

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

---

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Net Zero, Environment and Transport
<b>DATE</b>	19 March 2025
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Review of Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSs)
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CR&E/25/056
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Gale Beattie
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	David Dunne
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Sue Cumming
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1 and 8

---

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the findings of the Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSs) Review and seek approval for the next steps.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Approve the content and the recommendations detailed in the draft report: Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSs) Review Report 2025 (Appendix 1); and instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to update LNCSs booklet and website information.
- 2.2 Note the strategic importance that sites designated for nature, including LNCSs, have in underpinning a range of Council duties, strategies and plans, including delivery of the Council’s Biodiversity Duty, the Council Climate Change Plan, the citywide Net Zero Aberdeen and Aberdeen Adapts and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (Stretch Outcome 15). Also, that these sites support the future design of a Nature Network, identification of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and the 30x30 nature target.
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning to undertake the suggested next steps: i) remove the LNCS designation from Old Manse Wood, ii) implement the required boundary changes, iii) monitor those sites at risk, iv) follow up on confirming land ownerships, where appropriate; and v) continue the wider review process into stage 2, including the potential for any additional sites.
- 2.4 Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to report back to this Committee with recommendations arising from stage 2 of the LNCSs Review process, in particular the addition of any new LNCSs, by the third quarter of 2026.

- 2.5 Instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning to ensure the outcomes of the next steps and progress on any new LNCSs are reported in the annual Climate & Nature Report.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCSs) have been assigned a non-statutory local designation based on their local biodiversity or geology interest. They help to protect and contribute to the quality of the local environment and provide opportunities for people to learn about and take pride in their local environment; whilst also providing opportunities for health, well-being and recreation. They also help to enhance the sense of place, making Aberdeen a place where people want to live and visit. These sites actively contribute to the natural capital of Aberdeen, the local economy and health and wellbeing of people. There are 45 LNCSs in the City of which three are geology sites (Balnagask to Cove, Cults quarry and Three Hills). The LNCSs cover 2754.29 hectares which makes up approximately 6.8% of Aberdeen and of the LOIP Stretch Outcome 15 target (26% of Aberdeen protected and / or managed for nature by 2026).
- 3.2 Aberdeen City Council (ACC) has a duty to safeguard LNCSs through the Local Development Plan process and recognises that statutory and non-statutory sites can make an important contribution to conserving and enhancing biodiversity and geology and the sense of place.
- 3.3 The awareness of the intertwined crises of nature and climate has steadily grown as well as the recognition of the impact that the LNCS system has in contributing towards the health and resilience of ecosystems, and the Scottish Government's ambitions for a nature positive future by 2030 set out in the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045](#). In 2023, the Council declared a Climate and Nature Emergency. Reviewing our natural capital in Aberdeen is important to the Council's understanding on how we address the twin interlinked crises, and how we adapt to a changing climate locally. LNCSs are strategically important sites designated for nature and by having a LNCS system we also underpin the Council's Biodiversity Duty, delivery of the Council Climate Change Plan, Net Zero Aberdeen, Aberdeen Adapts and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (Stretch Outcome 15).
- 3.4 LNCSs, along with other areas protected and/or managed for nature, can form the basis of a local Nature Network. Using these sites as stepping stones and corridors, they play a pivotal role in creating and connecting green spaces, allowing wildlife to adapt to our changing climate, and form places for outdoor access and active travel. The Scottish Government propose that by 2030 every local authority will have a [Nature Network](#) joined to [30 by 30 sites](#) (a commitment to protect at least 30% of land and sea for nature for 2030).
- 3.5 In 2022 the Council commissioned North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) to carry out a desk study review of the LNCSs within Aberdeen to analyse habitat changes between two mapping data sets (2004-2006 and 2018-2021). The aim of this work was to identify habitat loss

through development or land use change; and whether there was an overall loss or gain of broad and priority habitat. Full results of the review can be seen in Appendix 1 of the draft LNCSs Review Report.

- 3.6 Broadly, LNCSs habitat has not changed significantly during the study period but some sites have shown habitat lost or natural habitat development and maturing. There are sites impacted by development, such as West Hatton by the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and Balnagask to Cove by the Aberdeen South Harbour, and potential future development associated with the Energy Transition Zone.
- 3.7 In August 2022 the Council set up a scientific panel made of: local recorders, county recorders, Aberdeen City Countryside Rangers, the NESBReC, a geologist, a retired zoology lecturer and a researcher from Scotland's Wildlife Trust, to assist with the next stage of the review; to review the condition of the sites. The scientific panel helped identify those sites which still qualified as LNCSs, sites which are at risk and require closer monitoring, and any sites that are no longer suitable for the LNCS designation. The panel also discussed potential new LNCSs and work around this is ongoing and will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee. The discussions that have been held in collaboration with the panel form the next steps section for each site.

Table 1 summarises the next steps with full details regarding individual sites can be found in Appendix 1 pages 8 – 52. The aim is to complete next steps in 2025 and add new LNCS's in 2026.

Action	Number of LNCS Sites
De-designate	1 - Old Manse Wood
Sites at Risk (and require monitoring)	12 - Baads Moss, Balnagask to Cove, Corby Loch, Culter Compensation Dam, Den of Leggart, Hazelhead Park, Leuchar Moss, Loriston Loch, Scotstown Moor, Southlasts Mire, Stoneyhill Wood, West Hatton
Boundary Changes	5 - Balnagask to Cove, Corby Loch, Deeside Old Railway Line, Three Hills and West Hatton

- 3.8 Officers will endeavour to ensure that LNCSs are reviewed at least once every 10 years to ensure they are still suitable for continued LNCS designation. Where feasible new sites will be considered and recommended for designation and be included as part of preparation of Local Development Plan.

#### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 NESBReC were commissioned by the Council through an existing Service Level Agreement to carry out the desk study to compare data sets and produce a report on findings.
- 4.2 The remaining LNCSs Review was carried out internally with no direct costs incurred. However, the next steps, includes identifying land ownership for a

small number of sites will incur limited costs which will be met from within the existing Strategic Place Planning budgets.

- 4.3 External funding opportunities, including the Nature Restoration Fund (Edinburgh Process Fund), will continue to be explored to provide support for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity activity, aligning with one the recommendations from the internal audit on Biodiversity and Natural Environment to maximise external funding opportunities.

## 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is no legal obligation to have a LNCS system, however, through National Planning Framework 4, states that Development Plans should protect, conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in line with the mitigation hierarchy and that Local Development Plans should also promote nature recovery and nature restoration across the development plan area. In addition, if Aberdeen City Council does not actively protect or monitor these sites it would be at risk of failing to fulfil its statutory Biodiversity Duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (“the 2004 act”). The 2004 Act states that it is the duty of every public body and office – holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Under current proposals, there will be a small loss of at least 3.46 hectares of LNCS land cover in de-designating Old Manse Wood and in carrying out minor boundary corrections. In the longer term there may be the opportunity to designate new LNCSs, compensating for the loss of habitat and expand the City’s Nature Network.

## 7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained with the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council’s Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No Significant Risks		L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Compliance</b>	Not carrying out the recommendations in this report risks not fulfilling the	Approval of the recommendations contained in this report	L	<b>Yes</b>

	Council's statutory Biodiversity Duty.			
<b>Operational</b>	No significant risks identified		L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Financial</b>	No significant risks identified		L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Reputational</b>	Risk of ACC not being seen to be protecting and enhancing nature.	Approval of the recommendations contained in this report	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risks identified		L	<b>Yes</b>

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b>Council Delivery Plan 2024</b>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <a href="#"><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></a>	<p><i>The examples within this report support the delivery of the following aspect of the policy statement:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise the importance of Aberdeen's Green Belt, green spaces and open spaces so they can be enjoyed for purposes of leisure, sport and environmental wellbeing, and investigate the creation of new pocket parks.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</b>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Protection of nature in the city will help create a more attractive place where people will want to live and work. It also helps to raise land value.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Protecting biodiversity and geology supports the stretch outcomes for Prosperous People. It is well documented that connecting with and spending time outdoors and in nature is good for health and wellbeing.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 15 – Addressing the nature crisis by protecting/managing 26% of Aberdeen's area for nature by 2026. LNCS make a contribution (6.81%) to the 26% target.
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	The LNCSs Review Report supports both national and regional priorities such as the emerging national strategy for Nature Networks, ACC's Nature Conservation Plan, Net Zero Aberdeen, Aberdeen Adapts, the Regional Economic Strategy, and the adopted principles of our North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP), which is a regional strategic partnership with Aberdeenshire

	and Moray Councils and public and private sector partners.
--	------------------------------------------------------------

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required.
<b>Other</b>	N/A

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 No additional papers used.

## 11. APPENDICES

- 1 Aberdeen City Council Local Nature Conservation Sites: A Comparison Between 2004-06 and 2018-21 IHS Survey Data (NESBReC Report, July 2022).
- 2 Draft Local Nature Conservation Sites Review Report 2025
- 3 [Site Biological Records](#)

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

<b>Name</b>	Sue Cumming
<b>Title</b>	Senior Environmental planner
<b>Email Address</b>	<a href="mailto:sucumming@aberdeencity.gov.uk">sucumming@aberdeencity.gov.uk</a>
<b>Tel</b>	01224 069399