

# Reporting on the Scottish Biodiversity Duty 2020-2023

JANUARY 2024

# **The Scottish Biodiversity Duty**

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, having regard to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and the United Nations Environmental Programme Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). 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, second and third reports were made publicly available by 1st January 2015, 2018, 2021, 2024 respectively. The next report must be made publicly available by 1st January 2027.

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION ABOUT NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **An overview of North Ayrshire Council's role and purpose, including any environmental responsibilities.**

An overview of North Ayrshire Council's (NAC) role and purpose. This includes environmental responsibilities. North Ayrshire Council works with our partners to deliver a wide range of local services.

NAC administers to an area around 886 sq.km (mainland 441 sq.km, islands 445sq.km). It has a coastline of 225km (mainland 67km, islands 158km).

On 30 June 2021, the population of North Ayrshire was 134,220. North Ayrshire had the 15th highest population in 2021, out of all 32 Council areas in Scotland.

The main settlements are:

- Irvine,
- Kilwinning,
- Ardrossan,
- Saltcoats,
- Stevenston,
- Beith,
- Dalry,
- Kilbirnie,
- Largs,
- Dreghorn,
- Springside,
- West Kilbride,
- Seamill,
- Fairlie,
- Skelmorlie,
- Brodick
- and Millport.

In 2022, the number of households in North Ayrshire was 65,237. This is a 0.5% increase from 64,886 households in 2021. In comparison to 2001, the number of households in North Ayrshire has increased by 11.0%. In 2022, the number of dwellings in North Ayrshire was 69,747. This is a 0.8% increase from 69,175 in 2021. There are 33 elected Members serving in North Ayrshire. The Council provides for 17 Community Councils. There are currently 11 active Community Councils in North Ayrshire.

The Council employs over 6,500 staff. Its most senior official is the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive, along with the Executive Leadership Team, oversees the delivery of all services.

- Land and estate management.
- Regulation of land use and development.
- Providing public information, community learning and education around nature and the environment.

The current Chief Officer and Directorate Structure includes the following services:

- Chief Executive's
- Communities and Education
- Place
- Health and Social Care Partnership

The structure further breaks down as:

- Chief Executive's Service includes Head of Service (Democratic), Head of Service (Finance), Head of Service (People & ICT) who report to the Council's Chief Executive.
- Executive Director - Communities and Education supported by Head of Service (Education) and Head of Service (Connected Communities).
- Executive Director - Place supported by Head of Service (Housing and Public Protection), Head of Service (Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property) Head of Service (Growth, Investment & Employability), Head of Service (Economic Development & Regeneration) and Head of Service (Neighbourhood Services).
- Director - Health & Social Care Partnership supported by Head of Service (Children, Families & Justice), Head of Service (Health & Community Care), Head of Service (Mental Health), Head of Service (HSCP Finance & Transformation) and Chief Social Work Officer.

### **Key environmental impacts of North Ayrshire Councils operations.**

NAC assesses the environmental impacts of its operations with Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA). The SEA is a means to judge the likely impact of a public plan on the environment. The SEA enables NAC to seek ways to minimise that impact if it is significant.

Public bodies are required by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 to undertake a SEA if qualifying plans that are likely to have significant environmental effects.

SEA is a key component of sustainable development in North Ayrshire:

- Requiring plan makers to assess options and compare the likely effects on the environment.
- Ensuring that the environment is considered early and openly.
- Facilitating greater consideration of how different plans interact with and influence each other and the environment.
- Opening the decision-making process to the public

The 2005 Act identifies the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, and Historic Scotland as the statutory consultees to the SEA. Their role is to offer their environmental expertise at key stages in the SEA process.

NAC undertakes the SEA screening process on all plans and strategies. Full SEAs are undertaken when required by the screening process.

The Biodiversity Duty applies to all NAC officers. All NAC teams and services contribute to fulfilling the Council's Biodiversity Duty. KA Leisure come under the

umbrella of NAC's Biodiversity Duty reporting. North Ayrshire Leisure Limited is a Company limited by guarantee and has charitable status. The Company's trading name is KA Leisure. The Company is governed by its Articles of Association. The Company is a not-for-profit organisation. Any surpluses generated are reinvested in improving facilities and services. The Company manages and operates community sport hubs, community campuses and golf courses.

External Partners also contribute to NACs Biodiversity Duty Reporting. NAC owns, manages, and regulates land use. In doing so it has key responsibilities linked to biodiversity.

### **Regulation of land use and development**

NACs Growth & Investment service include tourism services. They manage Ayrshire Growth Deal projects and other capital project support. The service has a development role for sites related to project activity. This includes:

- i3,
- Irvine Harbourside,
- Ardrossan,
- Hunterston,
- and marina developments at Cumbrae and Arran.

NAC own most of these sites except for Hunterston. The development of physical projects requires to go through Green Book production. This ensures that appropriate consents have been undertaken before development and release of funds. This includes environmental assessments, where applicable. Works at the costal quarter is Ardrossan aim bring contaminated land back up to residential standard.

The development plan for North Ayrshire comprises of the adopted Local Development Plan (LDP2) and the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). North Ayrshire Council adopted the current Local Development Plan on 28 November 2019. Scottish Ministers adopted National Planning Framework 4 on 13 February 2023.

The Local Development Plan (LDP) sets out how the Council aims to guide development and investment in our area over the next 20 years and includes:

- Our spatial development strategy: the principles we will use to direct the right development to the right place.
- Our placemaking policy: the key criteria that will allow us to deliver the six qualities of successful places.
- Our strategic development areas and the key factors we will consider in developing these major areas of change.
- Detailed policies provide additional criteria and more detail about how we will consider proposals for specific uses or developments.

The Local Development Plan Action Programme sets out how both the policies and proposals of the Local Development Plan will be delivered. The planning system in Scotland considers the development and use of land and buildings. A local development plan (LDP) is a long-term plan that describes where and how development - for example new houses - should and should not take place. LDPs are

very important documents setting out how the places people live, work in and visits will change in the future.

The Council is at the start of preparing a new Local Development Plan - LDP3 - for the North Ayrshire Council area. More information on the preparation of LDP3 can be found on the dedicated online Local Development Plan hub. To inform the preparation of Local Development Plans the Council undertakes land use audits.

The Adopted Local Development Plan (November 2019) sets out the limited circumstances in which NAC will support the development of new houses out with identified towns and villages. An example would be where it is proposed to convert or replace an existing building.

The purpose of the Policy Guidance Note is to provide further detail to developers, applicants and communities on the relevant Local Development Plan policies and matters that should be considered when the development of one or more houses in the countryside is proposed.

The Policy Guidance Note defines the key terms used in the policy and sets out key design principles that will apply in the consideration of such proposals.

NAC protects ancient monuments. They are important artefacts of North Ayrshire's heritage and may hold cultural value within a community. Designed gardens and landscapes are also important because:

- of their unique artistic value
- they contain rare or valuable plant collections.
- they are invaluable to wildlife.

Development near a scheduled ancient monument or designed landscape, may be subject to planning constraints and will be assessed for their impact on their surroundings. To this end the Council keeps a list of designated landscapes, historic gardens and local landscapes.

The Council's Economic Development and Regeneration service maintains a register of Vacant and Derelict Land (VDL). This is part of the annual Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey.

In 2021, North Ayrshire contained 12% of all vacant and derelict land in Scotland. One of the highest proportions of any Scottish Local Authority. The Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Register and Buildings at Risk Register identify over 250 sites. Most of these sites are in private ownership.

A refresh of the North Ayrshire Vacant and Derelict Land Strategy, originally published in 2014, provides an opportunity to review the themes, aspirations, and challenges of vacant and derelict land in North Ayrshire.

The 2023-2027 Vacant and Derelict Land Strategy will consider how vacant and derelict land fits within the wider context of national and local priorities and objectives, including:

- community wealth building
- the challenge of net zero
- the climate and nature emergency

The Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF) aims to tackle long-term vacant and derelict land in Scotland. Its objectives are:

- to stimulate economic growth
- create jobs.
- promote environmental justice and improved quality of life.
- to support communities to flourish and tackle inequalities.
- It is an element of the local government budget settlement, as agreed with the Scottish Government.

The fund focuses on projects that promote innovation in both temporary and longer-term greening techniques for vacant and derelict land sites.

NAC is currently one of five Local Authorities to receive a share of the fund from the Scottish Government and has done so since 2016/2017. NAC's Cabinet approves the expenditure of these funds on an annual basis.

The Council Environmental Health service is responsible for delivery of the Contaminated Land strategy and has a dedicated Contaminated Land officer who deals with all aspects of contaminated land surveillance and remediation.

The Council asks the designers of road developments to show how their scheme complies with the principles set out in North Ayrshire and national guidance. The aim is to achieve safe and sustainable developments which are a key part of the local environment.

Achieving sustainable development is crucial to the social, economic, and environmental objectives of the Council. Development must be sustainable in the widest possible sense. From transport accessibility to construction materials, the development process should be efficient and environmentally sound.

The Council is also a member of the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership (CMPP). The CMPP is developing a plan which will provide a framework to manage, effectively and sustainably, the economic, social, and environmental needs of the Clyde Marine Region. Legislation means that plans must be prepared to protect and enhance our seas. A National Marine Plan provides policies and objectives for the management of Scotland's seas. Marine planning will be implemented at a local level within Scottish Marine Regions. Regional marine plans will be developed by Marine Planning Partnerships. They will take account of local circumstances and smaller ecosystem units.

The Place Directorate within NAC is the corporate 'lead' for sustainability. There is an elected member portfolio holder for Place. An elected member sits on the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Regeneration & Sustainable Development Executive Group. This group has a climate change core remit. Within the Place

Directorate, the sustainability remit sits with Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property.

### **Sustainability**

The Council declared a climate emergency in June 2019 and has committed to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The Council has been proactive in reducing carbon emissions since our first Carbon Management Plan in 2006/07, and has monitored progress and implemented actions through three iterations of the Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy. Since our baseline year of 20025/06, carbon emissions have reduced across the Council's estate by approximately 69% (approx. 43% area wide).

In December 2023, Cabinet members approved the current Sustainable North Ayrshire (SNA) strategy, which solidifies the relationship between biodiversity loss and climate change. There are 9 strategic principles identified in the SNA which are as follows:

1. We will take a whole system approach (including behaviour change) to tackling climate change as far as possible, including identification of optimal approaches to achieve social and economic benefits alongside environmental ones.
2. We will continue to clarify and report transparently on our emissions so that the North Ayrshire emissions baseline is clearly understood.
3. We will complete a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy to help understand where efforts to reducing emissions and reducing fuel poverty are best focused.
4. We will prioritise actions in relation to two of the biggest emissions sources that have the most influence, commonly referred to as 'heat and fleet', including through project pathfinder approaches for decarbonisation of domestic and non-domestic buildings and vehicles to bring scale and pace to emissions reduction.
5. We will work with stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, to articulate the potential costs and skills requirements to meet our net-zero aspirations.
6. We will expand on the need for adaptation measures, recognising mitigation alone will not combat the impacts of climate changes on communities.
7. We will identify opportunities for expansion of carbon sinks and other carbon capture technologies, which are expected to be an essential element of our net-zero strategy to mitigate residual emissions by 2030.
8. We will seek to expand the remit and membership of the Climate Change Steering Group to enable us to work more closely with communities, taking account of outcomes from recent projects such as Climate Action Towns and Carbon Neutral Islands.
9. We will explore the potential for carbon accounting, including carbon budgets for Council services, to support our journey to net-zero.

The Council continues to develop and implement major sustainability projects, both corporately and through the Council's housing stock.

Over a range of projects and strategy development we have worked with a wide range of external partners for example, the Sustainability North Ayrshire strategy, Local Biodiversity Action Plan and response to the Climate and Nature Crisis consultation. To deliver on these goals the Council has a dedicated Sustainability team. The Sustainability team aims to:

- Assist in the production and coordinated delivery of sustainability, carbon reduction, renewable energy, and climate adaptation initiatives.



- Assist in the coordination of the Council's annual reports on compliance with the Public Body Duties (Climate Change Scotland Act 2009) and associated initiatives including reports to Executive Leadership Team and members committees.
- Compile and submit the Biodiversity Duty Report
- Prepare feasibility studies for new sustainability, biodiversity, and climate change initiatives.
- Submit funding applications to relevant bodies to assist with identification and delivery of sustainable development and climate change projects.
- Monitor and report on national policy on sustainability, biodiversity, and climate change matters.
- Lead the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all relevant service strategies.
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency projects,
- Management of the NAC's energy and water consumption and billing,
- and the coordination of action on NAC's response to the Climate and Nature emergency.

### **Property Management and Investment**

Property Management and Investment perform the "corporate landlord" function for the Council. This involves managing and maintaining operational and commercial property assets. This includes housing asset management. Property management also deliver a variety of capital and revenue projects. These range from minor refurbishments to multi-million-pound community campuses and social housing projects.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

#### **Waste**

Waste Resources provides a waste collection and recycling service to all households within this area. A similar service is provided to commercial waste producers. The service operates 4 household waste recycling centres together with a transfer station at Shewalton, Irvine and one in Brodick, Arran, as well being responsible for the management of three closed landfill sites at Shewalton, Nethermains and Brodick. Our waste awareness team provides guidance to households and businesses, and also delivers educational information to local schools and community groups to encourage participation in the Council's recycling services, and increased knowledge of the environmental impacts of waste, resource efficiency, and the Zero Waste challenge. This includes how the improper disposal of waste can impact on the environment and biodiversity.

The Council participates in the Clyde Valley Residual Waste Contract which allows North Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Councils to recover value from the residual waste in our area by turning waste into energy. 26,380 tonnes of residual waste from North Ayrshire are prevented from going to landfill every year (the equivalent of 2,127 double decker buses). Instead, the energy produced can be used to power around 32,000 homes.

#### **Roads**

The service maintains North Ayrshire's local road network which involves the upkeep of road surfaces, bridges, retaining walls and street lighting. In addition, the service deals with flood risk in accordance with the Flood Risk Management Act (Scotland).

Regarding flooding, Roads protect the environment by working with Planning to improve flood resilience and prevent inappropriate development. This also involves trying to educate the public around flooding and their obligation to protect their own property. This process also involves identifying flood risk and, in some cases, providing flood protection. These measures include natural flood management, coastal adaptation, and shoreline management.

### Streetscene

Streetscene undertakes strategic, statutory obligation and asset management responsibilities, regarding physical assets and open space within the public realm. The service maintains 2,410 hectares of public open space. A particular environmental responsibility includes the maintenance of Local Nature Reserves and 16 beaches - three of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Streetscene is also responsible for the litter clearing of the road's infrastructure and programmed cleaning of streets, open spaces and beaches including the removal of fly tipping and graffiti. The Open Space Asset Management Plan (OSAMP) sets out the Council's approach for the management and maintenance of all open space assets.

Grounds maintenance scheduled work is carried out by NAC's Streetscene operatives. The work is split into two seasons, as most work is weather dependant:

### **NAC STEM team**

#### Education

The NAC STEM team has been working to support schools in using outdoor learning. This included using biodiversity learning activities to deliver curriculum for excellence outcomes.

#### Curriculum and Qualifications

The curriculum for excellence (CfE) provides learners with opportunities to conserve, connect and engage with their local environment. Senior Phase qualifications that have strong links with biodiversity include:

- biology,
- environmental science,
- horticulture,
- rural skills
- and geography.

Schools engage with many partner organisations and programs to support biodiversity outcomes. These include:

- North Ayrshire Council Countryside Rangers,
- The John Muir Award,
- Eco schools,
- Heritage Heroes,
- Junior Forester
- and the RSPB Wild Challenge.

NAC also operate the Arran Outdoor Education Centre (AOEC). The centre is on the shores of Lamlash Bay on the Island of Arran. The purpose-built centre is the perfect place to access the outdoors. The focus of the programme is developing a child's personal and social development through outdoor learning.

AOEC want participants to know what to expect. Whether they a pupil, teacher, parent, or guardian. The aim is for service users to enjoy the experience of learning outdoors. The aim is for them to for fill their potential. Most young people who come to stay at the centre are excited about the activities on offer. Living together alongside social interaction is an important education tool. The combination of activities and social interaction help with personal development. The staff pride themselves on the ability to encourage and enable young people to learn lifelong social skills. These skills will support them well beyond their school life.

#### Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Learning for Sustainability is a cross curricular approach. Empowering learners, educators, and schools to build a socially-just, sustainable, and fair society. Sustainable development, including biodiversity, is one of the pillars of Learning for Sustainability. It has been a focus of the NAC STEM team.

In 2021, schools were to apply for locally funded Learning for Sustainability grants. These projects focused on local food production or improved biodiversity of school grounds. These areas link to the priority actions for schools in the NAC environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy. Schools had to show how their local food production/biodiversity initiative provided progressive learning experiences across the whole school. 34 schools were awarded grants, providing a potential reach to over 7800 pupils and their families. Of those 34 projects, 31 were focused on local food production, 2 on improving biodiversity of school grounds, and 1 on keeping chickens as an enterprise and wellbeing project. Although most schools have a primary focus on food production, many pupils who were interviewed recognised their school gardening programmes contributed to improving the biodiversity of the school grounds. In addition to the 34 schools who received school grants, a number of other schools have funded their own local food production and biodiversity initiatives.

In the 2022-23 session, 10 staff from different schools participated in 6 hours of school garden CLPL delivered by horticulture staff from Ardrossan Academy.

The delivery of such courses allows children to experience many different outdoor activities. This enables them to make considered choices on whether to further progress with these activities. The activities encourage teamwork and communication skills in a safe environment.

In the 2022-23 session:

- 23 North Ayrshire schools held current Eco-Schools certification (Green Flag),
- 2 schools were piloting the LEAF projects.
- and 19 schools participated in live lessons with KSB

Through the John Muir Award, Eco-Schools and engagement with North Ayrshire Countryside Rangers, many schools are providing pupils with the opportunity to conserve and protect local green spaces or areas of their school.

At the Eglinton Community Garden, the Equal Programme trainees grow vegetables and flowers and sew and maintain wildflower areas. The vegetables they grow are delivered to food larders throughout North Ayrshire, providing fresh produce to be distributed across communities.

### Professional Learning and Development

In the 2021-22 48 staff from primary, secondary, libraries, family learning and children's housing participated in gardening professional learning. The Dumfries House education service delivered the learning.

### Information and Culture

Information and culture sit in the communities and education directorate of north Ayrshire Council. The key areas of work are -

- Delivery of the school and public library service
- Arts, museum and heritage services
- Community events
- Children's play and school aged childcare

Through public events, activities and exhibitions we encourage responsible access to the outdoors, support and inspire people to access the outdoors and connect with nature. Through education programmes we develop understanding of our local environment and the importance of our natural environment in a local, national and global context. We promote sustainability and support projects that work with communities and individuals to reduce our impacts on climate change.

Agile working/reducing travel - North Ayrshire Council are a member of The North Ayrshire Museums Forum which promotes and develops public awareness of the heritage of North Ayrshire and surrounding area. The group have secured funding to purchase equipment to enable hybrid meetings to continue for members from our island communities to join without necessitating the need for travel.

Public events, activities, and exhibitions encourage responsible access to the outdoors. They support and inspire people to access the outdoors and connect with nature. Education programmes develop connections with the local environment. These builds understanding of the importance of our natural environment in a local, national, and global context. The programmes promote sustainability. They support projects that work with communities and individuals to reduce our impacts on climate change. Volunteer & educational programmes support projects to improve biodiversity value and enhance habitats within Eglinton Country Park.

### Growth, Investment and Employability

Currently involved in large scale regeneration capital projects specifically in relation to Ardrossan and the overall masterplan for the area including the coastal quarter and the harbourside. The coastal quarter in particular is concerned with ensuring previously contaminated land is brought back up to residential standard.

The Employability services aims to reduce unemployment rates and increase employment levels across North Ayrshire. They deliver a range of interventions to support individuals to address barriers to employment, access vocational training and develop attributes and skills for employment. Green jobs are a key focus as they are within a growth sector and the service delivers two discrete projects to equip and support people to progress to employment.

The Streetscene ILM Environmental Skills Training Academy offers paid work experience to 24 unemployed participants each year who are paid the Living Wage and are employed within the Streetscene team, working alongside the team to develop

their skills while delivering a wide range of environmental improvements.

The Equal Programme, who support unemployed individuals who have disabilities, maintain outdoor space at the Eglinton Community Garden and offer volunteering and paid work experience to individuals to develop skills for employment while working towards achieving an SVQ Horticulture qualification.

Ayrshire Growth Deal projects comprising of construction of industrial space and creation of a digital innovation hub at i3 Irvine Enterprise Area, transit marina proposals for Cumbrae and Arran, and the regeneration of Irvine Harbourside.

Most projects are at an early stage. Consideration has been given to any important habitats and protected species that may be within the project sites or in close proximity, to ensure there is no negative impact caused by the project. For example, monitoring of nesting bird activity during site investigations or scheduling of works out with bird nesting season.

## **People and ICT**

The People and ICT oversees the day-to-day workings and operational needs of the Council. This includes:

- Human Resources
- Organisational Development
- Employee Services (Payroll & Resourcing)
- Information Technology
- Customer Services (Contact Centre, Customer Service Centres, Benefits and Business Support (including Leadership Support)).

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

**Actions that the Council 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.**

### **Neighbourhood Services**

#### **Waste**

The Waste Service encourages biodiversity at its closed landfill sites, such as when Shewalton landfill site in Irvine was closed and capped in March 2018, this included planting long grass across the site to encourage a range of species to flourish in the area. The service along with Streetscene, will also be assessing whether there is any potential for tree planting opportunities at our closed landfill sites at Shewalton, Nethermains and Brodick to promote biodiversity.

Waste Services offer residents the chance to give their plants a boost with free compost giveaway events. Waste Services give away around 100 tonnes of compost each year to residents which help support the improvement of soil quality and therefore support improved biodiversity in residents' gardens.

#### **Roads**

Biodiversity is mostly supported by flooding related activities including natural flood management studies, fish passes at Eglington Park and the Upper Garnock Valley and localised treatment of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed. Two Natural Flood Management (NFM) Studies have been completed for parts of the Upper Garnock & the Gogo Water catchments. The studies have identified a range of soft engineering and tree planting measures that would help to intercept and store runoff in the upper catchments and therefore address flood risk in the urban areas located downstream.

The benefits of the proposed NFM measures in terms of wider ecosystem services were assessed as part of the studies to ensure the 'best value' was achieved. The effectiveness of natural features in flood risk terms is difficult to achieve and any standard of protection would depend on implementation and routine maintenance / replacement of the proposed measures. Generally, it is up to third party landowners to deliver the recommendations of the studies. This is difficult to realise.

Further NFM studies are planned to help address flood risk in Brodick and Lamlash. A NFM Study planned for Irvine will aim to address flood risk associated with coastal erosion.

#### **Streetscene**

Streetscene officers are involved in key partnerships such as the North Ayrshire Biodiversity Partnership.

Where possible Streetscene create a habitat for wildlife, such as wildflower areas. Streetscene continuously seeks opportunities to enhance or improve biodiversity through assessing grassed areas that can be left to grow (relaxed grass cutting) and to identify suitable areas for wildflower meadows to be created. Relaxed grass cutting and wildflower meadow areas were a key part of a Participatory Budgeting initiative led by Streetscene. This provided communities with the opportunity to voice their opinions and shape grounds maintenance priorities. Feedback was received on topics

such as: grass cutting, flower beds and planters, alternative planting, weeding and wildflowers.

As a result, areas across North Ayrshire were identified and relaxed grass cutting and / or wildflower areas were created.

Wildflower Meadows were introduced at Irvine Beach Park, Stevenston Beach Park and Ardeer Quarry area. A school planting day at Lochshore Park was successfully undertaken that resulted in a good show of flowers. The growth was cut and collected, and the project is continuing.

Further work to identify new locations for wildflower in the Irvine area has been carried out in partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Furthermore, Streetscene put forward relaxed grass cutting proposals in Kirkton Glen. Despite an overwhelmingly positive public consultation, a local petition objected to the proposal. However, Streetscene went to the Council's Scrutiny Committee and the outcome was that the petition was out voted and relaxed grass cutting with the biodiversity enhancement proposal was successful in proceeding. Flower and shrub beds have been enhanced in the Irvine area and in the Three Towns. This was in partnership with the Ayrshire Community Trust and volunteers.

Tree Planting – North Ayrshire Council has committed to planting 108,000 trees by 2030, in order to provide the anticipated level of carbon sequestration required to meet the net-zero ambition. North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland Plan: A Tree Planting Strategy, also recognises and stresses the importance of the wider reaching and longer-term benefits of trees and woodlands which will be delivered as part of the afforestation programme. This includes habitat creation, enhanced biodiversity, and creation of new green corridors.

Streetscene put forward biodiversity enhancement suggestions to the landscape architect designing the new school at Montgomery Park.

The work of Streetscene also looks to address some of the key drivers of biodiversity loss, with work to tackle Invasive Non-Native Species. The Council is required to undertake the treatment of invasive non-native species when it is present on Council owned land. Streetscene keeps a register of recorded invasive species.

## **NAC STEM team**

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Through the John Muir Award, Eco-Schools and engagement with North Ayrshire Countryside Rangers, many schools are providing pupils with the opportunity to conserve and protect local green spaces or areas of their school.

Professional Learning and Development

'Building a bird box' was delivered as part of the school gardening CLPL delivered by Ardrossan Academy horticulture staff,

## **Property Management and Investment**

Wildlife and ecological surveys are carried out when undertaking relevant capital projects. This ensures impacts to wildlife and biodiversity are minimised wherever possible. Landscape Architects are appointed on relevant capital projects to ensure the functional requirements of the external environment are balanced with the need

for appropriate planting. Sustainable Urban Drainage solutions are also employed, where appropriate.

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property: Biodiversity Officer**

#### The North Ayrshire Biodiversity Partnership (NABP)

The NABP is a forum for all stakeholders wanting to be involved in North Ayrshire's response to the climate and nature crisis. The partnership will enable members to share information, support each other and participate in the shaping and delivering of biodiversity actions in their own communities.

The Partnership is made up of representatives from across North Ayrshire. These include Council officers, government bodies, conservation organisations, landowners, and private individuals. No matter what background our partners are from, they all share the goal of halting biodiversity loss in North Ayrshire by 2030 and being nature positive by 2045. In 2023 action was taken to reform the existing partnership. In 2023 the partnership had 39 members. The members committed 58.50hrs to the partnership, representing a £1,170,00 in-kind contribution. The NABP also has a dedicated Knowledge Hub community. It enables members to connect digitally and share information. The partnership is facilitated by NAC's Biodiversity Officer and supported by colleges from Energy and Sustainability.

#### The North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) 2019-31

The LBAP details actions designed to halt biodiversity loss in North Ayrshire. Delivery of the actions involves partnership working. This is the fifth Local Biodiversity Action Plan to include North Ayrshire, and the second to exclusively cover North Ayrshire.

The essence of NALBAP 2019-2031 can be expressed as three central aims, based on those of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity" (2013):

1. Protect and restore biodiversity on land and seas, and to support healthier ecosystems.
2. Connect people with the natural world, for their health and well-being and to involve them more in decisions about their environment.
3. Maximise the benefits for North Ayrshire of a diverse natural environment and the services it provides, contributing to sustainable economic growth.

Nature conservation sites are protected areas of wildlife and geology. Within these areas, proposed developments are carefully assessed and may be restricted to allow the natural habitat to survive and flourish.

#### LNCS review

Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) are sites designated in recognition of their local importance for natural heritage. The sites are selected for their biodiversity or geodiversity value. In North Ayrshire, there are several types of nature conservation sites, these are:

- Natura 2000 sites.



- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) protected and designated under the Habitats and Birds Directives.
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – designated by NatureScot under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.
- Local Nature Reserves – selected and designated by local authorities.
- Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSs) – also selected and designated by local authorities; and
- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

Although LNCS is a non-statutory designation, it has a significant place in nature conservation in Scotland.

The Council is currently reviewing the LNCS. Those sites under consideration are important for Local Biodiversity or Geodiversity. These sites are important for the Council to meet the aims of the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Local Development Plan.

Survey work of the sites on the mainland have been completed. They are now subject to a community consultation process. Phase two will take place in 2024 and involve sites on the Island of Arran.

Biodiversity/Biodiversity Duty eLearning unit

“It is the duty of every public body and office holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”.

It is the Council’s goal to obtain full compliance with the statutory biodiversity duty across all services and office holders. For this to happen it is important that there is a universal knowledge of the duty across all NAC office holders. To facilitate this NAC has committed to introducing a mandatory eLearning unit on the subject. In 2023 The Council’s biodiversity officer has been facilitating a working group to create content for the unit. The working group members are drawn from Local Authorities across Scotland.

Nature Network

NAC is committed to the development of the North Ayrshire Nature Network (NANN). The groundwork for developing the network will involve a data collection and mapping exercise. The audit will be a desk-based landscape scale study, evidence-based collation, and examination of the existing data of what species are present in North Ayrshire. The audit will determine the baseline for present biodiversity levels in North Ayrshire. The baseline will be used to provide guidance for North Ayrshire Council as it delivers its response to the climate and nature crisis and the commitment to end net biodiversity loss by 2030.

Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network

The Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network is a Scottish Wildlife Trust-led project that aims to establish connected nectar and pollen-rich sites along the Ayrshire coast, ensuring the long-term survival of pollinating insects in the area. The Council’s biodiversity officer, countryside ranger service and a Streetscene officer sit on the steering group for the Network.

#### Place: Energy and Sustainability: Energy Awareness Officer

The Energy & Sustainability Team's ambition is to support carbon reduction and increase awareness of climate change action. To this end NAC employs an Energy Awareness Officer. This role involved developing a lesson for primary schools in North Ayrshire. Topics include:

- energy,
- sustainability,
- climate change,
- greenhouse gases,
- biodiversity,
- waste
- and transport.

The Energy Awareness Officer visits the schools to deliver the lessons.

There are a range of interactive activities for pupils. These includes a Renewable Energy Kit. The kit demonstrates the production of electricity using solar, water and wind power. Other activities focus on each school creating their own 'Climate Change Action Plan'. This is an activity involving making posters. The posters contain the pupils' ideas on what they can do to improve the efficiency of their school environment. The Climate Change Action Plan is a great way to link in with schools. It offers support and enables the conversation around the journey to net zero.

The Sustainability team raise awareness with the public and Council staff. This takes the form of online engagement. The team also deliver in person events throughout the year. Online events supported through social media channels are:

- Big Energy Saving Week,
- Global Recycling Day,
- Earth Hour,
- Climate Week,
- World Environment Day,
- National Vegetarian Day.

The energy awareness officer is also creating a mandatory sustainability eLearning module. The topics include:

- Carbon Literacy,
- Climate Change,
- Sustainability,
- Adaptation
- and Energy Efficiency.

#### Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy

This Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy provides an overview of work that has taken place to tackle climate change and sets out the journey ahead through implementation of nine strategic priorities, specific project actions and a Carbon Footprint and Project Register.

The Council Plan 2023-28 sets out North Ayrshire Council's commitment to deliver on our communities' priorities over a five-year period. These priorities have been identified as:

- Wellbeing
- Communities and Local Democracy
- Climate Change
- A Sustainable Council

This 'Sustainable North Ayrshire' strategy has been developed to support the Climate Change priority and the continuing strategic aim of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030.

In September 2023, the Scottish Government also recognised that the country is now faced with a 'Nature Emergency' and are consulting on a draft Biodiversity Framework and 5-year Delivery Plan for the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

The Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy aims to tackle both environmental challenges.

#### Sustainability: Solar PV farms

The Council is developing two solar PV farms on former landfill sites to maximise our land assets, reduce carbon emissions and support community wealth building opportunities. Throughout the design stage of these projects, nature networks are given priority to ensure a permeable matrix is established and there is connectivity between the sites and the surrounding landscape.

#### Sustainability: Adaptation

The Council has been supporting the Climate Action Town, Stevenston project, which is being led by Architectural and Design Scotland. Stevenston is one of nine Scottish towns taking part. The project looks at the challenges and opportunities for communities to tackle climate change by implementing adaptation actions using nature-based solutions. The project helps raise awareness and partnership working with the Council, communities, and local people.

#### Garnock Connections Landscape Partnership

The Garnock Connections Landscape Partnership delivered 28 projects between 2018 and 2023. Together with North Ayrshire Council, six organisations made up the partnership. The partnership invested and helped raise £700k in match funding. This funding supported projects across the 360km<sup>2</sup> of the project area. Support from the National Lottery's National Lottery Heritage Fund took the total budget of £2.1 million.

Garnock Connections (GC) was a Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS). It was led by RSPB in partnership with North Ayrshire Council, Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), NatureScot, and the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

Funding came from:

- the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) through the Landscape Partnerships grant programme.
- Ayrshire LEADER
- The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.

- Ayrshire Sustainability Group; and the members of the Landscape Partnership.

Four Council staff members were involved at Board, Steering Group and Working Group levels.

Projects were grouped in four themes:

Habitat Network enhanced the habitat and species networks. The goal was to diversify the landscape and encourage free movement of species. This would help them adapt to climate change and more sustainably manage water and soils.

The Knowledge Network helped communities better understand and value the wealth of heritage of the Garnock Connections landscape. The was undertaken through partnership working. These partnerships helped protect and promote both natural and cultural heritage.

The Access Network strengthened connections between people and place. The project offered active involvement within the landscape through themed walks, a trails app, provision of training and improved infrastructure. These were a catalyst to encourage exploration and making the landscape more accessible.

The Community Network helped people develop stronger connections with their heritage. This heritage was a rich history and wealth of wildlife. Communities connected through skills development and engaging in new interests. In doing so their health and wellbeing improved. They were also able to engage in the conservation and enhancement of their heritage. At the end the communities were inspired to safeguard their heritage.

Final evaluation ~ February 2023. The biodiversity and landscape outputs have been exceeded. The project delivered an extra 20 ha of landscape restoration and improvements. Total biodiversity and landscape works have covered 79.5 ha of the Garnock Connections area. This consisted of:

- 50 ha of blanket bog restoration,
- 12.5 ha of species rich meadow,
- 9 ha of invasive species controlled,
- 6 ha of native broadleaf woodland improved,
- 5 small scale habitat improvements totalling 2ha make up the remaining balance.

Examples of the 30 other activities to improve the biodiversity and landscape include:

- 6,421 trees planted.
- 5,277 wild plants propagated and planted.
- 302 sand martins ringed
- 200 whips planted for bank stabilisation.
- 25 brash and log piles created.
- 20 management interventions to improve hydrology and habitat.
- 19 barn owl boxes built and installed.

- 15 bee hotels and bee banks installed in green spaces.
- 8 ponds dredged.
- 6 bird scrapes created.
- 6 grebe islands created.
- 3 sand martin nest banks created.
- 2 tern bio havens installed.

### **Growth & Investment: Ardrossan**

Procurement is under way for the services of a specialist remediation company to return land previously used for heavy industry and petrochemicals back to residential usage.

AGD - projects are at early stages and will consider biodiversity. Ecological studies have been completed for some projects e.g., as part of i3 draft masterplan, to ensure important habitats and species are mapped as part of the project and due consideration given to these areas as part of the project development, with ongoing involvement of ecologists. Hunterston Natural Capital Account, Hunterston framework, i3 and Great Harbour masterplans embrace wider placemaking and environmental values. All projects also ensure consistency with the Regional Economic Strategy, LDP and NPF4.

### **Connected Communities: Arran Outdoor Education Centre**

Arran Outdoor Education Centre uses a variety of land types to support outdoor learning. Through John Muir Discovery Award, as part of the John Muir Award, there is an element of exploring wild places. Young people get to see the biodiversity of different land types such as farming and forestry. AOEC has, within its programme, conservation days with activities tackling invasive species. The most prominent of these species is rhododendron. These activities happen in connection with the NTS and Forestry Scotland. AOE work with COAST (community of Arran Seabed Trust) to let students take part in citizen science. These involve tasks such as looking at invasive species like bootlace weed. Working within the No Take Zone of Arran. The programme covers pollution by looking at various moss type and lichens.

### **Information and Culture: North Ayrshire Rangers Service**

Eglinton Country Park is home to the North Ayrshire Ranger Service. The country Park is the focus for actions to protect biodiversity and connect people with nature. The Ranger service operate two volunteering programmes in the park. The Friends of Eglinton and the Roving Volunteers.

#### **Friends of Eglinton**

Friends of Eglinton is a group of enthusiastic local people that help with conservation activities around the park. They meet from 9.30am to 12.30pm on every 2nd Wednesday and Saturday. The group are supported and trained by the Countryside Rangers.

They:

- carry out practical conservation work.
- help with wildlife surveys and monitoring.
- create new projects within the park to benefit the area.

### Roving Volunteers

Roving Volunteers sessions take in a whole host of conservation-based tasks.

These include:

- maintenance of furniture and infrastructure such as paths and boardwalks
- wildlife surveys
- habitat management like rhododendron removal

The volunteers meet twice most months around various sites within North Ayrshire's localities. It's a great way to meet new people, learn new skills and keep active.

### Public engagement

The Ranger Service deliver an annual programme of events, activities and educational opportunities to educate on biodiversity & local habitats and provide a range of outdoor experiences with the objective of developing a connection to nature. 2022/21 - data not available at present. 2023 – The ranger Service to date has provided 116 opportunities to 1698 participants (831 young persons & 867 adults).

The Country Park promotes the Eglinton Country Park Eco Code. The Code demonstrates the Parks commitment towards environmentally sound actions. These key areas are achievable and appropriate to our park, offices, visitor centre and cafe.

The Ranger Service offer work experience for school pupils in partnership with the Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce. They also run a Junior Ranger scheme. The Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) Junior Ranger scheme is open to North Ayrshire residents aged between 11 and 18.

In the 2020-21 session, 10 schools completed the John Muir Award. Anecdotally, this number has increased in subsequent years.

The Ranger service participant in the North Ayrshire Biodiversity Partnership.

The Ranger service and volunteers continue to work together to deliver practical conservation tasks:

- Control of INNS through the Country Park's conservation volunteer programme. Removing areas of Himalayan Balsam to control the spread within Eglinton Country Park.
- Pond habitat reinstatement. Loss of open water habitat due to natural succession and lack of vegetation management within one the ponds at Eglinton Country Park. This was undertaken as part of the Covid recovery planning. It ensured that outdoor learning opportunities could continue to be supported. Intensive works were carried out to re-establish open water habitat. Works included the removal of dense vegetation (following sepa and froglife guidance) and creation of soft landscaping around edges to promote biodiversity and naturalisation.
- Meadow Management, 3 meadows within Eglinton Country Park. No maintenance was carried out during 2020 or 2021 due to pandemic and resources being redirected. In 2022 meadows were scarified and yellow rattle seed spread to assist in the control of grasses and assist natural species to emerge. In 2023 maintenance included removal of any unwanted species and regeneration. It included the collection of seeds to enhance existing meadows.

Collected seed helped sow additional meadows/habitat corridors throughout Eglinton Country Park.

- Scythe training has been completed by ranger service staff and conservation volunteers in 2023 to allow for future reduction of carbon footprint in managing these meadows. This work would previously have been carried out using petrol trimmers. Two petrol trimmers were replaced with battery operated trimmers to reduce the services use of fossil fuels.
- Natural Hedgerows Continual maintenance of hedgerow, planted in 2015. Natural Hedge laying techniques are used to manage this foraging hedgerow to promote fruit growth. New trees are planted in any gaps that have appeared to ensure a rich, dense habitat.
- Creation of native hedgerows totalling 300 meters – only a small loss on established success numbers, but many continue to be nibbled by deer.
- Creation of a wildflower meadow 160m<sup>2</sup>
- Creation of fruit tree orchard – unfortunately, the trees were stolen after being in the ground for the first year. Plans are being prepared to replace the trees.
- Annual efforts to control invasive giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam – noticeable decrease but still not eradicated.
- Removal of 60 tonne of hazardous waste (tyres)
- Minimising pollution with no-use rule of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicide. The plan is to work towards replacing fossil fuel equipment with cleaner alternatives.
- Installation of a composting toilet
- Providing for wildlife: hedgehog homes, bug hotels, bird feeders, areas of open water, pollen and nectar for insects, knock-on food-chain effect.

### **Information and Culture: North Ayrshire Library and Information Service**

North Ayrshire Library and Information Service created four library gardens. This was part of the Public Library Improvement Fund Project Grow NA in 2019. In collaboration with Irvine's Men's Shed and local growing groups, fruit and vegetables were grown in library spaces. A tool library was also set up and used by the growing groups during the pandemic. These gardens are still in use today and have been themed for special events, e.g., Platinum Jubilee. Another library garden has been created since with another pending. A school library also set up an orchard in the school grounds.

One public library set up a Junior Growers' Group to manage the garden and each of the 7 local primary schools adopted a planter. The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) manage a garden in one public library with volunteers. Another output of Grow NA was to create Seed Libraries to encourage local communities to take the seeds, grow vegetables and donate the seeds back to public libraries. There are currently five with another pending: Seed libraries are also promoted at community events, e.g., Green Health Partnership.

## **People & ICT**

Teams with HR & OD and Employee Services have engaged with volunteering days at Eglinton Country Park. These days were linked to team building, our wellbeing agenda and to help restore areas of the park.

Employee Volunteering policy supports employees to give back to the local communities. NAC's staff volunteering programme allows up to 2 days a year volunteering per employee. The Get Connected programme is an internal North Ayrshire Council volunteering programme. Opportunities are advertised through the North Ayrshire Connects intranet site. These events are available for managers to book and are intended to help teams to reconnect in the aftermath of COVID and continuing remote working. Get Re-Connected is a programme of events scheduled to allow employees to volunteer at organised events to give back to the local communities. Volunteering with TACTS and Arran CVS are promoted on our intranet site to encourage volunteering.

## **Property management**

Wildlife and ecological surveys are carried out when undertaking relevant capital projects. This ensures impacts to wildlife and biodiversity are minimised wherever possible.

## **Growth and Investment**

For Ardrossan, procurement is underway for the services of a specialist remediation company. The project will return land used for heavy industry and petrochemicals back to residential usage.

Other AGD projects are at early stages and will consider biodiversity. Ecological studies have been undertaken for some projects e.g., as part of i3 draft masterplan. These will ensure important habitats and species are mapped as part of the project. Due consideration will be given to these areas as part of the project development, with ongoing involvement of ecologists. Hunterston Natural Capital Account, Hunterston framework, i3 and Great Harbour masterplans embrace wider placemaking and environmental values. All projects also ensure consistency with the Regional Economic Strategy, LDP and NPF4.



## **SECTION 3: MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY**

### **Steps the Council has taken to incorporate biodiversity measures into its wider policies, plans or strategies.**

NAC is providing public information, community learning and education around nature and the environment. NAC is committed to mainstreaming the issues around biodiversity loss and climate change. This is a key component to NAC's response to the climate and nature emergency.

NAC have a Strategic Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plan 2021-2024. This builds on the refreshed 2018-2021 plan. NAC commit to communities in North Ayrshire having access to the CLD support they need. Consultation and engagement identified the needs of the communities. Where needs have not been met, they have been included in the Action Plan. There is a focus of action to close the gap between needs and delivery. All provision aims to be free at the point of access for all Learners. The CLD supports disadvantaged or vulnerable groups and individuals of all ages. It engages them in learning, personal development and active citizenship. It places a focus on bringing about change in their lives and communities.

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property:**

#### **Biodiversity eLearning unit**

Throughout the process of developing the Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy, a series of community engagement sessions were held in each locality. From these sessions it was recognised that a constant clear message around biodiversity and the nature emergency, and climate change action is required. Therefore, actions within the new Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy support the move to increased community engagement. Furthermore, an e-learning unit is being developed for Biodiversity for staff, together with one for Climate Change and one for Adaptation.

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

The Council's fleet currently consists of over 500 vehicles and plant and a key part of our decarbonisation journey will be to assess the need for travel, rationalise our current fleet, and switch to low carbon alternatives. One of the actions in the Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy is to progress the Council's fleet decarbonisation route map.

### **Property Management and Investment**

Our project management process ensures all relevant service areas are consulted as part of the project briefing stage. Any sustainability / energy efficiency / bio-diversity requirements / outcomes will be captured as part of this process.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

#### **Waste**

Waste Services compost over 12,500 tonnes of food and garden waste which is collected within North Ayrshire each year through a contract with a leading provider of recycling and resource recovery solutions. The material is mainly recycled through an

in-vessel composting system (IVC) producing high grade compost certified to British Standard PAS100 which supports sustainable, healthy, and vibrant landscapes.

### Roads

SUDs systems are required for development where appropriate and the Flooding team produced a Drainage, SUDS & Flooding: Procedure Note for Prospective Developers. In addition, for larger roads projects, the service reviews drainage strategies. Activities in watercourses are dealt with by the Controlled Activity Regulations and appropriate licences are obtained before work is undertaken. This often includes consultation with non-statutory bodies such as the Ayrshire Rivers Trust and can include fish rescues before engineering work is undertaken.

### Streetscene

Biodiversity measures have been incorporated into the following Streetscene plans and policies:

#### Open Space Strategy

Streetscene's current Open Space Strategy (2016-2026) main objective is to increase the quality of parks, open space, and equipped play parks to play an active contribution in meeting the Council's Key Priorities.

North Ayrshire's open spaces provide a wide range of benefits for communities, the environment, and the local economy. They make an important contribution to the character and biodiversity of the area and to the quality of life and place by providing the setting for a wide range of social interactions and pursuits that support personal and community wellbeing. They also allow individuals to interact with the natural environment and provide habitats for wildlife.

The Open Space Asset Management Plan (OSAMP) sets out the Council's approach for the management and maintenance of all open space assets.

#### Tree and Woodland Management Policy

The Council is responsible for over 275 hectares of woodland. They provide significant biodiversity and wildlife value.

The Council seeks to manage its trees and woodland in an effective manner in the following ways relating to biodiversity:

- Providing and maintaining healthy and safe trees.
- Maintaining and encouraging biodiversity.

#### North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy

North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland Plan: A Tree Planting Strategy recognises the wider reaching and longer-term benefits of trees and woodlands which will be delivered as part of the afforestation programme, such as improved habitat creation, enhanced biodiversity, and creation of new green corridors.

During the site assessment process, biodiversity enhancement, improvements and the creation of habitats and green corridors are considered as part of the tree planting project to make a positive impact on biodiversity.

## **People and ICT**

As a supporting service our work does not directly link to biodiversity, we will however get involved where required to provide support. (eg. support in the creation and evaluation of the role profile for a Senior Countryside Ranger at Eglinton Park which is mentioned in the Biodiversity Plan). The service is also providing support in the development and roll out of Biodiversity Duty awareness model and provide its future hosting on the NAC iLearn platform.

## **Education**

We have used the NAC Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy to inform our practise. Workstream 4 identifies local food production and biodiversity awareness as priority actions for schools.

### Connected Communities: Arran Outdoor Education

All AOE P7 courses encompass the Discover aspect of the John Muir Award. They also meet various aspects within the Curriculum for Excellence model. Courses are generally run over a five-day, four-night period.

### NAC STEM team

We have used the NAC Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy to inform our practise. Workstream 4 identifies local food production and biodiversity awareness as priority actions for schools.

## **Growth and Investment and Employability**

### Growth and Investment

As part of the wide variety of projects that we are involved in we will consider plans to create or protect habitats and promote awareness of biodiversity. For example, we are including SUDS as part of the flexible industrial space at i3. The Council's PMI team have designed the first unit to include SUDS and later phases will also include SUDS. For Irvine Harbourside we will include interpretation on wildlife as part of public realm improvements to raise awareness of the wide variety of bird species. There are likely to be more opportunities to promote biodiversity as the Great Harbour project develops. The IMSE AGD project will consider the protection of research into, and education related to marine habitats. The Growth Deal projects follow Green Book methodology which means all necessary statutory consents will be in place by time the development happens. Design work will consider environmental impacts and carbon-based measures and mitigation.

As part of the wide variety of projects that we are involved in we consider plans to create or protect habitats and promote awareness of biodiversity. For example, SUDS are included as part of the flexible industrial space at i3. The Council's PMI team have designed the first unit to include SUDS and later phases will also include SUDS. For Irvine Harbourside we will include interpretation on wildlife as part of public realm improvements to raise awareness of the wide variety of bird species. There are likely to be more opportunities to promote biodiversity as the Great Harbour project develops. The IMSE AGD project will consider the protection of, research into and education related to marine habitats.

## Employability

The Equal programme team are based within premises in the town centre and are within an active travel hub office. At the rear of the building an overgrown area has now been landscaped by the Equal Programme trainees with wildflowers, flowers, bird feeders and a seating area to create a green space.

### **Information and Culture: Countryside Ranger Service**

Public engagement the Ranger Service deliver an annual programme of events, activities, and educational opportunities to educate on biodiversity & local habitats and provide a range of outdoor experiences with the objective of developing a connection to nature. 2022/21 - data not available at present. 2023 – The ranger Service to date has provided 116 opportunities to 1698 participants (831 young persons & 867 adults). As a participant of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership There is an opportunity for future to develop these opportunities to align with the priorities of the partnership group.

Garnock Connections Survey and Monitoring Lending Kits At the end of the Garnock Connections project, to continue the project legacy we have accepted a large amount of monitoring and surveying equipment that individuals can lend out free of charge to support biodiversity work within North Ayrshire. The equipment is currently being borrowed on an ad hoc basis and a more formal process is currently under construction and will be completed by end of 2023.

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

### **Ways in which the Council has integrated biodiversity into nature-based solutions to the climate emergency and other socio-economic outcomes.**

#### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

The Council has a new Sustainable North Ayrshire strategy which solidifies the relationship between biodiversity loss and climate change.

The Climate Action Towns project is another example of the use of nature-based solutions. The Council also considers a range of nature-based solutions, for cooling, flood management and coastal erosion.

#### **Property Management & Investments**

Wildlife and ecological surveys are carried out when undertaking relevant capital projects. This ensures impacts to wildlife and biodiversity are minimised wherever possible.

Landscape Architects are appointed on relevant capital projects to ensure the functional requirements of the environment are balanced with the need for appropriate planting. Sustainable Urban Drainage solutions are also employed, where appropriate.

#### **Neighbourhood Services**

##### **Roads**

The service is currently undertaking natural flood risk management studies and hope to find opportunities to implement some natural flood reduction measures as the opportunities present themselves. Roads prefer green engineering and have been considering the success of trials undertaken by others to protect sand dunes by burying inverted recycled Christmas trees.

##### **Streetscene**

##### **Climate emergency response**

In 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and announced a target date of 2030 to become carbon net-zero. In March 2020, the Council allocated funds for tree planting to provide carbon absorption to meet the net-zero aspirations as well as providing a wealth of other benefits such as biodiversity enhancements, health, wellbeing and physical activity opportunities, sustainable flood risk management and improved air quality.

#### **Education**

##### **Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

In the 2021-22 session, the NAC STEM team created, shared and promoted climate change resource in conjunction with COP-26. Pupils from across the authority were involved in climate learning activities and made pledges to adapt their behaviours to tackle climate change.

Recent publications, such as the 'Putting Learners at the Centre' report and the refreshed LfS action plan highlight pupil voices calling for more Climate Learning and opportunities for climate action by pupils and schools. NAC STEM will continue to support staff to meet these requests by pupils.

The Youth Participation officer manages a group of approximately 10 Climate Change Champions. These are young people aged 15 – 18 attending local secondary schools who have identified actions to tackle climate change.

#### Professional Learning and Development

For COP 26, NAC STEM created an 'Introducing climate change' self-study CLPL for non-subject specialists. This was designed to improve understanding of the science that underpins climate change and provide ideas for class activities. This CLPL, and all resources developed for COP 26, are still available for staff.

#### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

The community gardens offer a space to develop skills for employment but also a space which contributes to improving health and wellbeing. Many of the service users experience severe and enduring mental health challenges. This space and the horticulture activities contribute to improving health and wellbeing through a nature-based solution.

In addition to duties at the community garden, the Equal Programme trainees maintain an outdoor space located outside the visitor centre at Eglinton Country Park. This park is a busy public park where children and families can enjoy nature and the contribution from the trainees ensure this is a positive, tidy environment for all.

The Streetscene team maintain all outdoor spaces across North Ayrshire. The Streetscene ILM Environmental Skills Training Academy trainees increase the capacity for more outdoor space to be maintained, enhance, and used. They have been involved in a tree planting initiative which is ongoing over a planned programme.

#### **Steps the Council has taken to incorporate biodiversity outcomes into partnership initiatives, wider strategies, or initiatives of relevance to climate change.**

#### **Neighbourhood Services**

##### Waste

Waste Services work with all allotments societies in the area and provide over 100 tonnes of compost to these groups on an annual basis. This helps the allotment society users improve the soil quality of beds, plots, and poly-tunnels where they can grow vegetables, herbs, and biodiverse plants to encourage insect life. This also supports skills development and enhances physical and mental health of participants.

##### Streetscene

Streetscene is a member of, and actively participates in, the North Ayrshire Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership.

#### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

##### Growth and Investment

The team work with the Council's Biodiversity Officer to consider nature-based solutions as part of our projects. It's expected that as part of the improvements that will be made by the team's project's, this will address areas like health and wellbeing by improving access to nature. For example, through improvements to Irvine

Harbourside and Beach Park and Ardrossan North Shore area, making them more accessible and improved destinations for all.

## **Education**

### **Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

NAC STEM is working in partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful to deliver a day of climate learning (including threats to, and conservation of, biodiversity) on the 14th of Sep 2023. This event will be open to all P6 pupils across the authority with the intention that it becomes an annual event. All schools participating will be required to create a climate action plan that the pupils will implement and monitor for the remaining time in primary school.

In addition to this event, we will continue to promote the KSB Climate Action Schools programmes across NAC schools.

## **People & ICT**

Health & Wellbeing initiatives delivered through the Livewell programme, supporting employees to Livewell, Playwell, Savewell, Bewell and Eatwell.

The Leadership Academy which provides a variety of interventions that support soft skills development such as resilience, stress etc...

The Council Employee Benefits scheme provides access to discounted shopping, opportunities for discounted travel, and the cycle to work scheme. This was enhanced with the launch of our low emissions car scheme.

Through a Device recycling scheme, IT recycle old devices with an external company who erase the device in compliance with our audit standards. A pilot has commenced with the company to re-purpose recycled devices back into our community. This pilot will see a community group receive up to 12 devices to support digital inclusion.

## **The main climate change related challenges for biodiversity for North Ayrshire Council over the next three years**

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

Whilst the ambition and drive to halt biodiversity loss is clear, a recurring consideration is the resource required to deliver on these aspirations. The Council will utilise Nature Restoration funding to undertake a biodiversity audit to establish a nature baseline, and deliver on the Nature Network agenda, however it is evident that further resource will be required in the areas for planned maintenance and delivery of actions.

Without a significant increase in funding and resource it is unlikely that local authorities will be able to deliver the actions in the Scottish Biodiversity strategy in a way that will halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and contribute to the national commitment.

It will be a challenge for local authorities to deliver a truly integrated and functional Nature Network. Creating a functioning landscape of key local nature sites, National Nature Reserves, protected areas, and public and private land within the time scale, without significant investment and increased partnership working, will be a difficult task. As with all actions in the strategy it will be important for local authorities to be able to maintain the delivered actions for the duration of the strategy time frame. This will not be possible without the allocation of appropriate long-term funding.

The Scottish Government has identified that a deficit in funding will need to be made up through investment from the private sector. Due to the economic realities in North Ayrshire, it is unclear where this private sector funding will come from. This threatens to create a two-tier system of biodiversity investment. Local Authorities with stronger economic investment and business growth will be in a stronger position to gather private sector biodiversity investment compared to Local Authorities with less vibrant economies.

### **Property Management & Investments**

The key challenge will be ensuring external landscape proposals within capital projects reflect the need to protect and enhance biodiversity. The key risk to achieving this outcome is securing funding to allow biodiversity to be prioritised to deliver positive schemes.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

#### Roads

Flooding will create threats to infrastructure and homes. Temperature extremes will also create issues for our road infrastructure. Lengthy dry periods could also create problems for our infrastructure.

#### Streetscene

One of the key strategic objectives of the Open Space Strategy is to: Respond to climate change through the delivery of a connected and integrated network, incorporating water management, woodland area, and biodiversity benefits. Environmental factors contribute to the demands placed on Open Space asset management. Changeable weather conditions with severe weather extremes are becoming more common. This can affect the longevity of assets or result in emergency works as well as resulting in a deterioration of the open space assets and Streetscenes' ability to maintain them to the highest standard and meet this key strategic objective.

### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

#### Growth and Investment

Currently the rising costs of any capital project or development will potentially mean that biodiversity will not be regarded as one of the main determinants in relation to projects moving forward in a carbon neutral way.



## **People & ICT**

The main challenge in the service will be generating the uptake among staff of schemes being promoted.

## **Going Forward- North Ayrshire Councils focus for the period 2024-2027**

The focus for the Council in the next reporting phase will be the delivery of the North Ayrshire Nature Network.

## **SECTION 5: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

Corporate eLearn modules are in development for three topics, Biodiversity, Climate Change and Adaptation.

Energy lessons have been delivered to 13 primary schools, and work is ongoing with Keep Scotland Beautiful to support engagement with secondary school pupils.

Furthermore, the Council's youth Climate Change Ambassadors are aligned to support future climate change and nature engagement activities.

The Biodiversity Partnership is a good example of engaging with community groups, and the development of the Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy involved a series of 6 community engagement sessions, across each of the localities.

The Council's sustainability team work to ensure that there is a wider understanding of each officer's remit within the team and that everyone is aware of how the individual areas are interconnected and support each other.

### **Property Management & Investments**

Landscape Architects are appointed on relevant capital projects to ensure the functional requirements of the external environment are balanced with the need for appropriate planting. These designers are a key part of the design team and are involved in our extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement processes.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

#### **Waste**

Waste Services provide children and residents of North Ayrshire with bespoke education programmes which are supported by regular guidance. This includes tips on how to compost at home to promote the development of great habitats within gardens.

#### **Streetscene**

Streetscene provides training opportunities through a 3-year ILM employability programme and links with the Council's Ranger services. 2 participants recruited at two stages in the year over the next three years until spring 2025, the first of which is expected to get under way this spring. The training academy is in addition to Streetscenes' long-standing commitment to Modern Apprentices (MAs), four of whom are recruited to the department each year.

### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

#### **Growth and Investment**

At Ardrossan, we have been engaging with the local community and interest groups to put their mind at rest in relation to the remediation work that we will be carrying out. Answering all their concerns and specific questions along with updating online plans and updates of the work that will be taking place.

For AGD projects, the level of engagement varies depending on the project, but engagement has not been specifically related to biodiversity matters. As an example, there has been wider ranging public engagement on the Great Harbour project in Irvine where feedback has included comments on nature conservation. This will be considered as part of the development of the three main project hub areas.

## Employability

The employability service offers a wide range of volunteering opportunities at the community garden and has hosted employability events within this space to encourage more volunteering and engagement with the employability service. The trainees work towards achieving an SVQ in Horticulture and the garden offers this vocational learning space to learn and work towards achieving accredited qualifications.

A recent initiative, in partnership with Lockhart Campus which is a school for young people with complex needs and disabilities, offered visits for young people to learn more about the garden. A beehive which was previously located at Lockhart Campus is now sited at the garden and this partnership continues.

## Education

### Learning, Teaching and Assessment

During the reporting period, NAC STEM have been supporting schools to deliver STEM learning experiences (including biodiversity) outdoors. Actions have included sharing and signposting resources, creating new resources, delivering outdoor learning experiences in schools, and providing professional learning opportunities to develop staff capacity to deliver outdoor learning experiences.

NAC STEM have also created a STEM trail within Eglinton Park to engage the community with their local environment.

### Professional Learning and Development

CLPL opportunities that have taken place during the reporting period include:

- Outdoor Learning weekend residential delivered by Arran Outdoor Education Centre staff.
- STEM, LfS and Outdoor Learning Day delivered to over 100 staff in Oct 2022 Inservice day.
- Early Years Outdoor Science resource training sessions.
- Whole school outdoor Learning training sessions.
- Outdoor Learning team teaching.
- Go Wild programme CLPL. This programme has been completed by 12 schools and the Family Learning Team. A further 14 schools will participate in the 2023-24 session. The programme supports staff to use the outdoors as a context for literacy and STEM experiences and outcomes. A significant part of the course

is focused on biodiversity with learners conducting a 'bioblitz' to identify the flora and fauna found in the school grounds or local green space.

## **Workforce skills and training**

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

Corporate eLearn modules are being developed for three topics, specifically, Biodiversity, Climate Change and Adaptation.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

Waste, Roads and Streetscene

Learning is promoted among the workforce and needs identified using the 'our time to talk' process.

### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

The Council are exploring training opportunities for officers. Officers are very focussed on the delivery of projects and the development of related business cases. Biodiversity/nature consideration are specialist areas that may not have been considered as an area for CPD by team members. The new suite of biodiversity, climate change and adaptation eLearning units will create a universal base line knowledge for Council officers.

Staff within the Employability Service have been trained to assess and verify SQA qualifications and the horticulture qualification is delivered to offer environmental education opportunities.

The employability team also support a Modern Apprenticeship programme which recruits and trains MAs within the Council with four new recruits each year starting as Horticulture Apprentices

## **Education**

Professional Learning and Development

CLPL opportunities that have taken place during the reporting period include:

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is focused on biodiversity with learners conducting a 'bioblitz' to identify the flora and fauna found in the school grounds or local green space.

## **People & ICT**

The service is supporting the development of the sustainability e-learning modules. It is working to facilitate the delivery of sessions at the Councils connected leadership conference (for all Senior Managers/HTs/Chief Officers) and sessions at the Councils connected leadership Development Programme (for all Senior Managers/Chief Officers).

## **Opportunities available to Council staff to take part in practical actions.**

The Council supports employees who are undertaking volunteering within North Ayrshire. This can be in various forms, such as charitable activities within communities, environmental projects, or one-off events.

Employees are encouraged to share their time, knowledge, and skills throughout North Ayrshire in a positive and structured way.

## **Education**

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Providing CLPL opportunities to build capacity of staff and supporting staff to use biodiversity as a context to increase outdoor learning experiences.

Education staff are encouraged to take part in practical actions in response to pupils and support pupils' ideas to tackle climate change.

## **SECTION 6: RESEARCH AND MONITORING**

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

The Council monitors the carbon emissions associated with Council services i.e., energy from buildings, street lighting, waste, transport, and staff travel. The carbon emissions are reported to the Scottish Government annually through the Sustainable Scotland Network as part of the Council's mandatory Public Bodies Climate Change Duty reporting.

In addition, the area-wide emissions are monitored. These are published by BEIS (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2019>)

### **Neighbourhood Services**

The Council are part of the Society of Chief Officers for Transportation for Scotland (SCOTS) and they lead on research into issues around biodiversity and control of waste and pollution. This knowledge is shared with the roads community.

**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.**

The Council is limited in the monitoring activities it undertakes due to funding constraints, lack of capacity and a gap in the skills required.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

Streetscene

Streetscene works in partnership with the Ranger service and the Scottish Wildlife Trust to undertake a monitoring process to assess the biodiversity impacts of implementing actions such as relaxed grass cutting and the creation of wildflower meadows.

Through the Open Space Asset Management Plan, Streetscene will assess the risks of climate change on open space assets and develop a plan to mitigate any anticipated risks from the impact of changing weather and climatic conditions.

### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

Ecological studies and advice provided by ecologists for specific project sites raise awareness of nature conservation matters on project sites and how these should be addressed as part of projects and any related planning applications.

## **SECTION 7: BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES**

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

The North Ayrshire Biodiversity Partnership has been strengthened, meeting regularly to participate in North Ayrshire's response to the climate and nature crisis. The partnership enables members to share information, support each other and participate in the shaping and delivering of biodiversity actions in their own communities.

The initial stages of a Local Nature Conservation Sites review have been completed for mainland North Ayrshire. The review of sites has been subject to public consultation and feedback from the Biodiversity Partnership. This is being used to inform and improve the delivery of the second phase of the LNCS review which will involve sites on the Isle of Arran.

A Biodiversity eLearning module has been created, for use by Council employees, and members of the Biodiversity Partnership. The module focusses on raising awareness and compliance of our Biodiversity Duty, and to mainstream awareness of the Climate and Nature crisis across all services. The module has been created in collaboration with other Local Authorities, to share resource and promote best practice.

Work has begun on delivering the Scottish Government's Nature Network strategy. Delivery of the North Ayrshire Nature Network has been highlighted as a priority by the Scottish Government and is the primary focus of Nature Restoration Fund spending.

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2031 continues to be implemented; however, it will require to be updated following the outcome of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy consultation.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

#### **Roads**

Roads objectives are primarily around safety and maintenance of infrastructure and the reduction flooding risk. However, biodiversity and the protection of the environment are key considerations in any new infrastructure project and environmental impacts assessments and the obtaining statutory licences. For instance, in the recently completed Upper Garnock Valley Flood Protection Scheme, a dam was constructed but work also included the construction of a resting pool and a fish pass to allow the migratory passage of fish such as salmon and trout.

#### **Streetscene**

Leading projects in relaxed grass cutting, creating wildflower meadow areas and implementing a tree planting programme to enhance and improve biodiversity throughout North Ayrshire.

The Council's large-scale woodland tree planting programme aims to plant 108,000 trees, providing a range of social, economic, and environmental benefits, including the carbon sequestration required to meet our net zero ambition by 2030. So far over

20,000 trees have been planted, with a particular focus on a woodland area at Lochshore Park as part of the wider regeneration masterplan.

North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland Grant Fund has been developed to assist constituted groups to deliver tree planting projects at grass roots community level.

### **Growth, Investment and Employability**

Moving forward with plans to bring a significant site in Ardrossan back up to an environmental standard that will enable a new school and or housing. This will in turn feed into the wider LOIP and improve the standard of living and quality of life for all residents in the area. Along with tying into the idea of 20-minute communities and other strategic environmental initiatives set down by the government.

Key achievements for the employability service would be securing funding to support recruitment of environmental/horticulture trainees as well as supervisory staff across the key environmental employability projects.

### **Education**

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The Learning for Sustainability grants that schools accessed in 2021 were very successful in kickstarting/reengaging schools with biodiversity. A report on the impact of this programme is available upon request.

**The main biodiversity challenges the Council will face next three years.**

### **Sustainability, Transport & Corporate Property**

Delivering the nature network is the priority, however the challenge remains around resource, both financial, skills and capacity.

Council officers must have the appropriate training, skills, and knowledge to deliver, and the Council needs funding to support this, local communities, and project implementation.

In addition, wider engagement with communities, landowners and local businesses will be a challenge. The Council will seek to support increased capacity for our partners with limited resources.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

Roads

The main challenges are almost certainly going to be economic with serious tightening of budgets at a time of unusually high inflation. As the actual impacts of climate change will be, to a certain extent, unpredictable the Council will have to adapt and comply with whatever new legislation that is brought in to deal with issues in the future.

Streetscene

The main challenges anticipated are resource and financial pressures.



## **Going Forward – North Ayrshire Councils focus for the Biodiversity Duty Reporting period 2023-2027**

The primary focus for the Council will be the delivery of the North Ayrshire Nature Network (NANN). NANN will be delivered from the bottom up. It will address local needs and objectives. In doing so NANN will support national outcomes for nature and people. NANN will connect local people and communities to nearby important areas for nature. It will deliver local priorities and deliver connectivity at the local level. This connectivity will enhance existing initiatives such as active travel routes. NANN will build on connections at the local level. It will create opportunities to deliver strategic nature connectivity. This connectivity will help connect nature across the North Ayrshire and beyond.

The North Ayrshire Nature Network will be locally designed and delivered. We will do this through place-based engagement identifying local challenges and needs. We will work to create a sense of ownership of NANN in our local communities. The delivery of NANN will be challenging. The council will work to deliver a Nature Network that works for North Ayrshire.