Aberdeenshire
C O U N C I L **Infrastructure Services**

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE - 17 FEBRUARY 2021

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL 'BIODIVERSITY DUTY' REPORTING 2018 TO 2020

1   Reason for Report / Summary

1.1   The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 requires all public bodies to report on their work in relation to the 'biodiversity duty' which is set out in the Act. Sustainability Committee is recommended to approve Aberdeenshire Council's submission for the period 2018 to 2020.

2   Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

2.1   Agree Aberdeenshire Council's biodiversity duty reporting submission to the Scottish Government.

3   Purpose and Decision Making Route

3.1   The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their duties.

3.2   In order to monitor this biodiversity duty, the Scottish Government requires public bodies to report every three years. The Sustainability Committee approved Aberdeenshire Council's submission for 2015 to 2017 at its meeting on 28 February 2018.

3.3   The proposed biodiversity duty reporting submission for 2018 to 2020 is presented in **Appendix 1**. It should be noted that the reporting period is for the calendar years 2018, 2019 and 2020. The submission uses a template provided by Scottish Government. This has been prepared in consultation across services and directorates within the Council. No external or community consultation has taken place and no other committee has considered it. Should this Committee agree the report, it will be submitted to the Scottish Government and will be made publicly available on their website.

4   Discussion

4.1   The proposed biodiversity duty reporting submission for 2018 to 2020 is presented in **Appendix 1**. Notable achievements in the reporting period include:

- Being the first council in Scotland to produce a carbon budget in conjunction with our financial budgets each year
- Delivering the North East Non-Native Invasive Species Project
- Delivering the Aberdeenshire Council Greenspace Project

- Producing the Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Strategy 2019-2021
- Reviewing Aberdeenshire's network of Local Nature Conservation Sites
- The extensive Ranger Service programme of public events delivered and engagement with local communities, and their adaptation during coronavirus restrictions.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This Report helps deliver the Strategic Priority "Economy & Enterprise" within the pillar "Our Economy" and the key principles which underpin these priorities of "responsible finances", and "economy".

This Report helps deliver the Strategic Priorities "Education" and "Health & Wellbeing" within the pillar "Our People" and the key principles which underpin these priorities of "right people, right place, right time" and "human rights and public protection".

This Report helps deliver the Strategic Priorities "Infrastructure" and "Resilient Communities" within the pillar "Our Environment" and the key principles which underpin these priorities of "digital infrastructure" and "climate and sustainability".

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities		X	
Fairer Scotland Duty		X	
Town Centre First		X	
Sustainability	X		
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		X	

5.3 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required because this reporting collates activities that have already taken place and does not have a differential impact on people with protected characteristics.

5.4 This Report and the biodiversity submission to Scottish Government have been identified as having a positive impact on sustainability by allowing the Council to better understand and support the implementation of action for biodiversity.

5.5 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- Risk ID ACORP010 Environmental challenges (e.g. Climate change adaptation strategies and community resilience) as the Report aids the Council in understanding the risk faced as a result of biodiversity loss. Biodiversity underpins society and the economy and failing to protect biodiversity is a pressing risk for Aberdeenshire. *Corporate Risk Register*.

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- Risk ID ISSR004 Climate Change and the impact of failing to conserve the natural and historic environment by protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and historic assets. *Directorate Risk Registers*.

6   Scheme of Governance

6.1   The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

6.2   The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of:

- Section S1.1a of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as part of the Committee's role in approving, reviewing and monitoring the Council's work in respect of sustainable development and climate change in order to ensure compliance with relevant statutory duties.

- Section S1.1c of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as part of the Committee's role in promoting awareness of the need for sustainability within the Council and wider community of Aberdeenshire.

Alan Wood
Director of Infrastructure Services

Report prepared by James Davidson, Environment Planner
Date: 22 January 2021

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Aberdeenshire Council 'Biodiversity Duty' Reporting 2018 to 2020

Aberdeenshire

C O U N C I L **Infrastructure Services**

Appendix 1 – Aberdeenshire Council Biodiversity Duty Reporting 2018 to 2020

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PUBLIC BODY

Please describe your organisation's role and purpose, including any particular environmental responsibilities

Guidance on completing this section	Summarise your organisation's role and purpose, including a brief outline of governance and management structures. Summarise any relevance and impacts of biodiversity to your organisation, including your role in: • Land and estate management; • Regulation of land use and development; • Providing public information, community learning and education around nature and the environment; • Any key environmental impacts from your operations.
Text Field	Aberdeenshire Council manages a large estate which includes schools, care homes, housing, offices and their associated greenspaces. We also manage a range of public greenspaces and paths. We manage the majority of the public road network within the area also. In all aspects of our estate management there are impacts, benefits and opportunities in relation to biodiversity. Key ones are further explored in this report. As a Local Authority, Aberdeenshire Council has a broad regulatory remit. Of particular relevance to biodiversity is our role as the Planning Authority for Aberdeenshire. Included within this role is the preparation of a Local Development Plan which outlines plans and polices which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity. As a Local Authority we also administer the Tree Preservation Order process and have a role in the management of public access. We have a pivotal role in public information, community learning and education around nature and the environment for Aberdeenshire. We are the Education Authority for Aberdeenshire – managing schools. Nature and environment are key components of school activities. Our Ranger Service delivers information and education to children and adults. We also host NESBReC (North East Scotland Biological Record Centre) – the local biological records centre – which provides environmental information to a range of audiences.

	Our principal environmental impacts result from us fulfilling our statutory duties and operating our estate, in particular the carbon emissions that result from our operations. We have ambitious targets to reduce these emissions and are the first Local Authority in Scotland to publish a yearly carbon budget. Our management of buildings and greenspace, our role in flood protection and in the management of the public road network can all potentially impact and benefit biodiversity.

SECTION 2: ACTIONS TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY AND CONNECT PEOPLE WITH NATURE

Please describe and explain any actions that your organisation has undertaken <u>alone or as part of a partnership</u> to benefit biodiversity directly, to tackle the main drivers of biodiversity loss, or to achieve wider outcomes for nature and people

Guidance on completing this section	As a Level One reporting organisation, you may wish to report on activities across your organisation, including any actions that you have undertaken on the ground on land that you manage alone or with others.
	Please explain how these actions have benefited biodiversity, noting successes and challenges, and any plans for future or follow-up work. These might include:
	The creation, enhancement and protection of wildlife and natural habitat. Please include quantitative measures where possible (e.g. ha of raised bog restored, ha of new woodland planted, areas managed to enhance biodiversity).
	Involvement in key partnerships such as the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership, relevant Community Planning groups, running a Local Records Centre.
	Addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss, which might include work or projects to tackle: • Land use change; • Exploitation; • Invasive Non Native Species; • Pollution. Enhancing biodiversity at your premises through actions in and around offices such as: • providing bird boxes / feeders; • creating a habitat for wildlife, such as wildflower areas; • installing green roofs; • organising staff volunteering days.

Links to related resources	Guidance on the <u>Key pressures on biodiversity.</u> Guidance for Planners and developers on legally <u>Protected Areas</u> and <u>Protected Species.</u> <u>Guidance for all bodies on highest priority species and habitats for</u> targeted conservation action Guidance on biodiversity and the Planning system including creating, enhancing and protecting wildlife and natural habitats through <u>Habitat management</u> and <u>Habitat networks.</u> Guidance on <u>Buildings and biodiversity</u> - how to make space for nature in the built environment. Information on <u>Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships (LBAPs)</u>. Collecting and managing biodiversity data, including from Local Records Centres <u>Biodiversity - where to find data</u>. Information on <u>Placemaking, open space and green infrastructure</u>. **Case studies:** ○ <u>Greening parks and creating urban meadows in Edinburgh.</u> ○ <u>Scottish Water Volunteering Programme</u> Guidance on <u>Managing freshwater</u>, including pollution and on <u>Coastal development and marine pollution</u>. Examples of smaller actions that can be enacted in the office or staff homes - <u>Biodiversity - what can you do?</u>
Text Field	**Biological Records** Aberdeenshire Council hosts NESBReC – the biological records centre for the region. NESBReC covers Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Moray and the Cairngorms National Park and currently holds 1.5 million biological records. As well as hosting records, they carry out survey work and provide training on biological recording. Each year NESBReC hold a Recorders' Forum. The 2018 event, held at University of Aberdeen, had 115 attendees and the 2019 event had 94. The 2020 event, held prior to the coronavirus restrictions, had 115.

- Yearly wildlife recording training events are held for the general public; examples of subjects include: Trees in Winter; Mosses & Liverworts; Swifts; Hoverflies; Coastal Plants; Leaf-mining moths; Fungi; and Birds.

- Over 3,000 data searches are carried each year for planning applications, environmental consultants, organisations, students, researchers, local authorities and the general public.

- Regular postings on the NESBReC Facebook page highlight issues and events concerning local biodiversity.

Site Management

- Management of wildflower meadows at Aberdeenshire Council's Woodhill and Gordon House offices continue, with Gordon House in particular having a very successful and flower rich meadow. A small collaborative project between Landscape Services and the Planning Environment Team to establish a new meadow by the Deeside Way near Kincardine O'Neil has begun.
- A green roof, wildflower meadows and native tree planting were included as part of a Leader funded project, delivered by the Planning Environment Team, to protect Tullich Church near Ballater and its associated Pictish stones, while enhancing visitor experience. Monitoring of the site has identified bats, stoats and rabbits using the structure and surrounding graveyard.
- Works were undertaken to improve the path network and seating in Gauchhill woods at Kintore. The site is well used by local residents and school groups.
- Non-native conifers have been felled at Aikey Brae Stone Circle near Mintlaw. Native tree species will be planted in their place with the aim of improving biodiversity and the aspect from the stone circle.

Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species Project

A LEADER funded project working with agencies, river trusts, local authorities and community groups to raise awareness of and facilitate action to record and control non-native invasive plant species in Aberdeenshire. The project has continued to work with community groups and others to enable them to take action to control invasive species by providing training and materials as well as guidance on regulation and best practice. This has been supported with some work by contractors to access areas which cannot be cleared by volunteers. Clearing work has taken place on a number of watercourses in Aberdeenshire. The project funding ended in

2020 but information on INNS and their control will continue to be provided through the re-designed website and regular newsletters by Aberdeenshire Council. Annual meetings of the North East INNS Forum will continue. A few key project stats:

- 300+ volunteer hours on INNS control
- 12 community groups engaged with
- 22 volunteers trained in the safe use of pesticides
- 171 people attended forum meetings
- 1,863 records of INNS submitted during the project
- 8 newsletters produced

Aberdeenshire Greenspace Project

A project commenced in 2019 to examine greenspaces throughout Aberdeenshire. LEADER funding was received for two Greenspace Officer posts to develop a long-term, sustainable model for managing council greenspace, including increasing biodiversity. A key facet of the project was to engage with community groups and ensure they are part of the process. A number of demonstration sites have been delivered in partnership with community groups including tree planting, bulb planting and sowing Yellow rattle. Several engagement events have taken place throughout 2019 and early 2020 including presentations to community groups, engagement with schools and collaboration with local interest groups. A webpage has been developed and social media accounts have been set up to promote the project. Although project outputs were impacted by coronavirus, lessons learned are being collated and approaches for embedding within the greenspace management of the Council are being produced.

Protected Sites and Species

- Aberdeenshire currently has around 100 Local Nature Conservation Sites and a review was carried out as part of the proposed 2021 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. This review identified 14 new sites, proposed the extension of 4 existing sites, and proposed the minor amendment to the boundaries of 4 further sites. These sites will be identified in the ALDP with policies for their protection.
- Aberdeenshire Council Housing Service have been operating under an SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage, now known as NatureScot) Licence for all repair and maintenance work to council housing properties that has the potential to impact on bats. The Licence excludes sheltered housing, which generally has a

higher roost potential and is therefore covered separately. The Licence has resulted from a collaborative project between the Planning Environment Team and Housing Service. Communication with all Housing staff regarding what to do if bats are found on site has been required. Enhancement measures have also been put in place with bat boxes installed on some properties. The Licence has been renewed for 2020 and 2021.

- Aberdeenshire Council has developed a good working relationship with Huntly and District Swift Group, jointly identifying opportunities for the protection and provision of Swift nest sites in Council buildings and through the planning process. Projects include Swift provision at a redevelopment site in Inverurie and built in Swift provision in Housing Association new builds in Huntly.

Partnership Projects

- NESBiP (North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership) continues as a key mechanism for delivery of local biodiversity projects – with Aberdeenshire Council sitting on the steering group. During 2019 the NESBiP website was updated (https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/) and now includes information specifically for developers on incorporating biodiversity enhancement into developments and also provides updates on NESBiP current projects.
- The Dee Catchment Partnership, which Aberdeenshire Council is a member of, has continued to deliver a range of projects within the Dee Catchment and is currently implementing a river restoration project. Events and educational visits have raised awareness of issues such as invasive species, sustainable urban drainage schemes and natural flood management.
- East Grampian Coastal Partnership runs several projects which directly or indirectly benefit biodiversity, tackle the main drivers of biodiversity loss or contribute to wider outcomes for people and nature. For example, the 'Turning the Plastic Tide Project '(TTPT), which provides information about how to undertake beach clean ups; the monthly Seawatch Surveys open to the public; and collaboration on the NORCET Cetacean Surveys with Aberdeen University, Seawatch Foundation and Northlink Ferries. These involve volunteers carrying out whale and dolphin transect surveys on route to the Northern Isles.

SECTION 3: MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY

Please outline any steps your organisation has taken to incorporate biodiversity measures into its wider policies, plans or strategies. This should include decision-making structures and staff and organisational roles and responsibilities.

Guidance on completing this section	Describe and explain any of your own body's policies, plans and strategies that refer to biodiversity or may affect biodiversity positively or negatively, and how these are reflected in the structure of your organisation.
	These may include policies on managing green spaces, Open Space Strategies, Supplementary Planning Guidance, consideration of biodiversity in estate management, procurement policies and purchasing decisions, use of an Environmental Management System, Sustainability and Climate Change commitments or actions such as installing a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS).
	Detail any areas in which your organisation has most successfully implemented mainstreaming of biodiversity, or has demonstrated leadership in a local or national context, including through working with others, raising awareness, or delivering landmark projects or activities.
Links to related resources	Information on Green Infrastructure, placemaking, and open space strategies.
	Guidance on Buildings and biodiversity and SuDs - how to make space for nature in the built environment.
	Guidance on Buildings, Highways and Infrastructure - Maintenance & biodiversity.
	Research on Maximising the benefits of green infrastructure in social housing.
	The Place Standard tool and associated Strategic Plan 2020-2023 provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place.
	Guidance on managing Local Nature Conservation Sites systems.
	Case study - Procurement by the Scottish Courts and Tribunal (SCTS) Services.
	The Forest Stewardship Council global forest certification system.
	Guidance on Scotland's Pollinator Strategy, projects, resources.
	Case studies: o Local Nature Conservation Sites systems in North Lanarkshire and Aberdeenshire. o A Pollinator Action Plan in Aberdeenshire.

Text Field	**Council Plan**
	Our Council Plan is centred around three pillars: Our people, Our environment, and Our economy: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-plan/
	Aberdeenshire Council became the first Local Authority in Scotland to sign the Edinburgh Biodiversity Declaration: https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/apps/news/release.aspx?newsid=7023
	Strategy and Policy
	The **2017 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan** includes relevant policies, supplementary guidance and planning advice for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and biodiversity: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/aberdeenshire-local-development-plan-2017/. The 2021 Local Development Plan is currently in preparation.
	Supplementary guidance to the 2017 Local Development Plan includes identification of a network of Local Nature Conservation Sites in Aberdeenshire as well as Special Landscape Areas. The Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2017 is also supplementary guidance. The Strategy outlines a range of action to protect and enhance woodlands as well as make them more resistant to climate change and disease. It includes a map of preferred areas for new woodland creation, within which the protection and enhancement of biodiversity is key.
	Aberdeenshire Council Planning Advice provides best practice guidance on how to meet the requirements of the Local Development Plan and its associated supplementary guidance. It includes guidance on bats and development, biodiversity enhancement, ecological surveys, buffer strips, protected trees and outdoor access. https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/planning-advice/
	We have produced an **Aberdeenshire Pollinator Action Plan 2019 to 2021**. The objectives of the action plan are to:
	1. Raise awareness of pollinators in food production and ecosystems

2. Contribute to the monitoring and recording of pollinator populations

3. Reduce Aberdeenshire Council's use of pesticide and weed control that may have an effect on pollinator populations

4. Create habitat for pollinators, including improving habitat connectivity

5. Protect existing areas of wildflower rich grassland

The Planning Environment Team (Natural Heritage) provide input to, on average, 600 planning applications a year commenting on issues ranging from protected species and sites, woodland and trees, greenspace enhancement and protection of the water environment. They also review, on average, 60 forestry grant scheme and felling licence applications a year.

Procurement

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to securing meaningful environmental, social and economic value in procurements and working with all sectors of the business community in order to achieve increased prosperity. As a responsible and ethical buyer, the Council aim to embed the key principles of sustainability into procurement activity for the benefit of society, the economy and the environment. We consider environment sustainability, community benefits and economic benefits/stability as key parts of our procurement process.

Staff Engagement

Aberdeenshire Building Change (ABC) sustainability behaviour change pilot included many initiatives to engage staff with enhancing and recording native biodiversity through a points and rewards programme. The programme focused on behaviours not just at work but everyday life. Examples included: reporting sightings to NESBReC, completing a quiz on biodiversity and encouraging lunchtime litter picks. Some were encouraged to do more, for example Edenholme Care Home in Stonehaven worked with residents and the local primary school to build a bug hotel on their site. From there they purchased a greenhouse to grow food and local plants for their garden.

Construction of new Aberdeenshire Council Buildings

Delivering sustainable construction solutions is a key driver in the design and specification of projects delivered or managed by Aberdeenshire Council. In achieving this, improving the project site's biodiversity is one of the opportunities explored for every development, where practical to do so.

One example that illustrates the design team's approach to biodiversity is the 1140 Early Years programme, which includes individual projects at 80 locations. The 1140 programme is Aberdeenshire Council's response and commitment to the ambitious Early Years and Childcare expansion standards set by the Scottish Government. The key principle behind the outdoor learning enhancements in the 1140 programme is to create play and learning spaces inspired by nature. Where a lot of the sites were originally mostly tarmac or rubber crumb, the new spaces are a mix of sand, bark, varied planting beds or natural aggregate surfaces like self-binding gravel. This is not only beneficial for the children, offering textures, sensory benefits and seasonal changes, but replaces hard-man made elements with natural, permeable, living and circular elements. Sustainability has been centric to the detailed design of the schemes, with a particular focus on:

- Introducing a range of plants, many of which are native species or are aimed at pollinators such as Betula or Sarcococca

- Introducing areas of native wildflower meadow

- Native hedgerows where appropriate to support bird life

- Raingarden features to promote SuDS and create a variety of habitats

- Specifying informal contractor built play features made primary of timber, boulders or willow – all these items were locally sourced to ensure a low carbon footprint and supporting a circular economy

- All specified timber to FSC standard

Many of the settings in the programme involve minor refurbishments with an emphasis on enhanced external spaces, such as Lochpots Primary. The major refurbishment settings such as Westhill Primary Nursery create a more varied and interesting external environment, sometimes within an existing space, as part of their project scope. The final category of work is the new build projects. New build projects have the benefit of investment

	and a landscape scheme which is designed from scratch to create a flexible user friendly landscape that includes features to add excitement and interactivity. New Build examples are Fishermoss Nursery, Dales Park Nursery and New Machar Nursery.

SECTION 4: NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY

How has your organisation integrated biodiversity into nature based solutions to the climate emergency and other socio-economic outcomes?

Guidance on completing this section	Climate change is a direct driver of biodiversity loss. Some species are dying out while others are being displaced due to warmer air temperatures, extreme weather patterns, and higher sea levels. As well as being a direct driver of biodiversity loss, climate change also worsens the other drivers. For example it enables quicker spread of non-native invasive species. Combined action for biodiversity loss and climate change can be achieved through nature-based solutions. This reporting section provides the opportunity for your organisation to provide details on how you are supporting the positive contribution biodiversity can make to building resilience, and helping nature to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Nature-based solutions can play a vital role in helping us to protect and enhance biodiversity, achieve net zero targets, and improve quality of life. You may wish to report on a range of specific processes or activities that your organisation has undertaken, including on land you own or manage, within your buildings and workforce, and projects that you have delivered. Integration might include incorporating biodiversity into nature-based solutions to: The climate emergency, for example by developing climate change strategies that include nature, investing in green infrastructure and taking action for pollinators. Inclusive economic growth, for example by growing nature based industries, or investing in key natural visitor attractions. Health and wellbeing, for example by improving access to nature for all.
Links to related resources	Information on how urban nature-based solutions can help Scotland's towns and cities mitigate and adapt to climate change providing guidance and examples. The Helping nature to adapt webpage contains useful information on making use of nature's capacity to adapt to change as one of our best tools for managing climate change impacts, including through managing native

	woodlands and restoring peatlands. The publication <u>People, Place and the Climate Emergency</u> includes examples and information on local nature based solutions to deliver a range of socio-economic outcomes.
Text Field	**<u>Climate change and carbon</u>** Our **Climate Change Declaration** sets out our commitment to a sustainable future which mitigates and adapts for climate change: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/25146/climatechangedeclaration.pdf Aberdeenshire Council has a target to reduce carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 and to be Net Zero by 2045 from the 2010/11 baseline year. As part of the Council's commitment to climate change mitigation, we set our first carbon budget for 2017/18. We are the first Local Authority in Scotland to implement such a budget. This approach is to make sure that we are placing as much focus on our carbon footprint as we do on our financial budgets. The carbon budget is set in February each year at the same time as the financial budget and is monitored throughout the year by the Sustainability Committee. https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/green-living/environmental-policy/ **Climate Ready Aberdeenshire 2020 – 2030**: Climate Ready Aberdeenshire is a cross-sector initiative to create Aberdeenshire's climate change adaptation and mitigation strategy. It brings together the views and expertise of a range of diverse stakeholders from communities, public, private and 3rd sector organisations, to set out how we can work collaboratively to meet the challenges of a changing climate within Aberdeenshire. Our aim is a shared vision, strategy and action plan for Aberdeenshire to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impact. https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/green-living/climate-ready-aberdeenshire/ Objectives: 1. Increase the understanding and awareness of climate change risks and opportunities within Aberdeenshire 2. Work with communities using a place-based approach to discover what their priorities are and how they can be supported to mitigate and adapt to climate change 3. Support decision-makers to make climate friendly and climate ready decisions which support the delivery of local and national commitments, and mutually benefit Aberdeenshire's environment, economy and people

	4. Provide knowledge, advice and support, and link businesses, community groups and individuals to resources, projects and funding opportunities to help them mitigate and adapt to climate change

What steps has your organisation taken to incorporate biodiversity outcomes into partnership initiatives, wider strategies or initiatives of relevance to climate change?

Guidance on completing this section	Strategies or initiatives might include: • a Green Infrastructure Strategy; • a Pollinator Strategy; • Maintaining a Local Nature Conservation Sites system; • Participating in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership; • Developing a soil management strategy; • Co-operating in collecting, managing and using biodiversity data.
Links to related resources	NatureScot's overview of Green Infrastructure . Information on Pollinator strategies, managing Local Nature Conservation Sites systems, and on Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships (LBAPs). Guidance on Soil Management including soil carbon management. Information on biodiversity data, including obtaining and sharing data from Local Records Centres Biodiversity - where to find data. NatureScot provides various ideas and case studies on partnership approaches.

Text Field	Our **Local Nature Conservation Sites** represent the best local biodiversity and geodiversity sites in Aberdeenshire. They vary considerably in size from a few hectares to extensive stretches along river valleys. They include a range of habitats such as lowland raised peat bog, woodland, grassland, wetlands, coastal sand dunes and lochs. We have identified LNCS in the <u>Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017</u> which also contains policies for their protection. As noted above: • we have a pollinator strategy for Aberdeenshire, • we participate in NESBiP – the local biodiversity partnership, and • we host the local records centre for north east Scotland. Aberdeenshire Council supports the work of the **Ugie Peatland Partnership** which is led by RSPB, Scottish Water, NatureScot and other organisations to deliver a range of peatland restoration works within the Ugie Catchment area.

Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main climate change related challenges for biodiversity over the next three years?

Guidance on completing this section	You may wish to detail any arrangements that your organisation has in place to review or monitor the implications from modelling biodiversity on land that you own or manage under future climate scenarios.
Text Field	Climate variability and extreme weather events are likely to present challenges to biodiversity in the next three years and beyond. Both evidence and anecdotal observation indicate these are significant factors at play in Aberdeenshire already. As an organisation Aberdeenshire Council were struck by the State of Nature Report 2019 which showed strong population and range responses in so many species. Species are responding to multiple pressures of which a changing climate is a key one. It highlighted that some species and habitats are able to adapt but others are slower to do so or indeed may not be able to adapt. It is not only biodiversity that finds climate variability and extreme weather events challenging, as an organisation it has a significant effect

| | on us as we maintain roads, our estate, the public access network and carry out flood management activities for example. |

SECTION 5: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Public Engagement

Guidance on completing this section	Detail communications and education activities have you undertaken to inform or engage directly or indirectly with communities, young people and the public. This might include actions to raise staff, customer and public enjoyment and understanding of, and connection with, biodiversity and nature, such as: • Supporting volunteering; • Exhibitions and events; • School outreach; • Outdoor learning; • Citizen Science initiatives; • Provision of ranger services or public education programmes; • Information hosted on your webpage; • Blogs and press releases.
Links to related resources	Ideas on <u>volunteering outdoors</u>. Stats, stories, activities and inspiration to help bring nature and landscapes to life for young people and learners through <u>education</u>, including <u>Beyond your boundary: easy steps to learning in local greenspace,</u> and the <u>Outdoor Learning Directory</u> is a useful source of information and resources. Ideas on <u>citizen science activities</u> that can increase public enjoyment, understanding and connection with nature. Information on how to make more use of Scotland's outdoors as '<u>Our Natural Health Service</u>'
Text Field	**<u>Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service</u>** The Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service takes a lead role in the area on environmental education and awareness in the area. On average each year they delivered: • 138 community group sessions, reaching around 2,288 residents to raise awareness and understanding of biodiversity through topics including planting for pollinators and other wildlife, moth trapping and recording, woodland maintenance, wildlife gardening, bird, bat and hedgehog home building.

- 188 school sessions, reaching 4,625 pupils and accompanying adults. Topics include seed bombs for pollinators, woodland survey and biological recording, wild pollinators and wasps, animal and invertebrate ecology, countryside and coastal habitats, Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) bug counts, sustainable outdoor learning, and gardening for wildlife.
- 94 public events to raise awareness and understanding of biodiversity. Events included wild orchard planting, bird and bat box building, squirrel feeder box survey, lacewing and other bug surveys, wildflower walks, back garden bird watch, butterfly counts, freshwater exploration and rockpool investigation, woodland and coastal interpretative walks.
- Included in the above figures are sessions for those who are disadvantaged, engaging adults and children enabling them to access and enjoy nature where they may otherwise not have the confidence to do so. Examples of engagement with disadvantaged groups include achievement of the John Muir Award for Peterhead and Aberdeen Foyer groups and guided walks with New Scots groups of Syrian refugees.
- Sessions facilitating over 4,400 hours of volunteering to promote biodiversity. Tasks supported include conservation for aspen moths, invasive species monitoring and removal, tree planting and plastic piling dam creation at raised bog sites, and survey of amphibian bridges.

2020 was not an average year of course with significant measures in place as part of the response to the coronavirus pandemic, including the mobilisation of Ranger Service staff to Covid-19 duties and the cessation of onsite and face to face working for 8 months. The Ranger Service had to adapt and some examples of their 2020 activities included:

- Use of social media to raise awareness and understanding of biodiversity, for example pondwatch, treewatch, grassland watch (to tie into the Aberdeenshire Greenspace Project), a weekly series to encourage new audiences to undertake biological recording.
- Online social media posts to raise awareness of seasonal flora and fauna and encourage biological recording of such.
- Online guided walk films to highlight Aberdeenshire's biodiversity
- Development of printable leaflets and posters to protect biodiversity through responsible use of the countryside.

- 4 online public events to explore local biodiversity and encourage biological recording.

Schools

All schools in Aberdeenshire are signed up to the Eco-Schools Programme. 123 schools have achieved the bronze award, 14 schools have silver awards and 69 have Green Flag awards. Some notable highlights of this work include:

- **Banchory Primary School - 3rd Eco Flag in 3 Years -** Banchory Primary School achieved its 3rd Green Flag award. This success is largely due to pupils taking forward sustainable solutions at school.
- **The Gordon Schools - ERASMUS+ programme** has been focussing on sustainability and making the community more eco-friendly. So far pupils have put in recycling bins, food and drink waste bins, led assemblies on what the group do and how young people can be more sustainable, introduced Dopper bottles to cut down on single use plastic bottles and added water bottle fillers to water fountains. They are also trying to eliminate all single use plastics in the canteen, convincing people to use metal cutlery and ceramic plates. The group has visited 12 primary schools to teach younger students about littering, global warming and the negative impact of plastic on the economy and sea pollution.
- **Mill O' Forest School** was awarded its 7th Green Flag by Eco Schools Scotland. Mill O' Forest Primary is the only Primary school in Scotland to achieve this accolade. The 7th Green Flag was secured following a considerable amount of hard work by the school's Global Gang. The Global Gang is made up of a small group of pupils ranging from P2 to P7 elected by their fellow pupils. For their 7th Green Flag, the pupils chose to focus on projects connected with water, food and the environment, waste minimisation, a "Fairtrade Action Day" and litter.

Biodiversity Champions

We have a network of Councillor biodiversity champions, which cover topics and species such as wildcat, red squirrel, ponds and community tree planting. These champions engage with experts on their chosen topics and highlight relevant issues within Council processes.

Workforce skills and training

Guidance on completing this section	Detail activities that have been undertaken to support the development of your workforce, particularly in relation to skills relevant to biodiversity, nature, outdoor learning and community engagement in the natural environment. Activities might include: • Staff training, education and capacity building; • Hosting conferences, exhibitions and events; • Ranger services; • Collaborative working with other organisations and sharing best practice.
Text Field	Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service contributes to the development and delivery of the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) North East, training programme. Courses delivered for Rangers and allied professionals include, Bat Ecology, Wildcat Ecology, Research Talks and Visitor and Habitat Management. In 2020, the Ranger Service delivered 15 "Toolbox talks" to Landscape Services mowing teams on what biodiversity is, why biodiversity matters and how to share this information with the public in relation to mowing regimes, complementing the work of the Greenspace Officers. On average each year, the Ranger Service delivered 10 in-service or twilight training sessions to 150 teachers and Early Years Practitioners on Nature Connection in Young People, Outdoor Learning and Environmental Education in their establishments or local setting. The Planning Environment Team provide support and training to a range of Teams and Services across the Council. Training on protected species is provided to those that manage infrastructure such as roads and bridges. There is regular engagement with Development Management Officers on biodiversity issues including a regular online newsletter providing updates and information and key issues of relevance at that time. The **Aberdeenshire Council Greenspace Project** (see above) has provided the opportunity for internal training and awareness raising on greenspace management and the potential for biodiversity enhancement. A research visit took place to Edinburgh City Council to hear of their experience. National experts have been

	brought in to talk to staff with a particular focus on practical management solutions which provide environment and cost benefits while also meeting community needs.

Identify any opportunities that are available to your staff to take part in practical actions

Guidance on completing this section	Activities might include: • Volunteering days, for example with environmental Non-Governmental Organisations; • Participation in staff networks that aim to deliver on or promote biodiversity objectives; • Opportunities for secondments to other organisations working on biodiversity and conservation.
Text Field	As noted above, **Aberdeenshire Building Change** (ABC) sustainability behaviour change pilot included many initiatives to engage staff with enhancing and recording native biodiversity through a points and rewards programme.

SECTION 6: RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Describe any research activities that your organisation has undertaken to help develop understanding and awareness of biodiversity

Guidance on completing this section	Detail relevant research activities undertaken to raise awareness and understanding of nature and biodiversity both internally and externally, either alone or in partnership with others. Where relevant, summarise the key changes that this research has supported within your public body. This might include research papers, surveys or reports undertaken by your organisation.
Text Field	No relevant research

What follow-up actions or monitoring have you undertaken to assess the impacts of the actions you have taken? How have you measured this? If you do not carry out any monitoring activities, please explain why.

Guidance on completing this section	Where appropriate, you may wish to report on monitoring of: • Activities relating to recording biodiversity on land you own or manage; • Your contribution in meeting national and international biodiversity targets; • Biodiversity programmes or projects that you have delivered either alone or in partnership with others; • Implementation of relevant strategies or policies; • Relevant physical conditions, such as soil and water; • Organisational capability or development in relation to biodiversity.
Links to related resources	Information on biodiversity data, including obtaining and sharing data from Local Records Centres <u>Biodiversity - where to find data</u>. The <u>State of Scotland's Nature report</u> provides a useful overview. <u>The National Biodiversity Network</u> provides a single hub for biodiversity data management in the UK. <u>Biological Recording in Scotland</u> is a useful source of information on surveys and biodiversity data management in Scotland.

Text Field	• Every year, Aberdeenshire Council report on the Council's biodiversity and environment actions to its Sustainability Committee • Aberdeenshire Council has three-yearly strategies and annual action plans in place for our natural heritage work within the Planning Environment Team, for the Ranger Service and for NESBReC. Yearly monitoring is reported to the Council's Infrastructure Services Committee • The Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy management group carries out yearly monitoring of the opportunities identified in the strategy. • The Aberdeenshire Pollinator Action Plan monitoring and reporting is carried out by the Planning Environment Team. Progress with the actions is reported to the Council's Sustainability Committee.

Does your monitoring show any significant trends or highlight any areas of concern?

Guidance on completing this section	Trends or areas of concern might include those related to: • The conservation status of habitats that you manage or deliver programmes to protect; • The ecological health of land that you own or manage; • Adverse recordings of water or soil quality; • Increases or decreases in species present.
Text Field	No specific trends highlighted

Have you added any data collected to the National Biodiversity Network or your Local Records Centre?

Text Field	As per above, Aberdeenshire Council host the local records centre for the region – NESBReC. Various activities and programmes undertaken by the Council, promote, supply or encourage records to be sent to NESBReC. These include: • NESBReC's own training programme – at least 8 events every calendar year • The outdoor education and engagement undertaken by the Ranger Service, • Record collecting encouraged by the Invasive Non-Native Species Project

| | • Record collecting encouraged by the Greenspace Project |
| | NESBReC and the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) share and exchange a range of data. |

SECTION 7: BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Describe your organisation's main achievements for biodiversity over the reporting period and what you are most proud of (this can include processes, plans, projects, partnerships, events and actions).

Guidance on completing this section	As a Level One reporting organisation, it is likely that you will own or manage land, regulate land use, or have biodiversity as one of your main responsibilities. Examples of key achievements in this context might include: • Leading or contributing to programmes or projects that directly support the key steps in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, or contribute to international Biodiversity targets; • Demonstrating national or international leadership or expertise in relation to biodiversity; • Meeting your strategic aims in relation to biodiversity; • Improvement in habitat or ecological status; • Notable species present or recorded; • Completion of key projects; • Funding achieved or delivered; • Volunteering days or time invested; • Provision of successful education or public engagement activities.
Text Field	Our main achievements for biodiversity over this reporting period are: • Being the first council in Scotland to produce a carbon budget in conjunction with our financial budgets each year • Delivering the North East Non Native Invasive Species Project • Delivering the Aberdeenshire Council Greenspace Project • Producing the Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Strategy 2019-2021 • Reviewing Aberdeenshire's network of Local Nature Conservation Sites • The extensive Ranger Service programme of public events delivered and engagement with local communities, and their adaptation during coronavirus restrictions.

Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main challenges over the next three years?

Guidance on completing this section	Challenges might include: • Economic and resource pressures; • Delivery of cross-cutting actions; • Preventing further loss of habitats and species; • Effective management of invasive non-native species; • Pressures for space; • Need to meet targets; • Encouraging enhanced partnership working.
Text Field	Undoubtedly, there will be significant resource pressure on Aberdeenshire Council – magnified by the response and implications of the coronavirus pandemic. There will be a strong focus on recovery and the delivery of core services for the community. Clearly biodiversity is a core duty too and many of the measures and actions the Council have identified above show how we can integrate biodiversity protection and enhancement into our work effectively and sustainably. Seeking external funding and working with our communities and partners to deliver for biodiversity will further increase in its importance going forward. However, we are positive about this – the pandemic has highlighted the value and benefits of local nature and the outdoors more than ever. It is envisaged there will be willing communities, partners and funders to work with going forward.