

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE:	Corporate Policy and Performance
DATE:	21 January 2010
DIRECTOR:	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT:	Final Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy (2010-2015)
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/10/004

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the adoption of the Final Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy (2010-2015), which has been subject to formal public consultation. The strategy has been submitted to Housing & Environment Committee on 11 January 2010 for approval and sought that it be referred to Corporate Policy and Performance Committee for adoption.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- a) Approves the Final Nature Conservation Strategy (2010-2015) for adoption.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no additional revenue costs associated with the adoption of the strategy.

It should be noted that this strategy may have capital and revenue implications as a result of future projects required to implement the strategy. However, the Council's ability to implement the final strategy will be governed and influenced by resource constraints and other competing priorities.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

This strategy has direct links with the administration's Vibrant and Dynamic & Forward Looking requirement to 'adopt and implement policies which safeguard Aberdeen's green belt and green wedges'.

This strategy will also assist the Council in delivering a number of Single Outcome Agreement National Outcomes including: -

- 1 – 'We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe';

- 10 - 'We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need'; and
12 - 'We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and enhance it for future generations'.

This strategy has been designed to have a positive impact on Aberdeen citizen's quality of life, therefore, an 'Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment' has been conducted. The summary of the assessment is as follows: -

The Nature Conservation Strategy includes everyone and will have significant positive impacts on all groups. It promotes sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 through public participation, community engagement, and knowledge sharing in a nature conservation context. It aims to promote quality of life for all citizens that live, work and visit Aberdeen City through improving biodiversity.

For example, the young, old and people with disabilities will benefit from wildlife gardens or will be encouraged to get involved with their creation in facilities such as schools, sheltered housing or hospitals.

There is, however, potential for some negative impacts to the group 'Race'. Gypsies or Travellers that set up unauthorised camps on designated sites important for nature conservation may be requested to move to another site. The creation of official halting sites by the Council will address this potential issue. Changes to the nature conservation strategy are, therefore, not required.

A monitor and review process has been included in the strategy, and information gathered as part of this process will be used to amend actions required to implement the strategy and will inform future nature conservation strategies.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There may be potential operational and development implications that will arise from this strategy. For example, changes may be required to some operational activities that could have a negative impact on biodiversity, or developers may be required to include more consideration for nature conservation through design.

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 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.' The lack of an updated Nature Conservation Strategy places the Council at risk of not meeting this and other associated legal obligations.

The strategy outcomes must comply with the Health and Safety processes within the Council.

6. REPORT

6.1 Background

Aberdeen City's natural heritage is a key element to the City's character and is vital to its citizen's enjoyment and quality of life. It helps create the City's identity and makes it a pleasant and attractive place to live, work and visit. It is important to protect, preserve, enhance and promote the City's natural heritage in order to ensure a wildlife-rich environment for current and future generations.

With the assistance of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and other groups, Aberdeen City Council developed and adopted a Nature Conservation Strategy in 1994 in a bid to preserve and enhance the quality of the environment, to protect plants and animals and their habitats and to provide opportunities, where possible, for greater public access to sites.

While the current Nature Conservation Strategy has been an important tool in a Land Use Planning context, changes in legislation, the development of new policies and strategies, increased development within the City as well as a shift in the dynamics of the natural environment has brought about the need to update the current strategy.

The updated Nature Conservation Strategy will help the Council, through delivering all its functions, comply with the requirements of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992 which commits the UK to help protect and restore the functioning of natural systems and to halt the loss of biodiversity in the European Union. The Council will also be more able to comply with the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 which imposes a duty on every public body to further the conservation of our natural environment. This Strategy will also assist the Council deliver the requirements of the North East Local Biodiversity Action Plans which have been developed to meet the commitment of the CBD by taking action to conserve locally important species and habitats.

Along with Land Use Planning, this strategy has been designed to support all Council functions and will help to inform other future Council plans, policies and strategies such as the forthcoming Open Space Strategy and new Local Development Plan.

A plan will be required to implement the strategy once it has been adopted. A Monitoring Group will also be required to monitor progress of the implementation of the strategy.

6.2 Process to Date

In 2007, an expert working group made up of relevant Council officers and representatives from external organisations (including Scottish Natural Heritage, Aberdeen Greenspace, East Grampian Coastal Partnership and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) was established to review the Nature Conservation Strategy for Aberdeen (1994), and assist in the development of an updated

Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy. A workshop involving the wider Council also took place to assist in the development of the strategy. The draft updated strategy was finalised with the endorsement of the expert working group and was subject to a formal public consultation exercise which ran for 8 weeks between 7th September and 2nd November 2009.

During this period, articles informing the public of the consultation including where to obtain access to the strategy were released in a number of local newspapers (Press & Journal, Evening Express and the Aberdeen Citizen), plus, the Council's website and on the Zone. A Council officer conducted presentations at the Environmental Forum and Land Use Forum, plus, appeared on the 'Around with a Ranger' show at SHMU community radio based in Woodside. All Community Councils were contacted and provided with details of the consultation along with hard copies of the draft strategy plus comment forms. Hard copies were made available at the Council's main offices, The Point, and all libraries within the City. A page on the Council's website was also created providing further details of the consultation along with access to the strategy and an online response form.

The results of the public consultation have been taken into account within the attached final strategy.

6.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

As part of developing the strategy, a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been undertaken in line with The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. This has been conducted in consultation with the Consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and Historic Scotland). The SEA has assisted in identifying any significant effects of the strategy, both positive and negative, on the environment. The SEA Environmental Report was also subject to full public consultation at the same time as the strategy. The results of the public consultation have been taken into account within the attached final strategy.

6.4 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

Due to the presence of a number of species of European importance such as the Atlantic salmon, European otter and Freshwater pearl muscle, the River Dee is designated as a freshwater Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is a statutory designation as per the Habitats Directive (79/409/EEC). In order to comply with this Directive, an Appropriate Assessment (AA) has been considered. A full AA was not required as the strategy objectives do not generate any significant negative effect on the River Dee SAC.

6.5 Consultation Results Summary - Strategy

A total of 16 responses were received for the strategy and are broken down into the following groups: -

- Members of the public – 3
- Community Councils – 1
- External Organisations – 4
- Council Officers – 8

All groups were in support of the strategy and there were no major changes required as a result of the consultation process. Most respondents' comments were linked to grammatical issues with only a couple of respondents concerned that the strategy was not specific enough particularly with how it is to be implemented. All comments have been addressed and reflected in the final strategy where appropriate.

6.6 Consultation Results Summary – Environmental Report

As part of the SEA process, the consultation authorities were pleased with the content of the Environmental Report and were also in support of the strategy. No significant changes were required for the Environmental Report as a result of the consultation process.

7. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

These are listed in the Nature Conservation Strategy.



**The Aberdeen City Council
Nature Conservation Strategy
2010-2015**



Our Vision

‘The City of Aberdeen is recognised for taking a lead in nature conservation.’

Our Aim

To conserve Aberdeen City’s natural heritage for the benefit of our biodiversity, citizens and visitors, for current and future generations.

Our Objectives



1. Protect, preserve and enhance Aberdeen’s natural heritage (page 25).

Action is required to stop the decline in biodiversity through the protection and restoration of habitats and species important to the City of Aberdeen on Council owned land.



2. Sustainably manage Aberdeen’s natural heritage (page 29).

The Council needs to plan and manage the use of its own land in a way that assists in reversing the decline in biodiversity. The Council should also take up opportunities to encourage private land owners to do the same.



3. Involve communities in caring for Aberdeen’s natural heritage (page 34).

To make people aware of the importance and benefits of nature conservation, the Council needs to engage with everyone and get them involved at a local level.



4. Promote a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Aberdeen’s natural heritage (page 39).

Being informed will improve knowledge and enhance people’s experience of nature while at the same time help promote awareness and respect for the City’s natural heritage.

All photographs supplied by: -
Environmental Sustainability and Aberdeen Countryside Ranger
Service of Aberdeen City Council; and
East Grampian Coastal Partnership.

Agenda for Action

1. Maintain data on Aberdeen's natural heritage
2. Maintain the integrity of designated sites including identifying 'at risk' sites and restoring their value
3. Protect and enhance biodiversity in areas which are not designated
4. Increase the availability and ecological value of wildlife corridors
5. Seek opportunities to maintain, restore or enhance biodiversity associated with physical development
6. Consider and include nature conservation in all Council projects
7. Establish ways to make Council operational activities more beneficial to biodiversity
8. Seek ways of encouraging private land owners and businesses to adopt nature conservation practices
9. Manage invasive and non-native species which cause negative impacts on biodiversity
10. Influence site specific management plans fit for purpose
11. Establish ways of encouraging the public to improve biodiversity in their own gardens
12. Seek ways of encouraging nature conservation in community gardens and allotments
13. Work with health and education facilities to promote wildlife gardens
14. Encourage communities in partnership working to deliver nature conservation projects
15. Encourage citizens and communities to document and share knowledge
16. Improve Council staff knowledge and understanding of the importance of nature conservation in delivering their function
17. Increase public awareness of the benefits of nature conservation
18. Seek opportunities to improve access to natural heritage sites
19. Increase tourism through promoting the City's natural heritage
20. Promote and encourage responsible access to the City's natural heritage

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Foreword

This year, 2010, is officially the International Year of Biodiversity; a time when the importance of life on earth and the value of biodiversity for our lives are being celebrated. It is, therefore, fitting that Aberdeen City Council has just adopted its new Nature Conservation Strategy for the City of Aberdeen.

Biodiversity is the variety of life from the smallest animal to the largest plant. This variety of life interacts with other areas within our natural environment and helps to create all the different landforms and landscapes that we also see around us.

Historical records for the City have shown a strong connection with our natural environment. For thousands of years, Aberdeen's natural resources have been important to our lives for food, water, fuel, shelter and many other uses which have helped to maintain our quality of life.

These natural resources are still crucial to our lives today and form part of our heritage, our natural heritage, and are important for recreation, tourism and our economy.

However, it is now recognised that we are having a real impact on our natural heritage. We have far fewer valuable habitats and species than we did before – for example, it is strange to think that bird species such as the black grouse and the capercaillie used to be found roaming in Aberdeen's once abundant forests and woodlands!

As a City, we need to play our part in stopping the decline in biodiversity. Indeed, the issue of biodiversity loss is now seen as important as tackling climate change. Halting the decline in biodiversity through nature conservation will also assist efforts to tackle greenhouse gas emissions which are contributing to climate change.

Over the next five years, the Aberdeen City Council's Nature Conservation Strategy will focus on more action on the ground where everyone can get involved be that individually or as part of their community.

This is an opportunity, not only for the Council to fulfil its legal duty to conserve nature, but also for the citizens of Aberdeen City to help conserve our important natural heritage. It is vital that we treat our natural heritage in such a way that can also be utilised, appreciated and enjoyed by our future generations.

1 SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

Aberdeen City's natural environment consists of a variety of wildlife species and habitats, which is appreciated and enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

The different habitats, including river systems, coastal and marine, marsh, heath, woodlands, and many others are important for the survival of all our plant and animal species such as the red squirrel, European otter, Atlantic salmon, red kite and bottlenose dolphin. These different habitats and species create a diverse and interesting environment within and around the City.

This diverse environment provides the landscape in which we live, plus the natural resources which are important for our survival. It has been the foundation for the growth of Aberdeen's economy.

Utilising the natural resources from the forests, Rivers Dee and Don and the North Sea, Aberdeen has developed over the centuries from one of the major royal burghs of medieval Scotland to a large modern city prospering from oil and gas. Archaeological evidence indicates that people were living here, using the natural resources of land, sea and waterways, at least 8000 years ago.

However, human activities have had and are continuing to have a negative impact on our natural environment. Habitats are being fragmented or disappearing and associated species are declining in numbers, becoming isolated or threatening to disappear from our environment altogether. This can only have a negative impact on the resources that we depend on and our quality of life.

There is, therefore, a need to protect and conserve our natural environment for the benefit of biodiversity and for the citizens of Aberdeen now and into the future.

“...human activities have had and are continuing to have a negative impact on our natural environment.”



The Updated Strategy

Since the development of Aberdeen City Council's first Nature Conservation Strategy in 1994, much has changed including increased recognition of the need to protect our environment; improved nature conservation legislation; new policies and strategies at a local level; increased development within the City; and a shift in the dynamics of the natural environment.

After conducting a review of the 1994 Strategy, the decision was made that an updated Nature Conservation Strategy is required to reflect current needs. This Strategy has been developed for Aberdeen City Council to do just that.

“...an updated Nature Conservation Strategy is required to reflect current needs.”

Aberdeen City Council (the Council) has developed this Strategy in partnership with appropriate groups and interests at both a statutory and voluntary level including Scottish Natural Heritage, North East Local Biodiversity Partnership, Aberdeen Greenspace Trust Limited, East Grampian Coastal Partnership and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

An '**Agenda for Action**' has been designed to assist in meeting the overall vision, aim and objectives. Once the Strategy has been adopted, the development of an Implementation Plan will be required to implement the objectives and associated 'Agenda for Action' at ground level.

This will be a five year strategy covering the period 2010-2015 and will be monitored on a yearly basis.

This Strategy will replace the current *Nature Conservation Strategy for Aberdeen (1994)*.

This Strategy has been developed in line with the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

Who is the Strategy for?

The focus of this Strategy is on nature conservation for the sake of biodiversity and our natural heritage plus the natural resources that we depend on.

The Strategy also focuses on the citizens of Aberdeen so that they can have the opportunity to actively take part in nature conservation and enjoy nature and the environment in a sustainable way.

This Strategy considers all groups including individuals, community groups, voluntary groups, partnerships, developers, businesses and private landowners.

To do this, **the Strategy has been developed for the use of Aberdeen City Council**, particularly with regards to: -

1. The objectives of the Council's relevant policies, plans and strategies.
2. Any Elected member or officer who will be making decisions, or officer conducting operations or delivering projects that may have an impact on our local natural environment.
3. The services provided for the citizens of Aberdeen in a nature conservation context.

This Strategy makes it clear that it is important that everyone in Aberdeen has the opportunity to help conserve our natural heritage.

“...This Strategy makes it clear that it is important that everyone in Aberdeen has the opportunity to conserve our natural heritage.”



Tree planting in Aberdeen

What is Nature Conservation?

Nature is all around us and provides us with life of all kinds. This variety of life is known as 'biodiversity' which is the diversity among and within plant and animal species in our natural environment.

Biodiversity can be found anywhere on land and at sea, including our very own gardens.

Biodiversity and the way it interacts with the natural environment creates many different ecosystems¹ and landscapes and forms part of our heritage; our natural heritage.

Our natural heritage also includes geodiversity which is the diversity of minerals, rocks, soils, fossils and landforms. It is also the geological processes that make up the landform and the underlying structure of the Earth.

Our natural heritage refers to both biodiversity and geodiversity interests and the combination of these.

Nature conservation is, therefore, the conservation of our natural heritage.

“Biodiversity is simply the variety of life. It represents a new appreciation of nature, with the emphasis on the incredible diversity of varieties, species, habitats and ecosystems that exist all around us, and on their value to humans.”

Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands, 2004.



Red squirrels can be seen in gardens or in local woodlands in Aberdeen

¹ Systems formed by the interaction of communities of organisms with their environment.

Why Have a Nature Conservation Strategy?

Conserve our Natural Heritage

The need for the Strategy is firstly to conserve our natural heritage for the benefit of biodiversity. This Strategy considers individual species, habitats, and whole areas which include interesting geodiversity and landscapes, plus catchment areas such as those associated with river systems. It considers all areas of differing ecological value, species and habitats regardless of the level of protection afforded.

Maintain Quality of Life

We also need the Strategy to help conserve our natural heritage for the benefit of our own quality of life. Biodiversity and geodiversity are concerned with more than habitats, species, landforms and landscapes, but also about the natural resources on which we depend.

“...We also need the Strategy to help conserve our natural heritage for the benefit of our own quality of life.”

The benefits we receive from the natural resources we depend on can be divided into four areas: -

1. Production benefits;
2. Ecological/Ecosystem benefits;
3. Social benefits; and
4. Cultural benefits.

Examples of these different natural resource benefits are listed in Table 1.

Maintain Quality of Life – Continued**Table 1: Natural Resource Benefits**

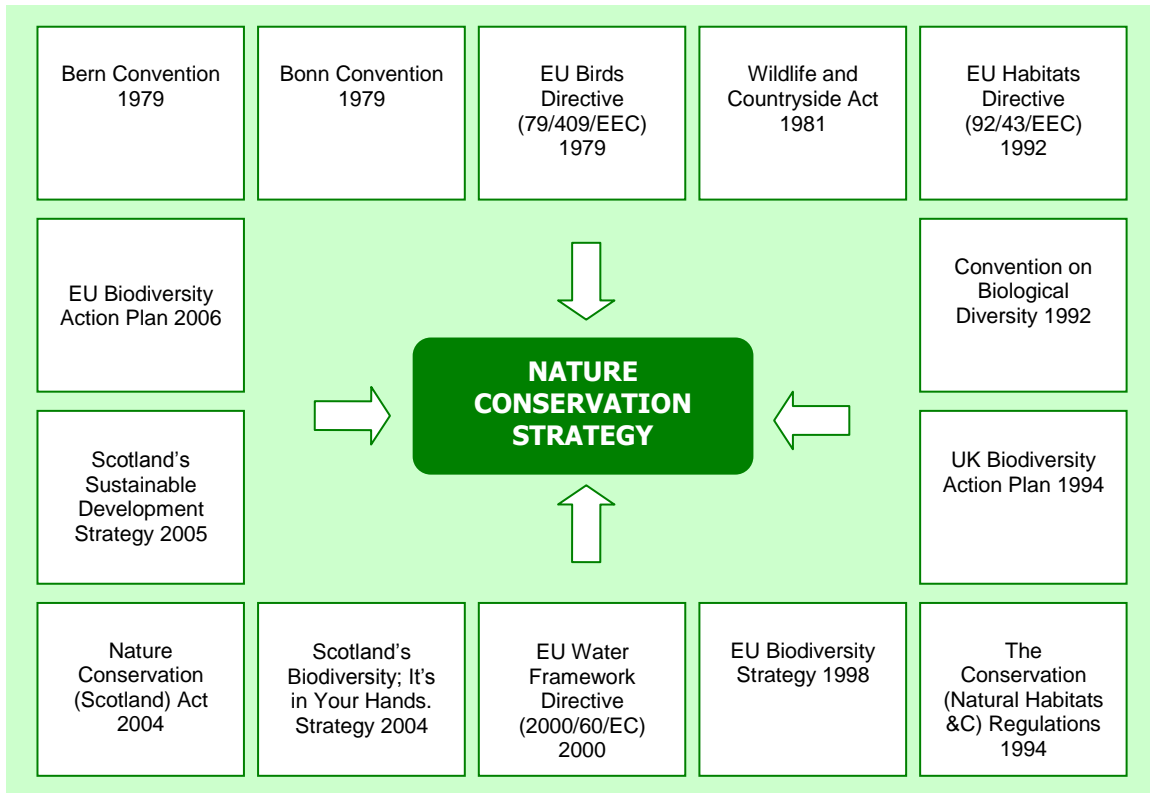
1. Production Benefits	2. Ecological/Ecosystem Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Pharmaceuticals • Genetics • Durable material (timber, natural fibre) • Energy (hydro, biofuels) • Industrial products (oils, rubber, plastics) • Ecotourism • Biological control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil formation & protection • Clean air/water • Nutrient storage • Seed dispersal & pollination • Weather/climate control • Pest control • Salinity control
3. Social Benefits	4. Cultural Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open space • Lifestyle enhancement • Recreation • Educational value • Scientific value • Aesthetic beauty - landscapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition • Heritage • Local character • History

Table 1 demonstrates that people depend on the environment for many things, but above all we need healthy food and water, medicines, shelter and a clean environment in which to live.

Legal Obligations

This Strategy is also the Council’s response to the various legislation and obligations at European, UK and at Scottish level which have been developed to help conserve our natural heritage. Table 2 notes some of the various legislation and obligations relevant to the Council.

Table 2: Legislation & Obligations



At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed by 150 government leaders including the UK Government. The aim is to achieve: -

“...a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.”

Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992.

Legal Obligations - continued

Subsequently, UK and EU Biodiversity Action Plans, legal obligations and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy have been developed to assist EU member states meet the requirements of the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992.

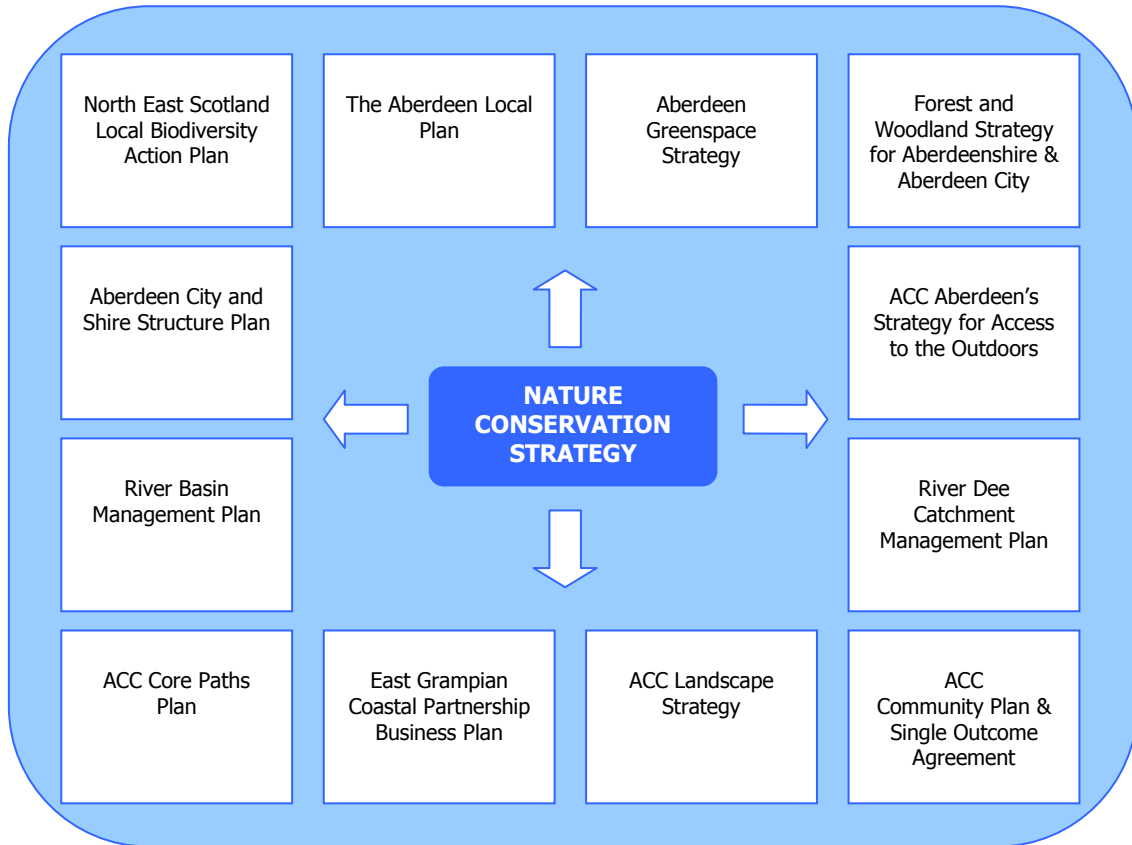
The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 also places a legal duty on local authorities to further the conservation of biodiversity, enhance natural features and protect wildlife. To comply with this duty, the Council must consider nature conservation in everything that it does.

Appendix A provides a brief summary of each legislation and obligation noted in Table 2.

Local Priorities

There are a number of policies, plans and strategies (Table 3) which contain various actions to help conserve habitats and species that are important at European, national and local levels. This Strategy is in response to these local priorities.

Table 3: Local Policies, Plans & Strategies



Of particular importance is the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan (NELBAP) which is a locally driven process developed to meet the requirements of the UK and EU Biodiversity Action Plans and ultimately the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992.

The Council will continue to support the NELBAP and contribute to the development and implementation of the various associated plans in a bid to halt the decline in our biodiversity.

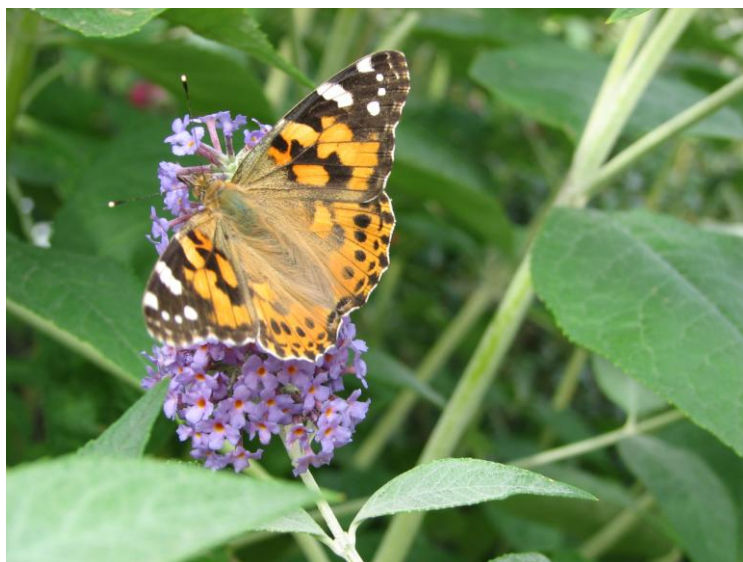
Local Records Centre

In response to the development of the NELBAP, a local records centre called the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) was setup in the year 2000. NESBReC collects, stores, manages and disseminates biological data for all types of organisations and groups including local authorities. The data they collect includes all forms of biodiversity and not just priority habitats and species. This type of initiative helps local authorities meet their nature conservation priorities and obligations.

“...This type of initiative helps local authorities meet their nature conservation priorities and obligations.”

The Council will continue to support NESBReC so that the information that it provides is up to date and reliable. In return, NESBReC will continue to provide information that will assist the Council make decisions in a nature conservation and land use context, and for contributing to and implementing biodiversity action plans.

This facility is accessible to the public making it available for anyone to obtain information and to contribute to the database. Further details can be found at <http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/>.



A Painted lady butterfly feeding on Buddleia

Sustainable Development

To ensure that our natural heritage is preserved for current and future generations, and that we are not living beyond our means, decisions that may have an impact on our natural environment have to be done with sustainable development in mind.

Sustainable development is the consideration of all environmental, social and economic aspects; they are all inextricably linked. Sustainable development is...

"...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Our Common Future, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987.

With sustainable development as the core aim, Agenda 21 is a plan of action implemented globally and locally and considers human impacts on the environment. Agenda 21 considers many issues including how decisions and actions involving the natural environment can affect us. Agenda 21 promotes, among others, public participation in any decision making process, and informing the public through appropriate methods of communication.

The Council has developed its own Local Agenda 21 Strategy, and to help drive this forward, the Aalborg Commitments² were signed by the Council in 2004 and cover many sustainable development issues including biodiversity.

Both Agenda 21 and the Aalborg Commitments form part of the Council's Community Plan which states '*Aberdeen's natural and built environment is protected and the City plays its part in protecting our planet*'.

Action on the ground for this Strategy will, therefore, involve engagement with communities through the Council's Community Planning process.

Links will be made via community councils and Challenge Fora such as the Land Use Forum and Environmental Forum, plus, Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future whose aim is to have a strong economy and excellent quality of life.

Sustainable development (and Agenda 21) is, therefore, important for our environment, the citizens of Aberdeen and our economy, and is a cross cutting theme of this Strategy.

² Further information on the Aalborg Commitments can be found at the Council's website on www.aberdeencity.gov.uk under sustainable development.

Climate Change

There are many aspects to consider for truly sustainable development and climate change is one of them. Although it is not completely clear what the overall impacts (both positive and negative) will be on our natural heritage, a shift in species populations, ranges, migration patterns and reproductive behaviour are already evident both on land and at sea as a result of climate change.

What is known is that climate change and biodiversity are interlinked. Biodiversity loss and climate change go hand in hand and both threaten the availability of our natural resources in the future.

“...a shift in species populations, ranges, migration patterns and reproductive behaviour are already evident both on land and at sea as a result of climate change.”

Other than aiming to improve areas of low ecological value and conserve areas of high ecological value using current best practice, it is difficult to know how to manage these sites for a changing future.

A programme of scientific research is ongoing at UK and global levels to establish tools that will assist in predicting the changing behaviour of species as a result of climate change.

If this Strategy is to be for the benefit of nature conservation and sustainable development, there will be a need to monitor progress in the development of guidance which will help the Council deal with the effects of climate change and future nature conservation.

The Council will continue to conserve nature following current best practice and will be prepared to adapt its procedures based on the influences of climate change and associated appropriate guidance from relevant experts.



Common blue butterfly found at the Donmouth Local Nature Reserve

Aberdeen's Natural Heritage

Aberdeen's natural heritage consists of a variety of interest and can generally be divided into habitats and species. Aberdeen's natural heritage also has other interests including geology, landforms and landscapes.

Many habitats, species and other natural heritage interests can be important at European, UK, Scottish and local levels and have been afforded some level of protection through the various legislation, obligations and action plans mentioned.

However, given that many species move around and don't stay within boundaries, other habitats, species and natural heritage interests that do not have the same level of protection can be just as important for nature conservation.

This Strategy, therefore, considers all habitats, species and other natural heritage interests regardless of whether they are found within or outside protected areas.

"...This Strategy... considers all habitats, species and other natural heritage interests regardless of whether they are found within or outside protected areas."



Woodlands provide a diversity of benefits including clean air, preventing flooding, acting as a carbon store, reducing noise, plus, important habitat for wildlife and as a landscape and recreational resource

Habitats

Habitats are a mix of biological and geological features that provide suitable growing conditions for plants, plus shelter, food and breeding sites for animals.

The setting for the variety of habitats found in Aberdeen can be both semi-natural and manmade. Box 1 provides examples of semi-natural habitats found in Aberdeen.

Box 1: Semi-natural Habitats

- Woodland
- Heathland
- Wetlands
- Grassland
- Water bodies
- River systems
- Coastal dune systems
- Marine

Development, agriculture, afforestation and inappropriate management have eroded many of the semi-natural habitats and there are only a few areas of semi-natural vegetation remaining within the built-up-areas of the City.



Heathland with heather overlooking Kingswells

Habitats - Continued

Box 2 provides examples of manmade habitats found in Aberdeen.

Box 2: Manmade Habitats

- Parks
- Gardens
- Railway embankments
- Roadside verges
- Disused quarries
- Landfill sites
- Buildings
- Bridges

Although manmade habitats tend to support a restricted range of native species, they are often supplemented by a variety of garden escapes making them diverse and interesting areas.



Wildflowers growing along a roadside in Aberdeen

Many of the habitats found in Aberdeen are impossible to re-create, therefore, it is important that every effort is made to conserve these remaining areas.

Species

The City of Aberdeen has a wide range of individual species and can be grouped as follows: -

- Mammals
- Birds
- Fish
- Amphibians & reptiles
- Butterflies & moths
- Other invertebrates
- Vascular plants
- Other plants



Otters can be found at both the rivers Dee and Don or in nearby tributaries



The Sea pea, which is nationally scarce, is found only in a small area of the Aberdeen coast



Common or Harbour seals can be found basking at Donmouth

Species - Continued

Table 4 provides a small sample of protected, priority or important species found in Aberdeen.

Table 4: Protected, Priority or Important Species

SPECIES	IO	UKBAP	NR/S	ISP	NELBAP
Bottlenose dolphin	✓	✓			
Red squirrel		✓		✓	✓
Peregrine falcon	✓				
Tree sparrow		✓			
Atlantic salmon	✓			✓	
Cousin German moth		✓	✓		
Great Yellow Bumble Bee		✓			✓
Sea pea			✓		✓
Wych elm					✓
Fringed hoar-moss			✓		
IO: International Obligations UKBAP: UK Biodiversity Action Plan NR/S: Nationally Rare or Scarce at UK Level ISP: Important to the Scottish Public NELBAP: North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Plan					

Species which are not protected, important nationally and locally, or classed as a priority are still important for biodiversity and nature conservation. Efforts will be taken to conserve all species regardless of their level of protection.

Other Natural Heritage Interests

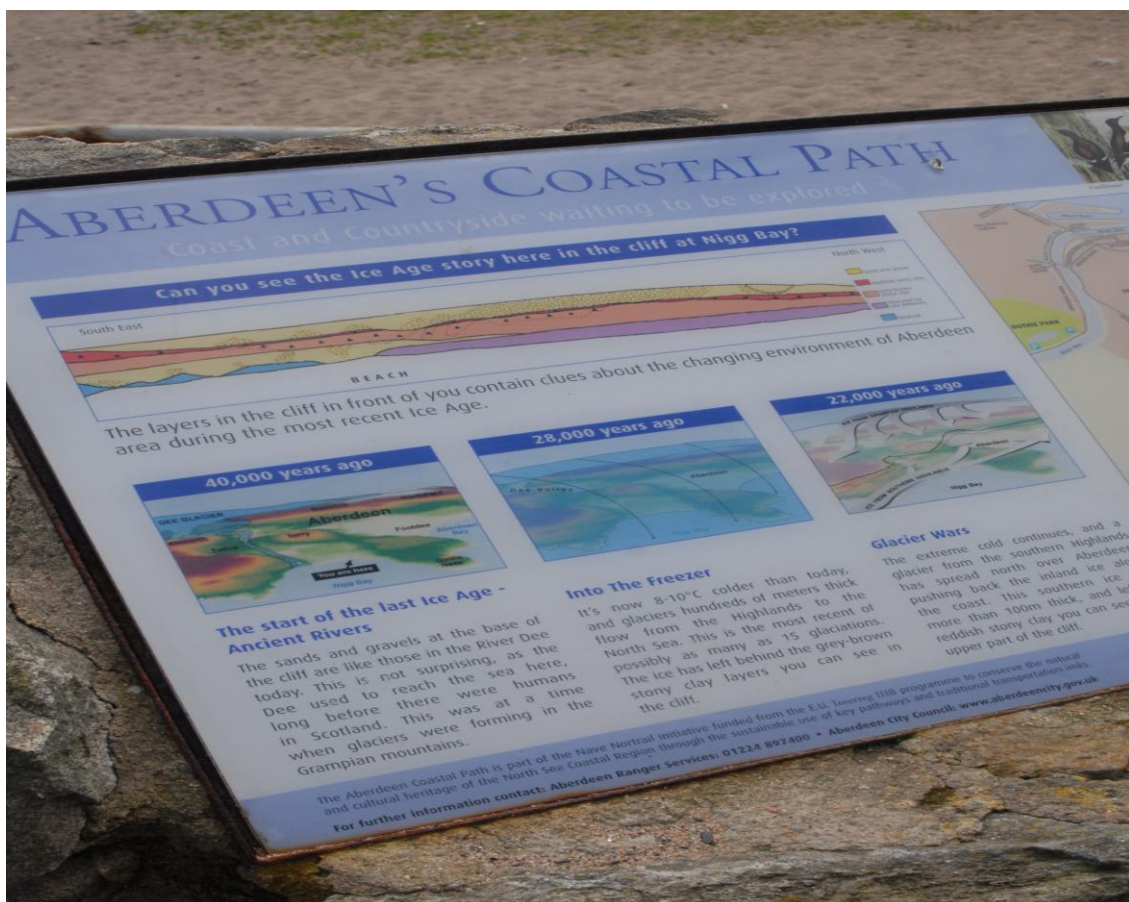
The geological interest in Aberdeen provides a platform for a variety of habitats. For example, the coastal strip between Balnagask to Cove includes coastal grassland, heathland, rocky cliffs and rock pools. Nigg Bay and Cove Bay have particular geological interest which has been recognised at UK level.

The geology and the different landforms found in Aberdeen help to create the interesting landscapes which contribute to the City's identity and quality of life.

Geology, landforms and landscapes are very much linked to nature conservation. Sites which are valued for their natural heritage often have associated visual or landscape importance.

“...Geology, landforms and landscapes are very much linked to nature conservation.”

This Strategy will link into Aberdeen City Council's Landscape Strategy which considers the enhancement of landscapes and wildlife habitats together.



Information on the geology at Nigg Bay

Site Protection Systems

To assist in protecting valuable habitats and species, various site protection systems (designations) have been introduced at international, national and local level. The City of Aberdeen has a number of site protection systems at various levels which help the Council fulfil its legal obligations to protect these areas.

Table 5 notes the various site protection systems currently present in the City of Aberdeen.

Table 5: Site Protection Systems in the City of Aberdeen

Designation	Status & Source	Number
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special Area of Conservation (SAC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory - Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) & the Conservation (Natural Habitats &C) Regulations 1994 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory - Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 & the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) <i>Includes both District Wildlife Sites (DWS) and Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Statutory - Local authority 	80
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Nature Reserve (LNR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Statutory - Local authority 	4

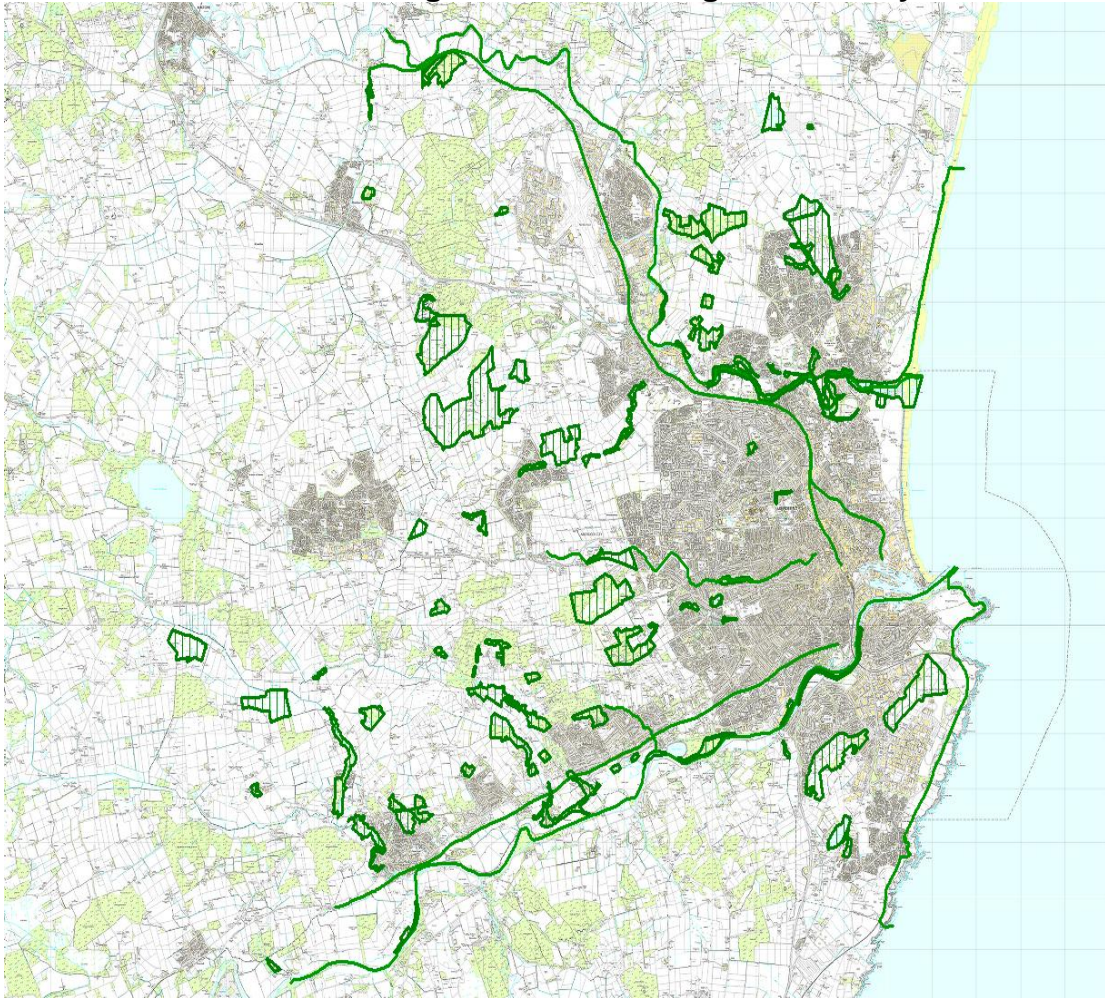
Statutory designated sites are those recognised at international level such as the European Commission's Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and those recognised at UK and Scottish level, for example a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Non-statutory designated sites are set at a local level to further protect locally important landscape settings and valuable wildlife habitats.

Scottish Planning Policy is currently being updated and there is an indication that in the future, the system for local non-statutory designated sites will be made simpler. They will all be known as Local Nature Conservation Sites and will have to meet the same set of criteria. These future changes will be considered during implementation process for this Strategy.

Appendix B provides a brief summary of each designation. Appendix C notes the locations of all designated sites currently found in Aberdeen.

Site Protection Systems - Continued

General distribution of Designated sites throughout the City of Aberdeen.



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KEY REFERENCES: -

Convention on Biological Diversity:

<http://www.cbd.int/>

EU Biodiversity Action Plan (EUBAP):

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/index_en.htm

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP):

<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/>

North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan (NELBAP):

<http://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/>

North East of Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC):

<http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/>

2 THE STRATEGY

Aims and Objectives

The Nature Conservation Strategy will focus on conserving areas at risk from adverse development and any activity which has a negative impact on our natural heritage. The focus is also to ensure that habitats, species, other natural heritage interests, and the people of Aberdeen, whether they are residents or visitors, benefit from protecting our environment. The focus will also be to look after our environment in a way that leaves an environment fit for our future generations.

The aim of this strategy is, therefore: -

To conserve Aberdeen City's natural heritage for the benefit of our biodiversity, citizens and visitors, for current and future generations.

To achieve this, the objectives of the Strategy are to: -

- 1. Protect, preserve and enhance Aberdeen's natural heritage;*
- 2. Sustainably manage Aberdeen's natural heritage;*
- 3. Involve communities in caring for Aberdeen's natural heritage; and*
- 4. Promote a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Aberdeen's natural heritage.*

To assist in meeting the aim and associated objectives, an '**Agenda for Action**' has been developed for each objective.

The Agenda for Action will help to set the scene for the development of an Implementation Plan which will be required to implement the adopted Strategy.

The objectives and Agenda for Action will not be considered in isolation. The Implementation Plan's own actions may link to more than one objective and any action or number of actions from the Agenda so long as there is no duplication.

OBJECTIVE 1: Protect, preserve and enhance Aberdeen's natural heritage

Action is required to stop the decline in biodiversity through the protection and restoration of habitats and species important to the City of Aberdeen on Council owned land.

State of our Natural Heritage

- i. To be able to conserve our natural heritage, there is a need to establish which habitats, species and other natural heritage interests are present within the City.
- ii. Some data on habitats and species is already available, particularly on locally important or designated sites but it may be inadequate or out of date.
- iii. Audits or surveys will be required and information gathered can be added to existing data or form new baseline data.
- iv. A review of existing and new data will be required enabling measurement of the current state of our natural heritage.
- v. Such information will help to establish if there have been any changes in the level of biodiversity present, or in other words, the ecological value of our natural heritage.



Heron in the River Don near Woodside

Integrity of Designated Sites

- i. If it is revealed that some integrity of Council designated sites has been lost, then steps will be required to make sure that the ecological value is not reduced any further.
- ii. Where sites have had their ecological value reduced, it is important to attempt to identify the cause so that action can be taken to rectify the situation where possible.
- iii. Any site or sites that have been identified as being 'at risk', action will be taken to prevent any degradation.
- iv. Management practices may need to be amended to help maintain the integrity of designated sites.
- v. For designated sites located on private land, opportunities will be sought to work with private landowners so that nature conservation is effective on both Council and privately owned land.
- vi. Maintaining the ecological value of designated sites will help to maintain its 'designated' status.
- vii. Opportunities will also be taken to identify sites where the designation status could be increased.

Non-Designated Sites

- i. While there is a duty to safeguard and enhance our natural heritage within all statutory and non-statutory designated sites, many habitats both semi-natural and manmade have no protection at all.

Semi-Natural and Manmade Habitats

Many species are far ranging and simply protecting a variety of semi-natural habitats is not always sufficient to protect some of them. Indeed, it is within these areas that much of the City's wildlife resources are located along with strategically placed and important wildlife corridors. Species may be found on roofs; bridges; within new and in derelict buildings; or on brown field sites. Important species such as birds, animals and insects, as well as their nest, roost and feeding sites should be identified. Opportunities should also be sought to link into existing or help to develop new NELBAPs for priority or locally important species.

- ii. There is a need to consider potential ways of protecting biodiversity found in non-designated areas which are both semi-natural and manmade.
- iii. This will demonstrate that the Council recognises that wildlife species cross boundaries and the areas beyond designated sites also require conservation measures.

2 THE STRATEGY

- iv. As well as establishing ways to protect non-designated sites, potential new designated-sites will also be identified.
- v. In non-designated areas with low or some ecological value, efforts will be taken to improve the biodiversity within them. The initial focus will be on target or regeneration areas of the City.
- vi. By improving such sites, new habitats can become available for species to move into.
- vii. The availability of new habitats will assist in increasing the range and diversity of species present throughout the City.
- viii. Improving biodiversity in previously ecologically poor sites can also add to or enhance the landscape character or features of that area.
- ix. Other relevant sites can include brown field and contaminated sites which are deemed unsuitable for development.
- x. Enhancement of such sites will also add value to neighbouring communities and improve their quality of life.

Wildlife Corridors

- i. Wildlife corridors contain a network of different habitats and can be a mix of semi-natural and manmade habitats as noted on pages 15 and 16.
- ii. A network of habitats are often of greater value than single habitats and are important for allowing species to move easily between them.
- iii. They help to enhance the connectivity between sites that have some ecological value, they prevent sites from becoming ecologically separated from other sites and prevent the isolation of species.
- iv. Species populations are maintained through the availability of wildlife corridors such as green corridors, transport corridors and waterways.

Waterways and the Water Environment

Our water environment is important for our economy, recreation, tourism, as a source of water supply for our homes and businesses, and our overall quality of life. The water environment is also important for our natural heritage. Our rivers, lochs, estuaries, seas and associated tributaries are important habitats for many species and also act as corridors enabling species to increase their range and access to other habitats. The River Dee, for example, is designated as a Special Area of Conservation due to the presence and importance of Atlantic salmon, European otter and Freshwater pearl mussel which depend on this habitat for survival. However, pressures on our water environment such as pollution can affect water quality and have a negative effect on individual species and biodiversity as a whole. The Council will continue to work with other organisations and take action which helps to achieve the Water Framework Directive's aim of good ecological status of our water environment by 2015.

2 THE STRATEGY

- v. Ways of ensuring that corridors are available for the benefit of our habitats and species need to be identified.
- vi. Opportunities will be sought to create new wildlife corridors and improve or restore the ecological value of existing ones where appropriate.
- vii. These actions will not only be important for species that are currently found within the City, but also for species that will move north in search for cooler conditions in response to climate change.
- viii. Work associated with wildlife corridors and nature conservation will link into the Council's future Open Space Strategy.



The River Dee is a Special Area of Conservation

Agenda for Action

1. Maintain data on Aberdeen's natural heritage.
2. Maintain the integrity of designated sites including identifying 'at risk' sites and restoring their value.
3. Protect and enhance biodiversity in areas which are not designated.
4. Increase the availability and ecological value of wildlife corridors.

OBJECTIVE 2: Sustainably manage Aberdeen's natural heritage

The Council needs to plan and manage the use of its own land in a way that assists in reversing the decline in biodiversity. The Council should also take up opportunities to encourage private land owners to do the same.

Land Use Development

- i. Land use development is generally detrimental to biodiversity and there are policies contained within the current Development Plan to help maintain the integrity of our natural heritage.
- ii. These policies assist in tackling conflict between the need to protect biodiversity plus other natural heritage interests and the need for new and improved communities.
- iii. This Strategy will continue to support these policies and will also help to inform future Strategic Development, Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance so that continued protection is offered to all designated sites plus sites not designated but still important for nature conservation.
- iv. Opportunities will also be sought through new Development Plan policies and guidance for improving biodiversity on development proposal sites.
- v. Some examples include setting specific conditions to enhance biodiversity as part of gaining planning permission or developer contributions to help improve our natural heritage where the ecological value will be reduced, species displaced and where development sites currently have little or no ecological value.
- vi. Implementation of buffer strips along water courses and water bodies that are adequate for each site are another way of protecting and promoting biodiversity as part of development management.
- vii. Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes (SUDS) for decreasing the amount of surface runoff can also be designed to benefit to biodiversity.
- viii. As well as new developments, there are opportunities for the design of the redevelopment of old buildings to provide or maintain roost and nesting spaces for bats and birds.
- ix. Creativity and competition will be encouraged among developers especially in areas where there is little green space.
- x. For example, green roofs; living walls; window boxes; hanging baskets; bird boxes; swift bricks; invertebrate boxes; native planting; and hedging can all help improve biodiversity especially where space is limited.

- xi. Improvements that will benefit and improve green corridors, biodiversity, landscape, plus, recreational and public access will be sought.



Hanging baskets at the Denburn car park

Council Projects

- i. When planning for and delivering projects that do not require planning permission but may have an impact on biodiversity, the Council will need to ensure that these projects consider nature conservation objectives.
- ii. The Council will need to think of a way to ensure that this happens, for example through guidance, so that it becomes part of the process in dealing with projects affecting Council land.
- iii. Whatever method is applied, it should help all Council officers meet nature conservation obligations and priorities when they are involved with any Council project.
- iv. It will also assist elected members to make informed decisions.
- v. Overall, the Council will be able to meet the obligations associated with this Strategy as well as the requirements of other Council local policies and plans which relate to nature conservation.

Council Operational Activities

- i. Many of the operational activities conducted by the Council can have an impact on our natural heritage.
- ii. These impacts can be both positive and negative. For example, reducing the amount of pesticides is beneficial to biodiversity, while a strict grass cutting regime on all greenspaces will reduce biodiversity interest.
- iii. The Council needs to adopt management practices that reduce or minimise the negative impacts on our biodiversity and other natural heritage interests on all Council land including parks, gardens, playing fields, sports pitches and so on.

- iv. This may be through adopting nature planting schemes which attract and help increase biodiversity; continuing to use as few chemicals and pesticides as possible when controlling weeds; reducing or minimising the use of peat or peat based products; and developing environmentally friendly grass cutting regimes and verge maintenance programmes where practical.
- v. Opportunities should be taken to incorporate nature planting schemes into areas where grass has been left uncut. Areas of uncut grass with or without planting schemes should occur in places that are appropriate, safe and practical to do so.
- vi. The management practices that the Council adopts need to build on what is already being done to help biodiversity so that they become even more environmentally friendly.
- vii. This Strategy will link into Aberdeen City Council's current Public Open Spaces Grounds Maintenance Policy and help to inform future similar policies.

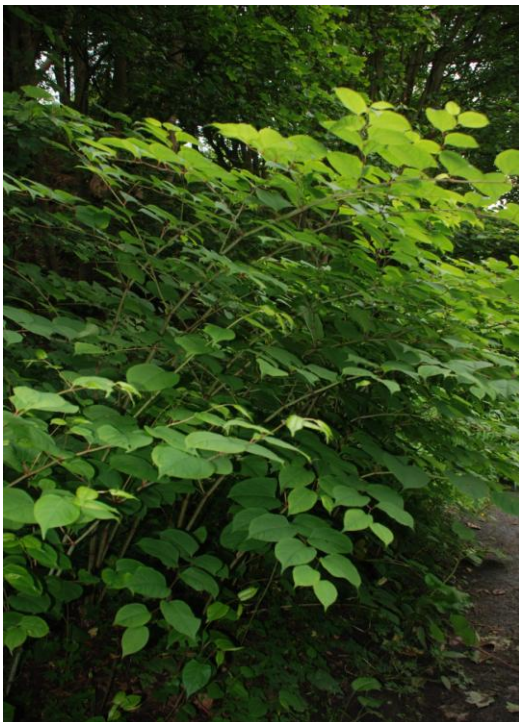
Private Land Owners & Businesses

- i. For the Council to realise its vision of taking a lead in nature conservation, it will look for opportunities to encourage private land owners and businesses to improve biodiversity on their own land including farms, buildings and existing developments.
- ii. The Council could, for example, collaborate with other organisations with similar nature conservation objectives to achieve their vision.
- iii. This will help to replace the loss or reduction of biodiversity in as many areas within the City other than just on Council owned land.
- iv. Taking some simple steps such as improving planting, nesting and roosting opportunities could be encouraged including more regular management practices that improve biodiversity on privately owned land.
- v. This type of action will also help to improve the connectivity between businesses, private and Council owned land, plus urban and rural natural environments.

Invasive Species

- i. There will be a need for the Council to continue its involvement in tackling invasive or non-native species that could have an adverse effect on the natural heritage in the City.
- ii. This will help to maintain good conditions for the survival of valuable species.

- iii. Tackling invasive or non-native species will also help to prevent irreversible damage to sensitive or vulnerable species.
- iv. The Council wants to establish if current control measures conducted are effective or not. This information needs to be fed back at the correct level so that it can inform future policy.
- v. The Council will identify new control of invasive or non-native species projects where relevant which are based on national policy and guidance.
- vi. An increase of invasive or non-native species may reflect the effects of climate change on our natural heritage. Opportunities should, where possible and appropriate, be sought to assist in measuring any new trends within the City.
- vii. Given that invasive or non-native species are found across boundaries, a partnership approach will be sought with other appropriate agencies and local authorities.
- viii. Any work associated with the control of invasive or non-native species will be conducted in line with Aberdeen City Council's Animal Policy which is concerned with animal welfare.



Japanese knotweed

Invasive species

Invasive or non-native species are becoming more common and some can be detrimental to our native species. Species such as Japanese knotweed and mink can often out-compete some of our native animal or plant species. This can cause irreversible damage particularly to sensitive or vulnerable species and habitats. Actions are in place at a Scottish level to tackle invasive or non-native species and the Council is already playing its part through, for example, the drive to improve conditions for the native red squirrel. It does, however, need to be borne in mind that some invasive species can also be native and that non-native species can become naturalised within our environment and bring positive benefits to biodiversity.

Management Plans

- i. Management plans for areas such as designated sites, parks and gardens will be important for the successful sustainable management of nature conservation in both Council and privately owned land.
- ii. The Council will establish what management plans already exist, for which sites and identify what form they are in.
- iii. The Council will also evaluate how effective these existing management plans are both on Council and privately owned land.
- iv. There will be a need to take action to ensure the appropriate implementation of these plans on Council owned land and that monitoring regimes are developed to support them.
- v. They will also need to be regularly reviewed and updated to guarantee that they are fit for that specific site.
- vi. Where feasible, new areas will be identified that could benefit from the implementation of management plans.
- vii. The Council will, therefore, need to develop appropriate processes to help staff achieve this on Council owned land and identify ways of encouraging private land owners to manage their own plans effectively.

Agenda for Action

5. Seek opportunities to maintain, restore or enhance biodiversity associated with physical development.
6. Consider and include nature conservation in all Council projects.
7. Establish ways to make Council operational activities more beneficial to biodiversity.
8. Seek ways of encouraging private land owners and businesses to adopt nature conservation practices.
9. Manage invasive and non-native species which cause negative impacts on biodiversity.
10. Influence site specific management plans fit for purpose.

OBJECTIVE 3: Involve communities in caring for Aberdeen's natural heritage

To make people aware of the importance and benefits of nature conservation, the Council needs to engage with everyone and get them involved at a local level.

Starting in Our Gardens

- i. Neat and tidy or intensively managed private gardens have been the trend for some time, but such a sterile environment can have a negative effect on our biodiversity.
- ii. Private gardens make up about 12 per cent of our greenspace in Aberdeen³ and are, therefore, important for nature conservation.
- iii. Making our gardens environmentally friendly will help to provide an important network of greenspaces by linking urban areas to the wider countryside.
- iv. This network will provide an important corridor for our wildlife and make our gardens healthier, livelier, colourful, interesting and enjoyable.
- v. By increasing the biodiversity interest in our garden, our knowledge of nature conservation can be improved.
- vi. Ways of enhancing the nature conservation value of private gardens with the involvement of local people and their communities will be explored.



Ponds and thoughtful planting can improve biodiversity in gardens

³ Aberdeen Greenspace Mapping, Aberdeen City Council, October 2007.

Community Gardens & Allotments

- i. Many people live in properties where there is little or no garden space at all.
- ii. Increasingly, there is a realisation that there are many benefits to having access to some greenspace.
- iii. Community gardens are becoming more important, and allotments are once again becoming popular.
- iv. Both Community gardens and allotments can help to improve our health through the encouragement of physical activity; they provide a place to relax; and are valuable to local communities.
- v. The Council will seek ways of encouraging more community gardens in places where gardens or greenspace is limited.
- vi. Where appropriate, the enhancement of existing community gardens will be encouraged so that they become more beneficial for both communities and biodiversity.
- vii. As a way of growing fruit and vegetables, allotments are popular with people looking for healthy and affordable food, and with the environmentally conscious who want to reduce their carbon footprint.
- viii. The Council will look at ways of encouraging people to use allotments and to encourage those that already use them, to do so in a way that helps to benefit biodiversity.
- ix. A link will be made into Aberdeen City Council's current Allotments Management Policy and will also inform the development of future allotments management policies.



Allotments are beneficial for people and nature

Health & Educational Facilities

- i. Wildlife friendly gardens at facilities such as hospitals, sheltered housing, and nursing homes improve the immediate environment which is beneficial to the health and wellbeing of patients and residents.
- ii. Wildlife gardens in educational facilities such as in schools, colleges, universities and so on, also provide many benefits.
- iii. The benefits for children and students include a healthy outdoor space for physical activity, recreation, and bringing children and students together from different backgrounds.
- iv. Wildlife gardens also provide a great resource for outdoor learning, improving practical and social skills while gaining direct contact with our natural heritage.
- v. Wildlife gardens in educational facilities can encourage interest in nature conservation at a young age.
- vi. The Council will identify ways of working with or encouraging health and educational facilities to improve nature conservation.
- vii. This may include identifying schemes which are aimed at schools, for example, and encouraging the uptake of them such as the Bird Friendly Schools Project run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Eco-Schools Programme.



Primary school children planting for wildlife

Partnerships

- i. Contact with other appropriate organisations or partners can help to increase the availability of projects that communities could get involved with.
- ii. Partnership working provides benefits such as allowing potential access to funding streams, access to a wealth of experience from other partners, tools, resources, plus support and encouragement by working with others with the same objective.
- iii. Opportunities will be sought for organisations such as Aberdeen Greenspace, the North East of Scotland Local Biodiversity Partnership, the East Grampian Coastal Partnership and others to link up with communities and work together to improve biodiversity in their local areas.
- iv. As well as the Council's target or regeneration areas, there is a need for communities to identify greenspace or other appropriate areas that are currently undervalued and underused so that with the help of partners they can turn such areas into places that they will want to go to and appreciate, and at the same time, improve the environment for biodiversity.

Working with Others

The aim to halt the decline in biodiversity cannot be achieved in isolation. This Strategy recognises the need to work with others, plus, the benefits and opportunities that this will bring to nature conservation, communities and individuals involved. It will enable people to work together to improve their natural heritage while achieving a community spirit and a sense of pride. Opportunities can be available to work with partners to promote nature conservation as well as enhancing an area that local communities will want to look after and appreciate. Collaboration with other local authorities is important for integrated action, so too is working with other organisations that have a shared vision for nature conservation including the NELBAP and NESBReC. This will help to minimise negative impacts to the environment locally and regionally.

Communities Sharing Knowledge

- i. As well as encouraging partnership working and working with others, sharing knowledge is essential for successful nature conservation.
- ii. Knowledge gained by communities and individuals can be important for establishing trends, for example, on species numbers and ranges.
- iii. The Council will encourage communities and individuals to contribute to knowledge databases such as the NESBReC.
- iv. Knowledge shared can help to establish if the Council is meeting national and international targets at a local level.
- v. Sharing knowledge, for example, through local newspapers or newsletters can also empower people to take a lead in nature conservation and inspire others to take action.
- vi. Neighbouring communities could be encouraged to work with and learn from each other by sharing their knowledge.
- vii. Sharing knowledge can enable citizens and communities to feel a sense of pride and achievement for the work that they have undertaken to improve biodiversity.



Learning how to build nest boxes for wildlife

Agenda for Action

11. Establish ways of encouraging the public to improve biodiversity in their own gardens.
12. Seek ways of encouraging nature conservation in community gardens and allotments.
13. Work with health and education facilities to promote wildlife gardens.
14. Encourage communities in partnership working to deliver nature conservation projects.
15. Encourage citizens and communities to document and share knowledge.

OBJECTIVE 4: Promote a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Aberdeen's natural heritage

Being informed will improve knowledge and enhance people's experience of nature while at the same time help promote awareness and respect for the City's natural heritage.

Improve Council Awareness

- i. All staff within the Council would benefit from understanding the importance of nature conservation whether their jobs deal directly with the natural environment or not.
- ii. This will help to keep Council staff up to date on nature conservation issues and progress, plus, prompt them to consider possible impacts to biodiversity when undertaking their daily tasks.
- iii. The Council will develop ways of communicating the benefits of considering nature conservation when in different situations to all Council staff at all levels.
- iv. There needs to be consideration of what skills are currently available within the Council and whether existing services can be used to help improve nature conservation awareness.
- v. For example, the Council's Countryside Ranger Service currently promotes biodiversity including running events and walks for educational facilities, manages designated sites and provides advice to the Council on issues relating to our natural heritage.
- vi. The Council will build on existing services, infrastructure and processes to reach all staff.
- vii. Opportunities will also be sought to build on joint working already seen between different departments within the Council.
- viii. For example, the Countryside Ranger Service, Planning and the Archaeological Unit have all contributed to the development of information leaflets on various interests for the Council and the public.
- ix. Different sources of knowledge could be brought together to provide similar literature or information and in different formats for promoting nature conservation to all Council staff.
- x. This could be through information technology, posters, leaflets or workshops.
- xi. This action will ensure that each individual within the Council will fulfil their role of assisting the Council meet its legal priorities and obligations.

Improve Public Awareness

- i. Successful nature conservation will only happen if the citizens of Aberdeen fully understand the need to conserve nature.
- ii. There is a requirement to ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the need and benefits to protect, preserve, enhance and promote Aberdeen's natural heritage for our current and future generations.
- iii. The Council will need to demonstrate the importance of nature conservation and educate the public at all levels and think of the best ways of doing this.
- iv. There is a need to educate those that live and work in, plus, visit the City of Aberdeen.
- v. Improving public awareness through education and personal experience will help to improve attitudes towards the environment both at home and at work.
- vi. The Council will look for ways to promote and provide further educational opportunities that will benefit all of Aberdeen's citizens.
- vii. For example, focusing on particular species or habitats that are familiar to people could act as a platform from which understanding can be achieved.



Displays and information boards at events such as the Highland Games are one way of improving public awareness of the importance of nature conservation

Accessing Our Natural Heritage

- i. It is important that biodiversity is enjoyed by everyone and that our natural heritage is accessible.
- ii. It has long been understood that there are positive links between outdoor access and nature conservation.
- iii. Enjoying nature is central to the outdoor experience as well as providing opportunities for exercise, and therefore, good physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- iv. Ensuring access to Aberdeen's natural heritage will provide benefits to both nature conservation and to the citizens of Aberdeen's quality of life.
- v. Along with sites that are currently accessible, the Council wants to provide, where possible, appropriate access to sites that are under used or not used at all.
- vi. The Council will also identify where more interpretation would be beneficial so that interesting information about our important habitats and species can be provided.
- vii. This will help to increase the understanding of the importance of our natural heritage.
- viii. The Council will ensure that access provision strikes a balance between meeting the needs of nature conservation and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.



Areas such as Scotstown Moor are important for recreation and biodiversity

Sustainable Tourism

- i. Access to our natural heritage is also recognised as being important for tourism.
- ii. It can provide job opportunities, provide places for people to visit and contribute to the local economy.
- iii. The Council wants to promote our natural heritage in order to attract people to come and visit the City.
- iv. As well as making our natural environment attractive to visitors, working with other partners or organisations, for example Visit Scotland, could be another way of encouraging sustainable tourism within Aberdeen City.
- v. The Council will consider ways of using our natural heritage to promote tourism and to contribute to sustainable economic growth in the City of Aberdeen.



Bottlenose dolphins can be regularly seen from the Aberdeen shore including other dolphin species, porpoises and even some species of whale

Responsible Access

- i. As well as enjoyment, there is now greater recognition to look after nature when accessing the outdoors.
- ii. The Council will encourage responsible access so that the displacement of species is prevented and that potential damage or degradation of important and protected habitats is minimised.
- iii. Conflicts of interest will also need to be considered. For example, there is a need to ensure that sensitive sites such as archaeological and historic sites are not damaged through the provision of access or while the public are enjoying access to our natural heritage.
- iv. The Council will consider ways of informing the public and visitors to access these sites responsibly. This will be done in a way that provides a balance between the need for respecting our natural heritage and enjoying the experience.
- v. This will be in line with the requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (www.outdooraccess-scotland.com) and Aberdeen's Strategy for Access to the Outdoors.

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

As part of the drive towards improving nature conservation, due regard must be given to archaeology and cultural heritage. Aberdeen is abundantly endowed with evidence of human activity in the past, much of which has greatly influenced and sculpted the appearance of areas that we consider as 'natural' today. The City's Sites and Monuments Record contains details of at least 3500 known historical and archaeological sites, ranging in date from 8000 BC to the 1960s AD: that number is constantly growing as new discoveries and identifications are made. Aberdeen has an excellent record of presenting history, natural history and archaeology to the public in a holistic manner, through guided walks, interpretation panels and leaflets.

Nature and heritage conservation are inextricably linked. For example, an early 19th century 'consumption' dyke or a prehistoric burial cairn can be seen as both important historic monuments and as habitats for wildlife. However, the search for a greener and a more bio-diverse environment can sometimes include aspects that may compromise our heritage. Tree planting, path-laying, landscaping and forestry operations to enhance an area could seriously damage buried remains. A stand of beech trees, while not native, might be all that remains visible of a 19th-century estate.

Historic features can be crucial to people's character, sense of identity and sense of place and are important from a tourism and economic perspective. In Aberdeen, the aim will be to safeguard, enhance and promote archaeology, cultural heritage and biodiversity together, through careful consideration and partnership working by Council officers and others.

Agenda for Action

16. Improve Council staff knowledge and understanding of the importance of nature conservation in delivering their function.
17. Increase public awareness of the benefits of nature conservation.
18. Seek opportunities to improve access to natural heritage sites.
19. Increase tourism through promoting the City's natural heritage.
20. Promote and encourage responsible access to the City's natural heritage.



Nature walks can be enjoyed responsibly

3 TAKING THE STRATEGY FORWARD

Implementation

Implementation of this Strategy will require a commitment from the Council, its staff and stakeholders involved in its development. This will include continued partnership working, disseminating information, and providing financial and/or in-kind support.

Successful implementation will also need a commitment to developing the **Implementation Plan** required to deliver at ground level the objectives and associated 'Agenda for Action' from this Strategy.

Monitor and Review

To assist in the delivery of this Strategy, progress will be monitored and yearly reports will be provided to the Council and its stakeholders.

Successful implementation can be gauged through data collection including data collected by NESBReC, monitoring, completed projects, promotional activities, press releases and so on. This information will be reported through the Council's 'State of the Environment' Report which can be found at www.aberdeency.gov.uk.

Information gathered on specific issues associated with the success of the Strategy will be reviewed and used to inform the development of future Nature Conservation strategies.

A **Monitoring Group** will need to be established to assist in the implementation of the Strategy.

Appropriate Assessment

Where any project developed to implement this Strategy could have an impact on the River Dee SAC, an Appropriate Assessment, as per the EU Habitats Directive, may be required.

The Nature Conservation Strategy will be updated every five years.



Sea thrift at Cove Bay

Appendix A – Legislation and Obligations

Legislation and Obligations – Description Summary	
Bern Convention 1979	The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and natural habitats ensures conservation and protection of wild plant and animal species and their natural habitats listed in the Convention.
Bonn Convention 1979	The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals conserves migratory species and their habitats by providing strict protection for endangered migratory species listed in the Convention.
EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) 1979	Provides a framework for the conservation and management of, and human interactions with, wild birds in Europe.
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Covers protection of wildlife (birds, and some animals and plants), the countryside, National Parks, and the designation of protected areas, and public rights of way.
EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) 1992	To take measures to maintain or restore natural habitats and wild species at a favourable conservation status, introducing robust protection for those habitats and species of European importance.
Convention on Biological Diversity 1992	Three main goals: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.
UK Biodiversity Action Plan 1994	UK Government's response to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Outlines the UK Biodiversity Action Plan for dealing with biodiversity conservation.
The Conservation (Natural Habitats &C) Regulations 1994	Transposes the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) into UK law. Public bodies have a general duty, in the exercise of any of their function, to have regard to the Habitats Directive.
EU Biodiversity Strategy 1998	Linked to Convention on Biological Diversity and aims to anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of significant reduction or loss of biodiversity at the source.
EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) 2000	To establish a framework for the protection of inland surface waters (rivers and lakes), transitional waters (estuaries), coastal waters and groundwater.
Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands, Strategy. 2004	Linked to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, this is a 25 year strategy to conserve and enhance biodiversity in Scotland.
Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004	Places duties on public bodies in relation to the conservation of biodiversity, and enhancement of natural features, protection of wildlife, and the preparation of a Scottish Fossil Code.
Scotland's sustainable Development Strategy 2005	Sets out action that Scotland will take to turn the shared priorities of the UK Framework for Sustainable Development into action.
EU Biodiversity Action Plan 2006	Specifies a comprehensive plan of priority actions, contains indicators to monitor progress and a timetable for evaluation.

Appendix B – Site Protection Systems

Designation	Description Summary
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Statutory designation as per the EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). Member States are required to take measures to maintain or restore natural habitats and wild species at a favourable conservation status. Member States are required to introduce robust protection for habitats and species of European importance. This includes a national list of sites for evaluation in to form a European Network of Sites of Community Importance, which are designated by Member States as Special Areas of Conservation.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Statutory designation as per the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, and notified by Scottish Natural Heritage to form part of a national network. Scottish Natural Heritage must be notified of any intention to carry out any potentially damaging operation. All SSSI's are District Wildlife Sites.
Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) <i>District Wildlife Site (DWS)</i>	Non-statutory designated sites identified by Aberdeen District Council, with assistance from Scottish Natural Heritage, as Sites of District-wide importance for nature conservation. DWS cover a wide range of habitats including semi-natural woodlands, heathland, wetland, river system and large stretches of Aberdeen's coastline. Protection is through local plan policy.
Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) <i>Site of Interest to Natural Science (SINS)</i>	Non statutory designated sites identified by the previous Grampian Regional Council as sites of regional importance for geology, geomorphology, botany, entomology, ornithology and freshwater biology during a study of Environmentally Sensitive Areas. All SINS are District Wildlife Sites. Protection is through local plan policy.
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Non statutory designated sites declared by Local Authorities to protect sites of local importance for nature conservation, education and amenity. Although LNR's have no statutory protection, declaration implies a commitment to give priority to nature conservation in the management of these areas. Managing rules or bye-laws can be used to control damaging activities. All LNR's are District Wildlife Sites. Protection is through local plan policy.

Appendix C – Designated Site Locations

Designated Site Location	SAC	SSSI	DWS	SINS	LNR
River Dee	✓				
Balnagask to Cove		✓	✓	✓	
Tullos Hill			✓		
Don Estuary			✓	✓	✓
Balgownie/Blackdog Links			✓	✓	
Charlestown Wood			✓		
Loirston Loch			✓	✓	
Kincorth Hill			✓		✓
River Dee Valley			✓	✓	
River Dee/Kincorth			✓		
Bridge of Dee			✓		
Pitfodels Castle			✓		
Garthdee			✓		
Morrison Island/Shakkin' Briggie			✓		
Lover's Walk to St. Maik's Well			✓		
River Don Valley			✓		
Braes of Don			✓		
Crook of Don			✓		
Woodside			✓		
Lower and Upper Persley Woodland			✓		
Kinta Valley			✓		
Lochside/Denmore			✓		
Scotstown Moor/Perwinnes Moss		✓	✓	✓	✓
Newton of Shielhill			✓		
Corby Loch		✓	✓	✓	
Glashie How			✓		
Danestone House			✓		
Cornhill Hospital			✓		
Den of Leggart			✓		
Westburn of Rubislaw			✓		
Rubislaw Den			✓	✓	

Appendix C continued...

Designated Site Location	SAC	SSSI	DWS	SINS	LNR
Hilton Wood			✓		
Clerkhill Wood			✓		
Grandholme Moss			✓	✓	
Stoneyhill Wood			✓		
Monument Wood			✓		
Persley Quarries			✓		
Walker Dam and Rubislaw Link			✓		
Allan Park Pond			✓		
Deeside Old Railway			✓	✓	
Hazlehead Park			✓		
Den Wood, Hazlehead			✓		
North Burn of Rubislaw			✓		
Bucksburn Gorge			✓		
Den of Maidencraig			✓		✓
Cults Den			✓		
Cults Quarry			✓		
Murtle House/Newton Dee			✓	✓	
Hillhead Road			✓		
Burnbrae Moss			✓		
Farburn Wood			✓		
Gough Burn			✓		
Den of Moss-Side			✓		
Foggieton			✓		
Murtle Den			✓		
Blacktop			✓	✓	
Binghill Wood			✓		
West Hatton			✓		
Brimmond Hill			✓	✓	
Elrick Hill			✓	✓	
Tyrebagger Hill			✓		
Woodlands Wood, Beidleston			✓		

Appendix C continued...

Designated Site Location	SAC	SSSI	DWS	SINS	LNR
Moss of Auchlea			✓		
Rotten of Gairn			✓		
Guttrie Hill			✓		
Culter House Woods			✓		
Hill of Ardbeck			✓		
Culter Burn			✓		
Woodend Woods, Peterculter			✓		
Little Hill, Caskieben			✓		
Kinaldie Den			✓	✓	
Culter Compensation Dam			✓	✓	
Old Manse Wood			✓		
Baads Moss			✓		
Mid Anguston Quarry			✓		
Leuchar Moss			✓	✓	
Southlasts Mire			✓		
Aberdeen – Inverness – Kittybrewster Railway Line			✓		
Woodland Walks, Foggieton			✓		
Fields at Cairdhilllock, Kingswells			✓		
Rubislaw Quarry			✓		

List of Acronyms

ACC	Aberdeen City Council
DWS	District Wildlife Site
LNCS	Local Nature Conservation Site
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NELBAP	North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan
NESBReC	North East Scotland Biological Records Centre
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SINS	Site of Interest to Natural Science
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

Include large print option and contact details etc.