



BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT

2015-2017

Inverclyde
council

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Biodiversity, short for biological diversity, is the term used to describe the variety of life found on earth and all of the natural processes. It includes all living things and the habitats in which they live. The importance of biodiversity was acknowledged internationally at the Earth Summit 1992, and when the UK Government became a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan was produced. The production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) was subsequently recommended in order to promote improvements in the environment on a local scale.

Launched on 1 April 2004, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire is a partnership initiative between the local authorities and a range of conservation organisations. The LBAP, which includes a range of actions for identified habitats and species to increase local biodiversity, was augmented with new action plans in 2008/09. The LBAP is also used to raise awareness of biodiversity in the area and to involve everyone including local communities, landowners, scientists, industries and business in the process.

Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands was published by the Scottish Government in 2004, and this document aims to conserve biodiversity for the health, enjoyment and well-being of the people of Scotland, now and in the future. This strategy was updated in 2013 with the publication of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity, reflecting certain international commitments. It focuses on the desired outcomes for 2020 to halt the loss of biodiversity in Scotland and to restore the essential services and benefits to society that a healthy natural environment provides.

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. This report meets that requirement. The structure of the document follows the template/structure set out in the Scottish Natural Heritage/Scottish Government Guidance for Biodiversity Duty Reporting.

SECTION 2: MAINSTREAMING

- a) Identify the steps your organisation has taken to incorporate biodiversity measures into other areas of policy, strategies or initiatives.

Inverclyde Council has taken steps to embrace its biodiversity duties within the whole range of activities, from a higher strategic level through to individual actions on the ground. Many of its higher end strategic working groups embrace biodiversity, with pertinent examples given below. These initiatives all lead to specific actions on the ground, many of which are highlighted later in this Report

As a main guiding document, Inverclyde Council utilises a Local Biodiversity Action Plan in partnership with both Renfrewshire Council and East Renfrewshire Council, published in

2004. Comprising a series of Species Action Plans and Habitat Action Plans, this document has led to a partnership approach which still provides a strategic guidance role for biodiversity matters in Inverclyde.

Prior to 2011, the three Councils involved in the LBAP partnership jointly funded a biodiversity officer, to deliver biodiversity outcomes across the physical and subject areas affected by the LBAP. That post is no longer in existence and the responsibility for biodiversity matters has reverted to the individual councils. In the case of Inverclyde Council, the role of biodiversity advice is currently undertaken by the Greenspace Manager, based in the Regeneration and Planning Service.

Since the last Biodiversity Duty Report, the three Councils and a range of interested agencies have, with the exception of 2015, continued to hold regular quarterly LBAP Steering Group meetings. In 2016 it was decided that the focus of the group should be reassessed given that staff and financial resources are more limited than when the group was first established. It was agreed that the group should rationalise and focus on the elements of biodiversity that can be achieved and are relatable to the group members including elements of biodiversity that are incorporated in other projects such as Green Network. Progress reports are made on biodiversity projects within the three Council areas allowing for an exchange of information and cross boundary collaboration. In Inverclyde, these tend to be projects with a biodiversity element rather than with biodiversity as their basis.

Single Outcome Agreement (SOA)/Local Outcome Improvement Plan

Inverclyde's Single Outcome Agreement was taken forward by the partnership initiative Inverclyde Alliance, and Inverclyde Council plays a key role in this partnership. The Single Outcome Agreement, previously agreed with the Scottish Government, and comprising a number of specified aims and objectives, has now been superseded by the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, with Environment, Culture and Heritage identified as one of 3 overarching priorities.

An Environment Group meets as part of this process, and among other agreed aims, the development of a Sustainable Habitat Network is vital. This is seen as a means of ensuring connectivity for biodiversity and will be a useful assessment tool as part of the planning process.

Biodiversity and the Planning System in Inverclyde

The Inverclyde Local Development Plan (LDP), embraces and promotes the concept of a Green Network at both local and national levels, as well as offering policy protection to areas of international, national, strategic and local designation. Biodiversity is clearly identified as an asset within the LDP, where the Council seeks to ensure that the protection and enhancement of biodiversity is considered in the determination of all planning applications (policy ENV7 - Biodiversity). Protection is also given certain trees and areas of woodland where it is recognised that there are many benefits, including biodiversity and integrated habitat creation.

This level of policy protection, contained within the primary land use document of the Council, is indicative of the value the wider community also places on biodiversity. The protection afforded by the current Local Development Plan continues in the emerging replacement Local Development Plan, with the Proposed Plan due to be published in 2018.

The Council's Planning Policy team is now also routinely consulted on forestry planting applications, particularly those affecting, or near to, designated sites. Some concerns have been raised about recent applications affecting local designated sites, and also affecting landscape. However the correct level of dialogue with the Forestry Commission has yet to be found, as recently those concerns have been largely set aside in favour of planting. This is a consultation relationship that can improve.

Land Management activities

Inverclyde Council's Grounds Services are responsible for large areas of natural habitat, man-made parks and general greenspaces. Of all Council services it has the greatest direct physical impact on biodiversity simply by its day to day operational activities. Many of these are deliberately beneficial towards biodiversity.

The more common invasive alien species are well documented elsewhere, as is their ability to smother out populations of native species which are generally far more supportive of other plant, insect and animal species. Invasive species generally host few other plants and animals resulting in a monoculture which is a poor base to a natural food web.

Inverclyde has numerous stands of both Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. Giant hogweed is thankfully rare. Woodlands have populations of Rhododendron ponticum and sycamore. There is a general programme of eradication of these species as resources allow, by either spraying or, in the case of sycamore and rhododendron, by cutting. Management practices have been introduced to stop the spread of Japanese knotweed on vehicles and machinery. The control measures are typically undertaken at more visible areas, simply as a result of pressure on resources, but it is nonetheless a valuable and well appreciated programme which helps protect Inverclyde's biodiversity.

Inverclyde Council is responsible for areas of formal planting and of natural tree growth and where possible, retention of native species is favoured. As an example, in Wemyss Bay Woods Local Nature Reserve, felling of native trees is resisted unless safety concerns are overriding. In areas of more formal planting, such as Greenock cemetery, the ornamental planting is supplemented by sufficient native planting to support varied wildlife. Hence the cemetery has become a hotspot for bats, various bird species (for example greater-spotted woodpeckers, treecreepers and sparrowhawks), roe deer and foxes.

Management practices generally are biodiversity beneficial where possible, for example avoiding pruning during bird nesting season, encouraging wild corners in parks and cemeteries. Herbicides used are biodegradable and become inert in contact with soil. Wildflower planting has taken place at Blairmore Crescent and management of ground to benefit orchids has been undertaken adjacent to the A78 in Inverkip.

More aggressive felling of certain species, mainly ornamental, has taken place in response to the identification of tree pathogens. In response to the identification of *Phytophthora Lateralis*, which affects the Cyprus Lawson trees, bio-chemical control measures are in place to stop the spread of the disease outwith the cemetery.

SECTION 3: ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Inverclyde Council has striven to approach its biodiversity duties on a partnership basis, working with and empowering a range of local interest groups and third sector bodies with an interest in improving their environment. However there have been some actions taken independently as part of statutory processes which have been intended to either identify new sites for local protection, or to justify existing sites.

LNCS Reappraisal

Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) is a local authority advisory designation which has supplanted a previous designation referred to as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). Inverclyde currently has 52 identified LNCS sites. As part of the Local Development Plan process, a review of existing LNCSs (previously SINCs) was regarded as necessary.

Of the 52 sites in Inverclyde, 25 were based on a phase 1 habitat survey carried out in 1992. Sites identified as important by this survey were then subject to further more detailed surveys and, where appropriate, were designated as LNCSs. There had been little organised monitoring of the habitats and species at these sites since.

The further 27 sites were surveyed and designated in 1999, and a similar lack of monitoring was applicable.

Resource constraints of a financial, personnel and expertise nature meant that a full re-survey of any or all of the sites by a currently practicing ecologist was not possible. However it was felt that this was perhaps not required in any case; the individual site descriptions were in many cases still valid or at the very worst were subject to change either by natural processes alone, or by human activities which, through the planning process, had been subject to rigorous examination and where additional survey information had been requested. Thus in addition to the original surveys, a bank of additional information was in existence.

Sites were therefore visited and assessed against the site descriptions from the original surveys, looking primarily for evidence of notable change. This was considered possible due the robust nature of the original surveys, which were based initially on a phase 1 habitat survey then followed up by more stringent assessment against a set criteria list. Changes looked for included any significant change in boundaries, changes in habitat due to either natural processes or land management, instances where adjacent areas of value could perhaps be included in the sites and areas where some development had occurred, and the effect this development had on the special interest.

Many of the sites, in particular from the earlier survey, were lacking in terms of the description of the special interest. For example, some described as “woodland” also in fact play a role as a “wildlife corridor”, or also encompass other adjacent habitats such as “acid grassland”. In these instances, the noted interest was changed to describe the range of habitats and value. This is important in terms of quick assessment of sites and how development may affect them, so for example tree planting on a site listed simply as woodland, may in fact be resulting in planting on acid grassland.

Kilmacolm LNCS study

As part of the Inverclyde Council Local Development Plan process, a ‘Call for Sites’ was issued. As a result of this, 10 sites within the greenbelt around Kilmacolm were suggested by developers and landowners as suitable for housing development, resulting in expressions of opposition from the local community. One of the main opposition threads was the potential loss of biodiversity, and to thoroughly assess the legitimacy or otherwise of these objections, it was decided to commission habitat surveys and LNCS assessments of each of the sites in question.

The *Inverclyde LNCS Assessment, Kilmacolm* was commissioned to assess the ten sites around Kilmacolm and Quarriers Village against an accepted and nationally consistent range of biodiversity criteria which would allow the sites to be scored in terms of their suitability for Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) designation. The LNCS designation in itself is a local designation for advisory purposes, and carries no statutory obligations. It is intended to guide decision making where possible and to fill a gap that exists below national and European level, statutory designations.

The work was carried out by Starling Learning, in partnership with Dr. Keith Watson, the County Botanical recorder. It consisted of a series of field studies at each of the sites, recording both botanical and faunal data, assessing habitat types against national rarity and looking for evidence of nationally and regionally notable species. These records in turn informed a standard scoring matrix which resulted in overall scores being obtained for each site. There is no accepted threshold that sites must reach to justify LNCS designation, rather it is a matter for consideration taking into account local conditions and the existence of other known valuable sites nearby.

To obtain thorough and robust results, two regionally accepted sets of criteria were applied, and further to standard practice a range of faunal surveys were carried out. This resulted in a very strong assessment for each site. The studies showed that the sites most valuable for nature conservation, were Knapps, the Police Station Field, Stables Wood and Planetreeyetts.

For Knapps, the suggestion is a slight extension of the LNCS already designated there, taking in some of the field areas adjacent to Knapps Loch. The recommendation for the Police Station Field is to extend the current Milton Wood LNCS to include the wildlife corridor created by the River Gryffe. Stables Wood is recommended for LNCS status due to it representing a contiguous extension to an existing woodland LNCS. For Planetreeyetts, the

area of wetland to the western extreme of the site scores highly and is recommended for LNCS designation.

As a result of this 2 existing LNCS were extended (Knapps and Auchenbothie Wood) and 2 entirely new LNCS were identified (Planetreeyetts and River Gryffe Corridor).

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

Inverclyde Council continues to offer core funding, officer support and elected member support to Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park was formally designated in 1990, although it had operated as a de facto regional park for some time previous to this. The operation of the regional park is supported politically and financially by Inverclyde Council, Renfrewshire Council and North Ayrshire Council. Strategic park governance is through a joint committee of elected members from each authority which meets 4 times annually. However, day to day management of the regional park is delegated to the park manager and staff.

The Regional Park has two operational centres within the Inverclyde Council area, at the Greenock Cut Centre and Lunderston Bay. The regional park is one of the major means through which Inverclyde Council delivers its biodiversity duty, and through its elected member representation on the joint committee it can give a degree of leadership and guidance to this process.

The Ranger Service employed by the Park to deliver a range of services to local communities, including environmental education, guided walks, volunteering opportunities, and talks and presentations to schools and other community groups. It also contributes to access management, habitat management, and biodiversity monitoring within the park boundary.

One notable project has been the Tag'n'track scheme. Tag-n-Track (TnT) uses the latest technology to track Lesser Black-backed Gulls locally and globally. This project is funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, Greater Renfrewshire and Inverclyde LEADER & Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. Lesser Black Backed Gulls are an amber listed species that often suffers from negative publicity, due in part to their ability to adjust their behaviour to live close to people. The project will be using solar-powered Global Satellite Monitoring (GSM) tags fitted to the birds with harnesses which collects data between 10-15 times a day. The data collected from the tags will allow an extensive school programme to be delivered across the Park encompassing the three council areas. Numerous events, workshops and talks to the public, various groups and other interested parties have taken place.

Inverclyde Local Access Forum

In common with other Councils, Inverclyde has a designated Core Path Network. Similar to other Core Path Networks, it comprises a network which tends to encourage access into areas of high biodiversity value, this of course being a reflection of the fact that historically people have required access to areas they consider attractive, relaxing and of interest. The

main mechanism for overseeing the Core Path Network, and advising the Council on its status, is the Inverclyde Local Access Forum.

Although not specifically concerned with biodiversity, the Local Access Forum plays a direct role in improving opportunities for people to access biodiverse areas. The forum is constituted under the Council's structure and along with a range of local agencies and user groups, the Council is represented on the forum, both at elected member and officer level.

SECTION 4: PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND BIODIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

A range of other projects have been supported by Inverclyde Council in partnership with other groups and organisations.

Green Gym

In partnership with the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership, a Green Gym volunteering programme has run for several years in Inverclyde. Focussed mainly on one of the two declared Local Nature Reserves in Inverclyde, the Green Gym at Coves LNR has allowed participants to be actively involved in targeted, sympathetic habitat management. This approach allows biodiversity gains to be achieved on site while also offering participants positive outcomes in relation to their health, promoting active lifestyles and boosting self-confidence. It also delivers experience and skills which are useful in the labour market, and acts as a social cohesion tool by bringing together people from the local community who may otherwise not have met. The Green Gym programme is delivered on site by TCV Scotland, which is recognised nationally for its excellence in delivering the Green Gym model.

Inverclyde Pollinator Corridor

The Council has supported the work of a local group trying to establish a pollinator corridor in Inverclyde. Inverclydebuzz was formed by local beekeepers and concerned residents worried about the plight of bees and pollinators. The group is trying to plant patches of wild flowers, across derelict land within Inverclyde, creating a "corridor" of forage, developing beautiful spaces, as well as saving our bees. The group's Belville Biodiversity Garden won Scottish Trust Our Place Small Project award. It is now developing plans to change a long abandoned swimming baths site into "Greenock's Secret Garden".

This site in particular was approached in partnership with Inverclyde Council, the site owners. The site has been derelict for a number of years but, being common good land, was restricted in the range of uses it could supply. The Council has formally agreed to allow InverclydeBuzz to manage this site as a biodiversity resource, and the final agreement to facilitate this will be completed in 2018. Additionally the group has been allowed to undertake management of other Council sites, planting pollinator friendly species on otherwise fairly barren ground.

InverclydeBuzz published a very well received leaflet "*A Wee Walk on the Wildside*" in 2017, with funding provided by Inverclyde Council.

In terms of other biodiversity communications, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park routinely publishes articles in the local press and on their website. Activities in schools are routinely covered by local press, as have activities such as the Green Gym programme.

Learning, training and volunteering in biodiversity matters has also been available through the Green Gym programme. InverclydeBuzz have run some identification workshops and as previously mentioned, the programme run by Clyde Muirshiel offers similar opportunities.

However, perhaps the best action has been the establishment of an Environment Network Group. Springing from the concept that a green network can be more than simply a physical thing, a network of like-minded “green” people and organisations was established. This was done as part of the community planning process, but with the aim of establishing a group that would become self-managing and self-determining. The group is now well established and meets quarterly, sharing resources, information and experience, all to the wider benefit of green issues in Inverclyde.

SECTION 5: BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

The Kilmacolm LNCS Study should be viewed as a local exemplar. It is an example of how biodiversity can play a role in statutory processes and also of the Council fulfilling its biodiversity duties within its core functions. Coming about as part of the Local Development Plan processes, it showed that the Council will react to biodiversity issues and concerns and, as in this case, make funding available when justifiable. The Study has resulted in an objective and thorough assessment of the sites and forms a body of work for all sides within the LDP process. It has gone beyond industry standard in terms of the criteria applied resulting in very robust and defensible findings, researched by professionals with excellent reputations in the field. The resulting changes and additions to the LNCS network in Inverclyde will also enable future decision making in these areas to be informed.

Challenges in the years ahead are likely to be related to resources. The loss of the dedicated greenspace officer post will have an impact on biodiversity related activities and local/historical knowledge.

Another challenge will be that of renewing, replacing or re-vindicating the current Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The current Plan, launched in 2004, was written in partnership with Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils. While this allowed the adoption of a Plan across boundaries (thus recognising that biodiversity also does so) it is perhaps dated in its focus of habitat and species Action Plans. Additionally, none of the local authority partners have shown a willingness to continue this joint approach. When taken into consideration with the loss of relevant staff posts, the future of the LBAP is a significant challenge. A danger is that lack of a clear Plan could result in biodiversity being marginalised within the decision making process. It is hoped that this could at least be partly allayed by the identification of a Strategic Habitat Network, in partnership with the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership. This could provide a basic tool to be used in the assessment of planning applications, putting potential habitat loss into an assessable

framework. This therefore represents a future highlight to balance out some of the challenges.

SECTION 6: MONITORING

In terms of monitoring, the major work has been the re-assessment of the LNCS sites and the Kilmacolm LNCS study. Additionally, all data received in support of planning applications (habitat surveys, bat surveys etc) are kept to inform future decision making within the local vicinity, and to provide exemplar approaches for the future. The Green Gym projects have included some wildlife surveys days, and that information is also available from delivery partners.

In terms of pure recording and monitoring, there is no biodiversity dedicated member of staff so this is somewhat limited. Both the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (NBN) and Biodiversity Action Reporting System are generally used as information sources, and no data has been fed in to these.

SECTION 7: CONTRIBUTION TO TARGETS

Targets/key steps from Chapter 1 (Healthy ecosystems) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(1.1) Encourage and support ecosystem restoration and management, especially in catchments that have experienced the greatest degradation	X	LNCS review and Kilmacolm LNCS Study
(1.2) Use assessments of ecosystem health at a catchment level to determine what needs to be done	X	Assessments as part of the planning process
(1.3) Government and public bodies, including SNH, SEPA and FCS, will work together towards a shared agenda for action to restore ecosystem health at a catchment-scale across Scotland	X	Partnership working with GCVGNP
(1.4) Establish plans and decisions about land use based on an understanding of ecosystems. Take full account of land use impacts on the ecosystems services that underpin social, economic and environmental health	X	Kilmacolm LNCS Study
Targets/key steps from Chapter 3 (Biodiversity, health and quality of life) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(3.1) Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a	X	Green Gyms

particular focus on disadvantaged groups		
(3.2) Support local authorities and communities to improve local environments and enhance biodiversity using green space and green networks, allowing nature to flourish and so enhancing the quality of life for people who live there	X	Green Gyms InverclydeBuzz Environment Network Group
(3.3) Build on good practice being developed by the National Health Service (NHS) and others to help encourage greenspace, green exercise and social prescribing initiatives that will improve health and wellbeing through connecting people with nature	X	Development of Active Travel actions and Strategy Green Gyms
(3.4) Increase access to nature within and close to schools, and support teachers in developing the role of outdoor learning across the Curriculum for Excellence	X	All Schools now have a Green Charter embedded in School Improvement Plans, which includes a biodiversity theme
(3.5) Encourage public organisations and businesses to review their responsibilities and action for biodiversity, and recognise that increasing their positive contribution to nature and landscapes can help meet their corporate priorities and performance	X	Local Development Plan looking at developer contributions to the wider green network.
Targets/key steps from Chapter 4 (Wildlife, habitats and protected places) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(4.1) Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits	X	InverclydeBuzz
(4.3) Integrate protected areas policy with action for wider habitats to combat fragmentation and restore key habitats	X	Local Development Plan Strategic Habitat Network
(4.5) Involve many more people than at present in this work and improve understanding of the poorly known elements of nature	X	Environment Network Group
Targets/key steps from Chapter 5 (Land and freshwater management) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(5.1) Promote an ecosystem approach to land management that fosters sustainable use of		

natural resources and puts biodiversity at the heart of land-use planning and decision-making		
(5.2) Ensure that measures taken forward under the Common Agricultural Policy encourage land managers to develop and retain the diversity of wildlife habitats and landscape features		
(5.3) Support 'High Nature Value' farming and forestry	X	Consultation on proposed Forestry planting
(5.4) Put in place the management necessary to bring Scotland's protected areas into favourable condition and improve the ecological status of water bodies		
(5.5) Ensure that biodiversity and ecosystem objectives are fully integrated into flood risk management plans, and restore wetland habitats and woodlands to provide sustainable flood management		
(5.6) Restore and extend natural habitats as a means of building reserves of carbon and to help mitigate climate change		
(5.7) Provide clear advice to land and water managers on best practice		
Targets/key steps from Chapter 6 (Marine and coastal) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(6.4) Achieve good environmental status for Scottish seas		

Note: *this revised template has been developed from the original version produced by the LBAP officer network*