

## REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 16 MAY 2019

### NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP – PARTNERSHIP REVIEW

#### 1 Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to:

**1.1 Approve the continued support for the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership.**

#### 2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 The North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP) was set up in 1997 and until recently was known as the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan partnership. NESBiP brings together three Local Authorities together with a range of conservation, farming, forestry and land agencies. Its role is to provide the framework for local action on national priority species and habitats. The Partnership's work also includes the conservation of habitats and species that are of importance to local communities, whether or not they are national priorities.
- 2.2 NESBiP benefits from the participation of a wide range of partners with shared goals and objectives and provides an efficient mechanism for pooling limited resources to deliver shared action. Through its involvement with NESBiP, Aberdeenshire Council promotes nature conservation both within the Council and the wider community which contributes to the delivery of the Biodiversity Duty outlined in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Involvement in NESBiP also supports the commitment in the Aberdeenshire Environmental and Climate Change Policy to 'Conserve the natural and historic environment by protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and historic assets'. The work of NESBiP supports Aberdeenshire's Priorities (2017-22) specifically 'protecting our special environment' and 'encouraging active lifestyles and promoting well-being'.
- a. The NESBiP employs a full time Co-ordinator, and also takes on additional staff to deliver specific funded projects. The Partnership is hosted by the James Hutton Institute which employs the Co-ordinator and manage the finances. A Minute of Agreement between the James Hutton Institute and the partners governs the hosting arrangement for the Partnership. The Agreement is currently under review and once completed will cover the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. This can be extended, by mutual agreement of all the partners, up to 31 March 2022.
- 2.4 The Partnership Assessment and Annual Risk Assessment have been carried out for NESBiP and are attached (**Appendix 1**). Over the last 3 years the Partnership has delivered a wide range of projects and initiatives, which are

detailed in the “North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership Progress Report 2014-17”, which (despite the name) contains details of progress to 2019. A copy can be made available to Members if required. A summary of the work is provided below:

- **Awareness-raising** is a key element of the work of NESBiP and has included organising events, use of social media, talks, articles in publications and knowledge exchange through seminars. Some of NESBiP's awareness raising work has been recognised by two successive Environment Ministers and the Partnership was pleased to welcome a MSP to the recent Year of Young People review seminar to present awards to a range of inspirational young advocates for biodiversity.
- **Demonstration or Best Practice Projects** – as NESBiP is not set up to own or manage large areas of land, the Partnership has worked to establish, or assist local communities to establish demonstration projects such as wildlife gardens, wildflower verges, the use of pollinator seed mixes and the management of allotments. It is hoped the lessons learned through these projects can assist the wider community (schools, community groups and local businesses) in implementing its own initiatives.
- **Wildlife Recorders of the Future** – NESBiP has adopted collaborative and innovative ways of improving our knowledge of the local environment. During 2018 the Partnership ran a Foundation Scotland funded pilot project to engage young people in wildlife recording. This project built on previous work encouraging the use of camera traps in local schools and specifically addressed the issue of encouraging young people to submit records of the wildlife they see. The project has provided a successful model for working with schools and youth groups and the Partnership aims to secure funding to continue this work.
- **Priority Species and Habitat Statements** – a list of locally important species has been drawn up and is being used to ensure that impacts of development or construction projects on these species are fully considered. Habitat statements are being finalised for publication on the Partnership web site. These build on the previous Local Action Plan documents and include all important habitats in the North East. The statements provide an overview of what is present and opportunities for project development to enhance and protect important habitats and associated species in future.
- **Collaborative working** and strengthening links across a range of organisations has allowed NESBiP and its partners to deliver a number of initiatives, including the identification of Aberdeenshire Councillors as Biodiversity Champions for a range of 11 species, habitats or projects.

The Partnership is also working on projects with local golf courses and developers to promote and publicise biodiversity action beyond statutory requirements.

2.5 The work of the NESBiP going forward is set out in an agreed 3 year Strategic Plan 2019-2022 and a detailed 1 year Action Plan with targets to be monitored and reviewed annually. Council Officers sit on both the Management and Steering Groups for NESBiP and will continue to seek to ensure that actions and targets are measurable and that annual reporting is completed. The Strategic Plan includes aims and objectives that support a number of the Council's Strategic Objectives. Copies of the Strategic Plan and Action Plan for 2019-20 can be made available to Members if required. The agreed NESBiP aims for 2019-22 are as follows:

- To improve the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of North East Scotland by providing information and advice to partners, decision makers, developers, land managers, businesses, communities, organisations and individuals; and to provide a focus for information exchange.
- To promote and demonstrate the effective delivery of biodiversity gains through collaboration with the work and actions of others.
- To raise awareness and build capacity within local businesses, organisations, communities and individuals to encourage and motivate them to act to protect and enhance biodiversity by demonstrating that they can make a difference.
- To promote examples of high quality, innovative biodiversity projects in North East Scotland to decision makers, developers, managers and potential funders/supporters across Scotland and beyond to celebrate these successes.

The focus of the Action Plan will include:

- Completion of the current on-going update of the NESBiP web site providing in particular focussed information for community groups and developers.
- Publicity and distribution of completed Habitat Statements which include opportunities for further action on securing and enhancing each habitat type.
- Securing funding for the expansion of the Wildlife Recorders of the Future project to additional schools and community groups.
- Continuation of best practice projects currently underway with a developer and a golf course.
- Delivery of focussed awareness raising events including the annual seminar.

- 2.6 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer from Business Services have been consulted and their comments incorporated into the Report.

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section F.1.1.c. of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to the use of resources in the Planning and Building Standards Service.

### **4 Implications and Risk**

- 4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required because the recommended actions will not have a differential impact on people with protected characteristics. A Town Centre Assessment is not required as there are no impacts on any of the identified town centres.
- 4.2 Funding is sourced from a number of partners, mostly Local Authorities and statutory agencies, generally on an annual basis. Partner organisations are facing budget challenges and this has led, in some cases, to a reduced availability of staff time to support the work of the Partnership, and to deliver relevant actions. The Partnership has worked hard to maximise outputs from the reduced resources available and to draw in appropriate project funding.
- 4.3 Aberdeenshire Council contributes a total of £8,500 per annum of which £7,500 is for core costs and £1,000 for project delivery. The annual core costs for the partnership are £47,000. The Aberdeenshire Council contribution of £8,500 is from the Planning - Environment Other Bodies and Organisations budget.
- 4.4 It is not expected that there will be any significant additional staffing requirements for the next 3 years covered by the Strategic Plan 2019-22. There is no specific Member involvement in the Partnership. Councillors are invited to a range of events and to the annual seminar. At present the Head of Economic Development sits on the NESBiP Steering Group and an Environment Planner from Planning and Building Standards sits on the Management Groups and provides significant input into the work of the Partnership.
- 4.5 The following Risk has been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

ACORP005 – Working with other organisations.

A Risk Mitigation is set out in **Appendix 1**.

- 4.6 The following Risk has been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level ([Directorate Risk Registers](#)):

*Climate Change:* Conserve the natural and historic environment by protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and historic assets. It is recognised that there is a heightened risk of the natural environment being damaged or lost as a result of climate change. The Planning and Building Standards, Planning Environment Team will continue to provide support, advice, and promote best practice to residents, visitors, developers, groups and communities within Aberdeenshire to ensure that they are aware of the natural environment so that it is preserved and to further the conservation of biodiversity.

**Stephen Archer**  
**Director of Infrastructure Services**

Report Prepared By: Emma Williams, Environment Planner  
Date: 1 May 2019



**Start-Up Assessment  
North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership**

**APPENDIX 1**

Criteria	Assessment	Comment/Proposed Action
The partnership's aims fit with the Council's strategic plan and priorities	Yes ▼	
The partnership's has set outcomes to be achieved that fit with the Aberdeenshire Single Outcome Agreement	Yes ▼	
The partnership has an agreed relationship with the Community Planning Partnership	No ▼	
Appropriate status and voting rights are accorded to the Council in the partnership	Yes ▼	
Any transfer of budget to the partnership is compatible with the strategic direction of the council and the Community Planning Partnership	Yes ▼	
All other appropriate bodies have been invited to participate in this partnership	Yes ▼	
The partnership makes a formal annual report that includes annual accounts and performance to its members and other bodies if necessary	Partly ▼	The Partnership produces regular newsletters to provide updates on the work of the Partnership and produces a Report on the period of the Partnership Agreement, this is currently annual.
The partnership ensures equality of opportunity for all and complies with statutory equalities duties as required	Yes ▼	
Members of the partnership's top-level decision-making group can be recalled by their nominating bodies	Yes ▼	
The risks faced by the partnership are shared between partners	Yes ▼	
The partnership has a complaints process or agrees to adopt the complaints process of a member organisation	Yes ▼	
Meetings of the partnership's top-level decision-making group are open to the public	No ▼	
The public is entitled to see reports considered by the partnership's top-level decision-making group	Yes ▼	Reports are not published but can be requested by members of the public.
Minutes of the partnership's top-level decision-making group are made publicly available	Yes ▼	Minutes are not published but can be requested by members of the public.
The partnership has a document such as a remit or memorandum of association to define its role, powers and how it carries out its business	Yes ▼	
The partnership's top-level decision-making group has a quorum for meetings	Yes ▼	
Members of the partnership's top-level decision-making group are appointed for a limited period of time	No ▼	

**Start-Up Assessment  
North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership**

The partnership follows the Account Commission's Code on Following the Public Pound and agrees appropriate arrangements for allocating start-up and running costs		The project is hosted by the James Hutton Institute which prepares its accounts in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, known as UK GAP. Internal accounting processes and procedures are designed to maintain control and accountability over public funds.
There are agreed arrangements for dissolving the partnership	Yes	
There are clear arrangements for the Council to exit the partnership	Yes	
There is a procedure for ensuring members who declare conflicts of interest take no part in decision	N/A	Officers, not Councillors, sit on the NESBiP Steering and Management Groups.
The requirements on council representatives on the top-level decision-making group of the partnership are compatible with the code of conduct for councillors	N/A	
<b>Cost / Benefit Analysis</b>	<b>Response</b>	
Please detail the staffing and financial implications of running the partnership, including those on other council services and partners	£8,500 per annum contribution from Aberdeenshire Council.	
Please state the source of any funding received by the partnership	Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Forestry, James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen City Council, The Moray Council.	
Please describe the benefits of the partnership	Contribution to the delivery of requirements under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004; Delivery of actions under the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; joint delivery of actions to protect and conserve biodiversity within Aberdeenshire; access to wide range of expertise and resources from partnership organisations; awareness raising activities carried out on behalf of the Council.	
The partnership is sustainable and is the best way of achieving its aims and outcomes	Yes	

**Annual Risk Assessment  
North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership**

<b>Partnership Name:</b>	<b>Completed by:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership	Emma Williams	04.04.2019

All partnerships must be recorded in the partnership register  
This table assesses whether your partnership should be recorded as a **significant** partnership requiring a Risk Register.  
Please enter the score in the last column for the statement which most closely represents your partnership.

Impact No.	Description	Minor (Score 1)	Important (Score 2)	Significant (Score 3)	Major (Score 4)	Score
1	The Council contributes to the partnership by direct funding and/or indirectly through staff resources, work done etc.)	< £10K per annum	£10K to < £50 k per annum	£50K to < £100k per annum	> £100k per annum	2
2	The partnership's success is critical to the achievement of one or more of the Council's Strategic objectives.	Not directly linked to a Strategic objective	Linked to a Strategic objective.	Significant contributor to success of a Strategic objective.	Essential to the achievement of a Strategic objective.	3
3	Failure of the partnership would have an impact on the Council's reputation.	Threat of adverse comment in local press or the equivalent that corporate Communications consider to be of material concern to the Council.	Actual adverse comment in local press or the equivalent that Corporate Communications consider to be of material concern to the Council.	Individual press reports in national media that Corporate Communications consider being of material concern to the Council	Concerted, widespread or recurrent critical coverage of the Council or for a specific event in the media	1
4	The extent to which partnership expenditure is controlled by the Council.	The Council has full control over expenditure decisions.	The Council has veto on expenditure decisions.	The Council is a party to expenditure decisions.	The Council has no control over expenditure.	3
5	The partnership takes decisions on behalf of or which are binding on the Council	The Partnership does not take decisions on behalf of the Council.	The Partnership does not take decisions on behalf of the Council but Council representatives with decision-making authority attend the partnership and consider and influence its recommendations.	The Partnership does not take decisions on behalf of the Council but Council representatives with decision-making authority attend the partnership and agree to be bound by its decisions.	The partnership has decision-making responsibilities directly delegated to it from the Council.	3
6	The Council has set up the partnership in order to receive additional funding and/or meet Statutory or Regulatory requirement.	Not required by law or to receive funding.	Indirect or limited links to successful achievement of funding.	Direct links to successful achievement of funding.	The Council is required to participate in this partnership by law or to receive specific funding.	1
Total Score						13
Maximum Possible Score						24
Impact %						54.17%
Evaluation						<b>Not Significant</b>

