West Dunbartonshire Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2015

Introduction

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, further requires public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report, every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.

This report sets out how West Dunbartonshire Council (The Council) has delivered biodiversity conservation across a range of functions. The format used is based on a suggested reporting template produced by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Section 1: West Dunbartonshire Council and Biodiversity

West Dunbartonshire Council has 22 Councillors representing 6 wards. The Council is led by the Labour Party. The Council operates through a system of committees with officers reporting to committees on relevant matters.

Reports relating to biodiversity are sent to the most appropriate committee but predominantly this is the Housing Environment and Economic Development committee.

Matters relating to biodiversity are discussed at the officer/manager group led Sustainability, Energy and Carbon Management Group (SECM).

The structure of the SECM group is indicated below:
The Council is reviewing the opportunity to create a biodiversity sub group with officers with specific remits relating to biodiversity to support the refresh of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The West Dunbartonshire Access Forum has members representing the interests of those making use of access to the countryside as well as land owners and managers.

West Dunbartonshire Council signed the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) Concordat in April 2014. As well as supporting the work of the GCV Green Network Partnership as a regional expression of the CSGN, West Dunbartonshire Council intends to:

- Embed the CSGN in the West Dunbartonshire Local Development Plan and relevant masterplans.
- Develop and enhance its partnership work to realise the CSGN.
- Identify opportunities for Green Network enhancement within West Dunbartonshire so as to target available resources and facilitate its delivery through the planning system.

The Council has also signed the Scottish Climate Change Declaration.

Despite its small size, the landscape of West Dunbartonshire is diverse, with the
Kilpatrick Hills, Bromley and Carman Muirs forming the backdrop to urban areas contained within the valleys of the Rivers Clyde and Leven. West Dunbartonshire is made up of 6 landscape character types: raised beach, rolling farmland, green corridors, drumlin foothills, moorland hills & ridges and rugged moorland hills. The dominant landscape is moorland. Over 40% of the land is classified as open countryside, representing a notably higher proportion than many other local authority areas in Scotland, and there are sizable areas of native woodland and freshwater, not least Loch Lomond. The northern part of the Council area falls within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park which is one of only two national parks within Scotland. The total area of West Dunbartonshire is 169 km²; the area within the National Park is 57 km².

The majority of residents in West Dunbartonshire live within 300m of an area of open space over 1 hectare in size. Open and green spaces in West Dunbartonshire, such as parks, playing fields and woodlands form the green network and link to similar networks in other authority areas. The Rivers Leven and Clyde form the spine of the green network. These river corridors and key green network locations such as the Dalmuir wedge, the Saltings and Overtoun are linked through the urban area; connecting to the Kilpatrick Hills and the Muirs to the west of the Vale of Leven, by way of paths, burns and habitat corridors including the Forth & Clyde Canal and the national cycle route.

Much of the northern shore line of the Inner Clyde estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EU Birds Directive. The Inner Clyde SPA contains extensive intertidal flats that support large numbers of wintering wildfowl, including an internationally important wintering population of redshank (Tringa totanus) which are the qualifying interest under the Directive. The site is also a Ramsar Site under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. Upstream of the River Leven, the Endrick Water Special Area of Conservation is an important habitat for Atlantic salmon and river lamprey. Also, the River Leven is the main outflow for Loch Lomond and acts as a critical wildlife corridor. Loch Lomond is designated as a Special Protection Area and under RAMSAR. Loch Lomond Woods are designated as a Special Area of conservation.

16 local Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) exist, 8 within the National Park and 8 out with the National Park area, reflecting the importance of the flora, fauna, and habitats of the area. Loch Lomond is designated as a National Nature Reserve.

The Saltings at Old Kilpatrick was designated as West Dunbartonshire’s first Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in recognition of the high natural heritage interest and value of the site for education and informal enjoyment of nature by the public, and there are proposals for further LNRs at Brucehill Cliffs and Faifley Knowes.

The Council has identified 48 Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) – these are sites that are recognised on account of certain local important features of habitat, plant or animal communities or geology. Duntocher Burn and the River Leven are major wildlife corridors in the area and host Local Nature Conservation Sites.

Section 2: Mainstreaming
The West Dunbartonshire Single Outcome Agreement has four priority areas, biodiversity cuts across these areas due to the associated benefits including improved health/wellbeing, employability skills, volunteering opportunities, protection of the local environment, provision of education and reducing social inequality.

Within the Council's Strategic Plan there are 5 key priorities for the Council, biodiversity is most applicable under:

- Improve local housing and environmentally sustainable infrastructure
- Improve the wellbeing of communities and protect the welfare of vulnerable people.

The directorate with the highest influence on biodiversity is the Housing, Environment and Economic Development. Within this directorate the planning and Greenspace teams contribute heavily to conservation of biodiversity. This ensures that land use planning, development and the management of Council owned land deliver protection and enhancements for biodiversity. The countryside rangers service is key in the identification and implementation of biodiversity projects.

Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments (in which biodiversity is a key consideration) are conducted throughout the Council where required.

The key plan relating to biodiversity is the Dunbartonshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) (produced jointly with East Dunbartonshire Council). This provides an overview on biodiversity in the area as well as identifying sources of funding to implement the projects. The plan describes the four main groups on which work has focused: urban, rural, woodland and wetland (including coastal).

The Aims and Objectives of the LBAP are:

- To conserve species and habitats in Dunbartonshire that are considered vulnerable or threatened on a local or national basis, and in turn to contribute to the conservation of our global diversity
- To promote awareness of our local natural resources
- To promote community engagement in, and ownership of, the practical conservation of our natural resources
- To promote sustainable and wise use of our natural resources

Identified within the plan are the key social, environmental and economic benefits of good quality greenspace. It highlights the ability of greenspaces in offering opportunities for recreation, sport and play, social interaction, healthy lifestyles, and in providing visually attractive areas. In addition, green open spaces allow for interaction with nature on a regular basis. The threat of urban growth and modern practices (greenbelt development, invasive species, etc.) are also recognised. In addition, so are the importance of the planning process and local developer's willingness to adopt more sustainable methods of development.

The LBAP will be reviewed in 2015 and number of the projects listed within section 3 have been listed within this plan or contribute to the overall aims and objectives.
The Strategic Development Plan for Glasgow and Clyde Valley, ‘Clydeplan’ is being reviewed, with the Main Issues Report having been consulted upon between January and March 2015. It is proposed that there will be 3 Strategic Delivery Areas (SDAs) for the Green Network within West Dunbartonshire: Clydebank, Bowling and Dumbarton. Clydebank has been selected as one of 4 SDA’s within the Clydeplan area for which a Green Network Delivery Plan will be prepared, through joint working between the Council and the CSGN Trust.

The proposed Local Development Plan (LDP) published in 2014 includes a wide range of measures designed to address biodiversity. Biodiversity is considered within the chapter ‘Enhancing the Green Network’, and specifically Policy GN3. Natura 2000 sites, protected species, SSSIs and Local Nature Conservation Sites are expressly protected by the Plan. The Green Network is included as one of the Plans 12 ‘Changing Places’, key areas that the Council wants to change over the next 5-10 years, helping to ensure that green network considerations, such as biodiversity, are fully embedded within the Plan.

The Proposed LDP identifies the Kilpatrick Hills as a Local Landscape Area, and sets out a strategy for the Kilpatrick Hills which aims to protect and enhance landscape character and the integrated network of habitats and important geological features. A Statement of Importance in respect of the landscape of the Kilpatrick Hills was approved by the Council in June 2015. The Statement describes what is special about the Hills and explains why they should be protected, supporting policy GN4 of the Proposed LDP.

Draft Supplementary Guidance for the Local Development Plan titled ‘Our Green Network’ was approved by the Council in May 2015 and was subject to public consultation between May and August 2015. The draft guidance has 3 parts:

Part 1 – Identifying Assets and Opportunities
In order to safeguard the green network in West Dunbartonshire it is necessary to define it. A mapping exercise has been undertaken to highlight the green networks within West Dunbartonshire and their most important assets. Also identified are the key opportunities to enhance the green network, for example by improving access or habitat networks.

Part 2 – Enhancing and Expanding Our Green Network
This section sets out the principles for embedding the green network within the design of new development. It also includes the open space accessibility, quality and quantity standards that will be required and the mechanisms that will be applied to determine the level of provision or financial contribution expected in order to enhance and expand the green network.

Part 3 – Design Guidance
This section sets out what the Council is looking for in terms of the design and layout of new development sites, starting with the process of appraising the site in the context of the existing network and improvements that can be made to enhance biodiversity.

The response to the consultation will be fully considered and a finalised version of the document will be presented to Committee in autumn 2015.
Supplementary Guidance on ‘Residential Development: Principles for Good Design;’ has also been developed alongside the LDP. This requires the development of new housing sites to maintain and enhance the biodiversity features of sites and provide linkages to surrounding green spaces and wildlife corridors.

The Climate Change Strategy (2012) identifies the importance of biodiversity in both climate change mitigation and adaptation. With respect to biodiversity, West Dunbartonshire is moderately served with habitats that could help buffer the effect of climate change on local biodiversity.

The Councils Open Space Strategy (2011) includes consideration of biodiversity with the objective to increase the management of amenity greenspace for biodiversity. When undertaking a site development or enhancement, biodiversity value and potential should be considered.

The Councils Access Strategy and Core Paths Plan vision is to provide management of a sustainable access network in West Dunbartonshire, in balance with the needs of sustainable land management and the needs of communities.

The Countryside ranger has created new management plans for Faifley Knowes proposed LNR and has assisted in the implementation of existing management plans such as Auchentoshan Woods and The Saltings LNR. Levengrove Park Conservation Management Plan was produced in 2012.

West Dunbartonshire Council contributed to the development of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Forestry and Woodland Strategy (2011) and is now to contributing to its replacement, which is currently being prepared.

Section 3: Action taken to improve biodiversity conservation on the ground

Action on biodiversity is taken throughout the Council but the majority is within the Planning and Greenspace Departments which sit under the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Directorate. Activities within each directorate are detailed below, although in many cases directorates will work in collaboration with other areas and external partners.

Community Health Care Partnership

In partnership with HEEDS the CHCP runs the Work Connect project. The projects are based in local parks and support clients with mental health, learning disability and addiction work. The Work Connect Levengrove Gardening Project provides training and mentoring in gardening skills for upwards of 100 individuals in 13 client groups throughout the year. The project has access to plots, raised beds, poly-tunnels, greenhouses, land for development and a training suite, all located in the Greenspace Depot at Levengrove Park. Everyone receives basic landscaping and health and safety training, some achieve SQA qualifications and some move into employment.
The Levengrove Art Planning Forum is a group of local artists and photographers (staff and plotters) who work together, developing their art; often with the natural materials available in the park. There highly successful art show promoted the use of the polytunnels in winter and provided an opportunity for service users to showcase and sell their work.

Inspirational Walks developed by a member of the Art Planning Group. The aim in the is, in association with Community Learning and Development, i) to publish a map of Levengrove Inspirational walk, make available in local libraries to promote mental health and well-being, physical activity and general promotion of the beauty and historical interest of the park to the local population and tourists ii) to participate in Walk leaders training for Levengrove Park iii) to develop and deliver the Inspirational walk as an SQA Core Communication qualification.

**Housing Environment and Economic Development**

The Community Greenspace Officer has engaged with and developed partnership working with residents, community groups, educational establishments, internal departments and external agencies to help them identify community aspirations in relation to greenspace and litter reduction.

The officer manages the Community Involvement in the Neighbourhoods Project. Activities have included community gardens, allotments, children’s play parks, volunteer training, community consultations and litter control activities. 6 new community groups were supported in 2013-14, 78 community clean ups were held and 128 community volunteers supported these initiatives.

Invasive Non Native Species which are a pest and a threat to natural habitats and species are managed on Council land. The Council has a programme of management for spraying of Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed infestations and the removal of rhododendron ponticum at selected Council-owned sites.

Grounds maintenance staff identify areas of maintained grass which are to be left uncut, creating new woodlands and development of further wildflower meadow areas.

The Countryside Ranger Service delivers on several of the LBAP aims and objectives through its work with local community groups and educational establishments, volunteer projects and delivering public events.

The Countryside Ranger Service works with a range of partners and community groups to deliver biodiversity projects. Projects have included:

- Enable Scotland Stepping Up Project delivered project on Barn owls, learning about their ecology, habitat requirements and carried out owl pellet dissection. They helped design boxes which were then built by the Levengrove Project. The Stepping up project consists of young people with mental and physical health issues.
- Sustrans Wildlife Champions delivered a project on planting native wildflower plugs along the NCN7 at Bowling to Dunglass
• Quarriers project, working with young people upto 25 who were at risk of homelessness. This group carried out a range of practical conservation tasks such as:
  o Skunk Cabbage removal at Balloch Castle Country Park
  o Himalayan balsam removal along the foreshore on the Clyde Estuary
  o Planting trees at Overtoun Estate and Balloch Castle Country Park
  o Creating Forest School sites at Balloch, Overtoun Estate, Auchnacraig and Havoc
• The Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park planted an area of Balloch Castle Country Park with a mixture of willow varieties which will be coppiced in the future to provide a sustainable source of willow on site for the Forest School Programme.
• The Tullochan Trust, through their John Muir Award, delivered a series of conservation tasks in Balloch Castle Country Park including bird feeders and boxes as well as tree planting and identification.
• Youthbuild, a local into employment group, created a new Forest School site at The Saltings LNR and assisted in the coppicing of the willow on the grassland meadow.
• Clydeshop mobility, delivered a series of guided walks and produced route cards to assist people with mobility problems experience countryside walks and learn about biodiversity.
• Community Payback have assisted with litter picking and drainage works on several council sites and completed a project in vegetation management for water voles at Faifley Knowes.

The Countryside Ranger Service delivers a series of guided walks and events aimed at getting people involved in the countryside and increasing knowledge of the natural environment. Events have included:

• Themed guided walks on birds, butterflies, herbal uses, tree identification, birds and geology
• The Great Outdoor Festival, annual event with up to 50 events covering greenspaces, formal parks and wider countryside
• Guided walks for over 50’s
• Sensory walk for the Dementia society
• Big garden bird watch at Balloch Park and Overtoun Estate

The Countryside Ranger Service, with local community volunteers, has carried out a range of practical conservation projects including:

**Auchentoshan Woods**

• Woodland thinning to improve quality of understory and creation of habitat piles
• Installation of bat and bird boxes
• Monitoring of historic badger sett
• Sowing wildflower seed
**The Saltings Biodiversity improvements**
- Digging scrapes for invertebrates
- Creating hibernacula for amphibians
- Installing bird and bat boxes
- Coppicing willow for grassland management
- Surveying orchids
- Delivering guided nature walks of the reserve
- Native wild plug planting

**Balloch park biodiversity improvements**
- Removal of rhododendrons
- Planting of willow for sustainable coppice
- Planting of 400 native whips
- Managing wildflower meadow areas
- Guided nature walks
- Big garden bird watch
- Installing bird and bat boxes
- Annual bat roost count

**Overtoun Estate**
- Removal of rhododendrons
- Guided nature walks to promote site
- Planting of 400 native whips

**Brucehill Cliffs (proposed LNR)**
- Removal of Himalayan balsam from havoc shore
- Native plug planting at havoc shore
- Moth and butterfly surveys at havoc
- Creation of Forest School Sites

The Countryside Ranger is also chair of the local Forest Education Initiative group and a member of the Clyde Bat Group as well as the Clyde Amphibian and Reptile Group.

Dalmuir Park Heritage Lottery Fund Project was a 3 year project (ending in 2015) which allowed funding for a community engagement ranger and two park rangers who are all involved in delivering outdoor education, community events and volunteer activities. The project included biodiversity improvements including:

- Naturalising Dalmuir pond boundary / planting
- River kick sampling invertebrate surveys
- Planting native wildflower plugs
- Sowing wildflower meadow
- Installing bird boxes on trees and on pond island
- Thinning out woodland to allow understory growth
An application is being developed for Heritage Lottery Funding for Levengrove Park.

Corporate Services
The Community Planning Partnership has funded the Environment Trust for the past 3 years. The Environment Trust conducted environmental and regeneration projects within West Dunbartonshire. Projects include phase I of the Moss o’ Balloch Regeneration Project - this is an innovative project aimed at using sustainable local materials with the overarching goal to improve Balloch as a vibrant visitor destination. Other projects have included regeneration of green space and woodland areas and tree planting with schools.

Education
The Education directorate have worked closely with the Greenspace, Countryside/Community Rangers and external agencies such as the Woodland Trust to engage the young people of West Dunbartonshire in the importance of biodiversity and the practical actions to conserve it.

Education projects have included:

- Countryside ranger delivering a series of talks to primary and secondary schools in West Dunbartonshire advising on the dangers of grassland fires and the threat to biodiversity. In conjunction with the Police and Fire Brigade.
- Countryside ranger delivering an Outdoor Learning Festival to assist educators on activities to carry out to promote biodiversity and outdoor learning.
- Establishment of new Forest School sites within the Council area and manage those sites. There are currently 6 sites on Council owned land.
- Countryside ranger delivering the Forest School programme and helped to mentor the 40 trained members of education staff by offering training and support.
- Working in conjunction with the ranger services environmental education delivered to schools on topics such as minibeasts, pond dipping, tree identification, sowing seeds, school grounds improvements, butterfly identification, hydrology and geography field trips.
- Programme of field trips learning about beaver reintroduction
- Designing and installing bird boxes as part of a John Muir Award
- Tree planting projects
- School/ Nursery garden projects

Section 4: Monitoring and Reporting
Through the development of West Dunbartonshire New Local Biodiversity Action Plan, the Council intend to scrutinise the process we have in place for monitoring the impact of the actions we have taken to improve/conserve biodiversity. Individual projects are monitored and reviewed by the lead officer. Where funding has been sought projects are reviewed in conjunction with funding partners.
Further work is required on the analysis of the outputs of these projects to ensure they are appropriate and supporting the overall objectives relating to biodiversity in West Dunbartonshire.

The Countryside Ranger Service, with local community volunteers, has carried out a range of biological monitoring projects including:

- Heron monitoring at Levengrove Park Heronry
- Black grouse surveys
- Otter surveys
- Orchid Surveys at The Saltings LNR
- Moth Identification at Balloch Castle Country park

Using the Nationally recognised Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS), West Dunbartonshire has annually scored higher than the acceptable standard of 67, scoring 72 in 2012/13 and 75 in 2013/14.

A summarised state of the environment report is included through the Social and Economic Profile and published annually. Environmental Indicators (including those on biodiversity) to support the Strategic Environmental Assessment Process are currently being updated. Information for the report and indicators is gathered through national and local inventories.

**Section 5: Partnership working and Biodiversity Communications**

The Council funds the Environment Trust through the Community Planning Partnership as mentioned in section 3. There are many examples of community engagement across a range of services as detailed in section 3.

Council officers also work in partnership with any external agencies including Heritage Lottery Funding, SNH, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park on various projects relating to green space and biodiversity.

**Section 6: Biodiversity Highlights**

- A group of volunteers from West Dunbartonshire reached the finals of the 2014 Clean Britain Awards.
- Dalmuir Park Heritage Lottery Fund Project
- Multiple examples of local community greenspace projects.
- Greater emphasis given to the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure, including biodiversity, in the emerging Local Development Plan and associated Supplementary Guidance