

Biodiversity Statutory Duty report 2021-2023

City of Edinburgh Council

This report sets out how the City of Edinburgh Council had delivered the statutory duty for biodiversity in the period 2021-2023. This statutory duty applies to all public bodies under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, and requires public bodies to ‘further the conservation of biodiversity’. A report is also required every three years and is presented below, using the recommended template from Scottish Government.

Section 1: Introductory information

The City of Edinburgh Council is a local authority with responsibility for an area including the city of Edinburgh, surrounding countryside and the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The Council is made up of 63 elected councillors representing 17 wards. The Council is currently a minority Labour administration. The Council operates through a system of committees and sub-committees with officers reporting to committees on relevant matters.

All committee reports include a section on Climate and Nature Emergency Implications. This requires all officers to consider the environmental impact of the contents of their report. In addition, every new project, policy or strategy is subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment which considers impacts on people and the environment, to comply with legislation.

The Council is the lead body for the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership. The Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership was one of the first in Scotland and has been in place for 20 years. The Council employs a Biodiversity Officer to facilitate the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan (EBAP). Councillors oversee the production and delivery of the Edinburgh LBAP through the committee reporting process.

The Council is a signatory to the Edinburgh Declaration. In February 2023 the Council declared a Nature Emergency. We are also a signatory to the Scotland Landscape Charter and Scotland’s Geodiversity Charter.

Section 2: Actions to Protect and enhance biodiversity

The Council has four directorates:

- Corporate Services
- Place
- Education and Children’s Services
- Health and Social Care Partnership

Relevant activities relating to biodiversity within each directorate are detailed below.

Corporate Services

Strategy and Insight

The Strategy and Insight Team leads on carbon, climate change and sustainability work within the Council. The team leads on the development of corporate strategies, policies,

action plans and projects which have clear links to biodiversity conservation. The work of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership and outcomes from the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan are integrated and embedded into wider sustainability and climate change work.

2030 Climate Strategy: Delivering a net zero, climate ready Edinburgh

The City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and a nature emergency in 2023 and has committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2030. To achieve this emissions target and adapt the city to the impacts of climate change, a 2030 Climate Strategy and Implementation Plan published in December 2021. The Strategy contains Council and citywide governance and reporting structures and strategic actions to achieve the 2030 net zero target and adapt the city. Key objectives in the Strategy include prioritising nature-based solutions to climate change and protecting and enhancing the city's natural assets including through delivery of Edinburgh's Million Tree Initiative, the creation of a green and blue network of connected waterways, greenspaces and active travel routes that will provide enhanced environments for citizens and protect the city's wildlife and delivering a Nature Network for the city.

Climate Adaptation

The high-level strategic actions identified in the Council's 2030 Climate Strategy, completion of an updated climate change risk assessment for Edinburgh and partner inputs are informing the development of a new Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan for 2024-2030.

The draft Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan sets out the key priorities and actions we need to take to adapt the city. One of the key priorities in the plan is safeguarding Edinburgh's natural environment through measures to increase resilience, enable natural change, species mitigation, connectivity and enhancement. This includes building understanding of the interrelationships between existing pressures on wildlife, habitats and climate change and taking action to alleviate them, working with our key greenspace and biodiversity partners in the city.

Edinburgh's adaptation partnership, Edinburgh Adapts will oversee implementation of the Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan. Edinburgh Adapts reports directly upwards to the NZELB. The Council's newly formed Nature Recovery and Climate Adaptation Working Group will report to the Edinburgh Adapts partnership, increasing integration of nature and climate adaptation work.

Corporate Procurement Service

The Council has had a comprehensive Sustainable Procurement Policy in place since 2012. A new five-year Sustainable Procurement Strategy was produced in March 2020. The Strategy places sustainability at the heart of the Council's procurement programme for the next five years, to ensure that the Council's considerable spending power is used to promote those economic, environmental and social outcomes that support growth, and simultaneously assist the Council in addressing the challenges that the city is facing.

The Sustainable Procurement Policy also informs the Council's terms and conditions of contract. For example, in schedule 8 section 1.1g a duty is placed on service providers to assist the Council on climate change.

The Commercial and Procurement team also use sustainability as selection and award criteria and seek to constantly evaluate processes that minimise the impact of the procurement for example in construction off-site fabrication, use of electric vehicles and use of local suppliers to reduce transport emissions are encouraged and scored accordingly.

The Policy has 4 main Outcomes

Outcome 1: the social and economic benefits from our procurement are maximised

Outcome 2: the environmental impacts are minimised, and the environmental benefits maximised from our procurement

Outcome 3: Edinburgh has a more sustainable supply chain

Outcome 4: sustainable procurement is embedded within the Council

To give an example, the Council procures timber and timber-based goods from verifiable sustainable sources that evidence clear chains of custody in line with the Council's Purchasing Policy for Sustainable Timber and Timber Products, to help protect the natural environment and reduce biodiversity impacts.

Place Directorate

Place Development

Planning and Building Standards Service

This is a key service which leads the delivery of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. It also delivers biodiversity conservation through Planning policies, guidance and designation of Local Nature Conservation Sites.

Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan

The Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan (EBAP) is the main delivery mechanism for biodiversity conservation across the city. The action plan is prepared by the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, supported and chaired by Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The latest EBAP (2022-27) was published in November 2022 and includes around 200 actions to be delivered in the five year period. These are a range of positive actions for biodiversity across the City. The Council's Place Development has a lead role in the governance, co-ordination of delivery and monitoring of the actions by the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, in collaboration with other departments.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), Local Development Plan (LDP), Proposed City Plan 2030 and Green-blue infrastructure

NPF4 and LDP include a range of planning policies to deliver biodiversity protection and enhancements. Locally important sites are protected through the Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) system within the LDP, together with Local Nature Reserves (LNR). NPF4 and LDP policies also recognise the value and potential of biodiversity outside designated sites. The Plans aims to enhance, safeguard and avoid fragmentation of the City's green network.

The next LDP, City Plan 2030, is being Examined by Scottish Government appointed Reporters having been approved by Planning Committee and representing the settled view of the Council. City Plan 2030 includes proposals for a new Green-Blue Infrastructure policy and Designing-in Positive Effects for Biodiversity.

The overall effect of this policy framework is to increase biodiversity while creating a city resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Edinburgh Design Guidance

In conjunction with the LDP, the Edinburgh Design Guidance sets out the Council's expectation for the design of new development in Edinburgh. This outlines expectations for landscape proposals and how biodiversity should be maintained and enhanced through development. In 2020, with input from SNH and other Lothian Planning Authorities, the chapter on biodiversity was updated. This collaborative approach assists with protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the region. In 2023, a further review of the guidance is underway.

Open Space Strategy

The strategy takes a co-ordinated approach to protecting and developing the city's network of open space, helping to deliver Edinburgh's contribution to the development of the Central Scotland Green Network. The Strategy is aligned with the Local Development Plan and co-ordinates with related strategies, including those for parks and gardens, allotments, play, sports facilities, active travel, climate change adaptation and biodiversity.

Key proposals include:

Continuing to manage the city's parks to a good standard and preparing management plans and funding bids to improve Leith Links and Calton Hill;

Creating a network of good quality green corridors, large and local parks as the city grows, with better design advice for developers;

Extending access to play areas through the Play Area Action Plan;

requiring new developments to meet 'play value' standards and promoting informal play within street and open space design;

Improving the value of existing greenspaces for people and wildlife, by expanding the Edinburgh Living Landscape project;

Empowering communities to establish community gardens, orchards and woodlands in under-utilised spaces, in particular for local food growing, with growing space and allotments also promoted in new developments; and

Extending annual Parks Quality Assessment checks and the Friends Group network to include cemeteries in recognition of their value to local history and potential for informal recreation. The Council will work with Edinburgh World Heritage to improve five burial grounds in the World Heritage Site.

Vision for Water Management & Green Blue Network for Surface Water Management

The Edinburgh Blue-Green City partnership has been set up as a multidisciplinary partnership between City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Water and SEPA to drive the development and delivery of a blue-green place-led approach to the management of storm water, reduction of flood risk and delivery of climate adaptation across the City. Nature-based solutions and positive outcomes for biodiversity are integrated into this approach.

External Partnerships

Citywide Transport and Planning officers represent the Council on external partnerships and groups which have a biodiversity remit, such as the Scottish Local Biodiversity Network, Forth Estuary Forum and Water of Leith Action Group.

Housing - Development and Regeneration

Greenspace improvements on Housing Land

Investment in greenspace associated with Housing land is underway. Outcomes will include nature positive interventions to enhance biodiversity, and nature-based solutions for adaptation measures.

Community Gardens

There are more than 45 community gardens on Council land associated with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The size, design, facilities and use of these community gardens is varied, but the main focus of each is the involvement of local Council tenants. A single supplier 'Community Gardens Framework' has been in place since November 2021 and as part of the framework an initial survey of all community gardens on HRA land was carried out. A programme was then created with the emphasis of managing and improving existing community gardens across the city. This has been done in a number of ways, including the use of community gardeners/gardening workshops, offering work experience/training to young people and looking at ways of improving rain water use and storage. The framework has also supported the delivery of new gardens where opportunities were identified.

Community Gardens in Affordable Housing Developments

Development and Regeneration have created two new community gardens as part of new affordable housing developments at Greendykes and Crewe Road Gardens. The community garden at Greendykes in particular has had a lot of initial success, with a strong group of local tenants now involved in using the raised beds and other facilities provided. There is also support of the project and its aims from neighbours who are not actively participating. A community gardener attends weekly and multiple workshops with have taken place with local tenants.

Place management service

Parks and Open space

Natural Heritage Service – site management and community involvement

The Natural Heritage Service manages many of the most important areas for nature in Edinburgh. These include the natural heritage parks, including seven Local Nature Reserves and the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The parks and Local Nature Reserves represent important natural areas owned by the Council, which lie at the core of Edinburgh's green network. The service also runs volunteer activities including practical conservation tasks and wildlife surveys.

This is a key service in the delivery of biodiversity conservation through greenspace management and habitat creation projects.

In terms of community engagement, there is an annual programme of events and monitoring and in 2023 a new iNaturalist Project which invites visitors to the Pentland Hills Regional Park to record their wildlife sightings, received 2490 observations from 263 observers.

The service also coordinates practical conservation projects for the corporate sector like the removal of invasive species, habitat management and tree planting across Natural Heritage Sites.

Nature Restoration Fund money was received and spent on, for example, machinery to create wild flower meadows.

Nature in your Neighbourhood – parks naturalisation

The Edinburgh Living Landscape (ELL) initiative includes Parks and Open Space in partnership with Scottish Wildlife Trust, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust and other organisations. It advocates the development of an ecosystem approach to the management of the Council's open space estate in order to realise the benefits to both biodiversity and public amenity. It aims to improve, link and create resilient green networks to deliver a healthy, accessible and attractive environment.

As part of the ELL initiative, Parks, Greenspace & Cemeteries created annual/perennial meadows across the city. In addition, naturalised grassland now accounts for approximately 13% of the Council's amenity grass estate. An emphasis was to not only to increase the area of naturalised grassland, but to ensure that these areas were better maintained and further developed. This has been achieved by bulb planting in some naturalised grass areas and incorporating ELL into our Landscape Quality Standards (LQS) assessments.

Allowing grassland habitats to develop in a more natural manner in urban settings by reducing grass cutting or sowing flowering plants offers these benefits:

- biodiversity will increase as birds, mammals and insects are attracted to more natural, wilder areas;
- costs of managing intensively maintained areas of grassland can be reduced;
- planting flowering species will add colour to the cityscape throughout the seasons; and
- less regular cutting slows rainwater run-off and helps lock-up carbon in soils, reducing CO₂ release.

Thriving Green Spaces project

The Council secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund in partnership with the National Trust, for a 2 year Thriving Green Spaces project. The project will create a 2050 vision and supporting strategy in partnership with stakeholders and communities. The work undertaken will determine how city greenspaces need to change to play an active role in delivering greater benefits in areas such as health and wellbeing, active travel, biodiversity, recreation and social cohesion. An Ecological Coherence Plan for the city is one of the outcomes of this work.

Edinburgh Nature Network

A project to create the Edinburgh Nature Network has mapped priority areas, and development opportunities, working with a wide range of stakeholders. Modelling of protected and priority habitats and ecosystem services has been undertaken. A pilot delivery area in Leith is being taken forward with external funding, to enhance parks and greenspaces for biodiversity.

Million Tree City Project

A target to plant c.300k trees by 2030 to make Edinburgh a 'Million Tree City' has been set. External funding for the first three years of tree planting was secured. A total of c.54k trees have been planted in the period 2021-23. In addition, 8 'Wee Forests' pilot areas have been planted as part of a partnership project.

Little France Park Local Nature Reserve

Little France Park is the city's newest Local Nature Reserve. It was designated in 2021. This recently created park has reclaimed unmanaged grassland for the local community and created a green corridor from the city centre to Midlothian. It establishes a new corridor for wildlife whilst offering a network of paths, cycleways spread across 45 hectares. The local community have already taken part in planting over 7000 new trees in Little France Park for woodland creation which involved 239 volunteers. Meadow creation is planned in the grassland areas which involves bringing in the local community and schools as in part of the Edinburgh Living Landscape project. Biodiversity Challenge Fund grant was secured from NatureScot to create additional meadow habitat.

Community involvement through Friends of Greenspace groups

Edinburgh has a network of over 70 Friends of Greenspace groups, supported by Parks and Greenspace staff. These groups are made up of volunteers who work closely with the Council and local parks officers to play a key role in enhancing and protecting local parks, woodlands and green spaces. The Friends have set up an umbrella Edinburgh Green Spaces Forum and operate in a semiautonomous way from the Council. They meet up to half a dozen times a year including an AGM. An annual 'thank you' event, hosted by CEC is held where various issues and current practices across the UK are discussed and information sharing takes place between groups. Given the current political and financial climate Friends groups and the Greenspaces Forum are a crucial link with an engaged group of citizens in the city who will undoubtedly play an ever-increasing role in their respective parks and communities going forward.

Allotments

Implementation of the Allotments Strategy by Parks and Greenspace staff has resulted in the creation of new allotment sites on Council land across the city. Some of these were supported by funding through the Neighbourhood Environment Programme. Gardens and allotments offer a valuable habitat, particularly in urban areas.

Invasive Non-Native Species on Council land

Invasive non-native species (INNS), which are a threat to natural habitats and species, are controlled on Council land. These include giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), and Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)

Schools and Lifelong Learning

Eco-schools and Outdoor learning

Environmental education in schools is delivered by this service, helping to support the Curriculum for Excellence. Additional biodiversity-related activities include the development of outdoor play projects within school grounds and delivery of the Eco-schools programme. The Eco-schools programme is supported by the Outdoor Learning team.

64 Primary and Secondary schools in Edinburgh have been accredited with a Green Flag or are working towards an Ecoschools award.

The Council also supports the John Muir Award and in 2022/3, 28 schools participated and over 1000 individuals received an award. Both of these schemes have a focus on nature and biodiversity outcomes. Many schools have carried out biodiversity improvements within their grounds and are engaged in outdoor learning.

- **Section 3: Mainstreaming biodiversity**

The conservation of biodiversity is embedded in the delivery of Council services such as Planning and Building Standards and Parks and Open Space. This ensures that land use planning and the management of Council-owned land deliver protection and enhancements for biodiversity. The role of the natural environment and biodiversity is reflected in the Council's Climate Strategy 2030 and Climate Ready Edinburgh draft plan.

The Planning and Building Standards/NPF4 policy framework supports the protection and enhancement of designated nature conservation sites, protected species and biodiversity in the wider landscape. The statutory Strategic Development Plan, Local Development Plan and non-statutory planning guidelines reflect the overarching aims of delivering connected green corridors, and protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

The Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27 includes key Council services. Many of the long running conservation activities included within the Action Plan are now embedded in core activities and work programmes.

The Edinburgh Nature Network initiative seeks to create resilient green networks on the Council Parks and Greenspace estate, delivering a healthy environment and increased accessibility for people. The inclusion of biodiversity in assessments such as Parks Quality Standards and Green Flag Award for parks and greenspace is also integral to the management of Council land.

The Council's best sites for nature are identified as Natural Heritage Parks and managed by a dedicated Natural Heritage Service team. Eight of these sites are designated as Local Nature Reserves. Programmes such as Eco-schools and the outdoor play project help deliver biodiversity gains within schools and education.

A list of plans, policies and strategies which reflect biodiversity objectives are given below:

[Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2021](#)

[Open Space 2021](#)

[Draft Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan](#)

[Allotments Strategy](#)

[Local Development Plans](#)

[Edinburgh Design Guidance](#)

[Edinburgh and Lothians Forestry and Woodland Strategy](#)

[Trees in the City: Trees and Woodland Action Plan](#)

[Climate Strategy 2030](#)

[Thriving Green Spaces](#)

[Green-blue Strategy](#)

[Sustainable Timber Policy](#)

[Sustainable Procurement Policy](#)

- **Section 4: Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity**

In 2019, the Council set a new ambitious target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and declared a Climate Emergency. In February 2023, a Nature Emergency was also declared. Sustainability and climate emergency action are being championed within the Council and across the city through a significant programme of corporately led activity as detailed above. As well as biodiversity focussed action in the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan, Nature Network and other projects, nature-positive outcomes are integrated into other initiatives which tackle the Climate Emergency. This includes specific actions in relation to tackling the nature emergency in the 2030 Climate Strategy, embedding of biodiversity and nature-based solutions into the draft Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan, Edinburgh's sustainable food plan, Growing Locally, and other related plans and policies.

In February 2020 an Edinburgh Climate Commission was formed. The Council is co-sponsor of the Commission, which brings together key organisations and actors from across the city, from the private, public and third sectors. The Commission aims to act as an enabler, working to accelerate action and impact on climate change in the city, and provide independent, expert and authoritative advice. One of the strategic aims of the Commission is to "Protect and improve its biodiversity and network of parks and greenspaces".

Other strategic work to support a resilient natural environment includes the Edinburgh Nature Network and Green-Blue Network, which model habitat networks and ecosystem services across this city, to identify where nature-based solutions can deliver multiple benefits. A Million Tree City project is being developed to support the zero carbon 2030 target and other adaption objectives, recognising that trees and woodlands provide nature based solutions to climate impacts. Nature-based solutions for managing water and drainage issues covering SUDS design, surface water drainage, flooding and water quality

A Climate Risk Assessment for Edinburgh identified increased rainfall events and an increase in heatwave events as the top risks for the city. Changes to rainfall patterns across the year with prolonged dry periods and an increase in intense rainfall events creates challenging conditions for nature rich habitats, vegetation and soils.

- **Section 5: Public engagement and workforce development**

Public engagement

As stated above, the Council is lead partner for the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership. The Partnership comprises approximately 30 organisations and bodies, including government agencies, conservation bodies, environmental trusts and local volunteer conservation

groups. The group is responsible for the production and delivery of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. The current Plan runs from 2022 to 2027 and includes over 250 actions for priority habitats, species and projects.

More information on the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership's work can be found in the latest [progress report](#).

The Council and Partners engage the public and volunteers through the network of 'Friends' groups who actively participate in biodiversity projects within parks and open spaces. There are public events and engagement activities throughout the year, and engagement with local community groups through project work. There is also significant volunteer resource engaged in species monitoring and recording through partners. Much of this activity in Edinburgh is led by expert volunteers and a significant amount of the species conservation activity within the EBAP is delivered through volunteers.

Communication and engagement

Awareness-raising, communication and engagement are a key element of biodiversity work within Edinburgh. The Council has undertaken a range of work to promote biodiversity, including:

- Publication of web-based information and use of social media;
- Co-ordination of 'Friends of Parks' programme and support for community projects within parks;
- A council-run website for Edinburgh's parks, EdinburghOutdoors.org.uk, contains a wildlife by month calendar for Edinburgh;
- A programme run by the Natural Heritage Service of annual events, conservation tasks and wildlife surveys;
- Work with members of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership on awareness activities and events, such as supporting ad-hoc Bioblitz events and engaging volunteers with wildlife surveys.

Workforce development

Training and learning opportunities have incorporated biodiversity, including:

- Internal training sessions on landscape and biodiversity for Planning, Building Standards staff;
- Work-related learning and knowledge sharing provided by Biodiversity Officers working with colleagues across services, e.g. Parks staff.
- Biodiversity Officer and other staff attending conferences, workshops and events e.g. Scottish Biodiversity Strategy events.

• Section 6: Research and monitoring

In the period of this report, ongoing collection of data on priority species/groups, often as part of national schemes such as pollinator transects, has been carried out. There is a rolling programme of assessment for Local Nature Conservation Site designations.

Modelling of ecosystem services provision was carried out as part of the Edinburgh Nature Network project.

A climate change risk assessment for the city has also been carried out,

Most of the species recording data is routinely passed to The Wildlife Information Centre, who manage and provide ecological data for the Council under a Service Level Agreement.

The status of biodiversity, and activity on biodiversity conservation, in Edinburgh is monitored through:

- Annual progress report on delivery of the Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan;
- Annual report on Nature Conservation produced by the Parks and Greenspace Natural Heritage Service; and
- A programme of species monitoring and survey work is carried out by Council staff, volunteers and partners to provide data. This includes regular surveying such as butterfly and bumblebee transects, as part of national monitoring programmes, and surveys to support the production of species atlases, as well as site-based monitoring. These data are managed by The Wildlife Information Centre and from there passed to the NBN Gateway.

Section 7: Biodiversity highlights and challenges

Biodiversity highlights

- The report above demonstrates the breadth of activities delivered by the Council which help to protect and increase Edinburgh's biodiversity. Particular strengths in Edinburgh are the high level of community involvement in greenspace projects, and the extent of partnership working both within and out with the Council. Specific initiatives that are highlights of biodiversity delivery from the last three years are:
- Production of the sixth Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan in 2022, which contains over 250 actions being delivered by the Council and Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership over a five year period;
- Closely aligning biodiversity conservation and climate change work by incorporating the natural environment within the draft Climate Ready Edinburgh adaptation plan and having the natural environment aims embedded in the new Edinburgh Climate Commission and zero carbon 2030 strategic aims.
- Implementation of the 2020 Vision for Water Management through the Green-blue Strategy;
- Development of the Edinburgh Nature Network;
- Creation of a new biodiversity rich park at Little France which is now designated as a Local Nature Reserve;
- Multiple examples of local community greenspace projects.

Challenges

Looking ahead, the main challenges are:

- Pressure on resources required for appropriate management of existing sites and development of new green infrastructure;
- Increasing understanding of biodiversity in the city through data and research;
- Increasing knowledge and understanding of risks to priority habitats and species from climate change impacts, and how to mitigate these;
- Upskilling of maintenance staff to look after new green infrastructure and habitats.