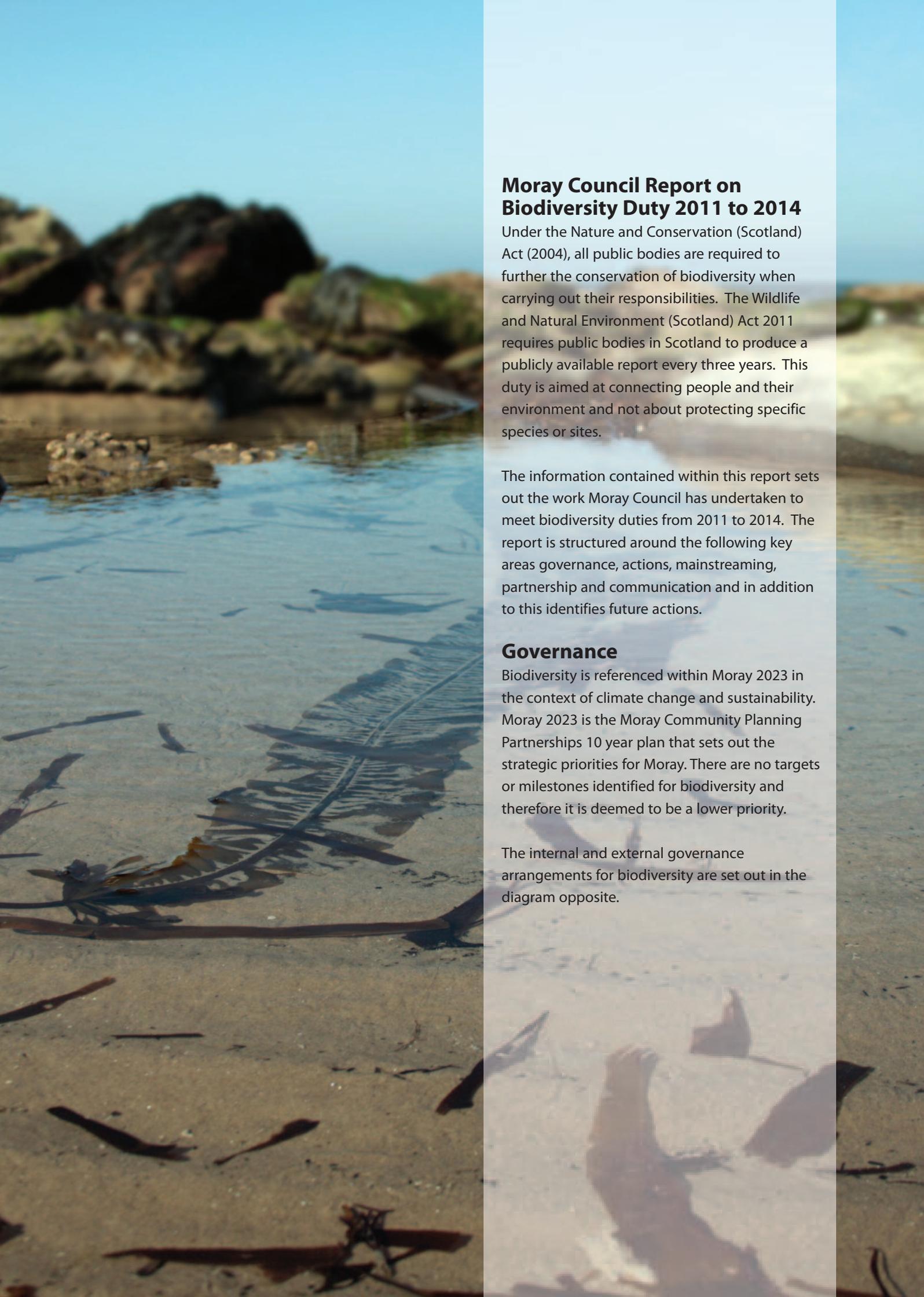




the moray council

Report on Biodiversity Duty

2011-2014



Moray Council Report on Biodiversity Duty 2011 to 2014

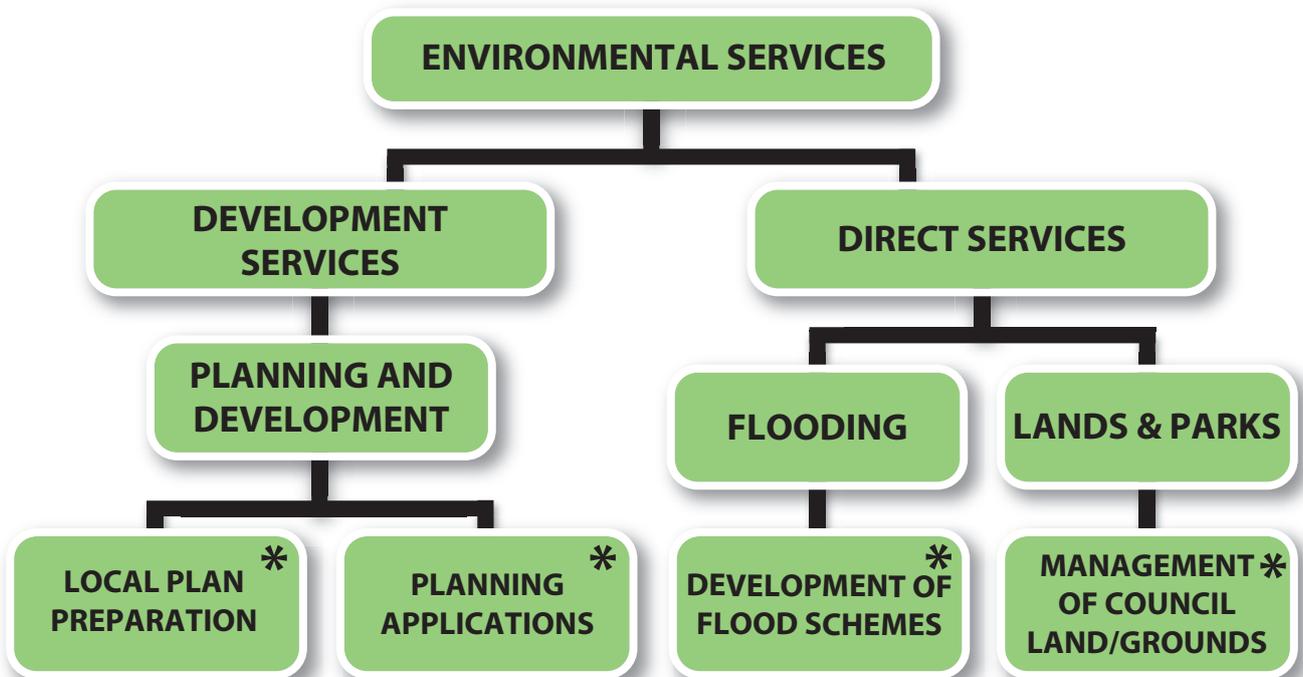
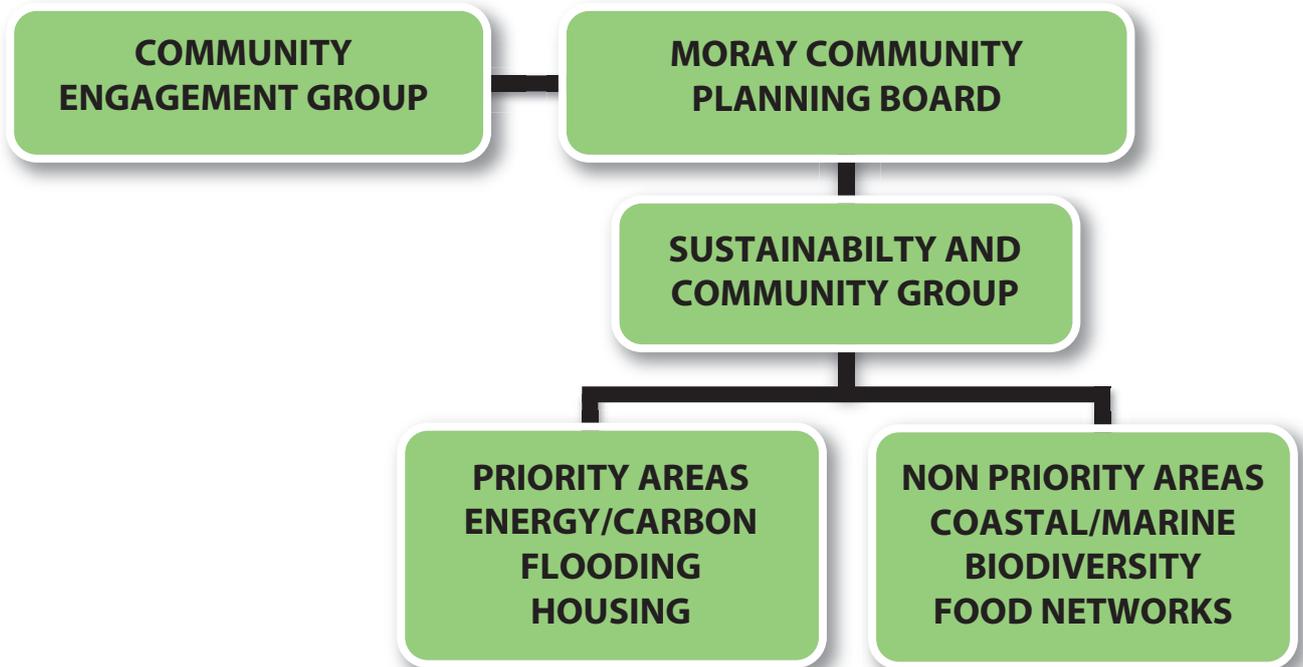
Under the Nature and Conservation (Scotland) Act (2004), all public bodies are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 requires public bodies in Scotland to produce a publicly available report every three years. This duty is aimed at connecting people and their environment and not about protecting specific species or sites.

The information contained within this report sets out the work Moray Council has undertaken to meet biodiversity duties from 2011 to 2014. The report is structured around the following key areas governance, actions, mainstreaming, partnership and communication and in addition to this identifies future actions.

Governance

Biodiversity is referenced within Moray 2023 in the context of climate change and sustainability. Moray 2023 is the Moray Community Planning Partnerships 10 year plan that sets out the strategic priorities for Moray. There are no targets or milestones identified for biodiversity and therefore it is deemed to be a lower priority.

The internal and external governance arrangements for biodiversity are set out in the diagram opposite.



* Biodiversity interest



Lhanbryde Flood Scheme

Actions

There are a number of actions that have been undertaken by the Council to conserve and enhance biodiversity and these are set out below.

The Flood Schemes in Forres and Elgin have incorporated soft engineering to replace vegetation so that, over time, the landscape that was affected by flood defence construction will be restored. Within the flood schemes plant species have been selected to replicate the natural habitats found on the river banks. Tree planting has been designed to mix trees, shrubs and other species to improve diversity. Wildflower meadows have been planted to increase the diversity of insect life.

The Council manages non native species such as Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam on sites in its ownership in line with The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2012.

The Council's Ranger section runs a series of educational workshop events which are open to the general public and liaises closely with the local secondary schools and their curriculum. Within its available budget the Council works with communities to involve them more in decisions about their environment.

As part of its woodland management the Council aims to ensure continuous cover in all its woods and that they are available at all times for amenity access. Much of the green waste produced by the Council is re-used as compost material, mulch or footpath surfacing.

The Moray Core Path Plan was adopted in 2012 and subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The Plan identifies a sufficient and integrated network of "core paths" as a framework providing for all forms of recreational access including walking, cycling, horse riding, canoeing etc within the Moray Area.

Future Actions

- There are plans and funding in place to construct a pedestrian/cycle network along the Elgin flood scheme that runs to the edge of the settlement promoting improved access to the countryside.
- Wards Wildlife site, Elgin- renew interpretation and access facilities
- Clunyhill Wood, Forres – fell some dominant tree species and replant with a more diverse range of hardwood species.
- Carry out a review of the Core Path Plan before 2016.

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming biodiversity into new development is seen as the Councils main means of achieving positive outcomes in terms of biodiversity.

The Council as Planning Authority has a remit to embed biodiversity into new development through the determination of planning applications taking account of Local Development Plan policies and guidance.

The Local Development Plan policies and land allocations were subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment procedures with specific objectives relating to biodiversity and specifically the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the landscape. A Habitats Regulations Assessment Record was also prepared to ensure no significant adverse impact on protected species.

Bid site checklists were completed for all new development sites being introduced which included biodiversity, green spaces, green networks and landscape considerations. In addition to this Scottish Natural Heritage were consulted on each identified site. The Local Development Plan is currently with the Scottish Government for Examination and there are no objections from Scottish Natural Heritage.

Climate Change Supplementary Guidance has been produced and this makes specific reference to the integration of landscaping and drainage solutions and the creation of blue and green networks to benefit biodiversity. Climate Change and Placemaking are primary policy drivers that will impact on biodiversity by promoting a more strategic approach to landscape and biodiversity provision by looking outside site boundaries and making linkages to existing green spaces to create habitat corridors. There are a small number of sites within the Local Development Plan identified as requiring advanced landscaping prior to planning applications being submitted.

Masterplans are currently being developed for Findrassie in Elgin and Dallas Dhu in Forres, where Scottish Natural Heritage have been involved in the process, engaged in workshops to embed biodiversity/green networks into the plans.

Future Mainstreaming

There are future areas of work that will further mainstream biodiversity as follows.

- Preparation of an Open Space Strategy in 2016.
- Rolling programme of masterplans and development briefs which will reference provision of green networks and integration of SUDS and landscaping.
- In line with Scottish Government policy the Council is currently researching how to implement compensatory planting which includes the best means to enhance biodiversity.

Partnership

The Moray Council has worked closely with Scottish

Natural Heritage in the last few years on the preparation of the Moray Local Development Plan. This partnership includes working together in the preparation of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Habitat Regulations Assessment requirements and providing detailed input on proposed allocations to ensure the plan supports the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. There is also a close working relationship to ensure the conservation and management of any Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the Council's ownership.

The Council is part of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership with representatives drawn from a range of organisations including local authorities, conservation, environmental and research organisations, statutory agencies, local businesses and individuals. The aim of the Partnership is to work together to protect and enhance local biodiversity through the delivery of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).

The Council works closely with the Forestry Commission where a core path crosses their land and work is ongoing with the organisation to implement the Scottish Government's Woodland Removal Policy which seeks compensatory planting for the loss of woodland.

The Countryside Ranger assists communities and other public bodies as part of the Scottish Mink Initiative that aims to protect native wildlife by removing breeding American mink from north Scotland and the Highlands. The Council also works with other public bodies as part of the Findhorn Bay Nature Reserve management committee.

Communication

As part of the Local Plan process and development of

the flood schemes across Moray, the Council has undertaken significant community consultation. The environment was a key theme at the 16 Local Development Plan engagement events held across Moray in the 3 year reporting period. In terms of communication with staff, there are regular newsletters issued that included articles on climate change and sustainability issues including biodiversity. The Ranger Service provides a summer events programme, interpretive talks, school visits and guided walks.

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