

REPORT TO: East Lothian Council

MEETING DATE: 27 August 2024

BY: Executive Director for Place

SUBJECT: Tackling the Nature Emergency: Update on Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present the first report to Council on progress with tackling the Nature Emergency, as requested through the Council's Declaration of Nature Emergency in October 2023.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Council is recommended to note the update on Tackling the Nature Emergency: East Lothian Council's Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature, which is summarised below and set out at Appendix 1 (published in the Members' Library Service, Ref: 85/24, August 2024 Bulletin).
- 2.2 It is recommended that future reporting would be lodged in the Members' Library Service.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In October 2023, East Lothian Council unanimously approved a motion to declare a Nature Emergency, recognising that biodiversity is in decline and the impact that climate change is having on wildlife and nature. The motion also stated that urgent action must be taken to reverse the decline in nature.
- 3.2 The Council's Nature Emergency declaration also recognises the state of nature, its inherent value, and the crucial role its recovery and restoration will play in realising climate targets.

- 3.3 In its declaration of Nature Emergency, the Council requested a report to full Council before the summer recess¹, which
- Outlines how existing Council strategies align with international and national biodiversity frameworks and strategies, specifically the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (agreed at COP15 in December 2022), the Berlin Urban Nature Pact, and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, and notes any changes to existing strategies required to deliver against these;
 - Provides an update on the development of East Lothian's Biodiversity Action Plan, including specific considerations of how the plan is impacting adoption of an ecological coherence approach to effectively identify and target actions required to tackle the nature emergency and deliver the various Council strategies, and the adoption of a partnership approach to maximise delivery opportunities for these strategies and to identify further opportunities for nature restoration, nature-based solutions, and protection of biodiversity, both within the county and in connection to larger networks.

The Council is already delivering action in East Lothian to tackle the nature crisis through our existing range of strategies, partnerships and projects, working with partner agencies, community groups and volunteers. The report at Appendix 1, published in the Members' Library Service (Ref: 85/24, August 2024 Bulletin ([Agendas, reports and minutes | East Lothian Council](#))), provides a summary of the range of work which has already been undertaken, and is currently underway, to tackle the Nature Emergency and protect and enhance biodiversity across East Lothian.

- 3.4 Further details are provided in Appendix 2, published in the Members' Library Service (Ref: 85/24, August 2024 Bulletin ([Agendas, reports and minutes | East Lothian Council](#))), of recent actions taken by the Council to protect and enhance biodiversity, by Countryside Services including the Countryside Ranger Service, Amenity Services, Planning Service, Road Services, Property & Capital Projects and Education.
- 3.5 Recent work to tackle the Nature Emergency includes:
- Approval of the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy in May 2024, which will help the Council address the climate and biodiversity crises, guide the delivery of two million trees for the East Lothian Climate Forest, increase the urban tree canopy and expand the network of hedgerows;
 - Completion of nature restoration work at Levenhall Links, Musselburgh, which included the conversion of ash lagoons into wetland habitat to support wading birds, and the planting of over 10,000 trees by the Council's Countryside Ranger Service and local volunteer groups;

¹ Report was prepared for June 2024; however, it was postponed until after the summer recess due to the pre-election period prior to General Election in July 2024.

- We undertook a project on Nature Networks in our parks and greenspaces, to identify nature enhancements supported by our communities, which was funded by the Levelling Up Parks Fund. This project has been included in the national Nature Networks Toolbox produced by NatureScot as a good-practice Case Study;
 - Grassland restoration to restore priority coastal habitats; dune restoration through the removal of Sea Buckthorn at Aberlady Bay, Gullane Bents and Yellowcraig; wetland and pond creation and enhancement at Barns Ness; and expansion of meadow and grassland areas in parks and urban greenspaces to support pollinators as part of the Nature Networks project – all funded by the Scottish Government’s Nature Restoration Funding allocation;
 - Environmental education and public events resumed after the COVID-19 pandemic due to increased capacity within the Countryside Ranger Service in 2021–2023, funded by awards from the Better Places Fund.
- 3.6 Through the Nature Emergency declaration, the Council committed to seeking to further embed action to reverse the decline in nature as we update our range of strategies and policies across all our services.
- 3.7 Appendix 1 outlines how existing Council strategies, specifically the East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Tree and Woodland Strategy, Green Network Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Local Development Plan and Countryside Site Management Plans align with the Global Biodiversity Framework, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Berlin Urban Nature Pact.
- 3.8 All of these Council strategies and plans, particularly the most recent, generally align with the national and global biodiversity frameworks and objectives. Opportunities will be taken to ensure that all the relevant Council strategies currently being renewed and updated will align with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein.
- 3.9 Appendix 1 identifies two ‘tiers’ of Council strategies which will deliver the aims and objectives of the Nature Emergency declaration:
- ‘Tier 1’: the primary Council strategies and policies which set out the objectives and specific actions to protect and enhance nature, green and blue networks and biodiversity; and
 - ‘Tier 2’: additional Council plans and strategies which can also deliver biodiversity enhancements and connectivity; however, these are not the principle strategies for tackling the Nature Emergency but will reference those strategies in ‘Tier 1’.
- 3.10 The Council’s ‘Climate and Nature Emergency Group’ of officers from across Council service areas will monitor and play an important role in driving and coordinating the work of the Council and our community partners to meet our climate and nature emergency objectives and duties. An internal Council officer working group, the Green Network Working

Group, is currently reviewing the Green Network Strategy and coordinating delivery of actions across Council service areas.

- 3.11 The Council's Nature Emergency declaration also requested an update on the development of our Biodiversity Action Plan. East Lothian's Biodiversity Action Plan (ELBAP) 2024–2034 is currently in development. The draft ELBAP will take into consideration the Nature and Climate Emergency declarations, and the international, national and local policy context including the revised draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.
- 3.12 The draft ELBAP will include a Delivery Plan which supports delivery of actions aligning with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy at a local level. The Delivery Plan will set out a partnership approach to delivering actions, working with key stakeholders in the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership (see Appendix 1), as well as other community organisations, neighbouring local authorities and Government agencies such as NatureScot, to maximise delivery opportunities.
- 3.13 As set out in the Council's Nature Emergency Declaration, the progress of work arising from this report will be monitored and discussed on an ongoing basis after this by the cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum (on the understanding that key milestones or changes will also be scrutinised and determined as appropriate and in accordance with Standing Orders).

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report meets obligations set out in the Council's approved declaration of Nature Emergency, to report on progress with aligning Council strategies with national and global biodiversity frameworks and objectives, and to provide an update on the development of East Lothian's Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 4.2 All relevant Council strategies currently being renewed and updated will require to align with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report has an entirely positive impact upon the wellbeing of our communities in line with our Open Space Strategy and Green Networks Strategy and enabling access for all to quality outdoor areas.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – There are no financial implications as a direct result of this Report.
- 6.2 Personnel – None.

6.3 Other – None.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Appendix 1: Tackling the Nature Emergency: East Lothian Council's Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature, Update, June 2024 (available in the Members' Library Service, Ref: 85/24, August 2024 Bulletin).

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7.2 Appendix 2: East Lothian Council's Biodiversity Duty Report 2021–2023, submitted to the Scottish Government, December 2023 (available in the Members' Library Service, Ref: 85/24, August 2024 Bulletin).

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