waste and recycling, and active travel. The network has been in operation since 2011 and has champions throughout most areas and levels of the organisation. The Champions work closely with other sustainable campaigns such as the Ayr Active Travel Hub and the Provost's School Footprint Challenge.

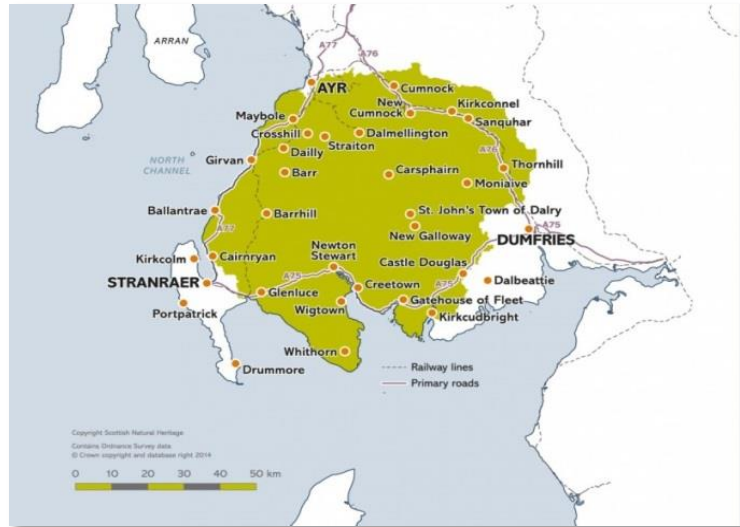
As an organisation South Ayrshire Council takes part in [Earth Hour](#) each year and has won the event for best council three times in a row (joint champion 2014), and runner-up once. Earth Hour is a global movement, which brings millions together across the world to call for greater action on climate change.



Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is one of two modern biosphere reserve designations in Scotland. It was enlarged in 2012 to reflect the new UNESCO criteria which more greatly emphasised the human dimension and peoples' relationship with the natural environment.

The area comprises 5268km² and a population of 95,000, centred on the Galloway Hills water catchment. While



predominantly within the Dumfries and Galloway council area, Southern Kyle and Carrick fall inside the Transition Area zone and the Carrick Forest area of eastern Carrick falls inside the Buffer Zone.



An ecosystem approach requires coordinated action across entire landscapes, as here in the Galloway Biosphere

The designation seeks to catalyse and promote initiatives, exhibiting good practice in conservation and environmentally sustainable development.

The Biosphere is providing a unique opportunity for land managers in the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere to receive advice on [habitat management](#) and participate in a collaborative project seeking to restore or create valuable habitat through the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Environmental Cooperation Fund (ECAF). The Council is currently exploring the options for funding to support this work.

Partnerships and communication summary

Through partnerships with other key stakeholders, other Local Authorities and species' conservation organisations, the council is working to extend the reach of our conservation actions and achieve wider gains for biodiversity. Partnerships working to date includes:

- Working with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Forestry Commission and other partners to promote the [Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere \(GSAB\)](#). The Biosphere is working with the Forestry Commission to promote a native woodland supplement to encourage investment in woodland planting.
- Working with East and North Ayrshire Council on pan-Ayrshire projects and networking.
- To continue contributing to GSAB funding. in the period from 2014 – 2017 this included funding for a Natural Heritage officer post.
- As part of the steering group working with the Southern Uplands Partnership to promote a Climate Ready Biosphere which promotes biodiversity.
- Working with conservation volunteers, [Friends of Belleisle](#), 'Friends of Fullarton and other groups to clear overgrown Rhododendron bushes, while planting native wildflowers to enhance wildlife value.
- Working with volunteers in our parks to erect bird boxes, undertake bat surveys and identify areas for specific planting or management to improve biodiversity.
- To continue supporting the Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network (IGNN) – helping to reinstate pollinators including our smallest



butterfly the Small Blue back into the western coast of Scotland. This year the Council provide IGNN with 10kg of Scottish provenance Kidney Vetch seeds.

- To continue working in partnership with the [South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre](#) (SWSEIC) and 'Where's' Wildlife in Ayrshire' projects.
- Encouraging and supporting South Ayrshire schools to become Eco Schools.
- Many schools have now developed their grounds to encourage biodiversity. There are currently 62 schools in South Ayrshire registered with the Eco-Schools programme in the South Ayrshire area with 25 achieving Green Flag status.
- Working in partnership with the Ayrshire Rivers Trust on the removal of invasive non-native species (INNS), such as Giant Hogweed, and Himalayan Balsam in riparian catchment areas. The Council routinely eradicates INNS on Council land.
- 'Running Bats' - successful bat walks have been held in Rozelle and Belleisle estates in Ayr.
- Council staff alongside Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) developed and provide content for the ['Wild Ayrshire'](#) Facebook page.
- More than 60 formal Planning consultations on biodiversity carried out by the ESO since October 2015.
- We continue to support Fairtrade, and serve Fairtrade coffee and tea at our meetings and in offices and canteens.
- Museums & Galleries – Staff at Rozelle Park staff host exhibitions with environmental connections. In 2014 The McLaurin Galleries / Rozelle Estate Ayr ran British Science Week with hosted photography training workshops in the Park, which looked at colour but also considered the biodiversity in the Park.
- Museums & Galleries - May 2016 – Festival of Museums – 'The Animals all around us' - the exhibition showcased the Councils taxidermy collection, and created education events for Primary Schools led by sustainability staff, to talk about wildlife and plants in the park. This was followed up with sessions looking at the taxidermy collection and considering its creation and history. Craft activities included carefully labelling the work, so it could be accurately identified for years to come.
- Museums & Galleries - July 2016 – Art on the Wing – a specially curated exhibition by RSPB Ayrshire, of paintings, drawings, wood carvings, sculpture, basketwork,



tapestry, graphics, miniatures, jewelry and ceramics to help save fragile habitats and nature reserves under threat. All works for sale profits in aid of conservation, habitat and species protection administered by RSPB Scotland. Throughout the year staff advertise and promote RSPB Ayrshire Bird Walks.

- To continue supporting the Scottish Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership. The partnerships deliver a wide range of biodiversity conservation, communication and education work in their local areas. Each partnership has a biodiversity action plan which identifies the habitats and species for which work is underway or planned.

Biodiversity highlights and challenges

‘Where’s Wildlife in Ayrshire’ Project

In October 2016, The [Southern Uplands Partnership](#) launched a new two-year project [Where’s Wildlife in Ayrshire \(WWIA\)](#) designed to engage with people throughout the region and encourage them to get involved in wildlife recording – gathering and sharing information about where different plants and animals live. By working with local wildlife



enthusiasts of all abilities – beginners and experts – it has helped to create a focal point for learning about our local wildlife while increasing opportunities to take account of local environmental data in the local decision-making process.

The project has been jointly funded through Heritage Lottery Fund, LEADER and the three Ayrshire councils. The project has helped to expand the activity of the neighbouring local

environmental records centre in Dumfries & Galloway, establishing a region-wide centre now known as the South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC).

Ayrshire is home to a wealth of wildlife which makes its home in the broad range of habitats that Ayrshire provides, such as farmland, bogs and a stunning coastline. Yet many [taxonomic groups](#) are under-recorded, and the lack of an active local environmental records centre means that there are plenty of opportunities to improve collation, sharing and use of biological information at a local level.

A key part of WWIA has been focusing on training communities and individuals to gather information about local wildlife. From February to August 2017, the project has held 12 species identification workshops across Ayrshire, teaching local people how to identify and survey amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies. These courses engaged with 119 people this year. In 2018 a further 12 workshops will be held in the region with the aim of continuing to provide people with new skills that focus on getting communities and individuals out identifying and recording wildlife in their area.



The first WWIA conference was held on the 11th March at Eglington Country Park in North Ayrshire. The conference was attended by more than 60 delegates, and was the first biological recorders conference in Ayrshire to bring people together from across the region.

The project provides a user-friendly online recording form so that records can be entered online enabling anyone to become a [citizen scientist](#). WWIA are also producing a toolkit highlighting the importance of wildlife recording, and giving guidance on how to run your own wildlife recording events in your local community.

WWIA is working in partnership with other wildlife groups and individuals in Ayrshire such as the [Scottish Wildlife Trust](#) (SWT), the [National Trust](#), [Butterfly Conservation](#) and local recorders. As part of the project WWIA have already managed to access over 30,000



biological records for Ayrshire from an old Recorder 2002 database (a database used for biological recording of species), which they are gradually re-importing into Recorder 6 (a newer more robust database). WWIA have a volunteer working one day per week to assist with digitising paper records from The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

WWIA are on target to hit the aim of mobilising 100,000 records which is impressive considering the short time the project has been up and running. The data sharing relationships that a local record centre provides are key to safeguarding biological data for the future, and ensuring that high quality and robust data is used in any planning or decision making for the region. The records gathered are already enabling the centre to start offering a service to commercial developers who need to understand the potential impact of proposed developments on local biodiversity.

By having a local records centre for Ayrshire, the three Ayrshire Councils can work towards meeting their biodiversity duties by ensuring any biological data is passed on to the records centre for safe storage and management.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships

In 2016 the Scottish Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership celebrated [20 years of Scottish Biodiversity Partnerships](#): Local Biodiversity Action Partnerships (LBAPs) were established across Scotland in response to the first UK Biodiversity Action Plan in 1994.

These partnerships now include many key stakeholders. LBAPs operate at a local level, to conserve and enhance biodiversity and deliver action for national priorities. They also work to protect species and habitats which are particularly important or valued locally.



Belleisle Estate Park Rangers

In 2015 the Council employed two [Park Rangers](#) using funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The four-year funding targets specific nature and biodiversity outcomes, as follows:

“Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups.”

A fortnightly practical conservation group has run at Belleisle Park since November 2015. Volunteering opportunities are open to all and advertised through Voluntary Action South Ayrshire (VASA) to reach a wide-ranging audience. The Rangers organise regular events at Belleisle Park, approximately 30 - 40 events per year. These give visitors the opportunity to enjoy green space and nature, with the majority of events free to make them accessible to everyone.

Events include:

- **Nature walks:** - Bat walks, dawn chorus walks, bumblebee walks, fungi walks, tree walks.
- **Identification workshops:** - Butterfly ID, bumblebee ID, bioblitz with local expert groups.
- **Earth hour:** - Events held to support the WWF campaign.
- **Family events:** - Bug hunts, environmental art, den building, natural crafts, building bird boxes.
- **Fun days:** - Belleisle 'Park Life'. This was a large-scale event events to encourage more people to take part in outdoor activities. Various environmental and wildlife groups were invited to have stalls and participate. South Ayrshire Council provided a free shuttle bus to provide transport from areas identified as deprived in the SIMD index and to cut down on transportation.



“Support local authorities and communities to improve local environments and enhance biodiversity using green space and green networks, allowing nature to flourish and so enhancing the quality of life for people who live there.”

The Rangers have been working to improve the local environment and biodiversity with volunteers and schools, including:

- **Pond work:** - Establishing an old duck pond as wildlife pond. This included creating shallower areas using gabions for planting, and to allow wildlife to exit pond. Plant material included use of marginal and oxygenating plants. Frogs and palmate newts returned to the pond during the first spring after work started, and a variety of invertebrates are now found in pond area.
- **Wildflowers:** - Planting over 5,500 wildflower plugs. The species included cow parsley, wild carrot, scabious, dog violet, lesser spearwort, ragged robin, cuckooflower, wood anemone, wood sorrel, yellow flag iris, winter aconite and snowdrops. These will provide habitat for pollinators and will also provide early nectar/pollen sources for invertebrates. Large areas of wildflower seed were sown using meadow mixes, woodland mixes and annual mix to encourage more pollinators.
- **Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS):** - Large stands of *Rhododendron ponticum* were removed from woodland areas. Controlled areas of few flowered garlic to prevent spread of the invasive species.
- **Habitat creation:** - The Rangers and volunteers have built bird boxes, bat boxes and hedgehog boxes to provide additional habitats within the park.
- **Tree planting:** - Planting has included native trees, mainly those that produce berries/fruits to provide food for mammals and birds. Species planted include hawthorn, blackthorn, crab apple and hornbeam.
- **Educational garden:-** The Rangers are creating an educational garden at Belleisle for use by school groups, including a pond area and wildflower meadow area. Raised beds will be created in 2018.



Belleisle Estate has formal as well as informal and woodland areas

“Increase access to nature within and close to schools, and support teachers in developing the role of outdoor learning across the Curriculum for Excellence.”

The Rangers provide led activities during educational visits from local schools, facilitating over 40 visits in 2017. Working with local teachers they provide activities that ties in to the Lifelong Learning Curriculum for Excellence.

Challenges - Some of the key pressures on biodiversity

1. [Habitat change](#): Changing land use and management have caused habitat fragmentation and resulted in loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity rich habitats were lost at an unprecedented rate in the second half of the twentieth century; this was mainly due to more intensive land use and urban development. Since about 1990 the rate of change has slowed and we have begun to reverse these losses for some habitats.



2. [Pollution](#): Impacts from pollution have reduced, but nutrient enrichment from diffuse pollution is still an issue. Pollution has reduced significantly since the 1980s but nutrient enrichment from diffuse pollution is still a problem in some areas. Pollution has a major negative impact; it can both reduce and modify biodiversity. This can happen directly - for example through changes to water quality - or indirectly, as pollution influences climate change.
3. [Over exploitation](#): Taking too much from our environment remains a threat to global biodiversity. The unsustainable use of natural resources remains a threat to global biodiversity although in Scotland we are using our natural resources more sustainably than twenty years ago.

4. [Climate Change](#): Climate change is one of the biggest challenges to Scotland's biodiversity. There is evidence that climate change is already affecting biodiversity and ecosystems in Scotland. Impacts are expected to increase as the magnitude of climate change increases in response to increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.



Adapting to climate change is necessary so that communities, the natural environment and economy can thrive.

5. [Invasive non-native species](#): Alien species are not only a threat to our biodiversity, but costly to manage. Invasive non-native species are animals or plants that are not native to this country and tend not to have any natural predators or other factors controlling their rate of growth and spread.

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 \(LDP\)](#) 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.

These policies also seek to ensure the protection of European Protected Species, and the enhancement of biodiversity throughout the built and rural landscape. They further reflects the overarching aims of the [Central Scotland Green Network \(CSGN\)](#) of delivering connected green corridors, and protecting and enhancing the natural environment. The CSGN is to be considered for inclusion as a 'Main Issue' for LDP2.



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



WWIA Culzean Amphibian ID day

The recent South Ayrshire State of the Environment Report (SofE) describes the current state of the environment in South Ayrshire while considering a number of different themes, namely biodiversity, population, human health, air quality,

climatic factors, soils and geology, landscape, cultural heritage, water, and material assets. The information contained within this report aims to set the scene in South Ayrshire today and provide a baseline from which changes in the environment can be monitored in the future.

Contributions to targets/key steps from the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"

Targets/key steps from Chapter 1 (Healthy ecosystems)	Contribution to key step?	Justification (project title or reference for activity)
Encourage and support ecosystem restoration and management, especially in catchment areas that have experienced the greatest degradation.	Yes	Troon Dunes restoration work and conservation; Fullartoon Woods hydrological and drainage work; work carried out by Grounds Maintenance Services and Golf Services creating wild flower areas etc.
Use assessments of ecosystem health at a catchment level to determine what needs to be done.	Yes	Work carried out in conjunction with the Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network (IGNN).
Government and public bodies, including SNH, SEPA and FCS, will work together towards a shared agenda for action to restore ecosystem health at a catchment-scale across Scotland.	Yes	Working with SNH partners and IGNN, SWT, South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC), a Southern Uplands Partnership and Wheres Wildlife in Ayrshire projects where there will be scope to look at improving catchment areas.
Establish plans and decisions about land use based on an understanding of ecosystems. Take full account of land use impacts on the ecosystems services that underpin social, economic and environmental health.	Yes	The South Ayrshire Council LDP provides policies and allocations to guide the scale and location of any future developments. LDP2 preparation will undergo Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and other environmental assessments to ensure the environmental performance is enhanced where possible. The LDP and Main Issues Report (MIR) also includes policies and processes that will protect, preserve and enhance all identified environmental assets, where applicable. The upcoming Council Open Space Strategy will use Geographical Information System (GIS) Open Space auditing and monitoring systems.
Targets/key steps from Chapter 3 Biodiversity, health and quality of life)	Contribution to key step?	Justification (project title or reference for activity)
Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups.	Yes	Work carried out by the Park Rangers, educational work including Provosts Footprint Challenge, working with 'Friends Of' groups including Friends of Fullarton.
Support local authorities and communities to improve local environments and enhance biodiversity using green space and green networks, allowing nature to flourish and so enhancing the quality of life for people who live there.	Yes	Working with communities and allotment societies to provide allotment and other growing / green spaces. The Councils Community Safety Service provides urban allotments and has a range of biodiversity related activities throughout South Ayrshire.
Build on good practice being developed by the National Health Service (NHS) and others to help encourage greenspace, green exercise and social prescribing initiatives that will improve health and wellbeing through connecting people with nature.	Yes	The South Ayrshire Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) and South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership encourage the use of green space for health benefits. The Rangers service has a network of volunteers and users that focus on accessing nature to keep fit and healthy.
Increase access to nature within and close to schools, and support teachers in developing the role of	Yes	A key part of the WWIA project has been focusing on training communities and individuals to gather information about local wildlife. From February

outdoor learning across the Curriculum for Excellence.		<p>2017 to August 2017, the project has held 12 species identification workshops across Ayrshire, teaching local people how to identify and survey amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies. These courses engaged with 119 people this year. In 2018 a further 12 workshops will be held in the region with the aim of continuing to provide people with new skills that focus on getting communities and individuals out identifying and recording wildlife in their area.</p> <p>Many schools have developed their grounds to encourage biodiversity. There are currently 62 schools in South Ayrshire registered with the Eco-Schools programme in the South Ayrshire area with 25 achieving Green Flag status.</p> <p>The Rangers provide led activities during educational visits from local schools, facilitating over 40 visits in 2017. Working with local teachers they provide activities that ties in to the Lifelong Learning Curriculum for Excellence.</p>
Encourage public organisations and businesses to review their responsibilities and action for biodiversity, and recognise that increasing their positive contribution to nature and landscapes can help meet their corporate priorities and performance.	Yes	Working with the IGNN and WWIA projects and companies such as GSK and Nestle to provide suitable habitats for wildlife within their sites.
Targets/key steps from Chapter 4 (Wildlife, habitats and protected places)	Contribution to key step?	Justification (project title or reference for activity)
Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits.	Yes	Rangers service provides activities that benefit all ages and abilities. Council plans, policies and strategies ensure that communities are considered fully with regards to access to green space.
Integrate protected areas policy with action for wider habitats to combat fragmentation and restore key habitats.	Yes	Priority habitats and species are defined under Article 1 of the Habitats Directive. The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) mandates the Council to ensure it will not adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites. Work with the IGNN and WWIA projects.
Involve many more people than at present in biodiversity work and improve understanding of the poorly known elements of nature.	Yes	Volunteering activities are available through the Rangers service and various 'Friends Of' groups. Volunteering activities are also available through the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire biosphere reserve, Wild Ayrshire Facebook page.
Targets/key steps from Chapter 5 (Land and freshwater management)	Contribution to key step?	Justification (project title or reference for activity)
Promote an ecosystem approach to land management that fosters sustainable use of natural resources and puts biodiversity at the heart of landuse planning and decision-making.	Yes	Council LDP , work carried out within the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, working with CSGN. The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere key goal is to foster sustainable economy and society. The Biosphere provides an opportunity for businesses of all sectors to "do things differently" while safeguarding the environment for both current and future generations.

Ensure that measures taken forward under the Common Agricultural Policy encourage land managers to develop and retain the diversity of wildlife habitats and landscape features.	Yes	Where possible Council Officers will offer advice on biodiversity to land owners and developers.
Support "High Nature Value" farming and forestry.	Yes	Ayrshire & Arran Forestry and Woodland Strategy. The strategy has been developed by the Ayrshire Green Network Partnership (AGNP), a joint initiative between Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), Scottish Natural Heritage, South Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council and North Ayrshire Council, set up to deliver the shared goals and vision of the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) with a regional focus to deliver local priorities in the Ayrshire area.
Targets/key steps from Chapter 6 (Marine and Coastal)	Contribution to key step?	Justification (project title or reference for activity)
Achieve good environmental status for Scottish seas	Yes	<p>The water environment is critical to South Ayrshire, both for providing wildlife habitat and for contributing significantly to the local economy.</p> <p>The most recent results available (2014) for South Ayrshire's coastal water bodies (Ayr Bay, Girvan and Culzean) show that all three water bodies achieved good status.</p> <p>To achieve 'good' status a water body must fulfil each of the following three criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contain pollutant concentrations below the level at which the supported plants and animals may be harmed • Have undergone minimal changes to their habitats • Not be negatively affected by invasive non-native species <p>The South Ayrshire coastal waters and associated beaches are well visited, particularly in the summer. The Council is responsible for cleaning amenity and recreational beaches above the mean high water mark. If not cleaned this litter poses a major hazard for the environment and nature. The council works with various community groups and environmental volunteers to remove litter and plastic pollutants from our shores. We will continue to campaign, educate, and take positive action to protect our seas in South Ayrshire and beyond.</p>

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 our services.

The Council will:

- Continue to promote biodiversity
- Continue supporting sustainable economic growth
- 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 and promote the IGNN, SWEIC and WWIA projects
- Contribute towards the objectives and targets of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity and 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands'
- Continue to support and promote the Southern Uplands Partnership and Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere
- Ensure the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process considers biodiversity in all future plans, policies, programmes and strategies (PPPS)
- Continue supporting local action groups, and 'Friends Of' groups
- Continue to promote Planning Development through conditions and habitat management plans for all the major wind farms and developments in South Ayrshire
- Adopt the [Ayrshire & Arran Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2014](#) as the overarching woodland strategy for South Ayrshire. One of the primary aims of this strategy is to promote future biodiversity, and this is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and applications for works to protected trees.
- Continue to improve the health and quality of life for the people of South Ayrshire, through investment in the care of green space, nature and landscapes

Conclusions

This report concludes that South Ayrshire Council has helped deliver a number of valuable outcomes and actions to further the conservation of biodiversity, including contributions to targets and key steps from the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity."

Compliance with the statutory biodiversity duty will help achieve a sustainable South Ayrshire Council by incorporating biodiversity into many of the Council's existing activities and actions. This will help to create a resilient natural environment, reduce carbon emissions, improve social justice, improve economic wellbeing and show environmental good stewardship.

The Council will continue to raise awareness of biodiversity wherever possible. We will strive to work with local communities, other local authorities and partners to ensure that biodiversity can be enjoyed by everyone for generations to come.

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