

APPENDIX 1: THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORTING: LEVEL ONE ORGANISATIONS

Public bodies that own or manage land, regulate land use, or have responsibilities linked to biodiversity

Report Outline

Bodies are encouraged to use the following structure for their report. This is set out in the template below, which you can either type directly into, or copy into a separate document.

- Section 1: Introductory information about your public body
- Section 2: Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity
- Section 3: Mainstreaming biodiversity
- Section 4: Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity
- Section 5: Public engagement and workforce development
- Section 6: Research and monitoring
- Section 7: Biodiversity highlights and challenges

Completion Notes

These completion notes offer guidance to support your public body to complete your Biodiversity Duty Report. Taken together with the associated hyperlinks, they provide suggestions on the breadth of actions that could be included in your report. They may also assist with forward planning on how biodiversity can be taken into account in future.

While they incorporate the key elements on which you may wish to report, they are not an exhaustive list and it is likely that there will be a range of additional work that your organisation carried out in support of biodiversity on which you may also wish to report. To find out more on the Biodiversity Duty see the [NatureScot website](#).



SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PUBLIC BODY

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

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>Summarise your organisation’s role and purpose, including if own or manage land, regulate land use, and any particular responsibilities linked to biodiversity.</p> <p>Summarise any relevance and impacts of biodiversity to your organisation, including your role in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and estate management; • Regulation of land use and development; • Providing public information, supporting community learning and education around nature and the environment; • Any significant environmental impacts from your operations.
<p>Text Field</p>	<p>Aberdeenshire Council manages a large estate which includes schools, care homes, housing, offices and their associated greenspaces. We also manage a range of public greenspaces and paths. We manage almost all of the public road network within the area also. In all aspects of our estate management there are impacts, benefits and opportunities in relation to biodiversity. Key ones are further explored in this report.</p> <p>As a Local Authority, Aberdeenshire Council has a broad regulatory remit. Of particular relevance to biodiversity is our role as the Planning Authority for Aberdeenshire. Included within this role is the preparation of a Local Development Plan which outlines plans and polices which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity. As a Local Authority we also administer the Tree Preservation Order process and have a role in the management of public access.</p> <p>We have a pivotal role in public information, community learning and education around nature and the environment for Aberdeenshire. We are the Education Authority for Aberdeenshire – managing schools. Nature and environment are key components of school activities. Our Countryside Ranger Service delivers information and education to children and adults. We also host NESBReC (North East Scotland Biological Record Centre) – the local biological records centre – which provides environmental information to a range of audiences.</p> <p>Our principal environmental impacts result from us fulfilling our statutory duties and operating our estate, in particular the carbon emissions that result from our operations. We have ambitious targets to reduce these</p>



	<p>emissions and were the first Local Authority in Scotland to publish a yearly carbon budget. Our management of buildings and greenspace, our role in flood protection and in the management of the public road network can all potentially impact and benefit biodiversity.</p>
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SECTION 2: ACTIONS TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY

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

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>As a Level One reporting organisation, you may wish to report on practical actions across your organisation in addition to actions on land that you manage or regulate.</p> <p>Please explain how your actions have benefited (or will benefit) biodiversity, noting successes and challenges, and any plans for future or follow-up work, such as on preparing for local nature networks or securing biodiversity enhancements in new developments.</p> <p>Actions might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing to actions in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan, and on local biodiversity priorities • Leading or contributing to a Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership • Integrating Nature-based Solutions through Community Planning, Local Development Plans and Local Place Plans • Providing opportunities for young people and learners to connect with and understand nature through Learning for Sustainability, Outdoor Learning and through STEM subjects • Supporting a Local Records Centre • Mapping natural capital and ecosystems • Digitising habitat maps and biodiversity surveys and audits • Integrating multi-functional Green Infrastructure into spatial plans • Working at a regional scale to restore nature <p>Please include quantitative measures where possible (e.g. area of habitat restored, meadow created, of Protected Areas, Local Nature Reserves and Local Nature Conservation Sites, and the number of new developments where biodiversity is being enhanced).</p>
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	<p>At a local level it is possible to enhance biodiversity through actions in and around buildings and new developments, such as by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• supporting the NPF4 approach to delivering biodiversity enhancement and contributing to nature networks• providing bird boxes / feeders, or taking other measures set out in the guidance on Buildings and biodiversity, while Developing with Nature listed below• making space for nature by creating wildflower meadows, raingardens, ponds and woodlands• installing green roofs and walls;• organising staff environmental volunteering days.
Text Field	<p><u>Biological Records</u></p> <p>Aberdeenshire Council hosts NESBReC – the biological records centre for the region. NESBReC covers Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Moray and the Cairngorms National Park and currently holds 1.8 million biological records. As well as hosting records, they carry out survey work and provide training on biological recording.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each year NESBReC hold a Recorders’ Forum. The 2021 event, held at University of Aberdeen, had 92 attendees, the 2019 event had 85 and the 2023 event had 90.• Promoting wildlife recording through on average 10 wildlife recording training events per year, focusing on identification skills and how to submit records. These are mixture of online and face to face events with good attendance.• Habitat surveys of Aberdeenshire – NESBReC administers a habitat survey of Aberdeenshire and over the last 20 years has amassed a huge and valuable dataset. To date, over a third of Aberdeenshire has been surveyed.• Over 3,000 data searches are carried each year for planning applications, environmental consultants, organisations, students, researchers, local authorities and the general public.• Regular postings on the NESBReC Facebook page highlight issues and events concerning local biodiversity.



Nature Restoration Fund

Yearly since 2021, all Local Authorities and National Parks have been awarded a Capital grant from the Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund. The fund aims to 'provide additional funding to support a wide range of projects that will deliver nature restoration, safeguard wildlife and tackle the causes of biodiversity loss especially climate change'. Aberdeenshire was allocated £268,000 in 2021, £212,000 in 2022 and £445,000 in 2023. The enlarged 2023 allocation included an aspiration to support the creation of local and regional nature networks. This very welcome provision has been spent on a wide range of projects in Aberdeenshire. New equipment to manage our greenspace for biodiversity has been a particular focus, as has plants to diversify that greenspace (which has resulted in a huge amount of positive community engagement). Projects have enhanced a range of woodland, wetland and grassland sites. Engagement of schools in practical habitat enhancement works has been a regular feature each year. Other works have targeted tackling invasive non-native plant species, including using sheep grazing, and installation of green roofs on new bus shelters.

Aberdeenshire Invasive Non-Native Species Project

A LEADER funded project working with agencies, river trusts, local authorities and community groups to raise awareness of and facilitate action to record and control non-native invasive plant species in Aberdeenshire ended in 2020. However, the legacy of the project is on-going with yearly works to tackle invasive species undertaken by the Council and by volunteers supported by the Council. A bi-annual forum will continue to be held, providing a focus for discussing activity. Promotion of invasive non-native species issues continues through the dedicated website for the area and through leaflets and social media. A particularly notable and popular project in recent times has been the use of sheep grazing to control Giant hogweed in Uryside park, Inverurie.

Aberdeenshire Greenspace Project

The initially fixed term Greenspace project launched during the previous reporting period is now a permanent fixture within Landscape Services. An extensive amount of work has taken place to modify management of greenspace to enhance biodiversity. Strong support from the Nature Restoration Fund has ensured equipment and plants are available to effect this change. The Council's Pollinator Strategy targets 10% of greenspace to be managed for biodiversity. Community engagement and input has been significant with over 100 schools and



community groups physically enhancing sites through planting each year. The dedicated social media for the work is popular, with lots of engagement.

Protected Sites and Species

- Aberdeenshire currently has 115 Local Nature Conservation Sites as designed through the 2023 Local Development Plan. Preparation for the 2028 Local Development Plan is underway with existing sites being reviewed and proposed extension or new sites being assessed and a review was carried out as part of the proposed 2021 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan.
- Aberdeenshire Council Housing Service have been operating under a NatureScot Licence for all repair and maintenance work to Council housing properties that has the potential to impact on bats. The Licence excludes sheltered housing, which generally has a higher roost potential and is therefore covered separately. The Licence has resulted from a collaborative project between the Natural Environment Team and Housing Service. Communication with all Housing staff regarding what to do if bats are found on site has been required. Enhancement measures have also been put in place with bat boxes installed on some properties. The Licence has been renewed for 2020 and 2021.
- Aberdeenshire Council has continued its good working relationship with Huntly and District Swift Group, jointly identifying opportunities for the protection and provision of Swift nest sites in Council buildings and through the planning process. Projects include Swift provision in Council housing Inverurie, built in Swift provision in Housing Association new builds in Huntly and installation of nesting boxes on public buildings in Stonehaven.

Trees and Woodland

- Throughout the reporting period, there have been very significant storms in Aberdeenshire which have resulted in extensive tree loss across the area. This includes in woodland managed by the Council. The tree loss and necessary clear up operation has been seen as an opportunity. Replanting schemes for areas lost comprise predominately native trees to provide biodiversity benefits and a more diverse species mix to build resilience in responding to the impacts of climate change. The Council has taken the opportunity to review and update existing woodland management plans in line with the principles of sustainable woodland management. The comprehensive plan for all woodland owned and managed by Aberdeenshire Council seeks to ensure woodlands are managed in a manner which protects and



enhances the environment, biodiversity and local culture, benefits and supports the local economy, provides value and enjoyment to residents and visitors and are resilient to the effects of climate change.

- As part of the wider work undertaken within the historic landscape of Haddo Country Park, new trees were planted within the Deer Park to ensure the continuation of tree cover and enable restoration of the depleted areas of ancient wood pasture. 81 individual standard trees of species which included oak, cherry, Norway maple, Scots pine and elm, were planted within the open parkland. Protection from livestock was provided with the use of traditional wood pasture crate fencing. It is hoped that this area of wood pasture and the associated biodiversity habitat can be extended and enhanced in future years.
- The Council continue to protect notable and valuable trees through Tree Preservation Orders.
- An Ash Dieback Action Plan is being developed in response to the identification of corporate and strategic risks arising from the impact of the disease. Widespread loss of the species ash will result in a detrimental impact on the biodiversity of Aberdeenshire woodlands and therefore action will be taken to ensure unaffected trees identified and monitored. The Recovery Plan will consider appropriate species for replacement planting, seeking to create woodlands and groups of trees which will be resilient to the impact of climate change and provide positive contributions for biodiversity.

Partnership Projects

- NESBiP (North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership) continues delivery of local biodiversity projects – with Aberdeenshire Council sitting on the Steering Group.
- The Dee Catchment Partnership, which Aberdeenshire Council is a member of, has continued to deliver a range of projects within the Dee Catchment and is currently implementing a river restoration project. Events and educational visits have raised awareness of issues such as invasive species, sustainable urban drainage schemes and natural flood management.
- Aberdeenshire Council continues to support the work of the Ugie Peatland partnership and in particular advising on issues relating to planning and the protection of important peatland sites through identification as Local Nature Conservation Sites.



SECTION 3: MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY

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

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>Describe and explain your organisation is integrating or considering nature and biodiversity through its policies, plans, guidance and strategies, and how these are reflected in the structure of your organisation.</p> <p>These may include policies on estate management, Open Space Strategies, Supplementary Planning Guidance, understanding the impact of your supply chains on biodiversity, adopting sustainable procurement and purchasing policies, using Environmental Management Systems, Sustainability and Climate Change commitments or infrastructure plans such as catchment management plans or surface water management.</p> <p>Detail any areas in which your organisation has most successfully embedded ways of protecting biodiversity in your work or has demonstrated leadership in a local or national context, including through working with others, raising awareness, or delivering landmark projects or activities.</p>
<p>Text Field</p>	<p><u>Council Plan</u></p> <p>Our Council Plan is centred around three pillars: People, Environment and Economy: Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2022 – 2027 - Aberdeenshire Council. It sets out our strategic approach to supporting Aberdeenshire communities and businesses to thrive, working with our partners to face the challenges of cost of living and the increasing inequalities, continue our recovery from the pandemic and respond positively to climate change, all whilst ensuring that Aberdeenshire is and remains a welcoming place to live, work and visit.</p> <p>Aberdeenshire Council became the first Local Authority in Scotland to sign the Edinburgh Biodiversity Declaration: https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/apps/news/release.aspx?newsid=7023</p> <p><u>Strategy and Policy</u></p> <p>The 2023 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) includes relevant policies, supplementary guidance and planning advice for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and biodiversity: Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 - Aberdeenshire Council.</p>



Supplementary guidance to the 2023 Local Development Plan includes identification of a network of Local Nature Conservation Sites in Aberdeenshire as well as Special Landscape Areas.

Of particular note, in advance of the requirements subsequently set out in National Planning Framework 4, is the LDP's requirement for all development to have positive effects for biodiversity with Planning Advice setting out the Planning Authority's expectations: <http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/0ceb7c55-b43d-45c4-a311-798f4bc9fa75/resource/fd777edd-c277-4621-bd31-f3672edef765/download/pa2023-10---planning-advice---securing-positive-effects-for-biodiversity.pdf>

The Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2023 is also Planning Advice. The Strategy outlines a range of action to protect and enhance woodlands as well as make them more resistant to climate change and disease. It includes a map of preferred areas for new woodland creation, within which the protection and enhancement of biodiversity is key.

Further Planning Advice provides best practice guidance on bats and development, biodiversity enhancement, ecological surveys, buffer strips, protected trees and outdoor access.
<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/planning-advice/>

Within the reporting period, we reviewed and revised the Council Pollinator Action Plan. Producing a more focused document with clear, measurable targets. The **Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Action Plan 2022 to 2027** identifies the work we will do to address the significant threats facing pollinating insects and includes the headline target that 10% of public greenspace will be managed for pollinators and biodiversity.
<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/27229/pollinatoractionplan.pdf>

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



Procurement

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

Staff Engagement

The Aberdeenshire Council Sustainability Champions programme was launched in the summer of 2022. The programme aims to lead and support teams and Services in understanding and aligning with the Council's various sustainability aspirations and commitments, including biodiversity. The Champions meet informally every month to discuss ideas, opportunities and challenges. They have also engaged in a number of litter picks and some native/wildflower planting on Council grounds.

Construction of new Aberdeenshire Council Buildings

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

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



- Introducing a range of plants, many of which are native species or are aimed at pollinators such as Betula or Sarcococca
- Introducing areas of native wildflower meadow
- Native hedgerows where appropriate to support bird life
- Raingarden features to promote SuDS and create a variety of habitats
- Specifying informal contractor built play features made primary of timber, boulders or willow – all these items were locally sourced to ensure a low carbon footprint and supporting a circular economy
- All specified timber to FSC standard



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

How has your organisation integrated biodiversity into actions on the climate emergency such as through Nature based Solutions?

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>Climate change is a direct driver of biodiversity loss. Many species are negatively impacted by higher air temperatures, changing weather patterns and extreme events, and by higher sea levels. Many animals and plants can be badly affected by such changes and may be at risk of local extinction in regions experiencing climate impacts.</p> <p>As well as being a direct driver of biodiversity loss, climate change can exacerbate other ways in which Scotland’s nature is harmed loss. A warmer climate can enable non-native invasive species to spread more quickly. For example, rhododendrons which were not naturally found in Scotland and which are highly detrimental because they grow vigorously and shade out our native woodland plants may become even more dominant as our climate becomes warmer and wetter. Similar problems are arising in our freshwater and marine environments.</p> <p>Combined actions for biodiversity loss and climate change can be achieved through Nature-based Solutions, which can play a vital role in helping us to protect and enhance biodiversity, achieve net zero targets, and improve people’s quality of life.</p> <p>This reporting section provides the opportunity for your organisation to provide details on how you are supporting the positive contribution biodiversity can make to building resilience, and helping nature to mitigate and adapt to climate change.</p> <p>You may wish to report on a range of specific processes or activities that your organisation has undertaken, including on land you own or manage, within your buildings and workforce, and projects that you have delivered.</p> <p>Integration might include incorporating biodiversity into Nature-based Solutions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help Scotland and nature to adapt to climate change by developing strategies that include nature, investing in green infrastructure, restoring nature and taking action for pollinators – these should be included in climate change reports
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusive economic growth, for example by growing nature based industries, or investing in key natural visitor attractions.• Improve health and wellbeing, for example by increasing opportunities to connect with nature for all. <p>Strategies or initiatives incorporating actions to address climate change might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate Change Adaptation Plan;• Local Development Plan;• Regional Marine Plan;• Open Space Strategy;• Forest & Woodland Strategy;• Green Infrastructure Strategy;• Pollinator Strategy;• Soil management strategy;• Locally-implemented Nature Network Strategy.
Text Field	<p>Our Climate Change Declaration sets out our commitment to a sustainable future which mitigates and adapts for climate change: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/25146/climatechangedeclaration.pdf</p> <p>Aberdeenshire Council has a target to reduce carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 and to be Net Zero by 2045 from the 2010/11 baseline year. As part of the Council's commitment to climate change mitigation, we set our first carbon budget for 2017/18. We are the first Local Authority in Scotland to implement such a budget. This approach is to make sure that we are placing as much focus on our carbon footprint as we do on our financial budgets. The carbon budget is set in February each year at the same time as the financial budget and is monitored throughout the year by the Sustainability Committee.</p> <p>https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/green-living/environmental-policy/</p> <p>Climate Ready Aberdeenshire 2020 – 2030: Climate Ready Aberdeenshire is a cross-sector initiative to create Aberdeenshire's climate change adaptation and mitigation strategy. It brings together the views and</p>



expertise of a range of diverse stakeholders from communities, public, private and 3rd sector organisations, to set out how we can work collaboratively to meet the challenges of a changing climate within Aberdeenshire. Our aim is a shared vision, strategy and action plan for Aberdeenshire to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impact. <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/green-living/climate-ready-aberdeenshire/>

Objectives:

1. Increase the understanding and awareness of climate change risks and opportunities within Aberdeenshire
2. Work with communities using a place-based approach to discover what their priorities are and how they can be supported to mitigate and adapt to climate change
3. Support decision-makers to make climate friendly and climate ready decisions which support the delivery of local and national commitments, and mutually benefit Aberdeenshire's environment, economy and people

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

In 2023 Climate Ready Aberdeenshire completed the final draft of their Strategy after short term working groups supported gathering more detailed information on Mitigation and Net Zero, Sustainable Economy & Communities, Adaptation and Resilience, and Enhancing and Protecting Biodiversity. The group are now focusing on the development of an Activity Log which is capturing activity in the 4 themes across Aberdeenshire by the different member groups of CRA. Enhancing and protecting biodiversity is very much a core theme of Climate Ready Aberdeenshire. More information can be found here:

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/green-living/climate-ready-aberdeenshire/>

The Climate Change Risk Register was updated after a Local Climate Impact Profile (LCLIP) was completed for 2019-2022. The outputs of the LCLIP helped to enhance the Risk Register. Biodiversity sits within the Risk Register as 'Damage to ecosystems and damage to and loss of biodiversity due to climate change and extreme weather events'.

The Council's Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) includes Climate Change and Sustainability. Within this assessment there are several questions requiring a response on the impacts in relation to Biodiversity.



	<p>Positive, neutral and/or negative impacts are assessed on the quality of environment, quantity of the environment, wildlife and biodiversity. Guidance has been prepared to support officers in completing IIAs to ensure due regard is considered to the impacts on biodiversity.</p>
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Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main climate change related challenges for biodiversity over the next three years?

Guidance on completing this section	<p>You may wish to detail any arrangements that your organisation has in place to review or monitor the implications from modelling biodiversity on land that you own or manage under future climate scenarios.</p>
Text Field	<p>Extreme weather events do appear to be more frequent. Strong winds, flooding and periods of drought have all had significant implications for the area through this reporting period. Predictions do suggest this is a trend which will continue. Inevitably this extreme weather has a significant, abrupt impact on nature also. This is of course in addition to the general trend of climate change which is incrementally impact on nature in the area. As detailed elsewhere, the Council aims to ensure its estate is providing habitat for biodiversity and is resilient to the effects of climate change. We will continue to have strong polices which protect and enhance natures – through Planning for example. We will continue to promote and educate nature and biodiversity to our communities, though our schools and Countryside Ranger Service also.</p>



SECTION 5: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Public Engagement

Guidance on completing this section	<p>Detail communication and education activities you have undertaken to inform or engage directly or indirectly with communities, young people and the public. This might include actions to raise staff, customer and public enjoyment and understanding of, and connection with, biodiversity and nature, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting volunteering;• Exhibitions and events;• School outreach;• Outdoor learning;• Citizen Science initiatives;• Providing a Countryside Ranger Services or public outdoor education programmes;• Providing information on your website on how to connect with local nature;• Blogs and press releases about biodiversity and nature.
Text Field	<p><u>Aberdeenshire Council Countryside Ranger Service</u></p> <p>The Aberdeenshire Council Countryside Ranger Service takes a lead role in the area on environmental education and awareness in the area. Each year they deliver over 200 sessions for schools, community groups and the general public. These sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide volunteer opportunities for communities and organised groups in biological recording, practical conservation, biodiversity enhancement and climate change actions.• Enhance the condition of natural and historic features through site and countryside management; raise awareness of climate emergency and biodiversity loss at Countryside Ranger Service public and group sessions.• Encourage and support positive action by the public to address the climate emergency and biodiversity loss.• Support partner organisations to combat biodiversity loss and climate change and support the enhancement of biodiversity.



	<p>The Countryside Ranger Service also responds to hundreds of requests from individuals, schools, local businesses and community groups seeking advice and guidance biodiversity topics, including protecting and enhancing biodiversity.</p> <p>The Service also launched its Biodiversity Education pack and Sharepoint page. This is an interactive resource to support teachers looking to undertake biodiversity awareness and understanding activities in their school grounds or local area.</p> <p><u>Schools</u></p> <p>All schools in Aberdeenshire have signed up to the Eco-Schools Programme. 123 schools have achieved the bronze award, 14 schools have silver awards and 69 have Green Flag awards.</p> <p>Education and Children’s Services have developed a Sustainability and Climate Change strategy with extensive input from pupils: https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/apps/news/release.aspx?newsid=8320</p>
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Workforce development

Guidance on completing this section	<p>Detail any activities that have been undertaken to support the development of your workforce, particularly in relation to skills relevant to biodiversity, nature, outdoor learning and community engagement in the natural environment.</p> <p>Activities might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff training, education and capacity building; including through CPD events for example from the Improvement Service and Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.• Hosting conferences, exhibitions and events;• Providing a Ranger service;• Collaborative working with other organisations and sharing best practice
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<p>Text Field</p>	<p>Aberdeenshire Council Countryside Ranger Service contributes to the development and delivery of the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) North East, training programme. Courses delivered for Rangers and allied professionals include Bat Ecology, Wildcat Ecology, Research Talks and Visitor and Habitat Management.</p> <p>The Countryside Ranger Service deliver “Toolbox talks” to Landscape Services mowing teams on what biodiversity is, why biodiversity matters and how to share this information with the public in relation to mowing regimes, complementing the work of the Greenspace Officers. The Service have also developed an online training resources on tree planting and greenspace management.</p> <p>The Natural Environment Team provide support and training to a range of Teams and Services across the Council. Training on protected species is provided to those that manage infrastructure such as roads and bridges. There is regular engagement with Development Management Officers on biodiversity issues including a regular online newsletter providing updates and information and key issues of relevance at that time. The team have developed an online training resource on bats and Council property.</p>
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Identify any opportunities that are available to your staff to take part in practical actions

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>Activities might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering days, for example with environmental Non-Governmental Organisations; • Participation in staff networks that aim to deliver on or promote biodiversity objectives; • Opportunities for secondments to other organisations working on biodiversity and conservation.
<p>Text Field</p>	<p>Greenspace enhancement programmes with opportunities to ‘adopt’ and enhance greenspace are open to Council teams as well as to the community. The Natural Environment Team have adopted a site in Westhill and are helping to enhance the site with wildlife and tree planting. The site was formerly mown grass.</p> <p>As noted above, the Aberdeenshire Council Sustainability Champions programme includes opportunities for practical works to enhance biodiversity.</p>

SECTION 6: RESEARCH AND MONITORING

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

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

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

Guidance on completing this section	Where appropriate, you may wish to report on monitoring of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your impacts on local biodiversity priorities and national and international biodiversity targets; • Enhancing biodiversity in local developments • Biodiversity programmes or projects that you have delivered either alone or in partnership with others; • Implementing strategies or policies; • Physical environmental parameters, such as soil, weather, coastal erosion, and local hydrology; • Organisational capacity and development in relation to biodiversity.
Text Field	Every year, Aberdeenshire Council reports on the Council's biodiversity and environment actions to its Sustainability Committee. This includes reporting on a huge range of programmes and activities – all of which are listed in this report. The Aberdeenshire Pollinator Action Plan annual monitoring and reporting is carried out by the Natural Environment Team. Progress with the actions is reported to the Council's Sustainability Committee.



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

Guidance on completing this section	Trends or areas of concern might include those related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The conservation status of habitats that you manage or deliver programmes to protect;• The ecological health of land that you own or manage;• Adverse recordings of water or soil quality;• Increases or decreases in species present.
Text Field	No specific trends highlighted.

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

Text Field	<p>Aberdeenshire Council host the local records centre for the region – NESBReC. Various activities and programmes undertaken by the Council, promote, supply or encourage records to be sent to NESBReC. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NESBReC’s own training programme – approximately 10 events every calendar year• The outdoor education and engagement undertaken by the Countryside Ranger Service,• Record collecting encouraged by the Invasive Non-Native Species Project• Record collecting encouraged by the Greenspace Project <p>NESBReC and the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) share and exchange a range of data.</p>
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SECTION 7: BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

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

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>As a Level One reporting organisation, it is likely that you will own or manage land, regulate land use, or have biodiversity as one of your main responsibilities. Examples of key achievements in this context might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating your LBAP • Integrating nature in your Local Development Plan • Leading or contributing to programmes or projects that directly support actions in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, or contribute to international Biodiversity Targets; • Demonstrating national or international leadership or expertise in relation to biodiversity; • Meeting your strategic aims in relation to biodiversity; • Improvement in habitat or ecological status; • Notable species present or recorded; • Completion of key projects; • Funding achieved or delivered; • Volunteering days or time invested; • Provision of successful education or public engagement activities.
<p>Text Field</p>	<p>The success of the Greenspace Project and it now being adopted as a mainstream approach to the management of greenspace has been a significant success. Backing this was the adoption of the new Pollinator Action Plan for the Council – our third. This identifies that 10% of greenspace should be managed for biodiversity. The Nature Restoration Fund funding from Scottish Government came along at the perfect time for our greenspace works and has provided the very welcome funding to support changes in management and enhancement works. This in turn has resulted in a huge, positive community enhancement and effort in enhancing greenspace, which over 100 community groups doing practical works to enhance greenspace each year.</p>



	<p>Our Countryside Ranger Service and NESBReC continue to be hugely important for environmental education and recording in the region.</p> <p>The 2023 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan includes strong policies, supplementary guidance and planning advice for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and biodiversity. Of particular note, in advance of the requirements subsequently set out in National Planning Framework 4, is the Local Development Plan’s requirement for all development to have positive effects for biodiversity with Planning Advice setting out the Planning Authority’s expectations.</p> <p>While the significant damage and challenges of storm damage to our woodlands was a significant negative during the reporting period. This has been turned to a positive, with re-planting and active management to ensure the woodlands maximise biodiversity benefit and are also resilient to the effects of extreme weather and climate change.</p>
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Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main challenges over the next three years?

<p>Guidance on completing this section</p>	<p>Challenges might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and resource pressures; • Delivery of cross-cutting actions; • Preventing further loss of habitats and species; • Effective management of invasive non-native species; • Pressures for space; • Need to meet targets; • Encouraging enhanced partnership working.
<p>Text Field</p>	<p>The situation with Local Authority budgets means there are very likely to be resource constraints. However in line with our duties, Aberdeenshire Council will continue to deliver on biodiversity activities. In doing so we shall of course seek to show the benefits to our wider environment from that work. The Council wide support and approval for all the actions identified in this report shows it has been successful in doing this over the reporting period. There is an opportunity desire to create a single, Council wide, high-level strategy on nature recovery which makes the valuable and cost-effective action as clear and visible as possible. Linking our duty</p>



under legislation to long-term funding is a core part of supporting a strategic approach and the Nature Restoration Fund has been hugely beneficial in this respect over the reporting period. Extending such a funding commitment into the future would provide a secure basis to plan the long-term delivery for nature that is clearly required. Indeed, we understand it is possible this may potentially be legally required if statutory nature recovery targets result from the Scottish Biodiversity process. It is clear Scottish Government sees Local Authorities as key deliverers of nature recovery and as with so many areas of our work there needs to be financial support to allow us to do this fully.