

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 9 March 2010

BY: Executive Director of Community Services

SUBJECT: United Nations International Year of Biodiversity

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise the Council that 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity, as designated by the United Nations.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the UN designation, its relevance to East Lothian and how the year will be marked locally and nationally.
- 2.2 To sign up with the United Nations as a partner organisation in International Year of Biodiversity, which will allow the Council to use International Year website to promote events and to use the 2010 biodiversity logo.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 'Biodiversity' is a relatively new term for wildlife and nature. The term encompasses every living thing on Earth, and the habitats where they live. In 1992, the heads of government of over 150 nations signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. There was recognition that wild plants and animals, and their habitats, were diminishing dramatically. Species were becoming extinct because of human activities and this would degrade human life-support services such as food production.
- 3.2 Each signatory nation agreed to establish a biodiversity programme, aiming to halt the decline in biodiversity and then reverse that decline. The agreed deadline for the first aim was 2010.
- 3.3 Following co-ordinated research and dialogue between government and NGOs, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) was launched in 1996. It described a series of habitats and species that were particularly

vulnerable in the UK. Species included icons such as otter and red squirrel but also many less familiar species such as beetles and mosses. These are known as Priority Species. Priority Habitats included woodland, marsh, sand dune and heathland.

3.4 Post-devolution, the biodiversity process in Scotland is progressed by the Scottish Biodiversity Committee, composed of government and NGOs.

3.5 Biodiversity is directly linked to the government's Single Outcome Agreement regarding:

- 1) the built and natural environment,
- 2) reducing our environmental impact,
- 3) living in well-designed sustainable places.

It also feeds into other National Outcomes such as living healthier lives and taking a pride in our national identity.

3.6 There are two biodiversity indicators in the East Lothian 2009-10 Single Outcome Agreement under National Outcome 12. The Local Outcome is that 'East Lothian has an attractive and healthy environment with a rich diversity of wildlife, habitats and distinctive historic built environment, which enhances people's lives.'

3.7 The East Lothian Biodiversity process began in 2000. The current ELBAP was published in 2008, listing over 300 Priority Species and over 30 Priority Habitats. The aims of the ELBAP are to:

- 1) Ensure that no locally native species or habitat becomes extinct.
- 2) Reverse the loss of Priority Species.
- 3) Reverse the decline in extent and quality of Priority Habitats.
- 4) Involve local communities in the biodiversity process.

3.8 Since the ELBAP was launched, many projects and initiatives have been developed with local communities, schools, farmers, developers and Council departments.

3.9 Community initiatives include development of local groups, notably in Prestonpans and Longniddry to create orchards, meadows, woodlands and other habitats. The Countryside Ranger Service is an integral part of encouraging biodiversity at the community level. Grounds for Awareness is an annual grant-awarding fund to enhance biodiversity in school grounds. Woodlands, hedges, wildflower meadows, fruit trees, vegetable beds and bird boxes have all been encouraged through this scheme.

3.10 The East Lothian Local Plan includes policies aimed at protecting biodiversity during the planning process. Amenity Services has also encouraged biodiversity in parks and urban open space by designing landscapes that attract wildlife as well as people.

- 3.11 The Grey Partridge Project is a partnership between East Lothian Council, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and local farmers. It has focused on the grey partridge as a means to encourage wider conservation on farms. The project has been recognised nationally as an example of good practice among farmers, conservationists and policy makers.
- 3.12 2010 has been assigned the International Year of Biodiversity because it coincides with discussions on the global decline in biodiversity. The UN first assigned an International Year in 1959 (World Refugee Year). Other issues assigned a year by the UN include human rights (1968) world population (1974) eradication of poverty (1996) and freshwater (2003). All these issues are directly linked to biodiversity.
- 3.13 East Lothian relies on biodiversity just as much as the developing world. Productive agriculture, seafood, freshwater, industrial materials all come from biodiversity. East Lothian, as elsewhere, also relies on biodiversity for tourism and well being.
- 3.14 Biodiversity is a significant part of sustainable development and debates on climate change. Species and habitats need to be sustained for future generations to utilise or enjoy. As climates change, habitats and species need to migrate and adapt to new conditions or they will be lost. Coastal habitats are a good example of ecosystems under threat: from sea level rise on one side and agriculture and development on the other.
- 3.15 At an international level, the UN has designated 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity and it is organising various events to mark this year, including a review of the Convention of Biological Diversity. This conference will debate the success of the biodiversity process over the last 18 years and will seek agreement on action for the coming years.
- 3.16 UK, events include conferences, exhibitions and festivals. The Natural History Museum is co-ordinating the implementation of the biodiversity year across the UK. This includes registration of partner bodies and control of the UN biodiversity logo.
- 3.17 It is proposed that the Council take part in the International Year of Biodiversity by signing up as a partner organisation. This will allow the Council to use the UN biodiversity logo and International Year website to promote its biodiversity events. This will link the Council to the International Year of Biodiversity, which in turn will help promote the International Year and Council more widely.
- 3.18 In East Lothian, it is proposed to organise a series of events to raise awareness of biodiversity and what individuals can do to help.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Being a partner organisation will contribute to the 2009-10 Single Outcome Agreement and 2008-13 East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial - none
6.2 Personnel - none
6.3 Other - none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 More information about 2010 can be found at www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/#1. Information on signing up as a partner can be found at www.biodiversityislife.net/?q=node/64.
- 7.2 East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan, available online at www.eastlothian.gov.uk/downloads/ELBAPweb.pdf.

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