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**REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL 6 APRIL 2022**

**SUBJECT: EDINBURGH DECLARATION AND BIODIVERSITY**

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

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report asks the Council to sign the Edinburgh Declaration and note potential future actions to assist in halting biodiversity decline.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Council in terms of Section III (F) (13) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to dealing with all matters relating to Environmental Protection.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Council;**

- (i) agree to sign the Edinburgh Declaration;**
- (ii) note potential future local actions to help address biodiversity decline within section 4.3 of this report; and**
- (iii) note reports on the draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF 4) consultation and Local Development Plan guidance were reported to the Planning and Regulatory Services Committee on 1 March 2022. These reports set out the national policy and evidence gathering requirements to address the nature crisis.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Edinburgh Declaration as set out in **Appendix 1** is intended to set out the aspirations and commitments of the Scottish Government, Edinburgh Process Partners and the wider subnational constituency of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, in delivering for nature over the coming decade.
- 3.2 The Declaration calls on national governments, as parties to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity, to adopt an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework, with bold actions to halt biodiversity loss. It also calls for greater prominence to be given to action at the local level and recognises the role of all levels of government and society in working more effectively together over the next decade. The participation of local authorities from

across the world is being sought in signing the Edinburgh Declaration. 12 Scottish local authorities have already become signatories including Aberdeenshire Council, Glasgow City Council, Edinburgh City Council and Orkney Council. In a joint letter dated 15 December 2021 from Màiri McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment and Land Reform and Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity the remaining local authorities have been invited to sign up to the Declaration. The letter is set out in **Appendix 2**.

- 3.3 The Council recognises its duty to protect and enhance biodiversity. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their duties. This is known as the Biodiversity Duty. The range of work the Council does across all services in protecting and enhancing biodiversity is collated and reported to Planning and Regulatory Services Committee, prior to submission of a summary report to Scottish Government on a three-year cycle. The last 3-year report was reported on 10 November 2020 (para 9 of the Minute refers).
- 3.4 The Edinburgh Declaration contains a commitment, which is already delivered by Scottish local authorities under the Biodiversity Duty. Signatories agree in principle to:
- Build on previous efforts, recognising the value of nature.
  - Implement appropriate actions that build on global goals.
  - Mainstream these actions, integrating them into local planning, management, and governance.
- 3.5 At Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee on 8 February 2022 it was agreed to recommend the Council sign the Edinburgh Declaration (para 9 of the Minute refers).

#### **4. NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 (NPF 4), THE NATURE CRISIS AND FUTURE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS BIODIVERSITY DECLINE**

- 4.1 In addition to the Council's biodiversity duty, draft NPF 4 commits planning authorities to address the nature crisis, setting out requirements for development to facilitate biodiversity enhancement and support nature recovery and restoration. The next Local Development Plan (LDP) must be supported by an Evidence Report informed by an understanding of the natural assets and existing nature networks in the plan area. In addition to this it must also be informed by up to date audits, strategies and action plans, including the Local Biodiversity Action Plan where applicable, and take into account statutory Open Space Strategies and Forestry and Woodland Strategies.
- 4.2 Taking into account the requirements set out above a series of actions could be implemented by the Council in support of the Edinburgh Declaration. These actions support biodiversity enhancement and could be financed from the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund, this would be subject to a further report seeking committee approval.
- 4.3 The following actions have been identified.

- Supporting local communities with their biodiversity aspirations.
- Preparing biodiversity action plans for Council owned sites and supporting schools with their biodiversity plans.
- Delivering on biodiversity enhancements and management proposals at Millbuies woodland and Wards wildlife site.
- Accessing biodiversity data to inform the Evidence Report required for the next LDP, using that data to create and enhance green networks.
- Accessing biodiversity data to inform ongoing development management casework to safeguard and enhance biodiversity.
- Exploring re-establishing local wildlife site networks and potentially identifying new sites and supporting their enhancement.
- Accessing biodiversity data and expertise to advise on mitigation and enhancement work for declining habitats and species, feeding that information into all the above actions.

4.4 It should be noted that further committee reports in response to the draft NPF 4 consultation and Local Development Plan Guidance were presented to Planning and Regulatory Services Committee on 1 March 2022 these reports provide further detail on the implications of further work on biodiversity. (paras 13 & 14 of the draft minute refers)

## **5. 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**

There are no legal implications associated with signing the Edinburgh Declaration. The Council already has a statutory biodiversity duty and draft NPF4 policy on the nature crisis will form part of the statutory LDP when adopted.

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

The proposed future actions to carry out additional biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures identified in para 4.3 above would be dependent upon ongoing funding from the Nature Restoration Fund. The Scottish Government has recently announced a multi-year package of funding over the next five years with further detail to follow.

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

There is no direct risk from signing and agreeing with the principles set out in the Declaration. There is however a reputational risk associated with inaction on reversing biodiversity decline.

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

There are no staffing implications associated with signing the Declaration.

**(f) Property**

There are no property implications associated with signing the Declaration.

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

None at this stage.

**(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts**

Agreeing to the recommendations in this report will help the Council meet its climate change and biodiversity commitments. There are no climate emissions directly resulting from agreeing to sign the Declaration. However, advancing the principles of the Declaration will contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity in Moray and will support existing measures the Council is taking to tackle the nature and biodiversity crisis.

**(i) Consultations**

Consultation has taken place with the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), the Head of Economic Growth and Development, the Legal Services Manager, the Principal Climate Change Officer, the Equal Opportunities Officer and Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer, and their comments incorporated into the report.

**6. CONCLUSION**

**6.1 In signing the Edinburgh Declaration the Council agrees with calls to adopt an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework, with bold actions to halt biodiversity decline. Furthermore, for greater prominence to be given to actions undertaken at a local level.**

**6.2 There are a number of potential actions the Council can undertake at a local level in keeping with the principles of the Edinburgh Declaration that will help efforts to halt biodiversity decline. Reports on the implications of further action by the Council were be reported to Planning and Regulatory Services Committee on 1 March 2022.**

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Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-813460984-192  
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