**Falkirk Council**

**Biodiversity Duty Report**

**2021-2023**



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# **Introduction**

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| **Public Body** | **Falkirk Council** |
| **Role** | **Local Authority**  **Authority area: 29,769 hectares**  **Population (at 2021): 160,700** |
| **Reporting Period** | **1/1/2021 – 31/12/2023** |

Section 1.1 of the Nature Conservation Scotland Act (2004) states that “It is the duty of every public body and officeholder, 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 2021-23.

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. Funding.**

**5. Challenges and next steps.**

**6. 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 parts of the Council.

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)).

# **Governance, Leadership and Management**

## **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.

## **Leadership**

In 2021 Falkirk Council signed the Edinburgh Declaration to signal its support for ambitious global targets for biodiversity conservation. The declaration recognises the crucial role regional governments and local authorities, like Falkirk Council, have played and continue to play in biodiversity conservation.

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

* Attending environmental events.
* Supporting environmental initiatives and activities.
* 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.

The Council Plan (2022-27) vision is for"Strong communities where inequalities are reduced, and lives are improved." It’s 3 priorities are:

* Supporting stronger and healthier communities
* Promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities
* Supporting a thriving economy and green transition

## **Management**

There are several corporate, cross-service groups which can champion and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity across the Council’s functions. These include the Open Space Corporate Liaison Group and the Cross-party Climate Change Action Group.

Within Falkirk Council, Development Services takes a lead role in delivering the Biodiversity Duty. The Biodiversity Officer post, seated within the Planning and Greenspace unit, has a specific remit to further the conservation of biodiversity through 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.

# **Mainstreaming**

## **Plans, policies and strategies**

Biodiversity conservation must be incorporated into relevant plans, policies and strategies, if it is to be delivered effectively across the Council. Council plans, policies and strategies which were particularly key to furthering the conservation of biodiversity during 2021-23 are:

* [Second Nature: A Biodiversity Action Plan for the Falkirk Council area](https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/environment/environmental-management/docs/biodiversity/Second%20Nature%20-%20A%20Biodiversity%20Action%20Plan%20for%20the%20Falkirk%20Council%20Area.pdf?v=201907081334)
* Falkirk Council’s Environmental Policy

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

* [Falkirk Greenspace - A Strategy for our Green Network](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/environment/environmental-policy/docs/green-network/Falkirk%20Greenspace%20-%20A%20Strategy%20for%20our%20Green%20Network.pdf?v=201702161345)
* Local Development Plan 2 and supporting Supplementary Guidance
* Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2030
* Falkirk’s Open Space Strategy
* Falkirk Forestry & Woodland Strategy and Urban Woodland Management Plans
* The Falkirk Learning for Sustainability Framework
* Callendar Park Masterplan (draft)

The Council’s response to the climate emergency recognised the important role of nature-based solutions and carbon off-setting through habitat creation.

Various other plans, policies and strategies take account of environmental issues and recognise opportunities to conserve the natural environment, secure nature-based benefits and minimise potential negative impacts on biodiversity. These include:

* An Economic Strategy for Falkirk 2015-25
* The Libraries Strategic Plan 2022-27

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. Taking this lead 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.

## **Procedures and processes**

Most Services or Units adopt specific procedures to ensure they routinely assess the effects of their activities on biodiversity, adhere to environmental law and adopt environmental good practice. In some cases, this is done on a project-by-project basis rather than assessing the impacts of wider policies or strategies. In other cases, it is done on an ad hoc basis, relying on the awareness and understanding of the individual officers involved. Several Services or Teams, which have less opportunity to affect biodiversity, do not have procedures in place to identify or assess potential impacts on biodiversity. Procedures used 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.

## **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 & Greenspace 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 specialist, in-house advice and support is significantly constrained by the capacity of staff with biodiversity expertise.

Some Teams, whose work is more likely to impact on biodiversity, have provided a range of relevant environmental training opportunities to staff.

## **Staff Awareness**

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

The Green Champions Network comprises staff members from all Services. They work to promote resource efficiency and to support the Energy & Climate Change Team to ensure that sustainability is embedded across the Council. The network helps to spread a culture of change and collaborative working. Network volunteers have undertaken practical work to conserve biodiversity.

# **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 (2021-23). While not exhaustive, it illustrates the range of activities that have taken place.

## **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 (2021-23)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Protected areas** | Consent was secured from Nature Scot for all works likely to impact on statutory designated sites. |
|  | An EIA and HRA has been produced for the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme. This assesses impacts on the SPA and other ecologically sensitive features. |
|  | Biodiversity restoration and management work has been carried out at Council-owned SSSIs. |
|  | As a competent authority Falkirk Council undertook Appropriate Assessments to ensure no significant negative impacts on European designated sites from development. |
| **Species protection** | Protected species surveys were done where work might affect them, and licences sought as necessary. (E.g. Bat surveys were carried out and a protected species licence secured prior to demolition of Abbotsford House. Expert advice and surveys were secured prior to paths works affecting badgers and pond works and surveys effecting great crested newts.) |
|  | Tree works were avoided during the bird breeding season and nesting bird surveys done where needed. |
|  | Work within rivers and burns was scheduled to avoid fish spawning and migration periods and done in consultation with SEPA. |
|  | Appropriate ecological surveys and assessment were required with planning applications likely to impact on protected biodiversity. |
| **Habitat protection** | For building projects, biodiversity impacts were assessed and development proposals informed by appropriate habitat surveys, to ensure that legal obligations were met and the impact of the development on biodiversity minimised. |
|  | Biodiversity was included in framework contracts for term consultants for engineering and flooding, providing expertise on ecological issues during project design and planning. |
| **Invasive species** | Engineering and building projects included the survey, identification and treatment of invasive species (such as Japanese knotweed) and licensed disposal where required. |

## **Assessing and limiting negative impacts**

To combat biodiversity loss we must, as a minimum, do no harm to biodiversity through our actions. Assessing the effects of our work on biodiversity and limiting negative impacts is essential. 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 Council functions also have a role to encourage others to consider their impacts on biodiversity as well.

**Table 2: Examples of action taken to assess and minimise negative impacts on biodiversity (2021-23)**

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| **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 such as the Active Travel Strategy 2023 |
|  | New build housing and infrastructure projects undertook appropriate environmental surveys and assessed potential environmental impacts. |
|  | Habitat Regulation Appraisals have been done for any projects likely to have a significant impact on Special Protection Areas (designated for their important bird populations). This includes the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme. |
| **Limiting our negative impacts** | On new developments, where existing natural habitat is to be disturbed, Building Design engaged landscape designers to develop proposals to mitigate the level of disturbance, by management of or the introduction of new landscape features. |
|  | The project to restore Kinneil Kerse landfill site engaged experienced consultants to ensure the negative ecological impacts of the work were minimised and the restoration delivered significant benefits for biodiversity. |
|  | Landscaping schemes on new build housing projects have been designed to mitigate impacts on biodiversity and include pictorial meadows, trees, and bird and bat boxes. |
|  | Council officers sought advice from the biodiversity officer to ensure proposed projects did not damage biodiversity. (E.g. Events managers consulted about activity near protected species in Callendar Park and the Helix team sought advice about habitat management.) |
|  | Grounds maintenance limited potential negative impacts of works by:   * Avoiding tree works and hedge cutting during the bird nesting season * Reducing the use of glyphosate by spraying less frequently * Expanded the use of electrical machinery like hedgecutters & strimmers * Cutting some grass less frequently |
|  | An otter pass was constructed within a new culvert on the Denny Eastern Access Road to minimise obstruction to this species. |
| **Helping others to assess their impacts** | LDP2 policy ‘PE19: Biodiversity and Geodiversity’ protected biodiversity via the planning process; promoting the assessment of ecological impacts from development and the mitigation of negative impacts. |
|  | The Development Management process required 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 provided further guidance to developers. |
|  | The Biodiversity Officer and other Greenspace staff gave advice to local individuals and groups about how they could safeguard biodiversity. |

## **Promoting environmental best practice and innovation**

The Council has taken a lead in applying principles such as Habitat Networks, Biodiversity Net Gain and the Sustainable Management of greenspaces. Services tried new approaches to how they did things to deliver benefits for the environment and local communities.

**Table 3: Examples of action taken to apply environmental best practice and innovation (2021-23)**

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| **Nature Networks** | The Council has worked to help promote and start delivering the Inner Forth habitat network.  Consultants were commissioned to produce a ‘Spaces for Nature’ report which developed mapping and broad principles for the identification and delivery of a council-wide Nature Network. |
| **Sustainable Greenspaces** | The ‘Sustainable Grass Management pilot project’ successfully trialled alternative approaches to the management of greenspaces, to deliver benefits for biodiversity, climate and well-being. These approaches have started to be rolled out to more council-owned amenity grassland sites. The pilot project was highly commended at the Nature of Scotland Awards 2023. |
|  | The award winning Zetland Park project was an exemplar of community driven, local authority enabled, park regeneration. The project included a wide range of biodiversity enhancements including meadows, tree and bulb planting, pond restoration and a rain garden. |
|  | The Council’s Community Growing Officer supported community groups to design and plant peat-free, perennial flower beds. Over 30 community adopted flower beds have been converted to pollinator friendly planting, across 11 different communities. |
|  | The Helix Park stopped using herbicides. |
| **Biodiversity Net Gain** | Several large Council projects applied the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) principle to secure positive outcomes for biodiversity, including the A904/A9 road upgrade. The Falkirk to Denny cycle route has been designed with a view to achieving 5-10% BNG. |
| **Guidance and advice** | Supplementary guidance on Local Nature Conservation Sites, Biodiversity & Development, and Green Infrastructure promoted best practice in protecting and enhancing biodiversity through development. |
|  | The Biodiversity Officer provided support, guidance and advice to colleagues, counterparts in other councils, third-party organisations, community groups and individuals on biodiversity protection and restoration. Other members of the Greenspace Team also provided biodiversity advice. |
| **Procurement** | Free period products were carefully procured by Fairer Falkirk to ensure sustainability. The supplier provides responsibly sourced, plant-based products and re-usable options. They are committed to compostable packaging and carbon off-setting. |
| **Tackling the Biodiversity Crisis** | NPF4 and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy detail national policy and actions to tackle the biodiversity crisis. Falkirk Council has been exploring how it will implement these policies to tackle the biodiversity crisis at the local authority level. |
|  | NPF4 policies require the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of biodiversity to be achieved on almost all development sites. These policies have been implemented. Development Management, Planning Policy and Greenspace officers have started discussions to inform the ongoing application of these policies and associated best practice. |
|  | The Biodiversity Officer participated in co-design processes to develop national frameworks for Nature Networks and 30x30 (30% of land protected for biodiversity by 2030). Work to inform local delivery has been started. |
|  | The Council’s Biodiversity Officer chairs the Scottish Biodiversity Officer’s Network. This is a vital forum for sharing best practice and engaging with the national and regional development of biodiversity conservation policy and action. |

## **Positive action to conserve biodiversity**

Falkirk Council has delivered a huge amount of positive action over the last three years to conserve biodiversity. Biodiversity conservation is a core function of the Planning & Greenspace Team, but many sections of the Council have been able to take some action to help conserve 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 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 (2021-23)**

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| **Protecting and enhancing**  **important sites for wildlife** | Extensive habitat improvement work has been done at Bothkennar and Kinneil Island (both part of the Firth of Forth SSSI). |
|  | The Council protects 103 locally designated Wildlife Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Local Nature Reserves and Geodiversity Sites. It carried out extensive biodiversity management and enhancement on many of the sites that it owns including: Polmont Woods, Summerford Park, Kinneil Estate, Bantaskine Estate, Kinneil foreshore, Bonnyfield Nature Park, Avonglen Quarry, Westquarter Glen, and Polmont Park. |
|  | Habitat enhancement and conservation was done on ponds, meadows, woodland and riparian habitat in Muiravonside Country Park. |
|  | All three Local Nature Reserves (LNR) were managed by local management groups with the active support of Falkirk Council. Significant habitat restoration was delivered at Bonnyfield and Kinneil Foreshore LNRs |
| **Protecting important species** | Projects to make our greenspaces more nature-rich and to create nectar-rich community flower beds helped to conserve vital pollinators. |
|  | With the Falkirk Wildlife Volunteers Group, the Council continued projects to conserve Barn owls and Kestrels, and to survey reptiles on bogs. |
|  | Housing Services promoted the creation of Hedgehog Highways throughout its estates. |
|  | 5 new tern rafts were installed at Bothkennar to provide nesting areas for common terns. 45 breeding pairs of common terns used the rafts in summer ’23. |
|  | A Bat Box project provided new roost locations at 6 sites. |
|  | The Council worked with the Bean Goose Advisory Group to monitor and protect the wintering bean goose flock. New night vision equipment supported catching and GPS tagging. |
|  | The Council monitored and protected rare great crested newts at key breeding sites. |
|  | The rangers worked with the SSPCA Wildlife rescue centre on mammal releases on suitable council owned sites. |
|  | The Council controlled invasive species (especially Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed) on its land. A phased programme of rhododendron and laurel eradication was started at Bantaskine and Kinneil Estates, and in woodlands in the Lower Braes area. Management of invasive aquatic plants commenced at the Helix. |
| **Restoring and creating new habitat** | Enhancement work, including coppicing, thinning, scrub control, tree planting and woodland wildflower planting was done on at least 8 woodland sites covering over 50ha. |
|  | Some schools changed their school playing fields and outdoor spaces to make them more biodiverse by planting trees, returning hard standing to natural surfaces, creating school gardens and growing food.  3 Secondary schools, 3 secondary ASN settings and 10 primary schools participated in the 2022 national Dandelion Schools Growing Initiative. |
|  | The Sustainable Grass Management Pilot project, on 35 sites, created:  21.3ha of naturalised grass, 2.1ha of wildflower meadow, 4.3ha of native woodland, 240,250 spring bulbs and 6 orchards.  Similar sustainable management at over 15 other greenspaces delivered:  3ha of new/enhanced meadow; 1250m2 spring bulb patches; 10,000 more spring bulbs planted by volunteers; 150m of native hedge; 1000 native woodland trees, 4 new orchards; riparian and parkland tree planting.  The Spaces for Nature project produced designs for enhancement on a further 10 council-owned greenspaces. Machinery for sowing and cutting meadows has been bought to support future meadow creation and management. |
|  | Pond creation, restoration and enhancement was done on at least 6 sites. |
|  | Restoration of the 158ha Kinneil Kerse landfill site significantly enhanced the biodiversity of the site planting hedgerows and trees; creating grasslands, scrub and ponds; and installing shelduck nest boxes and hibernacula. |
|  | The Helix Park management team reduced the area of mown grass across the site and planted pollinator friendly species. Machinery to support wildflower meadow management was purchased for the site. |
|  | 500 ‘Spaces for Nature kits’ were produced, for distribution to local residents, to encourage people to make space for nature in their gardens. |
|  | Libraries staff worked with local groups to install and plant pollinator-attracting flowers in planters outside Grangemouth and Meadowbank libraries. |
| **Connecting habitats** | The sustainable grass management project worked across 35 sites, with others added subsequently, and helped to connect ecologically rich greenspaces across the urban area.  Enhancement of important ecological sites created a network of high-quality biodiversity sites which will form the backbone of this area’s Nature Network. |
| **Nature Restoration Fund Projects** | During this period Falkirk Council received £710,000 capital funding from the Nature Restoration (Edinburgh Process) Fund. The funds from March 2021-March 2023 supported 20 biodiversity enhancement and restoration projects. Funds from March 2023-24 were allocated to 14 biodiversity restoration projects, many of which have been started. |
| **People power** | Council staff took part in environmental enhancement activities including:   * The Development Management Team volunteered to do tree planting at Kinneil Foreshore LNR * Green Champions volunteered to plant trees at Ash Park, Banknock |
|  | Many biodiversity projects worked with community volunteers, including:   * Sustainable grass management pilot - 395 volunteers planted trees & bulbs. * Pollinator-friendly flower beds - 15 community groups involved. * Bean Goose monitoring – done by volunteer monitoring officers. |
|  | The Falkirk Wildlife Volunteers Group was supported by the Council’s outdoor ranger and did a wide range of voluntary biodiversity enhancement and monitoring work. |
|  | The Helix Gardeners and Park Attendants worked with volunteers on habitat management projects and conservation tasks across the Helix site. |
|  | The Council’s Unpaid Work Team delivered a range of biodiversity enhancements including planting trees, pollinator friendly flowerbeds, bulbs and wildflower gardens; tree and scrub management; and wildflower meadow creation. |
|  | The Council supported teams of trainees undertaking practical conservation and countryside management tasks, alongside employability training. |

## **Advice, Training and Sharing Good Practice**

A very limited number of staff are available to provide in-house ecological expertise, however most Services were able to source biodiversity advice when needed. Most staff doing work that was very likely to impact on biodiversity accessed appropriate training and advice. Individuals and communities were offered biodiversity advice when requested and where officer capacity allowed. The Green Champions Network offered 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 (2021-23)**

|  |  |
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| **Advice** | The Biodiversity Officer and Outdoor Rangers provided expert advice on biodiversity issues to colleagues within Falkirk Council. |
|  | Supplementary Guidance on Local Nature Conservation Sites and Biodiversity & Development and guidance on Green Infrastructure provided advice to landowners and developers. |
|  | Biodiversity advice was provided to communities and individuals on request. |
|  | Environment staff, particularly the rangers, advised schools, community groups, walkers, the general public and other Council Services about how to reduce their impact on biodiversity. |
| **Training** | Relevant staff were encouraged to attend biodiversity training courses. These included:   * A Biodiversity Information Sharing Event for planning officers * RTPI Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity, and Habitat Regulations training * Nature networks workshop and learning sessions * Biodiversity Net Gain workshops/seminars |
|  | Teachers received training about planning and delivering sustainable development education and were provided with resources and support to deliver this area of the curriculum. |
|  | During practical volunteering sessions Development Management staff learnt about protected species and biodiversity from the outdoor ranger. |
|  | Estates team members received toolbox talks on invasive species, use of electrical equipment, and use of new grass cutting equipment for meadow management. |
| **Sharing good practice** | The Green Champions network offered a way to harness and share individual officers’ interests in and knowledge of environmental matters. |
|  | The Biodiversity Officer shared good practice with colleagues across Scotland via the Scottish Biodiversity Officers Network, Park Managers Forum and other Scotland-wide biodiversity fora and stakeholder groups. |

## **Awareness raising, communication and education**

A range of methods were used to raise awareness and communicate both within the Council and beyond. Schools offered 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 (2021-23)**

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| **Awareness raising & communication** | Social media, (including the Falkirk Explored facebook page) has grown in popularity and was used to share messages about biodiversity issues. |
|  | Libraries have a wide range of stock in a variety of formats for all ages covering topics on sustainability, environment, and biodiversity. They supplied information from, and provided signposting to, agencies and partners linked to biodiversity e.g. Forth Environment Link, SEPA, and Sustainable Thinking Scotland. |
|  | The outdoor rangers promoted a wide range of opportunities for people to discover local biodiversity, through their work with schools and community groups, a programme of public events, and the provision of site interpretation. |
|  | Falkirk Council supported a variety of initiatives to promote biodiversity and encourage people to learn more about it, including practical volunteering opportunities and led walks. |
|  | Falkirk Council provided support to the Falkirk Wildlife Volunteers Group – a group of local volunteers taking action to conserve biodiversity. |
|  | The ‘Spaces for Nature’ project designed a logo and series of interpretation panels to raise awareness of habitat creation in greenspaces and the importance of making space for nature. |
| Education | The curriculum support team developed and refined the ‘Falkirk Learning for Sustainability Framework’ to ensure that all learning establishments successfully integrate learning for sustainability into their curriculum. |
|  | Almost all nursery, primary and secondary schools had a school garden or an outdoor learning space, where they could grow things and learn about nature.  Most Falkirk schools and nurseries were registered with Eco-schools. |

## **P****artnership working**

Many of the above activities demonstrate the level of joint working that took place between Council Services to achieve biodiversity conservation. In addition, Council Services worked 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 was critical to the delivery of local biodiversity conservation.

Falkirk Council actively supported a number of partnership projects which further the conservation of biodiversity at the landscape scale. These included the Climate Forth project and the Forth Climate Forest.

# **Funding**

During this reporting period the Council had a small revenue budget of £10,000 p.a. specifically dedicated to biodiversity conservation.

The Council also received an annual capital allocation of Nature Restoration Funding from the Scottish Government, to be spent specifically on nature restoration works in accordance with the conditions of grant.

Additional external funding was secured to support the delivery of specific biodiversity projects.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2021-22** | **2022-23** | **2023-24** |
| **Revenue budget - biodiversity** | £10,000 | £10,000 | £10,000 |
| **Nature Restoration Funding (Capital)** | £183,000 | £179,000 | £348,000 |
| **External Funding** | £12,501 | £7,150 | £36,150 |

Spending on biodiversity related work by other parts of the Council has not been quantified.

# **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 an opportunity not only to highlight the considerable range of biodiversity conservation activities that took place, but also to highlight barriers to fulfilling the duty and opportunities for improvement.

## **Challenges to delivering the Biodiversity Duty**

This reporting process, and particularly the feedback from across the Council, highlighted several challenges and constraints to delivering the Biodiversity Duty. The main challenges were:

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| **Funding** | The availability of funding to deliver biodiversity conservation was highlighted as a significant constraint. Increasing costs exacerbated this issue.  The limited revenue funding available specifically for biodiversity conservation was a particular concern. |
| **Staff resource** | Significant constraints on officer time was a limitation on the biodiversity conservation that could be delivered.  In parts of the council where biodiversity conservation was not a primary function, it was challenging to allocate staff time to consider biodiversity.  Many parts of the Council rely on the Biodiversity Officer and Outdoor Rangers for expert support and advice. Availability of this expert support and advice was constrained by limited officer time. |
| **Awareness** | Some parts of the council reported limited awareness of biodiversity and specifically the Biodiversity Duty. Limited awareness (amongst council officers and the wider public) of biodiversity and the need to conserve it, made it more challenging to implement certain biodiversity projects. |
| **Knowledge** | Many parts of the Council indicated that they were constrained by a limited knowledge of biodiversity conservation issues. Most functions highlighted a desire for more awareness raising, training, expert advice and support from specialists. |

## **Next steps**

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

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Governance, leadership and management** | 1 | Determine the need for biodiversity training or awareness raising amongst elected members and senior Council staff, to help embed biodiversity conservation fully across all services. |
|  | 2 | Increase awareness and understanding of nature-based solutions that can deliver action for climate change and sustainable communities as well as biodiversity. |
|  | 3 | Raise awareness of the Biodiversity Crisis and the national response to this (including NPF4 and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy), and the role Falkirk Council has in the response to this crisis. |
| **Mainstreaming** | 4 | 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. Explore the potential for an online learning unit and/or in-person training sessions about biodiversity |
|  | 5 | 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. |
|  | 6 | Promote closer joint working between teams working on core environmental issues (including climate, biodiversity, flooding, and land management) – potentially offering joint training on ecosystem services, nature-based solutions and natural capital approaches. |
|  | 7 | Signpost biodiversity learning and volunteering opportunities to Council staff. |
|  | 8 | Engage with Council teams/functions that have highlighted a need for more information or guidance, to help them deliver the biodiversity duty and identify manageable actions they can do to conserve biodiversity. |
| **Action** | 9 | Ensure that expert biodiversity advice is available to all Council Services as required, and that staff members know when and where to seek advice. |
|  | 10 | Use social media to raise awareness of biodiversity amongst Council staff and the wider public. |
|  | 11 | Refine the implementation of NPF4 policies relating to biodiversity and deliver Scottish Biodiversity Strategy actions including Nature Networks. |
|  | 12 | Ensure that, wherever possible, Council-owned land is managed in a way that delivers nature-based solutions and biodiversity conservation, as important community benefits. |
|  | 13 | Encourage each Council Service/function to identify a small number of biodiversity conservation actions to deliver during the period 2024-2026. |
| Funding | 14 | Explore options for securing additional revenue and capital funding for biodiversity conservation, including a potential natural capital asset approach. |
|  | 15 | Assess the funding and resources likely to be required to deliver those aspects of NPF4 and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy that are to be led by Local Authorities, using this assessment to advocate for additional funding and resource. |

# **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 contributed (during the period 2021-23) to national targets for the conservation of biodiversity (as set out in the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”.)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Targets/key steps from Chapter 1 (Healthy ecosystems) of the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”** | **Contribution to key step?** | **Justification** |
| (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 grassland, woodland, and pond/wetland, control of invasive species, 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 provided 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 and nature networks, key wildlife sites and ecosystems informed the development of policies/plans and projects relating to biodiversity. |

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| **Targets/key steps from Chapter 3 (Biodiversity, health and quality of life) of the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”** | **Contribution to key step?** | **Justification** |
| (3.1) Provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups | Yes | The Council provided 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, with communities, has done significant work to create biodiversity rich greenspaces. Greenspace management is taking account of opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity. Development of nature networks and ‘Spaces for Nature’ provides 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 and greenspaces connected people to nature. Opportunities were 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 had access to a school garden and/or orchard. Many schools were supported to use nearby greenspaces. Several schools 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 | A number of local businesses and public bodies supported conservation projects or volunteering. |

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| **Targets/key steps from Chapter 4 (Wildlife, habitats and protected places) of the “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity”** | **Contribution to key step?** | **Justification** |
| (4.1) Ensure that the management of protected places for nature also provides wider public benefits | Yes | Access provision and interpretation was provided at most council owned sites of importance for wildlife. Greenspace enhancement projects delivered climate resilience, CO2 sequestration and well-being benefits. |
| (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 promoted 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 continued 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. |

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| **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 worked to restore and enhanced its SSSIs. |
| (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 undertook a detailed EIA and HRA. The scheme design includes a range of habitat mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures.  Work to restore wetlands, protect and enhance riparian woodlands and combat invasive species along our rivers contributed 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 | Falkirk Council protected most of the areas raised bogs as designated Wildlife Sites. Protection, enhancement and creation of natural environments including woodland, wetland and grasslands contributed to carbon sequestration. |
| (5.7) Provide clear advice to land and water managers on best practice | Yes | Supplementary Guidance on Local Nature Conservation Sites provided a statement for each designated site outlining appropriate management to protect and benefit biodiversity. Supplementary Guidance on Biodiversity and Development provided guidance to developers and planners on biodiversity issues.  Advice and examples of best practice were provided to council staff undertaking land/water management. |

# **Appendix 1: Biodiversity Duty Survey Form Returns**

All parts of the Council were asked to report on their delivery of the Biodiversity Duty during the reporting period (2021-23). Most Services provided responses which informed this report. Reporting responses were received from the following functions:

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| Education: Curriculum Support |
| Culture: Helix Park |
| Customer and Business Support |
| Development Management |
| Employment and Training |
| Engineering Design |
| Estates Management |
| Fairer Falkirk |
| Finance, Innovation & Technology |
| Housing: New Build, Asset and Investment, Housing and Communities |
| Libraries Service |
| Planning and Greenspace |
| Resilience |
| Social Work (Childrens Services) |
| Sports and Leisure |
| Transport Planning |
| Waste Services |

# **Appendix 2: Biodiversity Duty Survey Form Questions**

Each section of the Council was asked to report on their delivery of the Biodiversity Duty during the reporting period (2021-23) by answering the following questions.

1. Detail how your team has considered the impact of its work on biodiversity?
2. Give examples of where your team has taken action to reduce the potential negative impacts of its work on biodiversity.
3. List the work your service/team has done which has benefitted biodiversity.
4. Give examples of any training or learning your team has done to increase awareness and understanding of biodiversity.
5. Is there a project or activity that benefitted biodiversity and that your service/team would particularly like to highlight? Please give brief details.
6. Identify actions your service/team could do over the next 3 years to help conserve biodiversity.
7. What (if anything) makes it challenging for your service/team to consider biodiversity and take action to help conserve it?
8. Does your service/team need support to help it consider biodiversity and take action to help conserve it? If so, what support would you like?
9. What else do you think Falkirk Council (not just your service/team) could do to benefit biodiversity and meet its statutory duty to conserve biodiversity across all its functions?