

NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY 2010-2015
IMPLEMENTATION
Appendix A - PROJECT PROPOSAL

1.0 PROJECT TITLE

Non-statutory Local Designated Sites Review Project.

2.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

Aberdeen City's natural heritage is diverse. It provides us with the natural resources we depend on for food, energy and tourism for example. It also benefits our health and wellbeing; our overall quality of life. We, therefore, need to conserve our natural heritage so that we can continue to enjoy and benefit from it well into the future.

Aberdeen City Council's Nature Conservation Strategy has been updated to meet the increased recognition of the need to conserve nature, plus changes in local policies and nature conservation legislation. It has also been updated to consider current pressures and challenges, such as the increasing need for land for housing and businesses, plus the effects of climate change.

The overall aim of Aberdeen City Council's Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 is: -

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

There are four objectives to help meet the overall aim: -

1. *Protect, conserve 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.*

There is an Agenda for Action to help guide the implementation of the strategy. This project has been borne out of the Agenda for Action and has been designed to contribute to nature conservation action at ground level.

2.2 The Need for the Project

This project is required to help establish the current state of the natural heritage within non-statutory local designated sites in the Aberdeen City area. That is, establish the quality and variety of habitats, plus the number of individual or range of species found at each site. The project will concentrate on local designated sites which can be found both on Council and private land.

It has been some time since reviews were conducted on all local designated sites and the information on these sites is now out of date. For example,

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alterations to site boundaries and the interests for which the sites were designated could have changed from the time they were originally surveyed. This makes it difficult to continue to protect such sites effectively and it also makes it more difficult to defend such sites in the planning system. It is, therefore, important to understand if these sites have changed much, if at all, since they were first surveyed. The outcomes of the project will show whether the integrity of designated sites has remained the same, has been reduced or lost, or even increased over a period of time.

The outcomes from this project are required before a number of other actions can be taken for implementing the Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015. Some of these actions have been incorporated into this project.

Firstly, it is hoped that the outcomes from this project will help to identify the causes of any negative impacts to designated sites and so that possible resolutions can be established and/or measures implemented to help return those sites back to the level of integrity that made them designated sites in the first place.

Secondly, opportunities where required, will be taken to maintain the level of integrity of sites where there is no evidence of degradation.

Thirdly, opportunities will also be taken to identify sites where the integrity has increased to a level that it could be considered for increasing its designated status. For example, a site currently designated as a Local Nature Conservation Sites could meet the criteria required for a Local Nature Reserve.

As well as improving nature conservation, accurate information on local designated sites, including site boundaries and integrity, will help to continue and improve their protection in a land use context. The outcomes from this project will, therefore, help to inform future Local Development Plans and land use policies.

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2.3 Designated Sites

Aberdeen City has a number of designated sites (site protection systems) both statutory and non-statutory. There are 88 in total. Table 1 below notes the site protection systems present in the City of Aberdeen.

Table 1: 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 Reserve (LNR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory - National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 	4
<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

Scottish Planning Policy has recently been updated and proposes to simplify and make consistent all local non-statutory designations in terms of their qualifying criteria and title. Designations, including District Wildlife Sites (DWS) and Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS), will be known in the future as Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS). Protection is afforded to all local non-statutory designated sites through Local Plan Policy. Protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is afforded at UK level through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Local Nature Reserves through the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, whereas, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are afforded protection at EU level via the Habitats Directive.

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2.4 Legislation & Obligations

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a legal duty on local authorities through delivering any functions to further the conservation of biodiversity, enhance natural features and protect wildlife. Therefore, Aberdeen City Council has to consider nature conservation in everything that it does.

The Act also states that in complying with the duty imposed, local authorities must have regard to Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy 'It's in Your Hands', 2004 and the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992. The aim of The Convention on Biological Diversity 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'.

This project meets these (and other) legislative requirements.

3.0 AIM

To obtain up to date information on the ecological health and value of Aberdeen City Council's non-statutory local designated sites.

4.0 PROJECT SCOPE

To review non-statutory local designated sites within Aberdeen City Council boundary. This will include DWS only, which will be known as Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) in the future.

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5.0 KEY MILESTONES

MILESTONE	START DATE	END DATE
Resources to undertake work established and agreed	Jan 2010	Mar 2010
Sites selected and prioritised	Jan 2010	Feb 2010
Existing baseline data on all site protection systems gathered	Apr 2010	Sep 2010
Site surveys conducted	Apr 2010	Sep 2010
Data input	Sep 2010	Dec 2010
Review of sites using existing and new data conducted	Sep 2010	Dec 2010
Degraded sites and sites where there is loss of integrity identified	Jan 2011	Feb 2011
Sites for restoration identified	Jan 2011	Feb 2011
Sites where ecological value meets criteria for new designation identified	Jan 2011	Feb 2011

6.0 SCOPE EXCLUSIONS

- This project will not review non-statutory Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS) within the City as this is already being conducted as part of a separate project led by Aberdeenshire Council.
- District Wildlife Sites (DWS) only which have been included in the SINS Review Project will not be included in this project.
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR) will not be reviewed against the different criteria set for LNR.
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) plus the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) will not be included in this review as responsibility for this task lies with Scottish Natural Heritage.
- Areas which are not designated will not be included in this project. The Open Space Audit, which is currently being conducted, includes biodiversity quality. Information from the Open Space Audit can be used to assess some non-designated sites separate to this project.

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7.0 SOURCES OF DATA OR INFORMATION

As part of other current projects, data will have recently been gathered for a number of local non-designated sites either as part of a desktop exercise to gather existing data or as part of new site surveys. Data available for these relevant sites will be drawn into this project which will **help prevent duplication of effort, time and costs**. This data should be available from the following current projects:-

- Sites surveyed as part of the SINS Review Project; and
- Existing data gathered for some DWS as part of a desktop exercise for the Open Space Audit.

Other information can be gathered from Countryside Rangers based on their expert knowledge and experience with relevant sites. This information can help to establish some of the outcomes of this project.

The Council's Geographical Information System (GIS) can provide information required for some of the outcomes of this project.

8.0 DWS ON PRIVATE LAND

- Contact will need to be made with landowners to seek approval for access to DWS on their land so that survey work can take place.
- In return, landowners will be provided with information on the state of the ecology on their land.
- A letter highlighting the project along with the benefits should be designed and sent to each landowner.

9.0 OUTCOMES

1. Provides up to date information on non-statutory local designated sites.
2. Identifies sites which meet the new LNCS criteria.
3. Identifies areas where there is degradation and loss of integrity of designated status.
4. Identifies areas where restoration is both practical and feasible.
5. Identifies sites where designation could be upgraded.
6. Identifies sites which do not meet the new LNCS criteria but would be afforded some protection through open space policies.
7. Provides more accurate and up to date site boundaries.
8. Provides important information for other actions required to be taken for implementing the Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015.
9. Provides data for next Local Development Plan.

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10.0 POTENTIAL CONSTRAINTS

- Lack of funding to carry out the work required.
- Lack of resources within the Council to carry out work.
- Lack of experience required within the Council for surveying, analysing data and making recommendations.
- NESBReC – potential lack of resources to meet level of work required.
- Holiday commitments, thus, having an impact on limited time to complete project.
- Participants own workload, and time constraints.
- Timing issues with next Local Development Plan.
- Unable to identify owner of sites on privately owned land.
- Unable to obtain agreement for access to sites from Private Landowners.

11.0 RESOURCES

11.1 Project Coordination

Project coordination will be conducted by the Environmental Planner within Planning and Sustainable Development. This will include liaising with the NESBReC Manager who will be managing habitat surveyors, coordinating and chairing meetings. The role will also include project administration including taking minutes from meetings, preparing papers and arranging meetings etc. This work will be included within existing staff time and costs.

11.2 Habitat Surveyors

The habitats surveyors will be required to conduct the actual sites surveys, plus, gather existing data, data input, assist in the reviewing of sites using both existing and new data. Some costs for this work can be covered under the existing Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Council and NESBReC.

11.3 Other Staff

Further staff may be required to assist with the gathering of existing data, particularly data that is currently held within the Council, and review of data to identify changes, trends etc. It is expected that this work will be included within existing Council staff time and costs.

12.0 REVIEW PROCESS

A panel of experts will be required to review the data gathered from the surveys. It is proposed that there will be two phases in the process involving firstly a Sub Panel, and secondly, a Review Panel.

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12.1 Sub Panel

The Sub Panel will consist of a few individuals and will include the following members: -

ACC Environmental Planner;
ACC Countryside Ranger;
NESBReC Manager; and
NESBReC surveyor.

The Sub Panel will carry out the initial assessment of the data. It will be the role of the Sub Panel to establish those sites which: -

1. Clearly meet LNCS criteria;
2. Clearly do not meet LNCS criteria; and
3. Sites where there is uncertainty over whether a site meets the LNCS criteria or not.

The Sub Panel will prepare the information linked to points 1 and 3 for the Review Panel to examine further.

12.2 Review Panel

The Review Panel will consist of a large number of experts covering many different backgrounds. This may include: -

- Geology;
- Geomorphology;
- Entomology;
- Biology;
- Botany;
- Ecology; and
- Ornithology etc.

The Review Panel will examine those sites (recommended as LNCS plus those sites where it is unclear if they meet the criteria or not) for discussion or approval.

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13.0 PROJECT COSTS

Activity	2010/2011 (£)
Habitat Surveyors	4,000
IT - map preparation, data upload/download, GIS data editing	1,500
NESBReC manager - project management and participation in panels	900
Collate existing data	SLA
Input new data on to database	SLA
Create new GIS layer to replace old DWS layer	SLA
TOTAL	6,100

As noted in section 11.2, some costs can be covered under the existing SLA between ACC and NESBReC.

14.0 BUDGET SOURCE

Funds exist within the 'Environmental Planners' budget, however, approval will need to be sought from the relevant Council Committee to use these funds from the budget for the purpose of this project.

15.0 SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACTS

This project links into a number of the Council's 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'.

It also has links with the Council's Vibrant and Dynamic & Forward Looking requirement to 'adopt and implement policies which safeguard Aberdeen's green belt and green wedges'.

This project has indirect positive benefits on Aberdeen citizen's quality of life. The outputs from this project provide baseline information from which action can be taken to improve nature conservation. People benefit from having access to nature. It encourages physical activity, provides places to relax and improve our overall health and well being.

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16.0 STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION

Organisation/Group	Involvement
Aberdeen City Council	Project lead & coordination, plus, desktop review & evaluation after survey work complete.
NESBReC	Habitat surveys & review of data.
Private Landowners	Agreement to be sought to allow access to their land for survey work.

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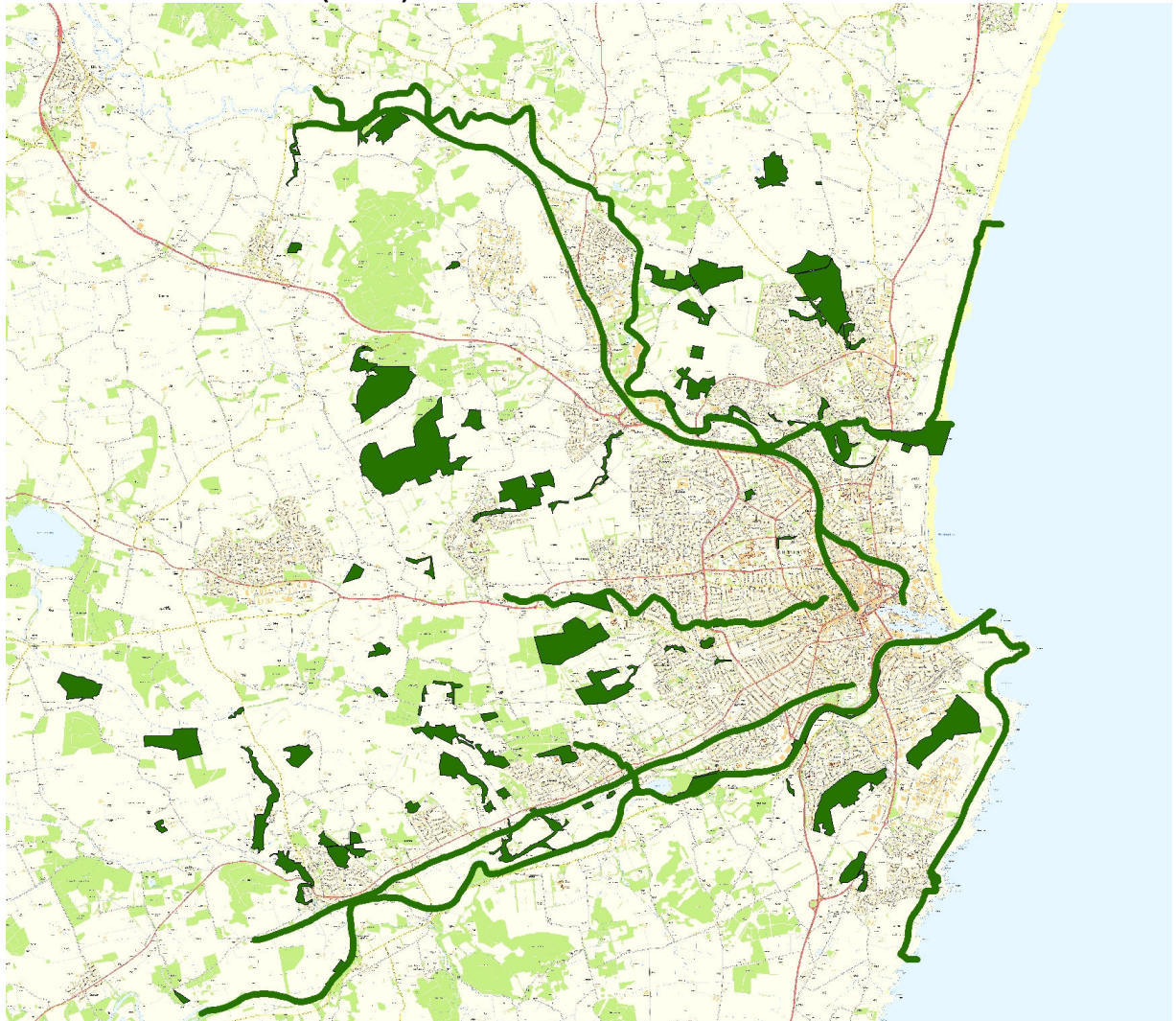
17.0 SELECTED SITES

NO:	SITE	NO:	SITE
1	2. Tullos Hill	26	38. Hillhead Road
2	5. Charlestown Wood	27	39. Burnbrae Moss
3	8.1 Kincorth	28	40. Farburn Wood
4	8.2. Bridge of Dee	29	42. Den of Moss-side
5	8.3. Pitfodels Castle	30	43. Foggieton
6	8.4. Garthdee	31	46. Binghill Wood
7	8.5. Morison Island/Shakkin Briggie	32	47. West Hatton
8	8.6. Lover's Walk to St Maiks Well	33	50. Tyrebagger Hill
9	10. Kinta Valley	34	51. Woodlands Wood, Beidleston
10	11. Lochside/Denmore	35	52. Moss of Auchlea
11	13. Newton of Shielhill	36	53. Rotten of Gairn
12	16. Danestone House	37	54. Guttrie Hill
13	17. Cornhill Hospital	38	55. Culter House Woods
14	18. Den of Leggert	39	56. Hill of Ardbeck
15	19. Westburn of Rubislaw	40	57. Culter Burn
16	21. Hilton Wood	41	58. Woodend Woods, Peterculter
17	24. Stoneyhill Wood	42	59. Little Hill, Caskieben
18	27. Walker Dam & Rubislaw Link	43	62. Old Manse Wood
19	28. Allan Park Pond	44	63. Baads Moss
20	29. Deeside Old Railway	45	64. Mid Anguston Quarry
21	31. Den Wood	46	66. Southlasts Mire
22	32. North Burn of Rubislaw	47	67. Aberdeen-Inverness & Kittybrewster Railway Line
23	34. Den of Maidencraig	48	68. Woodland Walks, Foggieton
24	35. Cults Den	49	69. Cairdhillock, Kingswells
25	36. Cults Quarry	50	70. Rubislaw Quarry

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18.0 MAP (please also refer to DWS booklet for individual sites)

District Wildlife Sites (DWS)



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