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**REPORT TO: PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE ON  
10 NOVEMBER 2020**

**SUBJECT: BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORTING 2018-2020**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND  
FINANCE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report asks Committee to agree the content of the Biodiversity Duty Report for 2018-2020 and note publication of the Edinburgh Declaration.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (E) (2) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the Review and Preparation of Strategic and Local Plans.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that Committee agree:**

- (i) the content of the Biodiversity Duty Report 2018-2020 set out in Appendix 1 that will be issued to the Scottish Government; and**
- (ii) to note the publication of the Edinburgh Declaration.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 The public sector can play a key role in leading by example and make a real contribution to Scotland's efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced a requirement for all public bodies in Scotland to make a report publicly available on compliance with their biodiversity duty. Biodiversity duty reports are required every three years, and are not only about protecting biodiversity through managing specific sites, habitats and species but also aim to:

- Increase the level of understanding and connection between people and the living environment.

- Promote consideration of all our impacts on the natural world through our actions and decisions, including through procurement and use of resources.
- Encourage staff, partners and customers to engage with and understand and consider biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Report set out in **Appendix 1** will be issued to the Scottish Government and made publicly available on the Council's website on 1 January 2021.

- 3.2 Biodiversity is important as it provides many vital services that enrich our lives and that we depend on. Biodiversity underpins much of our food and drink production through maintaining healthy soils and pollination, it captures carbon and helps to clean and cool the air, it protects us against flooding and it regulates our supply of fresh water.
- 3.3 Human activity is causing biodiversity to be lost at a greatly accelerated rate and these losses can be irreversible, impoverish us all and damage the life systems we all rely on. Biodiversity loss and the climate emergency are intimately linked. Climate change increases the pressure on biodiversity while the living world provides us with nature-based solutions to climate change.

#### **4. HIGHLIGHTS OF BIODIVERSITY REPORT**

- 4.1 The completed reporting template provides an overview of the range of work the Council has undertaken to meet its biodiversity duty from 2018 to 2020.
- 4.2 A summary of the actions undertaken to conserve and enhance biodiversity is set out below.
- Biodiversity was identified as a key issue in the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.
  - The Moray Local Development Plan (LDP) 2020 includes a specific biodiversity policy requiring all new development to conserve and enhance biodiversity with larger developments providing a Biodiversity Plan.
  - Placemaking and Open Space policies within the LDP also support biodiversity requiring delivery of high quality multi-functional green spaces with integrated green and blue infrastructure such as swales, permeable paving, SUDS ponds, alongside green roofs and walls and grass/wildflower verges in streets.
  - Draft Planning Policy Guidance has been prepared to support the LDP and provides examples of how development sites can improve biodiversity.
  - Adoption of the Open Space Strategy and Woodland and Forestry Strategy Supplementary Guidance which embed biodiversity enhancement.
  - NatureScot participate in the Quality Audit process for housing developments to provide expertise to improve biodiversity outcomes by identifying opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity at the earliest stage.

- The LDP includes green network mapping to support the creation of connected green infrastructure and avoid habitat fragmentation.
- The Council's Draft Climate Change Action Plan includes actions linked to the LDP to enhance biodiversity.
- The Council's Food Growing Strategy sets out guidance on how food growing spaces can contribute to biodiversity by attracting pollinators.
- The Council is a member of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP) alongside Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The Partnership promotes knowledge sharing and joined-up approaches to tackling threats to biodiversity, and facilitating conservation action for local biodiversity.
- In partnership with NESBiP a grassland management workshop was hosted in Moray to explore benefits of grassland management to create wildflower areas based on experience elsewhere.
- Two pilot grassland management/wildflower pilot areas in Forres were developed as a result of the workshop session.
- Ranger Service community engagement including a programme of events including pond dipping, mini beast hunts and guided walks. A junior ranger programme with Speyside High School and involving local schools in non-native species control.

4.3 While the Council is becoming more active on biodiversity issues, resources constrain how much can be done. The indicative Regional Spatial Strategy approved by this Committee on 15 September 2020 (para 14 of the minute refers) included a number of strategic level projects, some relating to biodiversity such as promoting native woodland expansion in the south of Moray, a new natural heritage park along the Moray Coast and peatland management. To deliver these projects and to build upon current activity will require additional resource.

## 5. **EDINBURGH DECLARATION**

- 5.1 On 31 August 2020 the Scottish Government published the Edinburgh Declaration (**Appendix 2**). The declaration seeks agreement between subnational, regional and local governments across the world calling on the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to elevate ambition in order to halt biodiversity loss. It urges greater prominence be given to the role subnational authorities' play in delivering on the new global targets to be agreed next year.
- 5.2 In recognition of the key role of local authorities in delivering biodiversity protection the Declaration is open for signing by parties working at the local level. This is currently being considered by COSLA.

## 6. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity is important to building a better future for our children and young people in Moray, supporting their health and wellbeing and connecting them with nature.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 requires all public bodies in Scotland to prepare and publish a Biodiversity Duty Report.

### **(c) Financial implications**

There are no financial implications arising directly from the report.

### **(d) Risk Implications**

None.

### **(e) Staffing Implications**

The preparation of the Biodiversity Duty Report has been absorbed within existing Strategic Planning and Development workloads with input from the Lands and Parks Service. While considerably more action could be undertaken on biodiversity as outlined in para 4.3, additional staffing resource would be required.

### **(f) Property**

None.

### **(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

The Equalities Officer has raised no equalities or socio-economic impact issues.

### **(h) Consultations**

The Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), Head of Economic Growth and Development, the Legal Services Manager, Lissa Rowan (Committee Services Officer), the Environmental Protection Manager and the Equalities Officer have been consulted and comments received incorporated into the report.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

**7.1 A Biodiversity Duty Report covering 2018 to 2020 has been prepared and sets out the range of actions undertaken by the Council to conserve and enhance biodiversity.**

**7.2 Significant progress has been made in mainstreaming biodiversity into the Moray Local Development Plan including requiring developers to demonstrate retention, protection and enhancement of features of biological interest within all development sites.**

Author of Report: Emma Gordon, Planning Officer

Background Papers:

Ref: