

**Falkirk Council**  
**Biodiversity Duty Report**  
**2018-2020**



**Falkirk Council**

## Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004

### Biodiversity Duty Report 2018-2020

<b>Public Body</b>	<b>Falkirk Council</b>
<b>Role</b>	<b>Local authority</b> <b>Authority area: 29,769 hectares</b> <b>Population (at 2019): 160,890</b>
<b>Reporting Period</b>	<b>1/1/2018 – 31/12/2020</b>

### Introduction

Section 1.1 of the Nature Conservation Scotland Act (2004) states that “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”. This requirement is known as the Biodiversity Duty.

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (2011) requires all public bodies to report on their delivery of the Biodiversity Duty. Reports are to be produced and made public every three years.

This document reports on Falkirk Council’s delivery of the Biodiversity Duty for the period 2018-20.

It addresses the following key themes:

- 1. Governance: providing clear leadership and management on biodiversity.**
- 2. Mainstreaming: integrating biodiversity into corporate projects, plans and strategies.**
- 3. Action: taking action to protect and enhance biodiversity.**
- 4. Challenges and next steps.**
- 5. Contribution to national targets.**

This report is based on the knowledge of key personnel with a remit for biodiversity conservation within Falkirk Council and responses to a questionnaire returned by representatives from other Council Services.

This report will be made available on the Council’s website ([www.falkirk.gov.uk](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk)) and a copy can be requested from the Council’s Biodiversity Officer (E-mail: [biodiversity@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity@falkirk.gov.uk)).

## 1. Governance, Leadership and Management

### 1.1 Governance

Overall governance is provided by the elected Members of Falkirk Council. All policies and key strategies are reported to Council for discussion and approval. Environmental policies and initiatives are usually reported to the relevant Council committee. Progress on delivering the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and other key environmental initiatives is reported to Council periodically.

### 1.2 Leadership

Individual Councillors provide visible leadership with regard to environmental issues, relevant to their ward and their specific remits and responsibilities. For example:

- Attending environmental events.
- Supporting environmental initiatives.
- Helping communities to inform and engage in local environmental improvements.
- Supporting key environmental policies or programmes within the Council, such as the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Sustainability is a key focus in the **Council's Corporate Plan 2020-22**

It's vision states: "Everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and build sustainable communities."

It's commitments state that we will:

- Safeguard our green spaces and maintain a transport infrastructure that is sustainable, and fit for purpose
- Support sustainable economic recovery that benefits everyone
- Support the growth of the low carbon economy to deliver new employment and create a greener environment
- Look to capitalise on the environmental and green benefits that arose during lockdown to ensure we meet our carbon reduction targets

### 1.3 Management

The Corporate Sustainability Working Group provides a mechanism for integrating and championing sustainability issues and initiatives throughout the whole Council from the top down; including policies and activities to further the conservation of biodiversity.

There are additional cross-service groups which can champion and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity including the Open Space Corporate Liaison Group.

Within Falkirk Council, Development Services takes a lead role in delivering the Biodiversity Duty. The Biodiversity Officer post, seated within the Planning and Environment unit, has a specific remit to further the conservation of biodiversity through delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process. The Biodiversity Officer also provides expert advice, guidance and support to Council Services to assist and encourage actions to further the conservation of biodiversity, in line with the Biodiversity Duty.

## 2. Mainstreaming

### 2.1 Plans, policies and strategies

It is essential that biodiversity conservation is incorporated into relevant plans, policies and strategies, if it is to be delivered effectively across the Council. Council plans, policies and strategies which are particularly key to furthering the conservation of biodiversity are:

- [Second Nature: A Biodiversity Action Plan for the Falkirk Council area](#)
- Falkirk Council's Environmental Policy

Other plans and policies which help promote the protection and conservation of biodiversity include:

- Falkirk Greenspace - A Strategy for our Green Network
- Local Development Plan 2
- Falkirk's Open Space Strategy
- Falkirk Forestry & Woodland Strategy and Urban Woodland Management Plans
- Falkirk Council's Procurement Strategy 2020-23

Various other plans, policies and strategies take account of their potential impact on biodiversity and seek to minimise negative impacts.

The Council is a key partner in the **Local Biodiversity Action Plan** (LBAP) process, co-ordinated by the Council's Biodiversity Officer. This process identifies and delivers focused local action to conserve biodiversity. Input from Falkirk Council to this process is critical to safeguarding our vital local biodiversity. Playing this key role in the LBAP process is a fundamental element of the Council's fulfilment of its Biodiversity Duty.

The Falkirk Council Area has had a Local Biodiversity Action Plan process since 2000, supported by a Biodiversity Officer within Falkirk Council. Many of the actions within the Local Biodiversity Action Plan relate to Council owned land or Council initiatives.

The most recent Local Biodiversity Action Plan was approved and published in 2018 and reflects the current priorities for local biodiversity action.

### 2.2 Procedures and processes

Specific procedures are adopted by most Services or Units to ensure that they routinely assess the effects of their activities on biodiversity, adhere to environmental law and adopt environmental good practice. In some cases this is undertaken on a project by project basis rather than assessing the impacts of wider policies or strategies. In other cases this is done on an ad hoc basis and tends to rely on the awareness and understanding of the individual staff involved.

Procedures used by some Services to assess and limit impacts on biodiversity include:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Consultation with the Biodiversity Officer or similar expert

- Use of ecological consultants
- Environmental Impact Assessment (where legally required)
- Pre-works ecological surveys
- Contractor and procurement standards or requirements

The Council's committee report template includes a mandatory section which asks the author to set out the "Sustainability/Environmental Impact" of any proposal.

### 2.3 Advice and Expertise

The majority of Council Services seek biodiversity advice from the Biodiversity Officer or, in some instances, from external organisations or specialist consultants. Other staff within the Planning and Environment Unit, such as the outdoor rangers, also provide expert advice to colleagues.

Some Services have staff with specific responsibility for and knowledge of biodiversity conservation issues. However, most rely on a general awareness of environmental issues by those staff whose remit it is most relevant to. They then access expert advice and support from elsewhere within the Council or externally as required. The availability of this advice and support is constrained by the level of specialist staff resource dedicated to biodiversity conservation and ecological issues.

Those Services most likely to regularly impact on biodiversity have provided a range of relevant environmental training to some staff.

"Senior staff are familiar with legislation relating to their areas of work, ... and if necessary have access to further environmental specialist advice through consultancy frameworks and Falkirk Council colleagues". (Staff member, Development Services)

### 2.4 Staff Awareness

General staff awareness of environmental issues is likely to have increased over the past three years reflecting a greater awareness within wider society of issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Awareness of the Biodiversity Duty amongst managers and key staff is likely to have remained mixed. However, most are aware of the environmental policies and initiatives of particular relevance to their areas of work.

The Green Champions Network (established in 2019) has 62 voluntary staff members from all services and seniority levels within the council. They work to promote resource efficiency in the Council and to support the Energy & Climate Change Team to ensure that sustainability is embedded in all operations and policies. The network helps to spread a culture of change and collaborative working. It has produced an Employee [Green Charter](#).

### 3. Action for Biodiversity

This chapter highlights the wide variety of activities undertaken by Falkirk Council to further the conservation of biodiversity over the reporting period (2018-20). While not exhaustive, it illustrates the range of activities that have and continue to take place.

#### 3.1 Adhering to environmental law

All services adhere to environmental law. Those services most likely to have an impact on legally protected biodiversity have procedures in place to assist with this. They also have access to relevant advice and expertise either in-house or from consultants.

**Table 1: Examples of action taken to meet legal environmental standards (2018-20)**

Protected areas	Consent is secured from Nature Scot for works likely to impact on designated sites (e.g. management of reedbeds on a SSSI).
	An EIA and HRA are being produced for the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme. This includes consideration of impacts on the SPA, potential to create habitats as compensation for any habitat loss, and proposals to replace any trees affected by the works.
Species protection	Use of a checklist to ensure contractors check hedges for nesting birds and other wildlife prior to replacing them with fencing.
	Protected species surveys done where work might affect them (e.g. bat surveys were carried out prior to demolition of a building, and replacement bat boxes put up.)
	Tree works avoided during the bird breeding season and nesting bird surveys done where needed.
	Work within rivers and burns scheduled to avoid fish spawning and migration periods, and done in consultation with SEPA.
	Licences secured for work that may impact on protected species (e.g. paths works affecting badgers or great crested newt surveys).
	Appropriate ecological surveys and assessment required with planning applications likely to impact on protected biodiversity.
Habitat protection	For building projects biodiversity impacts are assessed and development proposals informed by protected species & habitat surveys to ensure that legal obligations are met and the impact of the development on biodiversity is minimised.
	Biodiversity is included in framework contracts for term consultants for engineering and flooding, providing expertise in ecological issues during project design and planning.
Invasive species	Engineering and building projects include the survey, identification and treatment of invasive species (such as Japanese knotweed) including licensed disposal where required.

### 3.2 Assessing and limiting negative impacts

To combat biodiversity loss we must aim, as a minimum, to do no harm to biodiversity through our actions. Assessing the effects of our work on biodiversity and limiting negative impacts as far as possible is therefore important. Those Services most directly involved with work that impacts on biodiversity are generally aware of the need to consider their environmental impacts on biodiversity. In other services the approach taken may depend on the knowledge and awareness of the individuals involved. Some services are in a position to also ensure others consider their impacts on biodiversity.

**Table 2: Examples of action taken to assess and minimise negative impacts on biodiversity (2018-20)**

Assessing our impacts	The Council's committee report template includes a mandatory section which asks the author to set out the "Sustainability / Environmental Impacts" of any proposal.
	Full Strategic Environmental Assessments have been undertaken on key policy documents including the Local Development Plan 2, the Community Food Growing Strategy and the Core Path Plan.
	A Summary Ecological Appraisal was done as part of the development of a Low Carbon Vehicle Hub to ensure no disturbance to wildlife, particularly nesting birds.
	Habitat Regulations appraisals are undertaken for any projects likely to have a significant impact on Special Protection Areas (designated for their important bird populations). (E.g. the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme)
	Impacts on biodiversity and eco-system services are considered when deciding whether or not to cut back or remove trees.
Limiting our negative impacts	On new developments, where existing natural habitat is to be disturbed, Building Design engage landscape designers to develop proposals to mitigate the level of disturbance, by management of or the introduction of new landscape features.
	Plans for a new Culvert at the proposed DEAR development include an otter passage.
	The Low Carbon Vehicle hub development relocated on-site trees close by to enable development.
	Landscaping schemes on new build housing projects have included provision of wildlife tunnels or gates in fencing.
	Street lighting is designed and located to reduce negative impacts on biodiversity.
Helping others to assess their impacts	LDP2 policy 'PE19: Biodiversity and Geodiversity' protects biodiversity via the planning process; promoting the assessment of ecological impacts from development and the mitigation of negative impacts.
	The Development Management process requires applicants to consider the environmental impact of a proposal and, where appropriate, identify measures to limit and compensate for negative impacts on biodiversity. Supplementary guidance on Biodiversity and Development provides further guidance to developers.
	As a competent authority Falkirk Council undertakes a significant number of Appropriate Assessments to ensure there are no significant negative impacts from development on European designated sites.

### 3.3 Promoting environmental best practice and innovation

The Council is taking a lead in applying principles such as Biodiversity Net Gain and Ecological Networks. Greater awareness of the climate and biodiversity challenges we face has emphasised the need to consider sustainability. Services are looking at new approaches to how we do things to deliver benefits for the environment and our local communities.

**Table 3: Examples of action taken to apply environmental best practice and innovation (2018-20)**

Biodiversity Net Gain	Several large Council development projects are applying the Biodiversity Net Gain principle to secure positive outcomes for biodiversity. The first to apply the principle was the A904/A9 upgrade. Other projects investigating using BNG include: development of former industrial works at Abbotsford, the Falkirk-Denny cycle path and remediation of Kinneil Kerse landfill.
Ecological networks	The Council has been a key partner in development of the Inner Forth Habitat Network. It is also working with partners to finalise a blueprint for the green network, highlighting key actions needed to further expand important parts of the Council wide habitat network. We are also a key partner in delivering the Pollinator Way – an extensive habitat network along the John Muir Way.
Procurement	Sustainability is a key theme in the Councils Procurement strategy. For example the recent horticultural framework requires recycling/reuse of plastic plant pots and use of peat alternatives instead of peat as a growing medium.
	Bereavement services have purchase non-peat based soil improver based on farm waste.
Guidance and advice	Supplementary guidance on Local Nature Conservation Sites, Biodiversity & Development, and Green Infrastructure promote best practice in terms of protecting and enhancing biodiversity through development.
	Our grant funding team (EU Leader funding) is highly geared towards sustainable tourism and promotes good practice to funded developments e.g. farm tourism schemes.
New technology & innovation	The Council is providing funding for a local trial of an innovative new approach to the control of Himalayan Balsam (an invasive plant species), using a plant rust.
	A new weed control contractor is using the latest laser guided technology to apply herbicide only where it finds weeds, thus reducing the use of herbicide by up to 80%.
Transforming how we do things	A review of grass cutting regimes has been done to identify how we can change our management of grassed areas to deliver social, environmental and financial benefits. Recommendations for a trial of the proposed changes will be presented to committee in Feb 2021. It is hoped this work will lead to significant benefits for biodiversity.
	Working together flooding, environment and climate change staff have commissioned a study to look at the potential to create new habitat (woodland, long grass, wetland, green roofs & walls) on council owned land and buildings to absorb CO <sup>2</sup> , attenuate flood waters and benefit biodiversity.

**“We have been working on a full grassland management review and over the next 3 years we should see massive changes in how we provide our service which will only increase biodiversity”. (Staff member, Development Services)**

### 3.4 Positive action to conserve biodiversity

There has been a huge amount of positive action over the last three years to conserve biodiversity. Whilst this is a key role for some Services, most sections of the Council have been able to take some action to help biodiversity. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan process delivers a wide range of local biodiversity projects on Council land or with the direct support of council staff.

Local communities, interest groups and enthusiasts play a vital role in looking after local biodiversity. Falkirk Council has supported and enabled local people to take environmental action, whether through funding, advice, working alongside them or simply offering encouragement.

**Table 4: Examples of positive action to conserve biodiversity(2018-20)**

Protecting and managing important sites for wildlife	The Council protects 100 locally designated wildlife sites, sites of importance for nature conservation, and geodiversity sites. It carries out appropriate management on some of the sites that it owns.
	Extensive improvement work has been done at Bothkennar, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Other SSSI's owned by Falkirk Council are also undergoing positive management.
	Enhancement works have been done at Polmont Woods, Summerford Park, Bantaskine Estate, Kinneil foreshore, Bonnyfield Nature Park, Avonglen Quarry, and Forge Dam.
	In partnership with other organisations, the community and Larbert High School Falkirk Council delivered an award-winning project at Carron Dams Local Nature Reserve. It included habitat creation and enhancement, path works, public art, events and interpretation.
	All three Local Nature Reserves are managed by local management groups with the active support of Falkirk Council.
Protecting important species	Thousands of native bluebells have been planted at local woodland sites.
	With the Falkirk Wildlife Volunteers Group we have continued projects to conserve Barn owls, Kestrels and Tree sparrows, and started a reptile survey programme.
	A sapling grown from the ancient 'Kings Tree' in Denny has been planted near to the parent tree.
	Small holes have been made in garden fences of council houses to give access for hedgehogs. Signs tell the homeowner why the holes are there.
	Tern rafts upgraded to provide improved nesting areas.
	A camera trapping project proved red squirrel and pine marten are now using local woodlands.
	We work with the Bean Goose Action Group to monitor and protect the wintering bean goose flock. This includes GPS tracking of some birds.
	We monitor and protect rare great crested newts at key breeding sites.
	Worked with SSPCA Wildlife rescue centre on mammal releases on suitable council owned sites.

	We control invasive species (especially Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed) on Council owned land and at several other strategic locations. Private landowners are alerted to invasive species identified on their land and offered advice on appropriate treatment.
Creating new habitat	Six urban woodland management plans have been produced to guide the management and expansion of Falkirk Council's woodlands. Delivery of the first plan started in 2020.
	The Zetland Park Project design includes new areas of meadow, nectar-rich planting, bulbs, and a pond. Delivery of the project has started, with bulbs and meadow areas already planted.
	The Falkirk Pollinator Way and B-lines projects have created meadows, areas of native wildflower bulbs and bee banks in a number of parks including Camelon public park, Ash Park, Sunnyside Playing fields, Dollar Park, Stirling Rd Playing fields, Princes Park, Summerford Park, Policy Bing and Bantaskine Estate. An upgrade of Easter Carmuir's park also saw new meadow habitat and trees.
	Grass cutting has been reduced in frequency or stopped at a number of sites providing more naturalised grass habitat to benefit wildlife.
	Wildflower meadow seed has been used in landscaping schemes associated with a wide range of projects including: the Forth Valley Sensory Centre kitchen garden, the Abbotshaugh Bridge installation, a new retaining wall opposite Municipal Buildings, planting around the Sir John de Graeme fountain, and reinstatement after path creation/upgrade works.
	Working with Froglife we have created new ponds and/or terrestrial habitat such as wildflowers at 7 council owned sites.
	The 'Make a Difference' award scheme gives small grants to Council tenants groups to improve their local environment.
Connecting habitats	The design of the Denny Eastern Access Road includes a crucial woodland buffer strip which will reinforce and expand the local woodland habitat network.
People power	Individual council staff have volunteered to take environmental action including: planting at Zetland Park, sowing wildflower seed at Policy Bing and enhancement works at Carron Dams as part of Climate Week.

**"I think Falkirk is pretty good biodiversity wise. Red squirrels and pine marten, two protected species, have both moved into the area in the last 10 years because of our amazing wildlife corridors and woodland network. If they are coming back we are doing something right." (Staff member, Development Services)**

### 3.5 Advice, Training and Sharing Good Practice

A very limited number of staff are available to provide in-house ecological expertise, however most Services are able to source biodiversity advice when needed. Staff doing work that is clearly likely to impact on biodiversity are accessing appropriate training and advice. Individuals and communities are being offered biodiversity advice where requested. The green champions network offers a useful way of communicating with like-minded colleagues across Services to find advice and aid joint-working.

**Table 5: Examples of advice, training and sharing good practice (2018-20)**

Advice	The Biodiversity Officer, Outdoor Rangers and other Planning and Environment Unit staff provide expert advice on biodiversity issues to colleagues within Falkirk Council.
	Supplementary Guidance on Local Nature Conservation Sites and Biodiversity & Development has been reviewed and guidance on Green Infrastructure is in development to provide advice to landowners and developers.
	An on-line gardening workshop was offered to staff as part of Climate Week 2020, providing advice on gardening for wildlife.
	Biodiversity advice is provided to communities and individuals on request (E.g. Advice and survey work was provided to inform design and planning for a community garden project).
	Environment staff, particularly the rangers, advise schools, community groups, walkers, the general public and other Council Services about how to reduce their impact on biodiversity through direct contact, social media (Falkirk Explored) and indirectly through volunteers.
Training	Staff are encouraged to attend relevant biodiversity training courses. E.g. Planners attended a HRA awareness session, and Roads, Bridges & Flooding staff attended a half-day Environment/Ecology Seminar.
	In some units good practice and new initiatives are shared between colleagues. (E.g. A training session and site visit was arranged for colleagues interested in the Carron Dams project)
Sharing good practice /	Some units reported making the most of an individual's personal interest and expertise in environmental issues. The Green Champions network offers a more formal way to harness individuals' interest in environmental matters.
	The Biodiversity Officer shares good practice with colleagues across Scotland via the Scottish Biodiversity Officers Network and other Scotland-wide biodiversity fora and stakeholder groups.

“Consultation with the Biodiversity Officer is standard practice for most of our unit. This has helped us provide more biodiversity-friendly landscaping around projects where otherwise we would have simply used amenity grass seed mix.” (Staff member, Development Services)

### 3.6 Awareness raising, communication and education

A range of methods have been used to raise awareness and communicate both within the Council and beyond. Schools offer a wide range of environmental learning opportunities with access to nature within their grounds or in nearby greenspace.

**Table 6: Examples of awareness raising, communication and education (2018-20)**

Awareness raising & communication	Social media, (including Falkirk Explored facebook page) has grown in popularity and been an effect way of sharing messages about biodiversity issues.
	The outdoor rangers promote a wide range of opportunities for people to discover local biodiversity and find out more about it, through their work with schools and community groups, a programme of public events, and the provision of site interpretation.
	Tenant Talk magazine has provided council house tenants with information about wildlife gardening, hedgehogs and hedgehog gates, and local wildlife projects such as Froglife’s neighbourhood wildlife corridors campaign.
	Falkirk Council supports a variety of initiatives to promote biodiversity and encourage people to learn more about it. These have included: Forth Naturalist and Historian events, practical volunteering opportunities and events at our Local Nature Reserves.
	Falkirk Council provided practical support and funding to the Falkirk Wildlife Conservation Group – a group of local volunteers taking action to conserve biodiversity.
Education	Several schools encourage pupils to become involved in the John Muir award scheme as a means of engaging them in environmental issues and activities.
	Environmental themed activities have been provided to secondary school pupils at “STEM at the Helix”
	Almost all nursery, primary and secondary schools have a school garden or an outdoor learning space, where they can grow things and learn about nature. One lucky school even has its own resident fox.
	86 Falkirk schools and nurseries are registered with Eco-schools. 16 of these currently have green flags.

### 3.7 Partnership working

Many of the above activities highlight the level of joint working that is taking place between Council Services to achieve biodiversity conservation. In addition, Council Services are working closely with other organisations, community groups and client groups to further the conservation of biodiversity.

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership includes a wide range of conservation organisations and individuals, as well as Falkirk Council, and demonstrates the value of partnership working. Partnership working is critical to the delivery of local biodiversity conservation.

#### 4. Challenges and next steps

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act requires Falkirk Council to report every three years on its work to further the conservation of biodiversity. This report is not only an opportunity to highlight the considerable range of biodiversity conservation activities that are already taking place, but also to highlight opportunities for improvement.

This reporting process has highlighted some potential next steps to further improve upon Falkirk Councils delivery of the Biodiversity Duty over the next three years. These include:

<b>Governance, leadership and management</b>	1	Determine the potential requirement and demand for biodiversity training or awareness raising amongst elected members and senior Council staff, to help embed biodiversity conservation fully across all services.
	2	Consider whether Falkirk Council should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Declare a biodiversity emergency</li> <li>b) Sign the Edinburgh Declaration</li> </ol>
	3	Increase awareness and understanding of nature-based solutions that can deliver action for climate change and sustainable communities as well as biodiversity.
<b>Mainstreaming</b>	4	Use the Green Champions Network to encourage wider communication and joint action between council staff.
	5	Ensure key staff within all services are aware of the biodiversity duty, how they can help deliver it and links to other agendas such as climate change and a green recovery.
	6	Maintain and fully resource the Biodiversity Officer post and implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan, as a key mechanism for ensuring that Falkirk Council delivers its Biodiversity Duty across all Services.
	7	Promote close joint working between teams working on core environmental issues (including climate, biodiversity, flooding, and land management) – potentially offering joint training in ecosystem services and nature-based solutions.
<b>Action</b>	8	Ensure that expert biodiversity advice is available to all Council Services as required, and that staff members know when and where to seek advice.
	9	Promote the concept of all new major developments applying the Biodiversity Net Gain process.
	10	Implement the pilot project to trial alternative grassland management regimes, with a view to wider rollout if successful.
	11	Deliver habitat creation in Council greenspaces and installation of greenroofs and walls on council buildings (guided by the findings of the current habitat creation and CO <sup>2</sup> sequestration study).

	12	<p>Encourage each Service to identify a small number of new biodiversity conservation actions to undertake during the period 2021-2023. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use less herbicide.</li> <li>• Restore pools and riffles within heavily modified watercourses as part of any projects and consider possible daylighting of culverted watercourses.</li> <li>• Finalise a blueprint for the green network highlighting the key actions needed to expand important parts of the Council wide habitat network.</li> <li>• Help to signpost council staff to relevant biodiversity training and volunteering opportunities.</li> </ul>
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The challenge of Covid-19 throughout much of 2020 has undoubtedly had an impact on the work that it has been possible to do during that period. That said, a significant amount of work to conserve biodiversity has still taken place. The challenges of 2020 have reinforced for many just how important nature is to our lives. We face a global biodiversity crisis, however we also have a great opportunity now to take positive action for biodiversity as part of a sustainable, green recovery.

## 5. Contribution to national targets

Falkirk Council's work to further the conservation of biodiversity contributes to national efforts to protect and enhance Scotland's biodiversity. The following table gives an indication of how Falkirk Council is contributing to national targets for the conservation of biodiversity (as set out in the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity".)

<b>Targets/key steps from Chapter 1 (Healthy ecosystems) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"</b>	<b>Contribution to key step?</b>	<b>Justification</b>
(1.1) Encourage and support ecosystem restoration and management, especially in catchments that have experienced the greatest degradation	Yes	Varied work to restore and manage key habitats and ecosystems including peat bog restoration, pond/wetland enhancement, control of invasive species along river systems, and protection and management of a network of important wildlife sites.
(1.3) Government and public bodies, including SNH, SEPA and FCS, will work together towards a shared agenda for action to restore ecosystem health at a catchment-scale across Scotland	Yes	Extensive partnership working with a wide range of local and national organisations to deliver biodiversity conservation. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan provides all partners with a shared focus for local conservation action.
(1.4) Establish plans and decisions about land use based on an understanding of ecosystems. Take full account of land use impacts on the ecosystems services that underpin social, economic and environmental health	Yes	Consideration of habitat networks, key wildlife sites and ecosystems informs the development of the LDP, the LBAP and other key policies/plans.

<b>Targets/key steps from Chapter 3 (Biodiversity, health and quality of life) of the "2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity"</b>	<b>Contribution to key step?</b>	<b>Justification</b>
(3.1) Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups	Yes	The Council provides a wide range of opportunities for local people and groups to discover, enjoy and help to look after local biodiversity.
(3.2) Support local authorities and communities to improve local environments and enhance biodiversity using green space and green networks, allowing nature to flourish and so enhancing the quality of life for people who live there	Yes	The Council has various projects to support communities to enhance their local environments. Greenspace management is taking account of opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity. Green network projects like the Falkirk Pollinator Way provide benefits for both people and nature.

(3.3) Build on good practice being developed by the National Health Service (NHS) and others to help encourage greenspace, green exercise and social prescribing initiatives that will improve health and wellbeing through connecting people with nature	Yes	An extensive network of paths (monitored by volunteer path wardens) and greenspaces connect people to nature. Opportunities are provided for outdoor learning, conservation volunteering and discovering nature.
(3.4) Increase access to nature within and close to schools, and support teachers in developing the role of outdoor learning across the Curriculum for Excellence	Yes	Most schools have access to a school garden and/or orchard. Many schools are supported to use nearby greenspaces. Several schools have made very strong links to their local greenspace, helping to look after and promote it.
(3.5) Encourage public organisations and businesses to review their responsibilities and action for biodiversity, and recognise that increasing their positive contribution to nature and landscapes can help meet their corporate priorities and performance	Yes	Corporate volunteering has been supported on a number of wildlife sites / LNRs. A number of local businesses are involved in local conservation projects.

<b>Targets/key steps from Chapter 4 (Wildlife, habitats and protected places) of the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”</b>	<b>Contribution to key step?</b>	<b>Justification</b>
(4.1) Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits	Yes	Access provision and interpretation is provided at most council owned sites that are of importance for wildlife. Leaflets, guided walks, events, trails, etc. are provided to actively encourage public use.
(4.3) Integrate protected areas policy with action for wider habitats to combat fragmentation and restore key habitats	Yes	As well as a suite of nationally and locally designated nature conservation sites, Falkirk Council promotes the development of wider habitat networks. This is evidenced in the LDP2, the LBAP and in practical conservation projects.
(4.5) Involve many more people than at present in this work and improve understanding of the poorly known elements of nature	Yes	Falkirk Council continues to highlight the need for biodiversity conservation amongst its staff, engage new partner organisations and community groups in biodiversity conservation, and promote our wide range of wildlife to local people.

Targets/key steps from Chapter 5 (Land and freshwater management) of the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”	Contribution to key step?	Justification
(5.4) Put in place the management necessary to bring Scotland’s protected areas into favourable condition and improve the ecological status of water bodies	Yes	Falkirk Council is working to ensure that it’s SSSIs and other protected areas are under appropriate management.
(5.5) Ensure that biodiversity and ecosystem objectives are fully integrated into flood risk management plans, and restore wetland habitats and woodlands to provide sustainable flood management	Yes	The Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme is currently undertaking an EIA and Habitat Regulations Appraisal. The scheme will involve a range of habitat compensation and enhancement measures. Work to restore peatlands, protect and enhance riparian woodlands and combat invasive species along our rivers contributes to sustainable flood management.
(5.6) Restore and extend natural habitats as a means of building reserves of carbon and to help mitigate climate change	Yes	The Falkirk bog restoration project is restoring a significant proportion of the areas raised bogs. Once restored these bogs will capture carbon dioxide into the future. Protection and enhancement of other natural environments including woodland and grasslands also contribute to carbon sequestration. A study to identify habitat creation opportunities to sequester CO <sup>2</sup> has been started.
(5.7) Provide clear advice to land and water managers on best practice	Yes	Supplementary Guidance on Local Nature Conservation Sites (SG08) provides a statement for each designated site outlining appropriate management to protect and benefit biodiversity. Supplementary Guidance on Biodiversity and Development (SG05) provides guidance to developers and planners on biodiversity issues. Advice and examples of best practice are provided to council staff undertaking land/water management.