

## Appendix 3 - Review of Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Action Plan 2019-2021

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Action Plan 2019 to 2021 identified the work that Aberdeenshire Council would undertake to address the decline of pollinating insects. The Action Plan outlined the work the Council would take on the land it owns and manages, as well as how it would work with and influence others. The Action Plan period ended in March 2021 and progress against the actions is detailed below. The review will assist in preparation of the next Action Plan.
- 1.2. The Action Plan can be found at this link:  
<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/24875/aberdeenshirecouncilpollinatoractionplan2019to2021.pdf>
- 1.3. Pollinating insects are essential to healthy, functioning ecosystems as they have a key role in the reproduction of many plant species. They are also important to humans - fertilising crops, providing food, and also pollinating plants in our gardens. The available data continues to strongly indicate that pollinating insects are declining across the world – including in Scotland.
- 1.4. The Action Plan identifies the opportunities for Aberdeenshire Council to play its part in addressing this decline. The Environment Team within Planning and Environment took the lead role in developing, implementing, and monitoring the Action Plan. The actions identified were delivered by a number of Teams and Services in addition to the Environment Team, in particular Landscape Services, the Ranger Service, and NESBReC.

### 2. The Review

- 2.1. The Action Plan was structured around the 5 Objectives detailed below.
  - Objective 1:** Help raise awareness of the importance of pollinators in food production and in ecosystems
  - Objective 2:** Contribute to the monitoring and recording of pollinator populations
  - Objective 3:** Reduce Aberdeenshire Council's use of pesticides and other chemicals for pest and weed control that may have an effect on pollinator populations
  - Objective 4:** Create habitat for pollinators, including improving habitat connectivity
  - Objective 5:** Protect existing areas of wildflower rich grassland
- 2.2. Each of the 5 Objectives was further broken down to the series of actions with nominated leads and deadlines identified. Progress in achieving these actions is reviewed below with a red/amber/green assessment provided of action progress.

2.3. **Objective 1:** Help raise awareness of the importance of pollinators in food production and in ecosystems

There was a wide range of pollinator awareness raising through the strategy period lead by the Ranger Service, NESBReC and the on-going Greenspace project (a project which is looking to modify the Council’s management of public greenspace to benefit nature and communities). The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic were certainly felt with face-to-face events with schools and communities being cancelled. This resulted in increased use of social media as a promotional tool, with notable successes including Grassland Watch which was created during the lockdown restrictions when the cessation of Council grass-cutting greatly increased community engagement on greenspace management. In general, pollinator awareness has grown greatly in the public consciousness in recent years with people very aware of the declines and threats. Moving forwards, communication needs to continue its focus on practical action. Despite the impact of the pandemic, all actions are reviewed as green with coronavirus adaptations successfully made where required.

**Table 1: Objective 1 review detail**

Action	Detail	Lead	Deadline	Review
1.1 Raise awareness of pollinators through Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service and NESBReC events.	<p>1.1.1 The Ranger Service run a range of events throughout the year, many of which include awareness raising in relation to pollinating insects</p> <p>1.1.2 Add information on pollinators to Ranger’s summer events programme</p>	<p>Ranger Service</p> <p>Ranger Service</p>	<p>Yearly events programme</p> <p>March 2020</p>	<p>Yearly Rangers events programme was severely impacted by covid during strategy period and only one on the ground pollinator event was able to take place. However, strong awareness raising through social media including video on pollinators, encouraging recording of wildflower species in areas of reduced management and interactive online Question and Answer session on Wildlife Gardening and encouraging pollinators to gardens. National recording schemes for pollinators also promoted.</p>

	1.1.3 NESBReC to highlight pollinators at their events	NESBReC	Ongoing	Nesbrec held two recorders' forums in the period both of which covered topics of relevant to pollinating insects. In 2019 NESBReC held one course on the identification of Hoverflies and another on the identification of coastal plants. NESBReC recording training events impacted by covid in 2020 but grassland watch, national recording schemes and pollinating insect awareness generally strongly promoted through social media. One notable occurrence over the last couple of years that NESBReC has highlighted has been the arrival of Tree bumblebee in the area.
1.2 Work with schools to raise children's awareness of pollinators	1.2.1 Ranger Service to raise awareness of pollinators when working with schools	Ranger Service	Ongoing	School events impacted by covid during strategy period but Rangers will continue to raise awareness of pollinating insects in their work with schools.
	1.2.2 Greenspace Officers to work with schools to create pollinator habitat in school grounds or local area	Greenspace officers	September 2020	A number of schools are engaged with Greenspace Officers in modifying their grounds to benefit biodiversity including pollinators. Work on-going with Newtonhill and Banff primary schools being seen as an excellent example.

1.3	Seek opportunities to use Council facilities such as visitor centres and libraries to raise awareness of the importance of pollinating species	1.3.1	We have 2 pollinator banners - circulate one banner around libraries in Aberdeenshire	Libraries Centre, Oldmeldrum	Ongoing	Banner remains with library service for future use - libraries close for much of the strategy period.
		1.3.2	Use second banner at relevant events – it is on display at the Bennachie Centre but can be used elsewhere	Ranger Service, Environment Team	Ongoing	Banner remains for use at Bennachie Centre.
1.4	Create materials which promote pollinating insects	1.4.1	Create an appropriate sign to identify Council sites which are being managed for pollinators	Greenspace Officers	December 2019	Sign created and used in Greenspace project.
		1.4.2	Produce materials which identify good garden plants for pollinators suitable to growing conditions in north east Scotland	Environment Team	March 2020	Previous leaflet refreshed and re-printed. Used in Greenspace project and elsewhere.
1.5	Aberdeenshire Council pollinator champions	1.5.1	Aberdeenshire Council to have two Councillor pollinator champions	Environment Team	Ongoing	Engagement with the two pollinator champions on-going. A refresh of the process in 2021 is increasing engagement. Links with tree planting, Swifts, and hedgehog champions also made.
1.6	Seek opportunities for positive press and social media coverage	1.6.1	Use Aberdeenshire Council Leader-funded Greenspaces project as an opportunity to promote pollinating insects through press and social media	Greenspace Officers	September 2020	Pollinators promoted in materials, signage, social media, and directly by Greenspace Officers throughout the Greenspace project.

for planting and management for pollinators	1.6.2 Use Rangers and NESBReC social media to promote pollinating insects	Ranger Service	Ongoing	Both NESBReC and Ranger social media used to raise awareness and promote recording of pollinating insects - increased use of social media as a result of covid.
1.7 Respond to relevant national consultations on pollinators	1.7.1 Respond to relevant national consultations on pollinators and pollinator habitat ensuring the situation in Aberdeenshire is well represented	Environment Team	As required	Environment Team continue to feed in progress on our pollinator action plan to NatureScot when they review the national pollinator action plan where requested. A key process in the period was the Buglife B-lines project where key routes for enhancing pollinator habitat were identified nationally - we fed into this process for Aberdeenshire identifying the larger river corridors and the coast as our B-lines.
1.8 Work with partners and communities to protect and promote pollinators	1.8.1 Work with partners, including neighbouring local authorities and the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership, to promote and protect pollinators	Environment Team	Ongoing	Environment Team continue to work with partners, including the local biodiversity partnership who have strongly supported the Greenspace project.
	1.8.2 Provide advice to communities, where asked, regarding pollinators	Ranger Service and Environment Team	Ongoing	Responded to requests where they have come through - much of the contact has been directed to the Greenspace Officers.

2.4. **Objective 2:** Contribute to the monitoring and recording of pollinator populations

Recording of local pollinator populations continues – primarily by members of the public (citizen science) strongly supported by NESBReC and the Ranger Service. The Marr Area Ranger was nominated for a national recording award for contributions in recording butterflies and moths in particular. The aim to derive local pollinator status information has been hampered by lack of data, particularly the regular monitoring over long time periods, hence the need to continue to promote and support recording.

Action	Detail	Lead	Deadline	Review
2.1 Run identification courses for pollinator species	2.1.1 Run at least one NESBReC training course per year which focusses on pollinating insects	NESBReC	At least one training course per year	NESBReC held two recorders' forums in the period both of which covered topics of relevant to pollinating insects. In 2019 NESBReC held one course on the identification of Hoverflies and another on the identification of coastal plants. NESBReC recording training events impacted by covid in 2020 but Grassland watch, national recording schemes, and pollinating insect awareness generally strongly promoted through social media. One notable over the last couple of years that NESBReC has highlighted has been the arrival of Tree bumblebee in the area.
2.2 Promote and distribute Aberdeenshire Council	2.2.1 Reprint pollinator identification leaflet	Environment Team	November 2019	Leaflet reprinted and made available to for use.
	2.2.2 Put pollinator identification leaflet on website	Environment Team	November 2019	PDF placed on website.

pollinator identification leaflet	2.2.3	Promote and distribute pollinator identification leaflet	Environment Team, NESBReC and Ranger Service	Ongoing	Leaflet made available for use. Used by Greenspace Officers in particular during strategy period. Limited use by Ranger Service due only to the restrictions on face-to-face sessions and the closure of outlets.
2.3 Process and manage records of pollinating species from local recorders	2.3.1	NESBReC to identify pollinating species from submitted photographs and to manage and process any records of pollinators received from local recorders by inputting into the NESBReC database	NESBReC	Ongoing	Core job of NESBReC – ongoing.
2.4 Input into national recording schemes for pollinating species	2.4.1	Promote (through events and social media) national recording schemes for butterflies and moths	NESBReC and Rangers Service	Ongoing	National recording schemes promoted through both Ranger and NESBReC social media. Marr Area Ranger nominated for National recording award.
	2.4.2	Take part in national recording schemes for butterflies and moths	Ranger Service	Ongoing	Ranger team continue to contribute to national monitoring scheme for butterflies and moths.
	2.4.3	Provide local records to national recording schemes	NESBReC	Ongoing	Records provided by NESBReC
2.5 Provide information on the status of pollinating insects in Aberdeenshire	2.5.1	Investigate whether local status information can be derived from national monitoring scheme data (e.g. butterflies)	NESBReC	April 2020	Investigated. Not enough records from Aberdeenshire area in any of the recording schemes to derive local status information. Recording levels need to be increased - continue to promote and contribute.

2.5. **Objective 3:** Reduce Aberdeenshire Council's use of pesticides and other chemicals for pest and weed control that may have an effect on pollinator populations

The use of a number of pesticides has now been banned due to their detrimental effect on the environment (particularly pollinating insects) or human health, but there remains a general concern over the levels and range of chemicals used. Aberdeenshire Council's use of pesticides is in compliance with relevant regulations and code of practice. Aberdeenshire Council's Landscape Services have reduced chemical use by around 40% over the past 10 years and will continue to investigate opportunities to further reduce its use. Reduction continued through the Action Plan period with the pandemic in particular allowing for a real time 'test' of the impacts on maintenance of there being no spraying. The use of Glyphosate continues in certain applications, but the Greenspace project aims to trial alternatives going forwards. As further work is required here, this action is assessed as amber.

Action	Detail	Lead	Deadline	Review
3.1 Continue to reduce the use of chemicals in weed and insect control	3.1.1 Identify where it is appropriate and cost effective to reduce the use of chemicals in weed and insect control	Landscape Services	September 2020	Landscape Services continue to minimise their use of biocides. Generally, spraying was greatly reduced during the pandemic allowing for a 'test' of the impact of no use on maintenance. Glyphosate is still used, particularly on footpaths and graveyards. Further consideration of usage suggested for next Pollinator Action Plan.
	3.1.2 Identify and trial alternatives to chemical plant and weed control	Landscape Services and Environment Team (Invasive Non-native species project)	September 2020	Minimising usage has been the successful focus to date rather than exploring alternatives. However, the Greenspace project aim to trial alternatives.



2.6. **Objective 4:** Create habitat for pollinators, including improving habitat connectivity.

Existing meadows at Aberdeenshire Council properties are now valuable pollinator habitats although the pandemic impacted on annual maintenance in 2020. As sites at Gordon House and Kincardine O'Neil were not maintained in 2020, these actions are assessed as amber – maintenance needs to be re-started in 2021. Maintenance reduction at Woodhill House during the pandemic did highlight options for significant and ambitious biodiversity enhancement here with planting and reduced grass cutting to be implemented in 2021 and going forwards. It is hoped this can be a catalyst for other sites – further liaison is required, hence the amber status.

The Leader-funded Greenspace project concluded. Although the public engagement element of the project was impacted by the pandemic, work on identifying sites for reduced maintenance was completed and the value of the work and the need to engage meant the project was rolled over with 2 Greenspace officers in post for 2021. Planting of pollinator-friendly perennials and the sowing of amenity wildflower seed mixes is becoming the default position for flowerbeds previously planted with annual bedding.

Work on stalled development sites proved to be difficult to progress, with no uptake from developers and issues with the single Council site trialled. Action elsewhere is likely to yield more benefits.

Action	Detail	Lead	Deadline	Review
4.1 Create demonstration sites on Council owned/managed land	4.1.1 Maintain meadow at Aberdeenshire Council's Gordon House and explore options to expand the area	Landscape Services and Environment Team	Ongoing	Meadow now excellent wildflower and pollinator habitat. However, covid prevented the annual cut in 2020. Maintenance likely to resume in 2021.
	4.1.2 Maintain meadow at Aberdeenshire Council's Woodhill House and explore options to enlarge area	Landscape Services	Ongoing	Woodhill house ground left entirely uncut for much of 2020. Results have inspired an ambitious programme of habitat enhancement on site with Greenspace Officers, Environment Team, Landscape Services, and Property contributing to plan of reduced grass cutting and native planting in 2021.
	4.1.3 Explore options for meadows and existing and new Aberdeenshire Council premises	Landscape Services and Environment Team	Ongoing	Further identification of opportunities required - hopefully changes at Woodhill House can be a catalyst. Liaise further with Property.
	4.1.4 Maintain Deeside Way meadow at Kincardine O'Neil	Landscape Services and Environment Team	Ongoing	Meadow now excellent wildflower and pollinator habitat. However, covid prevented the annual cut in 2020. Maintenance likely to resume in 2021.

4.2 Complete Leader funded Greenspace Project	4.2.1 Identify Council owned/managed greenspace sites to trial reduced maintenance and environmental enhancement	Greenspace Officers	October 2019	Opportunities for reduced maintenance, tree planting, and wildflower meadows successfully identified across Council greenspace. A number of trial areas and fully implemented changes made as a result of project.
	4.2.2 Engage with the public and Council staff on reduced greenspace management and chosen sites	Greenspace Officers	March 2020	Local communities and Councillors engaged on proposals to date. Public events impacted by pandemic. However, a method of direct engagement - lettering homes adjacent to proposed reduced maintenance is to be trialed.
	4.2.3 Implement reduced maintenance	Greenspace Officers	April 2020	Implementation of reduced maintenance on-going in 2021 after covid related delays in 2020.
	4.2.4 Write up project summary and lessons learned including identification of reduced maintenance engagement and implementation process	Greenspace Officers	September 2020	Final reports of Leader-funded greenspace project completed. The value of the project and some delays due to covid mean the project has been extended using internal resources with two officers employed for 2021.
4.3 Review the production and use of annual bedding plants	4.3.1 Review the use and supply of annual bedding plants in the Council to see if pollen and nectar rich perennial plants (or some other pollinator beneficial planting type) would be a suitable alternative	Landscape Services/ Greenspace Officers	September 2020	Offering of perennial plants to communities being trialed in 2021. Use of bedding plants directly by the Council being greatly reduced with wildflower planting being put in place in a number of places.

	4.3.2	Identify if Council plant nursery facilities can produce alternatives to annual bedding – perennial plants, wildflowers or native trees for example	Landscape Services/Green Space Officers	September 2020	Use of nursery facilities still under review with trial of perennial plant supply being carried out in 2021. Facilities geared up to the supply of annual bedding so any changes would require investment.	
4.4	Stalled development sites - seek opportunities to sow wildflower mixes on sites with planning permission that are not likely to be developed for some time	4.4.1	Explore opportunities to sow temporary wildflower seed mix at stalled development sites in Aberdeenshire Council ownership former – for example at Ellon Academy site	Environment Team/Planning Information and Delivery Team	April 2020	Initial requests sent to a number of developers but no opportunities arose. Planting done on Council owned site in Alford in 2019 but was impacted by very dry summer. Enquiries and progress halted during covid - need to re-evaluate for next strategy.
4.5	Development Management enhances pollinator habitat	4.5.1	Ensure developments provide and enhance habitats for pollinating insects through complying with Local Development Plan policies on biodiversity enhancement, landscaping (including landscaping maintenance) and watercourse buffer strips	Development Management and Environment Team	Ongoing	Local Development Plan policies applied. 2021 Local Development Plan will include policies on biodiversity enhancement as well as protection of important habitats.
4.6	Aberdeenshire Council infrastructure projects provide	4.6.1	Work with relevant services (e.g. Roads or Property) to promote the inclusion of pollinator habitat in new infrastructure projects	Environment Team	Ongoing	Environment Team liaison with Property on-going. It is now essentially default that new school projects in particular will see opportunities for habitat.

pollinators habitat				enhancement. No new road project during the strategy but confidence that enhancement measures would be built in here also.
4.7 Review Council roadside verge management to see if benefits to pollinators can be increased	4.7.1 Carry out a review of roadside verge management policies and procedures to see if benefits to pollinators can be increased. Issues to explore include the timings of cuts, liaison with contractors and the use of yellow rattle	Landscape Services	September 2020	Road verge maintenance policy was reviewed during strategy period. However, habitat benefitting measures were largely carried over due to various constraints. Waiting to see if post-covid budgetary issues mean a fresh opportunity to engage.
	4.7.2 Survey road verges near Pitmedden that have previously been planted with Yellow rattle	Environment Team	August 2020	Site visit opportunities limited in 2020 - one visit made and some Yellow rattle remains. Need further in-season assessment to see if supplementary seeding required.

2.7. **Objective 5:** Protect existing areas of wildflower rich grassland.

Nesbrec habitat surveying was paused as a result of covid but will continue with an increased programme in 2021. For both Planning and forestry application, the Environment Team continue to promote protection of valuable pollinator habitat. New Local Nature Conservation Sites will be confirmed through the adoption of the 2021 Local Development Plan.

Action	Detail	Lead	Deadline	Review
5.1 Survey for wildflower rich grassland sites and other pollinator habitat	5.1.1 NESBReC to continue habitat surveys in Aberdeenshire so as to identify valuable grassland sites and other valuable pollinator habitats	NESBReC	Surveys carried out yearly in summer months	Habitat surveying took place in 2019. Paused in 2020 due to covid but will resume in summer 2021.
5.2 Protect valuable pollinator habitat in the development management process	5.2.1 Ensure development complies with Local Development Plan policies on natural heritage/biodiversity protection	Development Management and Environment Team	Ongoing	Environment Team continue to input to planning application to assist policy compliance and to seek enhancement.
	5.2.2 Where undesignated wildflower rich grassland or other key pollinator habitat is identified (though NESBReC survey work or the development management process for example) consider designating these areas as a Local Nature Conservation Site	Environment Team	Ongoing	A number of new Local Nature Conservation Site are proposed in the 2021 Local Development plan which include a range a natural and semi-natural habitat of benefit to pollinators. These will be confirmed with the adoption of the LDP.
5.3 Protect pollinator habitat from inappropriate afforestation	5.3.1 Consider impacts on pollinator habitat when responding to forestry planting consultations from Scottish Forestry	Environment Team	Ongoing	Environment Team continue to respond to forestry planting consultations - valuable grassland habitat highlighted in relevant applications

### **3. Concluding comments and next steps**

- 3.1. The Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Action plan 2019-2021 has structured and catalysed work to protect and enhance pollinator populations and also provided a means to promote the extensive and successful work of the Council. Undoubtedly the coronavirus pandemic impacted on some of the actions – reducing face-to-face public engagement and limiting site maintenance for example. However, it also presented opportunities such as the public became strongly engaged on the management of greenspace and the increased audience reach of social media messages on pollinators.
- 3.2. The majority of the actions of the strategy have been achieved. It is felt that the structured approach provided by the 5 overall objectives was appropriate and helpful.
- 3.3. A number of the actions captured in the strategy are essentially on-going. It is beneficial to identify these as they are key in achieving its aims. It is felt that highlighting the time-limited actions more fully in the future strategies would be helpful. Indeed, integrating more actions with specific targets would be beneficial overall.
- 3.4. Consideration should be given to the period of time covered in a new strategy. It is felt that a longer time period would be beneficial so that the revision/ renewal process does not get in the way of action. The time period will be driven by the necessary action to an extent, but having a three-year strategy, with regular monitoring, and possibly a yearly review process, is suggested as an initial model.
- 3.5. There is certainly strong value in having a pollinator strategy and thus the Environment Team will now begin the process of creating a new Strategy with the input of other Services and Councillors.