

# South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership

## Report by Sustainable Development, South Ayrshire Council

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Subject: Biodiversity in South Ayrshire

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### 1. Purpose

To consider the most effective ways to deliver on biodiversity in South Ayrshire

### 2. Recommendation

The Sustainability Partnership are asked to support the following recommendations:

- That the Sustainability Partnership strengthen working relationship with Central Scotland Green Network and the Galloway and Southern Biosphere to protect and enhance biodiversity in Ayrshire and South Ayrshire specifically.
- That the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan core document (2001) is used as a framework for action in South Ayrshire, and that future work in relation to the development of the LBAP document is concentrated on a biennial South Ayrshire update document to put this in context for those referring to it.
- That all Public Body Partners utilise the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process to ensure the consideration of biodiversity in plans, policies, programmes and strategies going forward.
- That reporting of progress in relation to biodiversity, and in particular the key developments listed above, is referred regularly by the Sustainability Partnership to the Community Planning Board, linking strongly to the proposed underpinning theme of sustainability which is to run through the new SOA.

### 3. Background

When looking at the importance of biodiversity in South Ayrshire we can clearly see the need for its protection and enhancement to ensure a vibrant ecosystem which is able to provide ecosystem services<sup>1</sup> so leading to - strengthening the economy in Ayrshire; food production (land and sea), forestry; tourism and recreation.

As a Partnership we have both direct and indirect links to the delivery of ecosystems services. In addition many partnership members have a Biodiversity Duty, under Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, which places the following duty on every public body and office-holder:

S1 (1) "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."

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<sup>1</sup> In terms of Ecosystems, biodiversity is key to ecological services such as:-

- Climate Regulation - Carbon capture through woodlands, forests & soil; Carbon Cycle
- Flood Regulation – Sustainable flood defences
- Soil Formation & Fertility – Growing substrate
- Food Production - Pollination & Seed Dispersal
- Water Quality Regulation - Natural filtration; Water Cycle
- Air Quality Regulation– Natural filtration; Photosynthesis Cycle

In 2000/1 South Ayrshire Council along with North and East Ayrshire Council developed the first Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The document provided a good picture of biodiversity in Ayrshire focusing on 7 habitat action plans and 11 species action plans. However the Ayrshire LBAP did not, and continues not, to have a dedicated member of staff to progress actions. As such very little of the actions targeted in the 2000/1 plan were achieved. Those that were achieved were due to them being core business to one of the LBAP partners as opposed to being driven by the plan.

In 2007 an Ayrshire LBAP review was undertaken and this document recognised the limitations placed on partners by:-

- No dedicated staff
- No dedicated funding
- No biological records centre

The review therefore was a very much more focused document, setting more achievable actions. The main objectives of the document centred on addressing the issue of the lack of a records centre and to restrict the plan to only 2 habitat and 2 species action plans.

2011 saw the start of the review of the 2007 document but has not reached conclusion. A draft document was produced which kept the species and habitat action plan headings but there have been changes / updates to the actions. The document also reflects the current national thinking and priorities in relation to biodiversity i.e. climate change; ecosystem services; invasive non native species. This updated Review document is facing greater challenges to its success due to pressure being placed on the resources of LBAP partner organisations, meaning it has not been possible to allocate leads against all areas of the plan. The review of the document has been ongoing for two years and partners have been unable to date to find a mutually agreeable way forward.

#### **4. Current**

Given that resource, whether financial or human, are becoming tighter and that all organisations require to work in the most efficient manner it is prudent that we, from time to time, reassess areas of work to ensure that they are taking into consideration new or influential drivers and where necessary identifying better ways of working.

All Local Authorities in 1994, via the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, were actively encouraged to develop their own Local Biodiversity Action Plan to assist the UK in delivering on its targets - that was almost 20 years ago and many things have changed in the intervening period.

The Ayrshire LBAP steering group has proven to be a very useful forum and achieved the following:

- prioritising habitats and species of importance in Ayrshire
- identifying actions and lead partners for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity
- fostering partnership working

However, given recent new opportunities for fostering partnership working and the difficulties in delivering actions and identifying lead partners through the LBAP Partnership, it may no longer be the best vehicle to further progress the biodiversity in Ayrshire / South Ayrshire in relation to these points.

In recent times there are a number of other drivers which will have a greater influence on biodiversity:-

#### **Legislative**

- Biodiversity Duty required by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.  
*As of 2014 every public body will also be required to report to government on its delivery of this Duty.*

- Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. *Every Policy Plan Programme or Strategy (PPPS) developed by a public body must consider if this legislation means it is required to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This provides the opportunity to protect and or enhance biodiversity, as the Assessment requires that 11 environmental issues require to be considered, of which a number either have a direct or indirect bearing on biodiversity.*

### **National Policy**

- The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). *It is a priority of the National Planning Framework 2 and it is anticipated that it will feature in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Planning Framework.*

### **International Designation**

- The Galloway & Southern Scotland Biosphere. *Natural World Heritage sites must be of outstanding universal value in accordance with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). Collectively, all biosphere reserves form a World Network linked by exchanges of experience and knowledge. They are part of a UNESCO scientific programme, governed by a "soft law", the Statutory Framework.*

Nationally significant attention is focused on the delivery of the aims and objectives of the CSGN, including the provision of funding. Regionally the Biosphere is of significant importance with a wide range of partners working together to ensure its success. As such it would be prudent to align efforts with these projects which are most likely to deliver biodiversity objectives for South Ayrshire.

## **5. Proposals**

With the increased awareness of the role that biodiversity brings to the economy of an area, to the health and wellbeing of the populous and to the fundamental need to ensure safe and productive ecosystems services, there is a need to ensure that efforts are focused in an efficient and co-ordinated way to ensure the protection, conservation and enhancement of this resource.

The proposal is that to make best use of resources, partnerships and enable South Ayrshire & Ayrshire to work toward assisting in the delivery of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity, that:-

- those resources available are focused to support the delivery of biodiversity through the Central Scotland Green Network and the Galloway and Southern Scotland Biosphere.
- the existing LBAP core document continues to be used as a source of reference, with a brief South Ayrshire biennial update prepared to highlight any relevant new developments in relation to this, i.e. the role of CSGN and the biosphere in delivery.
- reporting of progress in relation to biodiversity, and in particular the key developments listed above, is referred regularly by the Sustainability Partnership to the Community Planning Board, linking strongly to the proposed underpinning theme of sustainability which is to run through the SOA.
- SEA is proactively utilised to promote and further biodiversity in South Ayrshire across all public sector partner and partnership plans, programmes, policies and strategies in line with the Environmental Assessment Act (2005).

## **6. Resource Implications**

None – this paper proposed refocusing of resources for effective outcomes rather than any additional or reduced resource provision.

## **7. Legal**

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005  
Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004  
Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011  
Protected Sites - various

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