

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

5 NOVEMBER 2014

Agenda Item	12
Report No	PDI 46/14

HIGHLAND COUNCIL'S BIODIVERSITY DUTY DELIVERY PLAN

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This Report presents a final progress report on the 2011-14 Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan; a new Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan for the period 2015-17; and the statutory requirement of a Biodiversity Duty Report to the Scottish Government.

Members will be asked to note progress and approve the 2013-14 Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan report; approve the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan for the period 2015-17; and approve the Biodiversity Duty Report to the Scottish Government.

1. Background

- 1.1 Biodiversity is the variety of all life on earth and all the places where it is found. It is also the name given to a process of focussing conservation efforts on the rarest, most important or most threatened species and habitats in an area.
- 1.2 All public bodies have a statutory duty to "further the conservation of biodiversity". Two successive plans have been drawn up to help the Council's Services deliver this duty, covering the periods 2008-2010 and 2011-2014. A third iteration for 2015-17 is presented for approval in this report.
- 1.3 The current Highland Council Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan (2011-2014), was approved by the Planning, Environment & Development Committee on 21 September 2011. Progress has been reported to this Committee on the 16 November 2012 and 6 November 2013.

2. Report on the Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2011-14

- 2.1 The Plan is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the delivery of biodiversity-related policy across the Council, whilst the second provides action plans for different areas of work within the (pre-reorganisation) Council Services: Countryside Rangers, Housing, Planning & Development, Social Work and TECS.
- 2.2 Biodiversity Policy Delivery: Two of the six objectives have been delivered fully. The remaining four have been partially delivered and the outstanding actions will be carried forward into the 2015-17 plan. Full details can be found in Appendix 2.

2.3 Service Action Plans: There are 5 service action plans to report on:

- Countryside Rangers: This is progressing well with 4 actions being delivered and only one action being carried forward.
- Housing: Both actions have been carried forward into 2015.
- Planning & Development: One action is being delivered. Four are being carried forward.
- Social Work: The single action is being carried forward.
- TECS: Of these eight actions five are underway, one has been completed and two have been carried forward. The completed action relates to the policy on and mapping of Japanese Knotweed that was approved by the PED Committee in early 2014.

The delay in delivering some of the above actions is due primarily to availability of resources and competing demands for officer time. All of the outstanding actions will be carried forward into the new plan. Full details are appended in Appendix 2.

2.4 Communication Strategy:

The communication strategy is part of the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan. The delivery of this is progressing well and four of the actions are underway and four are scheduled to begin in 2015.

Key successes:

- 22 Councillors have become Species Champions.
- The Biodiversity Awareness Survey. The staff and Councillors are very aware of biodiversity and its importance and a good proportion of staff are directly involved in nature conservation.

2.5 Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2015-17: This plan builds on the actions of the previous plans and includes carry forward actions from 2011-14 and new actions for 2015-17. The new plan can be found in Appendix 2.

2.6 Highland Council Biodiversity Duty Compliance Report 2014: National reporting and auditing of the Biodiversity Duty by public bodies is now required by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (2011) Scotland; and the report in Appendix 3 will be made publicly available to fulfil this requirement before the deadline of 31 December 2014.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Highland Council's 2011-14 Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan has delivered a number of valuable outcomes. Although a few actions have been delayed, it is anticipated that they will all be delivered over the duration of the next plan.

4. Fit with the Programme for the Highland Council 2012-17

- 4.1 These actions support actions 7, 8, 11, 13 and 18 under the “Working Together to Empower Our Communities” heading in the Council’s Programme 2012-17. The Highland Environment Forum and Local Biodiversity Groups have a strong input from volunteers, and many of the projects are focused on working with communities and raising awareness amongst the general public.

5. Fit with the Single Outcome Agreement

- 5.1 Delivering the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan, strengthening the Highland Environment Forum will help the Council deliver SOA National Outcomes 1, 10 and 12. The local outcome is “Our natural heritage is protected and enhanced enabling it to deliver economic, health and learning benefits”.

6. Implications

6.1 Legal/Risk

Without the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan there is a risk that the Council will be found in breach of its statutory duties under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The Council is taking action to ensure that it meets its biodiversity duty.

6.2 Resource

The key thrust of most actions in these plans are at no-cost i.e. ‘added value’ to existing operations or creating better partnerships to improve service delivery. There are potential future resource implications for the Council arising from the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2015-17, namely the delivery of Green Networks. These will be the subject of future papers brought before the Council for its consideration and approval at the time.

6.3 Climate change/carbon Clever

The implementation of the Biodiversity Duty Action plan will result in a wide range of long-term benefits in relation to climate change and the Council’s Carbon Clever aspirations and targets through the safeguarding and enhancement of biodiversity.

6.4 Rural

The implementation of the Biodiversity Duty Action plan will be effective throughout the Highlands and the proposed actions will have a positive impact on the rural environment.

6.5 Equality and Gaelic implications

There are no equality or Gaelic implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

- approve the Highland Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan Report 2013-14 (Appendix 1);
- approve the Highland Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2015-17 (Appendix 2); and
- approve the Highland Council Biodiversity Duty Compliance Report 2014 to the Scottish Government (Appendix 3).

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure Service

Date: 13 October 2014

Author: Jonathan Willet, Biodiversity Officer (Job Share)

Ref: JW (Ext 2274)

Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Report on Highland Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2013-14

Appendix 2: Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2015-17.

Appendix 3: Biodiversity Duty Compliance Report 2014 to the Scottish Government.

Appendix 1: Highland Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2013-14 Report.

Summary of the Report

Of the 21 service actions for 2013-14;

- One has been completed.
- Ten are being delivered.
- Seven are carried forward until 2015.
- Three have not been progressed yet.
- Of the six key policy areas The Highland Council is fully delivering on two and the remaining four are being partially delivered.
- Of the eight actions in the Communications Plan, four are being delivered and the other four are scheduled for 2015.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all life on earth and all the places where it is found. It is also the name given to a process of focussing conservation efforts on the rarest, most important or most threatened species and habitats in a particular geographical area. There are three tiers of this so-called biodiversity action planning in the UK; Local Biodiversity Action Plans (there are 8 covering Highland but they usually covering a local authority area), the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is defined as, "(Development that) meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" Bruntland Report 1987. The three fundamental components of sustainable development are the environment, the economy and society. These are indivisible and always act together. The aim of the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed in 1992, is to halt global biodiversity loss by the 2010, is a key plank of working towards sustainable development.

Biodiversity action is part of sustainable development and taking action on sustainable development is a part of conserving biodiversity.

1. Introduction.

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 states, “It is the duty of every public body and office-holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.” This has been noted by the Sustainable Development Select Committee at the meeting of 9 March 2005.

To help public bodies to deliver the Biodiversity Duty Guidance was been created, the initial guidance was updated in 2009. The original guidance was followed and a report on this was presented to the Sustainable Development Select Committee on the 17th of January 2007, Paper SD2/07. This outlined where the Council was in relation to its delivery of the Biodiversity Duty and also how it should move forward to follow the Scottish Governments’ guidelines on delivering the Biodiversity Duty. This way forward took the form of the Highland Council Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2008-10. The progress of this plan was reported to the PED Committee on the 25th of May 2011 and in November of 2012, 2013 and 2014.

The initial and subsequent Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan has been developed in consultation with the Sustainable Development Officer and the Council’s Services. This Plan integrates with the workplan of the Climate Change Working Group and its progress will regularly be reported to that group. The Delivery Plan was based on agreed, 3-year action tables, which follow the format that was trialled in Badenoch and Strathspey in 2007/8.

The Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan consists of four sections;

- Biodiversity Policy Statement.
- Service Action Plans.
- Communication Strategy
- Reporting and Review.

These four headings were identified as the cornerstones of the delivery of the Council’s Biodiversity Duty. However these are not the end point but rather a starting point in delivering our Biodiversity Duty.

Most of the plan concentrates on the Service Action Plans. Four of the seven Council Services (pre-2014) were identified as being directly able to influence biodiversity through their day-to-day service delivery. They are Planning and Development, Social Work, TECS and Housing and Property Services. Due to the reorganisation of Council Services the tables will change slightly from 2015 onwards.

In addition to these services the Countryside Rangers were involved in creating an action plan specifically for their activities. Rangers are one of the key on-the-ground operatives who have been delivering the Biodiversity Duty since before it was thought of.

Finance, Chief Executive and Education, Culture and Sport did not have specific action plans developed for them as it was decided that their engagement in the Biodiversity Communication Plan and their participation in the Council's Sustainable Development work was the best way of engaging them in the Biodiversity Duty process. However, the Chief Executive's Service is being more directly engaged through liaison with the Sustainable Development Officer.

Highland Council was the first Council in Scotland that has gone through this process and produced a Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan

2. Biodiversity Policies.

Delivery of action under the following six policy headings is essential in the Council continuing to deliver its biodiversity duty. The objective status covers the year of the report and objectives will be; fully delivered, partially delivered or not delivered.

It should be noted that the report on the status of a particular objective is restricted to the Council policies for that objective. So, fully delivered means that all the necessary policies are in place and being acted on but the overall objective may not be delivered as that is dependent on action by all partners in that process, who may not have the biodiversity duty e.g. private companies placed on them.

2.1. Supporting Biodiversity Action.

Objective.

The Council will promote the biodiversity of the Highlands and ensure that the aims and objectives of the 8 Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Highland Environment Forum (HEF) and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) where appropriate, delivered through its services.

Actions.

- The Council will continue to support the local groups and the Highland Environment Forum as resources allow.
- The Council will continue to support the delivery of the Highland Biodiversity Action plan where appropriate.
- The Biodiversity Officers will seek funding for projects to deliver biodiversity action locally.
- Delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Action Plans where appropriate.
- The Landfill Communities Fund will continue to remain available for biodiversity projects.

Objective Status.

Fully delivered.

2.2. Development.

Objective.

Where development is to be approved the proposals should seek to conserve and where appropriate enhance the biodiversity of a site, through overall site planning, infrastructure, landscape and building design.

Actions.

- The need for further supplementary guidance will be considered and if required new supplementary guidance will be produced.
- Planning Officers training days on biodiversity issues organised annually.
- The Biodiversity Officers will input to new planning policy and plans as required.

Objective Status.

Partially delivered

Comment

There is no monitoring or collation of biodiversity enhancement or loss data with regard to development the suspicion is that development is not conserving and enhancing the biodiversity on site.

2.3. Green Networks.

Objective.

The Council will work with stakeholders and statutory bodies to identify “green networks” in the major development areas and around all the major settlements in Highland.

Actions.

- Seek to enhance the A96 Green Network.
- By 2014 identify and analyse the Inner Moray Firth, South East Sutherland, Thurso-Wick, Fort William and Portree Green Networks.

Objective Status.

Partially delivered.

Comment.

Green Networks have been mapped for the A96 and work has started on the Inner Moray Firth area. Work on the other areas hasn't started. The identification of a Green Network and the delivery of it are two very different things. There is uncertainty regarding over how Green Networks would be delivered and where the funding needed to manage them over time will come from. Further work is also needed to see how any such actions can link in with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's objective of delivering the Ecosystem Approach of biodiversity Conservation.

2.4. Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Network.

Objective.

The Council will support local communities if they desire to develop Local Nature Reserves.

Action.

- Continue to promote LNRs and provide advice and support to interested local groups.

Objective Status.

Fully delivered.

Comment.

So far Highland has only one LNR. One other community has shown interest but there was not unanimous support for a formal designation. There was a presentation LNRs at the Countryside Ranger gathering in Winter 2013/14 to encourage Rangers to promote this idea to any communities who may be interested.

2.5. Ecosystem Approach.

Objective.

The Council will, where appropriate, support ecosystem-scale projects to conserve and restore native biodiversity and help Highland's biodiversity adapt to climate change.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- When a large Ecosystem Approach Project is proposed Highland Council will consider its role in such a project.
- Use the Green Network mapping as the basis for delivery of the Ecosystem Approach in the urban/ suburban areas of Highland.

Objective Status.

Partially delivered.

Comment.

This is due to a lack of action from national partners in proposing regional projects. It is beyond the remit and budget of the Council to do this on its own. However the delivery of a Green Network, might go some way towards meeting this requirement..

2.6. Environmental Data Sharing Partnerships.

Action.

The Council will work with statutory bodies and local stakeholders to develop an environmental data-sharing partnership for Highland.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- Attend partnership meetings to manage the Highland Biological Records Database.
- Support this partnership as resources allow.
- Support the Scottish Biological Information Forum's action plan wherever possible.

Objective Status.
Partially Delivered.

Comment.

The Council has done as much as it can to deliver this. But until there is a National Policy on Local Data Sharing Partnerships outlining how national organisations will work locally to help deliver this action, it cannot be fully delivered in Highland.

3. Service Action Plans.

At present there are five Service Biodiversity Action Plans, these are; Countryside Rangers, Housing, Planning and Development, Social Work and TECS. In developing this plan contact was made with all Section Heads to ensure that they approved of all the actions in their delivery plans.

At present there are no specific workplans for Finance, Social Work, Education, Culture and Sport and Chief Executive Services. These were not developed as it was decided that their engagement with the Biodiversity Communication Plan and participation in the Council's Sustainable Development work was the best way of engaging them in this process. The Chief Executive Service is more directly engaged through liaison with the Sustainable Development Officer.

For schools the strong uptake of the Eco-schools programme and the new Curriculum for Excellence provide strong links to biodiversity as does the continued work of the Countryside Rangers with school groups.

3.1. Countryside Ranger Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in			
				2011	2012	2013	2014
1. Educational work in schools	Ongoing	Includes many activities in wider countryside, all aspects of natural heritage and aspects of cultural heritage that relate to the countryside.	Rangers	•	•	•	•
2. Guided walk and events programme	Ongoing	Programme in place	Rangers	•	•	•	•
3. Site management on Ranger managed sites.	Ongoing	Overall management to maintain/encourage/ restore native species and habitats.	Rangers	•	•	•	•
4. Identify one area of greenspace managed in each of the main population centres of the Highlands (10 towns over 2,000 inhabitants) to be selected for a trial change in its management to maximise its biodiversity.	Delayed.	Meeting required with senior rangers to progress this.	Biodiversity Officer/ Rangers/ TECS	•	•	•	•
5. To identify any areas with existing or potential community interest or involvement, which would be suitable as a Local Nature Reserve.	Ongoing.	Currently there is no interest from communities.	Rangers	•	•	•	•

3.2. Housing Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action/ Target.	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in			
				2011	2012	2013	2014
1. Leaflet pack to all Council Tenants.	Delayed	Planned for Spring 2015.	Highland Biodiversity Officer				•
2. Deliver training to key staff on protected species and biodiversity	Delayed.	Planned for 2015.	Highland Biodiversity Officer			•	•

3.3. Planning and Development Service Biodiversity Action Plan

Action/ Target.	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in			
				2011	2012	2013	2014
1. A rolling series of annual training events on planning and biodiversity.	On Target	Training has taken place annually 2011 on Bats, the Sustainable Design Guidance, EPS and Invasive Species	Biodiversity Officers/ PDS		•	•	•
2. Green Networks for the Inner Moray Firth development corridor mapped.	Delayed	No detailed opportunity mapping has taken place	PDS/ SNH	•	•	•	
3. Enhancement of the Inner Moray Firth development corridor Green Network	No progress	No work underway for biodiversity.	PDS/ SNH				•
4. Enhancement of the A96 Corridor Green Network	No progress	No work underway for biodiversity.	PDS/ SNH	•	•	•	•
5. Identify and analyse the Inner Moray Firth, South East Sutherland, Thurso-Wick, Fort William and Portree Green Networks.	No progress	No work underway	PDS/ SNH				•

3.4. Social Work Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action/ Target.	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in			
				2011	2012	2013	2014
Ensure all large care homes have bird table(s) and feeders and biodiverse landscaping.	Some progress	Issues over who pays for the bird food to be resolved. However Broadford Hospital have installed feeders independently funded by its League of Friends.	Biodiversity Officer				

Note: Funding for this would be sought from external sources and a partnership would be developed between the Ranger Service and the care homes.

3.5. TECS Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action/ Target.	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in			
				2011	2012	2013	2014
1. When clearing ditches only clear one side in any one year. Over-dig that side to maintain water flow.	On target		TECS				•
2. Give a talk to the grounds maintenance teams about invasive plants in the area and best practice in managing them.	On target	Delivered and ongoing since 2009. Focussing on Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam	Rangers/ Biodiversity Officers	•	•	•	•
3. Bridge inspectors to attend a bats and bridges course.	Ongoing	Training offered but was declined. To be repeated in 2015	Biodiversity Officer/ TECS				
4. Identify one area of greenspace managed in each of the main population centres of the Highlands (10 towns over 2,000 inhabitants) to be selected for a trial change in its management to maximise its biodiversity.	Delayed	Biodiversity Officer to meet with Senior Rangers to progress this.	Biodiversity Officer/ Rangers/ TECS				•

5. Map the Japanese Knotweed on the road verge network to confirm its range.	On target	Database created and shared with CS	TECS					?
6. Develop prioritisation criteria for controlling of keys sites with Japanese Knotweed.	Completed	Paper submitted to PED in Spring 2014.	Biodiversity Officer			•		
7. Continued involvement in and support of the Highland Invasive Species Forum	Ongoing		TECS	•	•	•	•	
8. New Action. Develop a new approach to road verge management in Highland, starting with trial sites all over the Region.	Ongoing		TECS			•	•	

4. Communication Action Plan.

Objective

- 2017 Target: To significantly raise the biodiversity awareness and understanding of Highland Council staff from 2014 baseline.

Actions.

Action	Group	Information	Date
1. Biodiversity Talks	For Members of Staff	These talks give staff the opportunity to hear about a specific species group or biodiversity issue from an expert in the field and hear what they could do to get involved should they wish to do so. These are currently held in the Council Chamber, it is planned that they will be webcast from November 2014 onwards.	Ongoing until June 2015
2. Biodiversity Talks	For Elected Members	There will be the initial offer of three short, 30 minute, talks on Highland's Biodiversity, Protected Species and Planning and Invasive Species. These subjects were chosen as they are issues that many elected members are dealing with on a regular basis. After the initial talks the elected members will be asked if they wish further talks on other subjects.	On hold until 2015
3. Species Champions	For Elected Members	The elected members will be invited to become a species champion. This follows on from the successful initiative that Scottish Environment Link undertook with MSPs. The choice of species will come from a list of over 70. The role of a species champion will be to take an interest in "their" species and act as an advocate for it, highlighting its importance and/or the issues affecting it in relevant debates or other opportunities that arise. The current list can be seen in Appendix 2.	Ongoing
4. Leafleting Tenants	Council Tenants	All Council Tenants will receive a suite of SNH leaflets	On hold until 2015

		highlighting nature on their doorstep and also what can be done to garden for wildlife. It is understood that not all tenants have gardens. Tenants will be asked what the Council can do to make their area better for biodiversity.	
5. Biodiversity Awareness Survey	All	Determining how successful the Communication Plan is very important. This will be done through a short, annual questionnaire for both elected members and staff. The first survey will take place in February 2014 and form the baseline to measure progress against. This will be repeated each Autumn. The questions can be found at the end of this paper.	February 2014
6. Review	Biodiversity Officer	The results of the annual survey will be reviewed when the results are available and any changes required to the Communication Plan will be made then.	October 2014
7. Reporting	Biodiversity Officer	The Communication Plan will be reported on as part of the annual Biodiversity Duty Reporting cycle.	October 2014
8. Newsletter	All	After each Biodiversity Duty Reporting Round an annual Highland Council biodiversity newsletter will be published. It will highlight the work undertaken by the Council for biodiversity, the results of the questionnaire and also interesting news from the world of Highland Biodiversity. The first newsletter will appear this Spring 2014 and then each subsequent Autumn.	January 2015

Comment.

Most actions are on target, with one being delayed and two that are scheduled to take place in 2015.

Results of the 2014 Biodiversity Awareness Questionnaire.

Question	Council Staff		Councillors	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Number of responses	314 (c.3% but the questionnaire reached far fewer)		24 (30%)	
1. Have you heard of biodiversity	97%	3%	96%	4%
2. Do you know what the word means?	79%	19%	92%	2%
3. Is biodiversity; Another word for nature conservation? The variety of all life on earth? A new washing powder?	13% - Another word for nature conservation 97% - The variety of all life on earth 0% - New washing powder		100% - The variety of all life on earth	
4. Biodiversity is the variety of all life on earth and the places where it lives and also a process to deliver nature conservation, but with urban sites and settlements being included in this approach. With this in mind is Highland's Biodiversity important to you?	95%	4% (a quarter skipped this question)	100% (21)	
5. Is Highland's Biodiversity important for tourism?	97%	2% (a quarter skipped this question)	100% (21)	
6. Is Highland's Biodiversity important for the economy in general?	97%	3% (a quarter skipped this question)	100%	
7. Do you enjoy watching wildlife documentaries?	88%	12% (a third skipped this question)	85%	15%
8. Do you spend time watching wildlife in you garden or elsewhere?	85%	15% (a quarter skipped this question)	95%	5%

9. Are you actively involved in nature conservation activities? e.g. Biological recording, feeding birds, volunteering for or contributing to a wildlife charity?	43%	57% (a quarter skipped this question)	57%%	43%
Councillor Only Question: Are you a species Champion?			23% (5)	62% (13) plus 3 don't knows.
10. What is your favourite Highland plant, animal, fish, fungi etc? Please name just one.	227 responses. Red Squirrel (25), Red Kite (13), Red Deer (10) and Wildcat (10). 69 different species including 2 votes for the Highland Crofter!		21 responses all different bar two votes of birds in general.	

Number of Participants:

Staff: There were over 300 submissions from all The Highland Council areas, but predominately Inverness and Nairn. This represents 3% of the Council workforce, so not really a representative sample. However it does give an indication of the interest in biodiversity within the Council.

Councillors: Response rates were low and demonstrate that further awareness raising work is needed. It is hoped that the next survey will achieve a 50% response from Councillors.

Time of responses:

Staff: Responses were in the first three weeks of the consultation, but very few respondents when the questionnaire was re-advertised a month later, suggesting that all those who were interested had responded.

Councillors: Two thirds responded in the first phase and one third responding after it was re-advertised.

Knowledge of Biodiversity Q1-6:

Overall this was exceptionally high. However this may indicate that this is not a representative group but rather a self-selecting group of staff with knowledge of and an interest in biodiversity or that the folk that work for Highland Council are exceptionally knowledgeable about biodiversity. Further work/consultation over the coming years will clarify this position. The 2006-9 SNH survey of attitudes to biodiversity in Scotland had around 70% of those asked responding positively to the interest in, the relevance of and concern about biodiversity. A 2011 SNH survey showed that a sample of the general public had a 47% recognition of the word biodiversity. The 2012 Western Isles Biodiversity Awareness survey found an 86% awareness of what biodiversity meant.

Engagement with biodiversity:

Similar percentages enjoyed watching wildlife on the TV and in real life. Active involvement with wildlife was similar to the 2011 SNH Report which found that 15% undertook some volunteering for biodiversity and 50% did some wildlife gardening.

Favourite Species:

No obvious front runner but there was a massive variety chosen, the majority were birds and mammals, followed by plants, bees and other invertebrates.

5. Discussion.

5.1. Policy delivery.

Of the six key policy areas identified two are being fully delivered by The Highland Council. The Policy on the Environmental Data Sharing Partnership is only partially delivered as it requires a national policy to be developed and work on this is ongoing. The Ecosystem Approach, is not being delivered because external partners are primarily responsible for its delivery and little progress is being made here. However delivery of the Green Network offers a chance for the Council to do this on a small scale and start to address the issues around determining the impact of development on biodiversity.

5.2. Service Biodiversity Action Plans.

5.2.1. Countryside Rangers.

This is progressing well with 4 actions being delivered and only one action being carried forward.

5.2.2. Housing.

Both actions have been carried forward into 2015 due to other activity taking priority.

5.2.3. Planning and Development.

One action is being delivered. Four are being carried forward into 2015.

5.2.4. Social Work.

The single action for Social work has been delayed due to the lack of available revenue funding from the usual funders. The Biodiversity Officer will explore this further in 2015.

5.2.5. TECS.

Of these eight actions five are being delivered, one completed and two have been carried forward.

The completed action relates to the policy on and mapping of Japanese Knotweed that was approved by the PED Committee in early 2014.

The delayed greenspace action was due to the reprioritisation of the Biodiversity officer time on road verges work.

The offer of training to Bridge Inspectors on Protected Species was not taken up. But it will be offered again in 2015.

5.3. Communication Plan.

The delivery of this is progressing well. Four of the actions have been delivered and four are scheduled to begin in 2015. Twenty two Councillors that have become Species Champions.

In summary the results of the staff and Councillor survey were good. The staff and Councillors are very aware of biodiversity and its importance and a good number are doing something for nature conservation. The key target for 2015 is to get a greater

number of respondents from both staff and Councillors to see if this year's survey results are reflective of majority larger sample of the staff and Councillors.

Jonathan Willet. October 2014.

Appendix 2: Highland Council's Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan 2015-17.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all life on earth and all the places where it is found. It is also the name given to a process of focussing conservation efforts on the rarest, most important or most threatened species and habitats in a particular geographical area. There are three tiers of biodiversity action planning in the UK; Local Biodiversity Action Plans (there are 8 covering Highland but they usually covering a local authority area), the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

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Biodiversity action is part of sustainable development and taking action on sustainable development is a part of conserving biodiversity.

1. Introduction.

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The initial and subsequent Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan has been developed in consultation with the Sustainable Development Officer and the Council's Services. This Plan integrates with the workplan of the Climate Change Working Group and its progress will regularly be reported to that group. The Delivery Plan is based on agreed, 3-year action tables, which follow the format that was trialled in Badenoch and Strathspey in 2007/8.

The Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan consists of 4 sections;

- Biodiversity Policy Statement.
- Service Action Plans.
- Communication Strategy
- Reporting and Review.

These 4 headings were identified as the cornerstones of the delivery of the Council's Biodiversity Duty. However these are not the end point but rather a starting point in delivering our Biodiversity Duty.

Most of the plan concentrates on the Service Action Plans. Four of the seven Council services were identified as being directly able to influence biodiversity through their day to day service delivery. In 2014 the Services were reorganised. There are now three relevant services Care and Learning, Community Services and Development and Infrastructure.

In addition to these services the Countryside Rangers were involved in creating an action plan specifically for their activities. Rangers are one of the key on-the-ground operatives who have been delivering the Biodiversity Duty since before it was thought of.

Finance, Corporate Development and Chief Executive Office do not have specific action plans developed for them as it was decided that their

engagement in the Biodiversity Communication Plan and their participation in the Council's Sustainable Development work was the best way of engaging them in the Biodiversity Duty process.

Highland Council was the first Council in Scotland that has gone through this process and produced a Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Act) Scotland 2011 included a section on the requirement for all public bodies to report on their delivery of the Biodiversity Duty by December 31 2014.

2. Biodiversity Policies.

Delivery of action under the following six policy headings is essential in the Council continuing to deliver its biodiversity duty.

2.1. Supporting Biodiversity Action.

Action.

The Council will promote the biodiversity of the Highlands and ensure that the aims and objectives of the 8 Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Highland Environment Forum, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) are, where appropriate, delivered through its services.

Current Status.

Highland is one of the best Council's in Scotland in terms of supporting the activities of local biodiversity groups and leading the wide partnership of organisations who are members of the Highland Environment Forum (HEF). Its support of HEF and its predecessor has been instrumental in encouraging the significant amount of work it has taken forward since 2006. The continued support of the local groups and Scottish and UK plans are vital to the conserving Highland's biodiversity.

Since 2008 the Landfill Communities Fund has disbursed over £230,000 to biodiversity projects. It remains a prime source of funding for local short-term biodiversity projects.

The Council has employed a full-time Biodiversity Officer (job-share since 2005) since 2002. In the past the post has focussed mainly on external partnership working and supporting local biodiversity groups. In 2010 the focus of the post was altered to spend a greater time working on biodiversity matters within the Council. The Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan is the framework for this.

Future/ Ongoing Actions.

- The Council will continue to support the local groups and the Highland Environment Forum as resources allow.
- The Council will continue to support the delivery of the Highland Biodiversity Action plan where appropriate.
- The Biodiversity Officers will seek funding for projects to deliver biodiversity action locally.

- Delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy where appropriate.
- The Landfill Communities Fund will continue to remain available biodiversity projects.

2.2. Development.

Action.

Where development is to be approved the proposals should seek to conserve and where appropriate enhance the biodiversity of a site, through overall site planning, infrastructure, landscape and building design.

Current Status.

Policies 58 to 61 in the [Highland-wide Local Development Plan](#) highlight this and the Sustainable Design Guide: Interim Supplementary Guidance, Green Networks: Interim Supplementary Guidance, Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects Guidance Note and Highland's Protected Species: Interim Supplementary Guidance all contribute to this.

There will be a review of the Policies in the HwLDP in late 2014 to ensure they are fit for purpose and delivering what they set out to do.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- The need for further supplementary guidance will be considered and if required new supplementary guidance will be produced.
- Planning Officers training days on biodiversity issues organised annually.
- The Biodiversity Officers will input to new planning policy and plans as required.

2.3. Green Networks.

Action.

The Council will work with stakeholders and statutory bodies to identify "green networks" in the major development areas and around all the major settlements in Highland.

Current Status.

As stated in the [Green Network: Interim Supplementary Guidance](#), "A green network comprises the network of greenspaces and green corridors within and around settlements, linking out into the wider countryside, helping to enhance the area's biodiversity, quality of life and sense of place. A green network provides the setting within which high quality, sustainable growth can occur."

So far the A96 Green Network is the only one to have been fully mapped to date. Some work has taken place on the Inner Moray Firth Green Network. At the moment there is no mechanism or funding to create and manage a Green Network on the ground.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- Seek to deliver the A96 Green Network.
- By 2017 identify and analyse the Inner Moray Firth, South East Sutherland, Thurso-Wick, Fort William and Portree Green Networks and seek a delivery mechanism and funding for this.

2.4. Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Network.

Action.

The Council will support local communities if they desire to develop Local Nature Reserves.

Current Status.

Merkinch LNR is the only one in Highland at the moment. Expressions of interest have been made from other areas but as yet have not lead to anything.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- Continue to promote LNRs and provide advice and support to interested local groups.

2.5. Ecosystem Approach.

Action.

The Council will, where appropriate, support ecosystem-scale projects to conserve and restore native biodiversity and help Highland's biodiversity adapt to climate change.

Current Status.

At present no such multi-agency project has been proposed in Highland yet.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- When an Ecosystem Approach Project is proposed Highland Council will consider its role in such a project.
- Use the Green Network mapping as the basis for delivery of the Ecosystem Approach in the urban/ suburban areas of Highland.

2.6. Data Sharing Partnerships.

Action.

The Council will work with statutory bodies and local stakeholders to develop an environmental data-sharing partnership for Highland.

Current Status.

A 3-year application for funding has been secured from SNH to continue the validation, verification and mobilisation of biological data collected in the Highlands and to continue managing the Highland Biological Records Database. A small partnership of organisations including Highland Council has agreed to provide match funding.

At the national level a Scottish Biological Information Forum (SBIF) has been created. This forum could be of great benefit to developing further an environmental data-sharing partnership for Highland. SBIF is progressing slowly in its actions but until there is a National Policy on Local Data Sharing Partnerships outlining how national organisations will work locally to help deliver this action, it cannot be fully delivered in Highland.

Future/ Ongoing Action.

- Attend partnership meetings to manage the Highland Biological Records Database.
- Support this partnership as resources allow.
- Support the Scottish Biological Information Forum's action plan wherever possible.

3. Service Action Plans.

In 2014 the Services were reorganised. There are now three relevant services Care and Learning, Community Services and Development and Infrastructure.

In addition to these services the Countryside Rangers were involved in creating an action plan specifically for their activities. Rangers are one of the key on-the-ground operatives who have been delivering the Biodiversity Duty since before it was thought of.

Finance, Corporate Development and Chief Executive Office do not have specific action plans developed for them as it was decided that their engagement in the Biodiversity Communication Plan and their participation in the Council's Sustainable Development work was the best way of engaging them in the Biodiversity Duty process.

For schools the strong uptake of the Eco-schools programme and the new Curriculum for Excellence provide strong links to biodiversity as does the continued work of the Countryside Rangers with school groups.

3.1. Countryside Ranger Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action	2014 Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in		
				2015	2015	2017
1. Educational work in schools	Ongoing	Includes Eco Schools programme, John Muir Award, school grounds projects, activities in wider countryside, all aspects of natural heritage and aspects of cultural heritage that relate to the countryside.	Rangers	•	•	•
2. Guided walk and events programme	Ongoing	Programme in place	Rangers	•	•	•
3. Site management on Ranger managed sites.	Ongoing	Overall management to maintain/encourage/ restore native species and habitats, and coherent ecosystems	Rangers	•	•	•
4. Identify one area of greenspace managed in each of the main population centres of the Highlands (10 towns over 2,000 inhabitants) to be selected for a trial change in its management to maximise its biodiversity.	Delayed	Meeting required with senior rangers to progress this.	Biodiversity Officer Senior Rangers/ TECS		•	•
5. To identify any areas with existing or potential community interest or involvement, which would be suitable as a Local Nature Reserve.	Ongoing. Currently there is no interest from other communities to do this.	It is an aspiration within the Council's Biodiversity Policy that there should be an LNR in each of Highland's ten, large population centres.	Rangers	•	•	•

3.2. Development and Infrastructure Service Biodiversity Action Plan

Action/ Target	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in		
				2015	2016	2017
1. A rolling series of annual training events on planning and biodiversity.	On Target	Training has taken place annually 2011 on Bats, the Sustainable Design Guidance, EPS and Invasive Species	Biodiversity Officers/ PDS	•	•	•
2. Green Networks for the Inner Moray Firth development corridor mapped.	Delayed	On hold. No detailed opportunity mapping has taken place	PDS/ SNH	•	•	•
3. Enhancement of the Inner Moray Firth development corridor Green Network	No progress	No work underway for biodiversity.	PDS/ SNH	•	•	•
4. Enhancement of the A96 Corridor Green Network	No progress	No work underway for biodiversity.	PDS/ SNH	•	•	•
5. Identify and analyse the South East Sutherland, Thurso-Wick, Fort William and Portree Green Networks.	No progress	No work underway	PDS/ SNH	•	•	•

3.3. Care and Learning Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action/ Target	Action Status	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in		
				2015	2016	2017
Ensure all large care homes have bird table(s) and feeders and biodiverse landscaping.	Some progress	Issues over who pays for the bird food to be resolved. However Bradford Hospital has installed feeders independently funded by its League of Friends.	Biodiversity Officer	•	•	•

3.4. Community Services Biodiversity Action Plan.

Action/ Target.	Action Status 2014	Information	Lead Partner	Action taking place in		
				2015	2016	2017
1. When clearing ditches only clear one side in any one year. Over-dig that side to maintain water flow.	On target		CS	•	•	•
2. Give a talk to the grounds maintenance teams about invasive plants in the area and best practice in managing them.	On target	Delivered and ongoing since 2009. Focussing on Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam	Rangers/ Biodiversity Officers	•	•	•
3. Bridge inspectors to attend a bats and bridges course.	Ongoing	Training offered but was declined.	Biodiversity Officer/ CS			
4. Identify one area of greenspace managed in each of the main population centres of the Highlands (10 towns over 2,000 inhabitants) to be selected for a trial change in its management to maximise its biodiversity.	Delayed	Biodiversity Officer to meet with Senior Rangers to progress this.	Rangers/ CS		•	•
5. Map the Japanese Knotweed on the road verge network to confirm its range.	On target	Database created and shared with CS	CS			
6. Develop prioritisation criteria for controlling of keys sites with Japanese Knotweed.	Completed	Paper submitted to PED in Spring 2014.	Biodiversity Officer			
7. Continued involvement in and support of the Highland Invasive	Ongoing		TECS	•	•	•

Species Forum						
8. Leaflet pack to all Council Tenants.	Delayed	Planned for Spring 2015.	Biodiversity Officer	•		
9. Deliver training to key staff on protected species and biodiversity	Delayed.	Planned for 2015.	Biodiversity Officer	•	•	•

4. Communication Plan.

Background:

The Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan (2008 to date) has engaged directly with a limited number of Council staff on specific biodiversity projects. This means that the vast majority of staff have no contact with the Biodiversity Officers or are aware of the projects that have been or are being delivered. To rectify this situation a Communication Plan was drafted in early 2014 and forms part of the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan.

Aim:

This Biodiversity Communication Plan aims to raise awareness and understanding of Highland biodiversity, the issues affecting it and the actions needed to increase both staff and elected members involvement in practical action to conserve biodiversity.

Audience:

Elected members, Highland Council staff and Highland Council tenants.

Baseline Survey:

Number of Participants:

Staff: There were over 300 submissions from all The Highland Council areas, but predominately Inverness and Nairn. This represents 3% of the Council workforce, so not really a representative sample. However it does give an indication of the interest in biodiversity within the Council.

For Councillors response rates were disappointing and demonstrate that there is still much more awareness raising work required. It is hoped that the next survey will achieve a 50% response from Councillors.

Time of responses:

Staff: Responses were in the first three weeks of the consultation, but very few respondents when the questionnaire was re-advertised a month later, suggesting that all those who were interested had responded.

Councillors: Two thirds responded in the first phase and one third responding after it was re-advertised.

Knowledge of Biodiversity Q1-6:

Overall this was high. However this may indicate that this is not a representative group but rather a self-selecting group of staff with knowledge of and an interest in biodiversity or that the staff that work for Highland Council are exceptionally knowledgeable about

biodiversity. Further work/consultation over the coming years will clarify this position. The 2006-9 SNH survey of attitudes to biodiversity in Scotland had around 70% of those asked responding positively to the interest in, the relevance of and concern about biodiversity. A 2011 SNH survey showed that a sample of the general public had a 47% recognition of the word biodiversity. The 2012 Western Isles Biodiversity Awareness survey found an 86% awareness of what biodiversity meant.

Engagement with biodiversity:

Similar percentages enjoyed watching wildlife on the TV and in real life. Active involvement with wildlife was similar to the 2011 SNH Report which found that 15% undertook some volunteering for biodiversity and 50% did some wildlife gardening.

Favourite Species:

No obvious front runner but there was a massive variety chosen, the majority were birds and mammals, followed by plants, bees and other invertebrates.

Communication Plan 2014

Action	Group	Information	Date
1. Biodiversity Talks	For Members of Staff	These talks give staff the opportunity to hear about a specific species group or biodiversity issue from an expert in the field and hear what they could do to get involved should they wish to do so. These are currently held in the Council Chamber, it is planned that they will be webcast from November 2014 onwards.	Ongoing until at least June 2015
	For Elected Members	There will be the initial offer of three short, 30 minute, talks on Highland's Biodiversity, Protected Species and Planning and Invasive Species. These subjects were chosen as they are issues that many elected members are dealing with on a regular basis. After the initial talks the elected members will be asked if they wish further talks on other subjects.	2015. Discussions have taken place a date will be arranged before the end of the 2014.
2. Species Champions	For Elected Members	The elected members will be invited to become a species champion. This follows on from the successful initiative that Scottish Environment Link undertook with MSPs. The choice	Ongoing

		of species will come from a list of over 70. The role of a species champion will be to take an interest in “their” species and act as an advocate for it, highlighting its importance and/or the issues affecting it in relevant debates or other opportunities that arise. The current list can be seen in Appendix 2.	
3. Leafleting Tenants	Council Tenants	All Council Tenants will receive a suite of SNH leaflets highlighting nature on their doorstep and also what can be done to garden for wildlife. It is understood that not all tenants have gardens. Tenants will be asked what the Council can do to make their area better for biodiversity.	2015
4. Biodiversity Awareness Survey	All	Determining how successful the Communication Plan is very important. This will be done through a short, annual questionnaire for both elected members and staff. The first survey will take place in February 2014 and form the baseline to measure progress against. This will be repeated each Autumn. The questions can be found at the end of this paper.	Each January
5. Review	Biodiversity Officer	The results of the annual survey will be reviewed when the results are available and any changes required to the Communication Plan will be made then.	Each October
6. Reporting	Biodiversity Officer	The Communication Plan will be reported on as part of the annual Biodiversity Duty Reporting cycle.	Each November
7. Newsletter	All	After each Biodiversity Duty Reporting Round an annual Highland Council biodiversity newsletter will be published. It will highlight the work undertaken by the Council for biodiversity, the results of the questionnaire and also interesting news from the world of Highland Biodiversity. The first newsletter will appear this Spring 2014 and then each	Each February

		subsequent Autumn.	
8. Website	Biodiversity Officer	Keep the news section of the Highland Biodiversity website up to date and publicise relevant events.	Ongoing
9. Email	Biodiversity Officer	Publicise events through the email contact lists.	Ongoing.
10. Press Releases	Biodiversity Officer	Ensure all events are well advertised and have pre and post publicity if appropriate.	Ongoing.

5. Reporting and Review

The cycle of reporting and review of this plan is fixed into the committee report cycle, with an annual report given to the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee. A report on this has to be made publically available every three years starting in 2015.

Jonathan Willet October 2014.

Highland Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2014

Introduction

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 (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. The first Report is to be made publically available by the 1st January 2015. The next report will be due in 2018.

1. Introductory information about your organisation and biodiversity

1.1 Highland Council has five Services that deliver a range of public services to residents in this area. The Chief Executive is in overall charge of Council operations. Eighty elected members oversee these operations through various committees related to the Services or the operation of the Council.

The Highland Council is committed to sustainability and hosts a sustainability section within the Chief Executive's Office. The Council also employs a full-time Biodiversity Officer within the Development and Infrastructure Service.

Highland Council was one of the founding members of Highland Biodiversity Partnership, which comprised of over 30 representatives committed to understanding, safeguarding, restoring and celebrating biodiversity within the Highland Council area. The Partnership has subsequently been incorporated into the Highland Environment Forum. The Forum is part of the Community Planning Partnership responsible for delivering the environmental outcomes of the Single Outcome Agreement in Highland. The Forum includes representatives from the Highland Biodiversity Partnership and other organizations with an interest in nature, wildlife, land use and climate change across the Highland Council area.

The Highland Council has been instrumental in the creation of 7 of the 8 local biodiversity groups and the drafting of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). The Cairngorms Biodiversity Action Plan predates these. The Biodiversity Officers have supported all of these groups since their inception.

The Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (HBAP) has been in existence since 2006, its third edition (2015-20) is to be launched for consultation in November 2014. The drafting of this has been the responsibility of the Biodiversity Officers.

The Highland Council has had a Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan working across all services since 2008. The third edition (2015-17) will be presented to the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee for approval. This covers both policy and practical action. It has had some notable successes, particularly the road verge management trial in Caithness and work on controlling Invasive Species.

2. Action taken to improve biodiversity conservation on the ground

Where possible The Highland Council has initiated projects on its own land e.g. road verges, invasive species control or has worked with partners to deliver real biodiversity gains across Highland. The list below highlights some of the key initiatives that have been taken forward over the last 8 years to improve biodiversity:

- 2006 to date. Since the Highland Biodiversity Project was started in 2002, over £700,000 of new funding has been spent on biodiversity action and planning in Highland. Over two thirds of this money was targeted towards local biodiversity projects. Seven Local Biodiversity Action Plans have been produced, over 130 projects delivered and over 250 awareness-raising events held across the seven LBAP areas.
- Over 50 projects undertaken to directly help Highland priority species through habitat improvements e.g. provision of nest boxes or rafts & training volunteers in surveying methods.
- 2006 to date. Highland Invasive Species Forum. Highland Council supports this group through the Biodiversity Officer's time. Members of this group have been very active in surveying Invasive Non-native Species (INNS) in Highland and undertaking control programmes for Mink, Giant Hogweed, Grey Squirrel, Japanese Knotweed and Rhododendron. In addition local Fisheries Trusts have been taking forward extensive INNS control in their catchments.
- 2006 to date. Countryside Rangers working weekly with schools and local groups to raise biodiversity awareness and take forward practical conservation projects.
- 2006 to date. Highland Biodiversity Action Plan. This is primarily supported by the Council and focusses on tackling key Highland-wide issues.
- 2007. Merkinch Local Nature Reserve designated. The first in the Highlands. Highland Council owns most of this site.
- 2008-10. First Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan approved by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee
- 2009 to date. Wildflowers on Roundabouts along the Southern Distributor Road. Very positive public feedback.
- 2011. European Protected Species Supplementary Planning Guidance produced with annual biodiversity training provided to Highland Council planners.
- 2011-14. Second Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan approved by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee
- 2011 to date. Wildflower-friendly road verge maintenance. Trial scheme in Caithness, which has been rolled out all over Highland. Partnership working with BearScotland on the Trunk Road Network. The public were encouraged to submit key areas they knew of for a change in management. Nearly 40 sites were identified.
- 2014. Invasive Species Policy and Japanese Knotweed Priority Assessment approved by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee.

3. Mainstreaming

The Highland Council has sustainable development at the heart of its policies. Biodiversity work has been continuously supported since 2000. There are specific policies in The Highland-wide Development Plan relating to biodiversity and the Council has committed itself to fulfilling its Biodiversity Duty through its various services through the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan. The Single Outcome Agreement for Highland uniquely has an environment section, specifically addressing biodiversity issues.

Working as part of the Highland Environment Forum the Highland Council and other partners take a holistic view of biodiversity as part of sustainable development within the Community Plan.

The Supplementary Planning Guidance for Green Networks that was adopted in 2013 provides the framework for the delivery of ecological and access networks in Highland's key development areas. Highland Council has also produced Sustainable Design Supplementary Guidance to facilitate well-designed, sustainable places.

4. Monitoring

The Council has supported a number of Highland-wide projects which have focused on building capacity and awareness in the biodiversity sector and implementing projects. These projects have recorded and monitored the numbers and demographics of those involved and have significantly increased awareness and involvement in biodiversity. Further information can be found on www.highlandbiodiversity.com

The Seashore Project in particular is focussing on training people to collect biological data from seashores and submit these records to the Highland Biological Records Database. These records are then made available on the National Biodiversity Network. It is hoped that once enough data is collected a baseline of species distribution on Highland's seashores can be generated.

The Highland Council's support of the Highland Biological Records Database (HBRD) facilitates some of the monitoring that takes place by volunteer recorders in Highland. Likewise the Capacity Building Project trained volunteers to undertake biological recording, which has contributed to the monitoring of projects, species and habitats.

Highland Council does not collect biological data formally although the Countryside Rangers are involved in many surveys and do submit the data they collect to HBRD.

In 2015 a Graduate Intern will undertake a survey of the quality of Sustainable Urban Drainage ponds within Inverness which should contribute to the proposed development of Green Networks in the A96 Corridor and Inner Moray Firth area as well as offering opportunities for biological recording and monitoring.

Information on Invasive Species is collected informally and is held by The Highland Council. The Council with its partners is working on a number of invasive non-native plant eradication

projects in some the biggest riparian catchments in Highland, with the aim of achieving complete eradication by 2020. These projects are all currently on target. It is likely that other species such as Salmonberry in Caithness, Gunnera in Skye and Lochalsh and Buttonweed in Wester Ross may also require ongoing monitoring. Highland Council Rangers were instrumental in recognising the issue of Signal Crayfish in Ballachulish which was subsequently eradicated. The Rangers continue to undertake post-eradication monitoring to ensure this species has been removed.

The Northern Mink Project has been given a small amount of funding from Highland Council to monitor the presence or absence of Mink north of Ullapool, around the Cromarty Firth and in the Cairngorms. Highland Council Rangers have again participated in this monitoring. The North Highland is currently free of breeding Mink.

Currently there is no report on general biodiversity trends in Highland. Good information exists on Golden Eagles or Corncrakes but that only tells part of the story. There is a significant amount of biodiversity data available in Highland but this is collected and held separately by different bodies. The most effective approach to biodiversity monitoring in Highland would be for organisations to work together to produce a regional monitoring report, which could be reported on the Biodiversity Action Reporting System.

5. Partnership Working and Biodiversity Communications

- 2002 to date. Supported eight Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Multi-sector partnership.
- 2005 to 2012. Partnership working with the Cairngorms National Park Biodiversity Officer. Public sector partnerships.
- 2006 to date. Highland Invasive Species Forum. Highland Council supports this group through the Biodiversity Officer's time. Multi-sector partnerships
- 2006 to date. Highland Biodiversity Action Plan. This is primarily supported by the Highland Council and focusses on tackling key Highland-wide issues. Multi-sector partnerships
- 2006 to date. Highland Biodiversity Partnership now part of the Highland Environment Forum (Highland's Community Planning Partnership). Multi-sector partnerships
- 2007 to date. Member of the Merkinch Local Nature Reserve Steering Group. Community partnership.
- 2013 to date. Bi-annual joint meeting with Cairngorms National Park Biodiversity Officer, North East Scotland LBAP Officer and Tayside Biodiversity Officer. Public sector partnership.

Communication

- 2002 to date. Countryside Ranger events run all the way through the year. All with reference to biodiversity theme.
- 2002 to date. Over 130 local biodiversity projects delivered and over 250 awareness-raising events held across the seven LBAP areas.
- 2005 to date. Email updates to local biodiversity groups and other contacts.

- 2005 to date. Regular press releases through the Highland Council Press Office.
- 2006 to 2009. Communities Project for Highland Biodiversity involved 268 volunteers, over 1,000 children from 21 schools and over 2,250 event participants.
- 2011 to date. Nature Detectives booklets produced with Invergordon Primary Schools, now in use in 38 schools across Highland.
- 2012. Soil Biodiversity Festival, with 28 events across Highland.
- 2012 to date. www.highlandbiodiversity.com with regular news updates.
- 2013 to 2015. Seashore Biodiversity Project underway, delivering training in seashore species identification & survey, raising awareness and bringing new audiences to enjoy seashore wildlife.
- 2013 to date. Monthly biodiversity talks held in the Council Chamber open to all.
- 2014. Communication Plan approved by Highland Council.

Building Capacity

- 2005 to date. Biodiversity Officer attendance at relevant SNH Sharing Good Practice events.
- 2005 to date. Regular attendance of the bi-annual LBAP Coordinators meeting.
- 2005 to date. Regular attendance of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy events and working groups.
- 2008 to 2011. Training provided to grounds maintenance operatives in the spring on Invasive Species.
- 2009 to date. Funding for one representative of the Highland Invasive Species Forum to attend the GB INNS Conference and the local volunteer's event.
- 2009 to 2013. Capacity Building Programme delivered 25 projects involving volunteers, held 41 events involving over 1,000 people, trained 113 people and produced 14 profile raising materials to help all seven Local Biodiversity Groups.
- 2010 to date. Annual training for Highland Council Planning Officers on key biodiversity topics

Volunteering

- Opportunities for staff volunteering for biodiversity have not been explored yet.

6. Biodiversity Highlights of the Past Year

Involvement

- The Highland Seashore Project has involved hundreds of people and is generating great feedback, see <http://www.highlandbiodiversity.com/seashore.asp>
- 22 Highland Councillors have become Species Champions

Practical Conservation

- Invasive non-native species work supported by Highland Council. Including the Northern Mink Project, the Highland Rhododendron Project, Inverness Invasive Plants Project and the Invasive Species Survey of Fort William.
- Securing a SUDS Intern post for one year.

Plans

- Drafting the 2015-20 Highland Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 2015-17 Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan.

Communication

- Highland Biodiversity Talks 2014-15.

Biodiversity Data

- Funding for the Highland Biological Records Database secured for the next three years. Match funding from SNH, The Highland Council, RSPB and Trees for Life.

7. Looking ahead – Main Challenges

- The main challenge: **how to deliver more for biodiversity, within The Highland Council, with a static or shrinking budget.** This can be tackled by raising the biodiversity awareness of Council's staff to facilitate the mainstreaming of biodiversity through service delivery.
- **Funding for biodiversity projects.** This could be tackled by a change in the landfill tax funding criteria allowing three or five year projects to be funded that aren't tied specifically to habitat management.
- **Externally, sustaining the momentum of projects that involve volunteer biological recorders** is an issue, in a time of funding constraint. This could be tackled by providing a central support hub for all volunteers involved in biological recording.
- **Increasing involvement in activities that are beneficial to biodiversity.** Awareness seems to be increasing or at least is high amongst the general public but this awareness needs to be translated into activity. This could be tackled by providing formal and informal opportunities for people to get involved in local biodiversity projects.
- **The absence of a report/system which monitors the state of Highland's Biodiversity.** There is a great deal of data available on Highland's biodiversity that is collected and held by different bodies, but not collated and analysed. This could be tackled through members of the Highland Environment Forum working together to identify what data is in existence and where the gaps are, collecting relevant missing data and producing a regular report on the state of Highland's biodiversity. This would link to the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement and evaluating the effectiveness of public expenditure on land management in the area.
- **Lack of integration/links between the local biodiversity process and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.** This could be tackled by producing a Highland State of Biodiversity Report and developing projects to address the issues it highlights, translating national targets into regional ones.

October 2014.