

Biodiversity Duty Report 2017-2020

East Renfrewshire Council



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Section I: Introduction

This Report outlines the progress made by East Renfrewshire Council in fulfilling its biodiversity duty between 2017 and 2020. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 makes it a duty for all public bodies to publish a report on the actions they have taken to meet their biodiversity duty every three years.

Biodiversity work is coordinated by the Council's Planning Service in collaboration with other council services, departments and organisations. This work considers the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Council's duty to "exercise any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions."

The term 'Biodiversity' is short for biological diversity and, put simply, it is the variety of life. It includes every plant and animal including humans. Biodiversity is the range of habitats on which all flora and fauna depend. It is not just about the rare and endangered: it encompasses all life from the common to the threatened.

This Report covers the following themes:

1. Introduction
2. Actions to protect biodiversity and connect people with nature
3. Mainstreaming biodiversity
4. Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity
5. Public engagement and workforce development
6. Research and monitoring
7. Biodiversity highlights and challenges

Environmental Protection and Land Management

The authority covers an area of 68 Sq. miles which extend from the suburbs on the boundary with Glasgow to the plateau moorland above Eaglesham. Within East Renfrewshire there are 6 SSSIs, 72 Local Biodiversity Sites covering 1179 Ha, one local nature reserve and 73 Tree Protection Orders. There are a further 424 hectares of land designated as protected urban greenspace in the Local Development Plan. East Renfrewshire Council directly manages 345 hectares of land, this figure includes management of 116 hectares of woodland. The SNH ancient/semi ancient woodland inventory shows there are 108 hectares of this type of woodland in East Renfrewshire.

Key sites for Biodiversity

Dams to Darnley Country Park is a partnership project between East Renfrewshire and Glasgow City councils. The country park covers 1350 acres of greenspace between Barrhead, Darnley and Newton Mearns. The park attracts an estimated 100,000 visitors a year. Biodiversity is actively managed within the park: there is a management plan in place which includes actions for the protection, enhancement and the promotion of biodiversity. Whitelee Access Project is a joint collaboration between East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire Councils, Scottish Power Renewables, Forestry Commission, Scottish Water and Glasgow Science Centre. The Whitelee is the area covered by the UK's largest onshore windfarm combining blanket bog, commercial coniferous forest and a mosaic of mires and wetland habitats.

Section 2: Actions to protect biodiversity and connect people with nature

I. The creation, enhancement and protection of wildlife and natural habitat

Actions in Dams to Darnley Country Park

- Approximately 1ha of wildflower created or managed for native wildflowers to enhance biodiversity
- Approximately 0.2ha of woodland thinned to remove problem species such as sycamore
- Approximately 0.15ha of pond maintained or enhanced to benefit biodiversity
- 15 bird boxes erected
- 2 bat boxes erected

Actions in Cowan Park

- 2 Hectares of amenity grassland transformed into mosaic of wet and dry meadow. The project is part of a flood attenuation scheme built as part of a new High School. The attenuation basin and surrounding area were created from mown amenity grass and have successfully transformed from single species grassland to diverse habitat. A reed bed planted as part of the scheme now attracts snipe and reed bunting
- 0.5 hectares of woodland planted, mixed native woodland planted on what was amenity grassland.

Actions at Whitelee

- The Whitelee countryside ranger service (WCRS) Worked with the Whitelee Visitor Centre (VC) to create a small wildflower meadow in front of VC, including bug hotel which is maintained by WCRS annually. (Local provenance, native Scottish seed where sourced). This is to try to promote more insect species and wildflower meadows.
- Planted mix of Scottish provenance native trees with JMT award group in mountain bike site - approx. 1300 trees planted in groups/drifts comprising D. birch, S. birch, Rowan, Aspen, S. Pine)
- The ongoing monitoring of badger setts around site. Facilitated the geophysics survey of a badger sett to produce underground sett map to better understand their use of the area
- Created a herpetofauna hibernacula next to the Visitor Centre (VC). This to promote herpetofauna species around the VC and to teach the public that all herpetofauna species are safe to the public if respected.
- Ran a reptile identification and survey workshop in Ayrshire for Where's Wildlife Ayrshire project
- Worked with Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) to move the swallow nest units from VC to wall when roofing work being done so nest sites still available – and with others managed to dissuade SPR from putting up anti-bird netting
- Dealt with various queries that came via environmental health on badgers and foxes in gardens from East Renfrewshire households.
- Recorded and reported numerous badger road fatalities – approached ERC roads department to get new 'wildlife' road signage put up on the B764 – this has been put in place in 2019.

Levern Water Restoration Project

- This partnership project with SEPA involves rewilding the River Levern by replacing an industrialised river setting with a natural morphology by rechanneling the river through derelict land and removing Victorian era weirs. Water quality, biodiversity, flood resilience will all be dramatically improved. The project has completed design stage through the 2017 – 2020 phase and now moves to construction phase.

Changes to Park Management Regimes

- The Council's Parks team is taking active steps towards a less intensive maintenance regimes which support biodiversity and sustainable water management and reduce overall maintenance costs. These measures have been successfully implemented at a number of locations including high profile Rouken Glen and Cowan Parks

2. Addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss

- There is an ongoing programme of Japanese knotweed control within the Dams to Darnley Country Park and on the banks of the Levern Water in Barrhead, involving spraying an area of approximately 0.3ha. The spraying regime is showing results but complete eradication proves elusive.
- Invasive Himalayan balsam is removed as an ongoing project by volunteers in Dams to Darnley Country Park. Approximately 0.2ha

3. East Renfrewshire Council participation in key partnerships

- Partnership between East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire Councils, Scottish Power Renewables, Forestry Commission, Scottish Water and Glasgow Science Centre in relation to the Whitelee access Project including participation in the Whitelee Habitat Management group including providing key species records to Scottish Power Renewables Team ecology team.
- East Renfrewshire Council is a participating member of the LBAP Steering Group for Inverclyde, East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire which meets on a quarterly basis. The group shares resources with neighbouring authorities, other organisations and voluntary bodies. There are 25 organisations represented on the LBAP group.
- Partnership working between East Renfrewshire and Glasgow City Council in relation to Dams to Darnley Country Park. As employing authority East Renfrewshire provides regular communication to other project partners and organises the steering group meetings to discuss key issues as required.
- The Dams to Darnley Ranger Service is a member of the of the Greater Pollok Greenspace and Woodland Development Forum and collaborates with the Glasgow Museum Resource Centre

Section 3: Mainstreaming Biodiversity

Measures to incorporate biodiversity into wider policies, plans or strategies. Including staff structures.

1. Integration with Plans and strategies

In response to the challenge of climate change and the national policy shift towards greater sustainability encapsulated in new legislation: the Climate Change Scotland Act 2019 and the Planning Act Scotland 2019, the Council has increased efforts to mainstream biodiversity into wider agendas. The introduction under of Section 24 of the Planning Act to explicitly include the effect on biodiversity in “environmental effects” and to include the net positive effects on biodiversity likely to result from the development will reinforce and support the Council’s policy and programme associated with the Local Development Plan.

The policy document which deals most directly with biodiversity is The proposed Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2). The plan’s spatial representation of national, regional, corporate and community planning policy is premised on principles of sustainability and low carbon. The East Renfrewshire’s LDP and proposed LDP2 support biodiversity within the wider context of sustainable development and explicitly in specific policies and supplementary planning guidance.

Policy D7 establishes protection for SSSI’s, Local Biodiversity Sites and Tree Protection Orders.

Policy D5 protects Urban Greenspaces and biodiversity interest within these areas

Policy D6 Establishes the open space requirements for new developments and provides a framework to ensure these open spaces are multi-functional, integrated and accessible, on site green networks and green infrastructure

The SPG Green Network and Green Infrastructure provide detailed guidance to developers.

The Development Contributions Policy has directed £1.5m towards, green spaces, parks, Dams to Darnley Country Park, and green network projects. Biodiversity has benefited from this cash flow.

The Open Space Asset Management Plan 2016-2021 is more focused on biodiversity than its predecessors, the protection and enhancement of biodiversity is now a stated objective and a consideration when decisions are made on the management of council outdoor assets.

2. Staff with biodiversity remit

Ranger service staffing, there are 4 countryside rangers. A 3 person team at Whitelee and a single ranger post at Dams to Darnley Country Park. The countryside ranger’s have a wide range of duties including: wildlife recording; access management; access improvements; education; public events; public engagements; habitat management; volunteering sessions; community engagement; promote active lifestyle and promote positive mental health well-being. Both Whitelee and Dams to Darnley have a project manager who provide project oversight and strategic direction.

Biodiversity policy is developed by the Development Plan’s team, this includes writing biodiversity policy for the LDP and writing SPG guidance for biodiversity. Within the period of this report a new LDP has been produced and is currently in the examination phase.



Section 4: Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity

The integration of biodiversity into nature based solutions to the climate emergency and other socio-economic outcomes?

I. Nature Based Solutions to address Climate Change

Climate Change Action Plan

The Council completed its Investigation into climate change in March 2020. This internal audit of the Council's response to climate change, produced 20 actions for the Council to pursue to reduce its carbon emissions. The Council has committed to being carbon net zero by 2040. The Council has since recruited a Climate Change Officer who will take the action plan forward. While all the actions are intended to mitigate climate change in the longer term and thereby reverse or slow down biodiversity loss, there are a number of actions which use nature based solutions to achieve this long term aim. By themselves these nature based solutions will have positive benefits for biodiversity, these specific actions include: a policy on peatland restoration, the promotion of green infrastructure in new development and planting a tree for each resident – approx. 95,000 trees.



2. Nature based solutions to health and well-being: Improving access to nature for all

- **Walks:** The Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service (WCRS) deliver a wide range of walks for all ages and abilities to help improve people's physical fitness and in turn by being outdoors and social interactions improve their mental health wellbeing.
Strollers Striders: is a health walk aimed at new and expectant parents following a set route that takes in different gradients to allow the health rate to increase for fitness improvements. Between the start of 2017 and middle of Nov 2020, 881 parents have been recorded at these weekly walks.
Ranger Walks: WCRS deliver every year a series of walks open to the public free of charge. The Rangers will also help deliver a number of charity walks and group walks when asked by different organisations; some of these are open to all members of the public or instigated by the groups own request. Between start of 2017 and the middle of Nov 2020, 747 people have taken part in 49 different walking events.
- **Branching Out:** In 2019 WCRS started to deliver the Branching Out programme that was designed by Forestry and Land Scotland. This programme has been proven to help improve the mental wellbeing of the clients over a series of weeks focusing on outdoor woodland activities. All the clients who are referred to the programme are clients who are gained help from a mental health charity. WCRS worked with Recovery Across Mental Health Barrhead (RAMH). 13 members of the programme attended the 14 week programme resulting in 134 attendances (an average of 10.3 per session. Another session was scheduled to run in 2020 but due to Covid was cancelled.
- **Mental Health Sessions:** WCRS have run a number of events with RAMH to help deliver gardening workshops and events to improve mental health. 6 sessions have been run with over 39 people attending them, since 2017.
- **Access Improvement Work Sessions:** WCRS work in partnership with a few groups who work with clients with additional support needs to allow the clients to help in land maintenance and access improvements to the site. Some of the work they have carried out has included: willow cutting, weeding, scraping paths, pond maintenance work and litter picks. Between start of 2017 and the middle of Nov 2020, 12 sessions have been run with 79 attendees.

3. Partnership Working of relevance to climate change

East Renfrewshire Council is a partner in the Glasgow & Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership (GCVGNP). There are currently two areas of partnership work.

1. Work with GCVNP includes contributing to the Blueprint Strategy: the city region project to identify key habitat corridors for woodland, grassland and wetland. GCVGNP are nearing completion of this ambitious project with a detailed local Blueprint Strategy for individual local authority areas - for both habitat and access enhancements. A key objective of the blueprint is to increase resilience to climate change through ensuring continuity of habitat, allowing species to migrate.
2. Contributing to the development to the Glasgow Region Climate Forest, a new woodland which will provide both mitigation and adaption benefits to the wider Glasgow area.

4. Co-operating in collecting, managing and using biodiversity data.

Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service (WCRS) take part in a number of national data collection programmes for different species on site. All data collected at a number of different transects on site and then inputted into the national survey programmes websites.

- UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme
- BeeWalk (Bumblebee Conservation Trust) - these only started in 2020 – due to Covid very few surveys could be carried out.
- Dragonflies and Damselflies (British Dragonfly Society) – these only started in 2020 – due to Covid no records have been recorded as a result of weather not being correct for survey days.
- Dams to Darnley Countryside Ranger service undertake the following Collaborative/Citizen Science recording activities.
- Bird ringing with Clyde Bird Ringing Group
- Big Butterfly Count as part of Butterfly Conservation
- Recording and monitoring for Trees For Life

5. The main climate change related challenges for biodiversity over the next three years?

There has not been research on the impact of climate change on biodiversity at East Renfrewshire level. River systems are experiencing increasing levels of rainfall but the impacts are not known. Anecdotally East Renfrewshire Parks report increasing numbers of mature wind-blown trees across the Council estate, this may be due to wetter ground conditions combined with increased wind speed.



Section 5: Public engagement and workforce development

I. Provision of ranger services or public education programmes

Dams to Darnley Country Park events between 2017 and 2020

- Fortnightly countryside ranger led country park volunteer group undertake a range of practical tasks aimed at habitat creation and enhancement. 74 volunteer days held, involving 480 participants.
- Countryside ranger led volunteer activities within the country park and local greenspaces involving 22 corporate and community groups and 233 participants undertaking habitat creation and enhancement tasks.
- The country park countryside ranger service led 77 activities with schools and colleges, involving 5,243 pupils. These involved outdoor learning activities within the country park, local greenspaces and school grounds, together with classroom based sessions. Activities have included biodiversity surveys and transects, pond dipping and tree planting.
- The country park events calendar has involved 60 events, involving 1,144 participants. Events have included walks focusing upon bats, fungi, birds and geology, as well as butterfly counts and pond dipping.
- The country park countryside ranger service also led or took part in 64 other community based activities, engaging with 2,707 people. This included bat and nature walks, talks, pond dipping, habitat surveys and community clean ups.



Whitelee

- WCRS deliver a wide range of actions to allow all ages and abilities to interact with nature and to allow them to build a better connection with biodiversity. All the sessions that have been counted for these numbers are one's that have focused on biodiversity and/or climate change.
- Supporting volunteering: as a service we welcome and support volunteers to take part in wildlife recording and access improvements.
- Events: WCRS have delivered a range of events focusing on wildlife and nature. These have included: amphibians events; bug hunts; wild foraging sessions; plant ID walks; bird box making. Between start of 2017 and the middle of Nov 2020, the Rangers hosted 15 events where nature was the main focus that 486 people attended (adults and children).
- Talks: WCRS visit a number of different community groups and youth groups to deliver talks covering nature, species, habitat management, climate change and green energy. Between start of 2017 and the middle of Nov 2020, 13 talks where nature was the main focus have been delivered to 376 people.
- Environmental Education: WCRS delivered a well-established education programme to nursery to Uni students; following educational outcomes. We cover a wide range of topics: wildlife ID; green energy; climate change; nature walks; habitat management. All sessions will cover how the wildlife found on the windfarm and how humans and the windfarm interact with the nature and habitats, in some form.
- 2017 – 2,011 students took part on education sessions. (41 sessions)
- 2018 – 2,161 students took part in education sessions. (46 sessions)
- 2019 – 2,748 students took part on education sessions. (60 sessions)
- 2020 – 599 students took part in education sessions. (less due to Covid). (13 sessions)
- Youth Groups: WCRS work with a number of outside youth groups and deliver 2 youth groups of their own (Boggy Beasties and Muddy Monsters). Between start of 2017 and the middle of Nov 2020, 22 sessions with youth groups where nature was the main focus have taken place with 394 children taking part.

2. Collaborative working with other organisations and sharing best practice.

Activities organised to support the development of skills in the Countryside Ranger Services

- Wetland bird identification training run by the British Trust for Ornithology
- Bat survey techniques run by Bat Conservation Trust Scotland
- Sharing Good Practice events run by SNH
- Hedge laying training

4. Opportunities that are available to your staff to take part in practical actions

The Ranger Service team carry out practical conservation and access work on the site when needed but there are no opportunities currently for other staff to be involved with practical action.

Section 6: Research and Monitoring

1. Research activities undertaken to help develop understanding and awareness of biodiversity

Whitelee Ranger Service facilitated York University random peat depth probing survey at Whitelee

2. monitoring undertaken to assess the impacts of actions taken, significant trends and areas of concern.

Biological recording measures are detailed in section in Section 4: collaboration with sharing data.

The Planning Service produce a comprehensive State of the Environment Report as part of each Local Development Plan Cycle, the most recent was published in 2019.

The intention is for this report to form the foundation of strategic environmental assessments undertaken for the Local Development Plan 2 and any supporting documents. However, given the wide range in topics covered it may also prove useful for strategic environmental assessments being undertaken by other sections of the Council. This report provides a range of environment data focused on 9 environmental topics. Each subject has a range of objectives, aimed at providing a means to identify trends in data and ultimately assess whether there are any positive or negative environmental trends.

The State of the Environment Report identified a weakness in the quantity and quality of available data, noting that there is not enough historical data or monitoring to draw a conclusion as to whether the biodiversity objectives are being met. Within the restrictions of data available the State of the Environment Report identified the following broad areas of required action.

- There is evidence of work required improve SSSIs and habitat restoration within the authority.
- Further work could be done to progress the Habitat Action Plans
- Further work required to monitor the effectiveness of LBS designation..
- The need to give further consideration to the protection, enhancement and management of woodland/forestry and the green network in the interests of improving biodiversity.
- The need to continue to promote the regeneration of the urban area and reduce the loss of land in the greenbelt.

3. Data provided to the National Biodiversity Network or your Local Records Centre?

- The Whitelee Ranger Service and the Dams to Darnley Countryside Ranger Service both send in records of wildlife that they have seen on site to the Local Records Centre where the data is then imputed into National Biodiversity Network.
- Records are for: mammals; butterflies; bumblebees; moths; birds; dragonflies; damselflies; invertebrates; reptiles; amphibians; flowers; trees.

Section 7: Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges

1. Principle achievements between 2017 and 2020.

The Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service collation of wildlife records from the Whitelee site and the addition of these records to the National Biodiversity Network. Numerous records were found to be new species records for the area.

The work done by Whitelee Countryside Ranger Service to educate students from primary to university in ecology, sustainability and green energy.

2. The main challenges to Biodiversity over the next 3 years

Invasive species

Cart and Kittoch Valleys SSSI

This quality of this SSSI has been declining for decades due to invasive non-native species impeding the regeneration of native species. A woodland management plan has failed to arrest the decline to unfavourable status.

Loch Libo SSSI

Invasive non-native Canadian pondweed has damaged the integrity of this site resulting in unfavourable status.

Japanese Knotweed is recorded on extensive areas of watercourses of the Whitecart river catchment. The current spraying regime is only able to treat a small extent of the problem.

Data

There is lack of data to assess trends and make informed decisions.

Development and Net Loss Biodiversity.

There is intense pressure to build houses on the greenbelt, largescale housing development is being managed through two Masterplans areas which set out strong policies on green network and biodiversity. The integrity of the masterplan areas have been undermined by the process of huge scale earth works and ground levelling, this highly disruptive process removes vegetation and degrades the capacity of soil. While extensive green networks will be a feature of the finished development biodiversity has to be reintroduced into these areas because the original biodiversity is lost. The result is green network that has a net biodiversity loss that may take decades to recover its former status.

