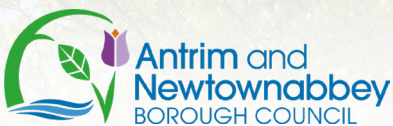


Antrim and Newtownabbey

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

2023 - 2028



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BLUEBELLS

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Foreword

Alderman Stephen Ross, Mayor of Antrim & Newtownabbey



I have pleasure in introducing you to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's second Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The Plan highlights the key actions and relevant partnerships required in order to help restore, enhance and protect key habitats and species found within our Council area.

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011, also known as the WANE Act, places a statutory duty on public bodies to undertake their functions while taking into account the protection, maintenance, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity, while raising awareness of its importance both inside and outside the organisation.

Council recognises that biodiversity is the key to sustainable development, and therefore the Local Biodiversity Action Plan will be an integral part of our local policies and plans. It highlights what is special in our area and outlines how we can protect and improve these areas. It also explains how through partnership working and local actions, we can all help to conserve and enhance our key habitats and species for future generations.

We are also exploring how we can mitigate the climate change crisis & protect our citizens from the existing and

future effects of climate breakdown, and as a result are currently working on the production of a Climate Change Action Plan. The Plan includes ambitious targets to reduce our emissions by 2030 and protect our Borough from the effects of climate change. This further demonstrates our strong and visible commitment to improving both the environment and sustainability, building on our work on climate adaptation, mitigation and decarbonising our economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided us with an opportunity to both revisit our relationship with nature and rebuild a more environmentally-responsible world. Nature proved a source of solace for many in terms of their mental health and wellbeing, as lockdown rules heightened our appreciation for local parks and green spaces. Therefore, while we must continue to ensure we meet growing demands for high quality outdoor facilities within our Borough, the natural environment must remain at the heart of all our decision-making.

It is hoped that this publication will inspire you to take ownership and get involved; any biodiversity improvements delivered at a local level, will make a significant impact at a national level.

Antrim and Newtownabbey's Designated Sites

1. Belfast Lough
2. Lough Neagh
3. Lough Beg
4. Rea's Wood
5. Farr's Bay
6. Randalstown Forest and Farr's Bay
7. Rea's Wood Forest
8. Lough Neagh Islands
9. Antrim Castle Gardens
10. Shane's Castle
11. Castle Upton
12. Aghnadarragh
13. Ballypalady
14. Inner Belfast Lough
15. Lough Beg
16. Lough Neagh
17. Outer Belfast Lough
18. Sandy Braes
19. Shane's Castle
20. Tardee Quarry
21. Monkstown Wood
22. Carnmoney Hill



- Ramsar site and special protected area
- Special area of conservation
- National nature reserve
- Historic park, garden and demesne
- Areas of special scientific interest
- Local nature reserves



What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity, an abbreviation of biological diversity, is the term used to describe the wonderful variety of living things you see around you.

This includes all the plant and animal life, including people, ecosystems, genetic variation, micro-organisms (bacteria, viruses and fungi) and the interactions between species. Each of these work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life.



ANTRIM CASTLE GARDENS



CARNMONEY HILL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE



CRANFIELD BAY,
TOOME/RANDALSTOWN



CRUMLIN GLEN

KEY SITES AROUND ANTRIM & NEWTOWNABBEY

1. Antrim Castle Gardens
2. Belfast Hills
3. Burnside River Walk
4. CAFRE Trail, Greenmount Campus
5. Canal Walk, Toomebridge
6. Carnmoney Hill Local Nature Reserve
7. Cranfield Bay, Toome/Randalstown
8. Crumlin Glen
9. Hazelbank Park
10. Lough Shore Park, Antrim
11. Lough Neagh
12. Monkstown Wood
13. Mill Race Trail, Antrim
14. Newtownabbey Way
15. Randalstown Forest and Farr's Bay
16. Ram's Island
17. Rea's Wood
18. Sixmilewater Park
19. Tardree Forest
20. Threemilewater Conservation Park
21. Valley Park

Why is Biodiversity Important?

Biodiversity is our life support system. It supports everything in nature that we need to survive: food, clean water, medicine, and shelter.

Many species work together in communities that form distinctive habitats, to provide these critical services. The loss of biodiversity reduces nature's ability to perform these functions.

A wide range of habitats can be found throughout the Borough, including loughs and rivers, woodland, grassland and urban developments. Our wetlands filter out toxins, clean water, and control floods, while woodlands supply fresh water, provide oxygen, control erosion, and remove carbon from the atmosphere. Many also provide us with tranquil, scenic settings to relax and exercise, to benefit our mental and physical health and to learn about the natural world.

Halting our biodiversity loss will allow us to continue to benefit from all that nature has to offer, particularly at a time when the planet's climate is changing, and with all the challenges that this change brings.

Legislation

We are all responsible for protecting this biodiversity for both present and future generations.

In Northern Ireland, the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011, already places a statutory duty on Council and all public bodies, to further the conservation of biodiversity by raising its profile and by making it an integral part of policy and decision making. In particular, it requires these bodies to take reasonable steps to protect, maintain, enhance, restore and raise awareness of priority species and habitats listed within the "Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy", which was first published in 2002 and is now currently under review.

This Strategy has set a target to significantly reduce overall biodiversity loss, and at a Council level, requests both internal actions and the co-ordination of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), in order to help meet the duty.

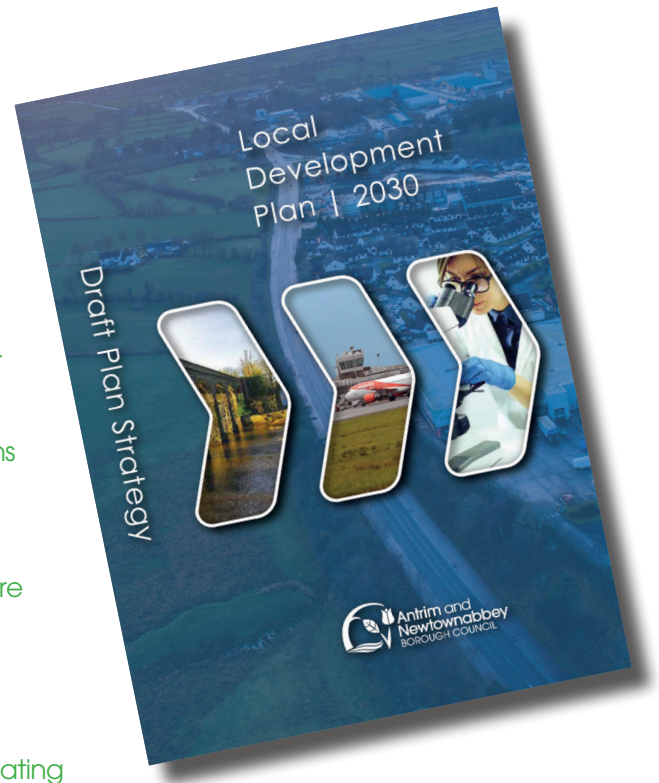
The Plan require the Council to work alongside a number of governmental and non-governmental partner organisations to develop and complete actions and fulfil targets, which promote and enhance biodiversity within the Council area. It is recognised that in order to create real changes that benefit local biodiversity, it is essential that we engage with local community groups, schools and businesses, as well as ensuring all partners are actively involved.

Within Council, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) also forms an integral part of existing internal policies and plans, so to ensure that we plan positively for the future of the Borough:

Local Development Plan

The Local Development Plan for our Borough, informs the public, statutory authorities, developers and other interested parties, of the policy framework and land use proposals, which will guide development decisions within Council, up to 2030. It will ensure that lands are appropriately zoned and that while infrastructure should be enhanced to develop the Borough for future generations.

The Plan also recognises the conservation and enhancement of our natural assets as essential, in creating a place with a sustainable future.



Community Plan “Love Living Here”

The Community Plan has a list of priorities to 2030, to include that “our towns and villages, and our green and open spaces, are clean and vibrant places which our citizens have pride in” and that “our natural environment is valued”.

Sustainability is key to developing a community plan, which meets the needs of all our citizens of our Borough.



Corporate Plan

“Our Borough, Your Vision”

(2019-2030)

The Corporate Plan sets out a vision, along with key objectives, to ensure that Council continue to develop the Borough in such a way that people will want to visit, live and work in it, will feel safe and see that their local environment is protected and enhanced. One of the measures for this, is the development of an LBAP.



Corporate Recovery Plan

(2021-2023)

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council are committed to ensuring that the Borough not only recovers from the current pandemic, but that it continues to develop, improve, grow and be a place where people choose to invest, learn, work, visit and live in. This Recovery Plan, which sets out an ambitious plan for recovery and renewal across the Borough, is our roadmap to make sure we rejuvenate our places, support our people and re-build for prosperity. This includes our ongoing commitment to improving the environment to secure a sustainable future.



Threats to Biodiversity

The biggest threat to biodiversity, is the loss of our natural habitats and the fragmentation of existing habitats into smaller pockets.

As we strive to meet the demands for our increasing human population, this has required us to replace natural habitats with land that is used for agriculture, housing, leisure activities, commercial units and industrial complexes. When a habitat is lost or reduced to a size that can no longer sustain the species that depend upon it, we can experience the local extinction of that species.

Other key threats to our native biodiversity, besides pollution and climate change (whereby many species do not have time to adjust), is the presence of invasive non-native species. These are species that have been introduced, either intentionally or unintentionally, outside their natural range. Many of these non-native species live in harmony with our native species causing no adverse impacts. However, a few non-native species have become known as 'invasive' as they thrive in our habitats and out-compete our native plant and animal life. Invasive plants found in our Borough include; Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed.

Further introduced species have been found to carry diseases against which our 'natives' do not have a natural defence. This includes the importation of ash trees from outside Europe, which carry a fungus called Ash Dieback. As a result, we could lose around 80% of our native ash trees in the UK. This will not only have a devastating impact on the biodiversity of our woodlands, but the management of the disease itself will come at a high cost; from the clearing up of dead and dying trees, to the loss of its environmental services such as air purification.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council: Local Biodiversity Action Plan

The key objectives of the LBAP are to:

- 01: help and conserve habitats and species
- 02: raise awareness of local biodiversity
- 03: involve people in biodiversity projects



Partners

In delivering these objectives, Council are required to work alongside a number of governmental and non-governmental partner organisations to develop and complete actions, which promote and enhance biodiversity within the Council area. It will also involve engaging with local community groups, schools, the farming community, and businesses, as well as encouraging all partners to be actively involved in making changes that benefit our local biodiversity. With time these partnerships will grow, and the LBAP will naturally evolve and more partners will be invited to join. At present the partnership organisations include:

- All Ireland Pollinators
- Bat Conservation Ireland
- Belfast Hills Partnership
- British Trust for Ornithology
- Buglife
- Butterfly Conservation NI
- Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
- Department for Infrastructure - Roads and Rivers
- Lough Neagh Partnership
- National Trust
- NI Badger Group
- NI Bat Group
- NI Housing Executive
- NI Swift Group
- Rivers Trust (Six Mile)
- RSPB - Antrim Local Group
- The Conservation Volunteers
- Ulster Wildlife
- Ulster Farmers Union
- Woodland Trust

Biodiversity Audit

An essential part of the LBAP process, is to establish information on the habitats and species that are found in the Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council area (both of national and local importance).

The emphasis has been put on those habitats and species that have been designated as a NI Priority, as well as locally charismatic habitats and species.

From this, local priority habitats and species have been identified, along with proposed actions to ensure their ongoing protection and enhancement.



Habitat Action Plans

The Borough contains a variety of habitats including semi natural grassland, woodland, parkland and hedgerow, wetland, peatland, marine, urban and built-up areas, and geological interest.

THE LBAP INCLUDES 6 BROAD HABITAT ACTIONS PLANS;

01

Wetlands

loughs, rivers, reed-beds,
fens, bogs and wildlife ponds

02

Woodlands

semi-natural woodland,
parkland and hedgerows

03

Built up Areas and Gardens

04

Grassland and Arable Land

05

Coastal

06

Peatland



WITH A FURTHER 3 ACTIONS PLANS FOR;

07

**Biodiversity
education &
awareness**

08

**Designated
sites**

09

**Landscape
Scale
Conservation
& Climate
Change**

01 Wetlands

Lough Neagh and Lough Beg are one of our most important wetland habitats, being the largest freshwater lake in the UK and designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). They support beds of submerged aquatic vegetation fringed by associated species-rich damp grassland, reed beds, islands, fens, marginal swampy woodland and pasture.

Lough Neagh and Lough Beg regularly supports internationally important numbers of migrating waterfowl and wildfowl in winter and has also been designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Ramsar Site.

There are 10 main watercourses/rivers in the Borough; the Ballymartin, Clady, Crumlin, Doagh and Dundesert Rivers, River Maine, Six Mile Water, Three Mile Water, Toome Canal and the Lower Bann. There are also smaller lakes, dams and ponds.

There are small fragmented area of fen and reed-beds in the Borough.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES INCLUDE;

- **Plants** - Irish Ladies-tresses, River Water Crowfoot
- **Mammals** - Otter
- **Birds** - Irish Dipper, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank, Mute Swans, Teal, Gadwall, Great-Crested Grebe, Pochard, Whooper Swan, Tree Sparrow
- **Amphibian** - Smooth Newt
- **Fish** - River Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon, Pollan, European Eel

Threats to Our Wetlands

In general, wetlands are threatened by draining for pastures, landfill and rubbish dumping, and nutrient enrichment (which can change species composition) from agricultural run-off etc. River habitat has been dredged and straightened in the past century, to improve land drainage and flood risk. This has resulted in heavy siltation and bare river beds and banks. In turn, this has led to soil erosion, land loss and been damaging

to our aquatic plants. Many ponds have been filled-in due to agricultural intensification and development. As a result, we have lost many local populations of amphibians, fish, wetland invertebrates and wetland plants. Some have suffered from pollution or have dried up, due to the lack of management. Others have become contaminated with invasive non-native aquatic species.

WHOOPEE SWAN



IRISH DIPPER



LAPWING



ACTIONS FOR WETLANDS

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To carry out a wetland survey.	Commission a wetland survey (subject to funding), to include a GIS wetland habitat map to guide planning consents – to include the monitoring of key species. Creation of new wetlands as part of SUDs or flood alleviation schemes.	DAERA ANBC (Planning)
To work with existing stakeholders/ partners to create a minimum of 3 new ponds.	Manage existing ponds for biodiversity, while encouraging the creation of new ones.	The Conservation Volunteers Belfast Hills Partnership Threemilewater Conservation and Angling Association
To ensure that the management of our properties on the Lough Neagh shoreline, do not have any significant impacts on the European designated sites.	Carry out Habitat Regulation Assessments and AAs as required for NIEA approval, prior to carrying out any activities on these sites.	Lough Neagh Partnership DAERA
To continue to collaborate with adjacent landowners to ensure that the key features of the following designated sites are protected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lough Neagh and Lough Beg: SPA and Ramsar • Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay SAC 	Coordinate bi-annual meetings with relevant landowners, to share best management practice.	Neighbouring landowners – e.g. Massereene Golf Club and Shane's Castle Estate



KINGFISHER



02 Woodlands

(Semi-natural woodland, Parkland and Hedgerows)

Ancient, semi-natural woodlands are extremely valued for nature conservation, as the plant and tree species have descended from the original native woodland. Woodland cover is generally low in the Borough, with a few remnant ancient/semi-natural woodland areas. What exists is mostly concentrated in areas around the Lough Neagh shores, on large estates and along river corridors. The Shane's Castle Parkland is a notable site, it has the largest concentrations of open-grown ancient and veteran trees in Northern Ireland.

The Newtownabbey Way is an example of an important woodland corridor, especially as it is located in the built-up, urban environment. The woodland here has been expanded to connect existing woodland pockets. Quite often in the Spring, Bluebell, Wood Anemone, Ramsons and Lesser Celandine can be found flowering at ground level.

On the shores of Lough Neagh, Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay are fine examples of wet woodland, dominated by alder, willow and birch.

Well managed native species-rich hedgerows (containing six or more native tree or shrub species), are important biodiversity features in the landscape, supporting a wealth of insects, mammals, birds and understorey plants. They act as wildlife corridors, allowing plant and animal species to disperse across the countryside, connecting them between two or more woodland areas. In farmland areas, hedgerows provide vital nesting sites for a number of declining birds such as the Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES INCLUDE;

- **Trees/Plants** - Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Holly, Oak species, Primrose, Wood Sorrel, Wood Anemone, Bluebell, Wild Garlic
- **Mammals** - Red Squirrel, various Bat species, Hedgehogs
- **Birds** - Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, Great Tit, Barn Owl, House Sparrow and Bullfinch

Threats to Our Woodlands

Native woodlands are small in size, fragmented from other woodland areas. The presence of invasive non-native species can further threaten their existence – for example, Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel and Grey Squirrel. The planting of non-native tree species, such as Beech and Field Maple, further leads to the decline in their biodiversity value.

The ongoing spread of Ash Dieback, will continue to have devastating impact on the biodiversity of our woodlands.

Hedgerows are often in decline due to a lack of management, which leaves them overgrown and gappy. They are often replaced by fences around the perimeters of larger pasture and arable fields. In areas of flat land near Lough Neagh, there are large pasture fields bordered predominated by wet drainage ditches.



ACTIONS FOR WOODLANDS

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To reconnect woodland areas and encourage new native broad-leaved woodland planting, to include mixed species hedgerows	<p>Secure funding through appropriate woodland grant schemes.</p> <p>Deliver annual local community growing programmes – e.g. Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns Grow” project.</p> <p>Monitor the impact of tree diseases such as Ash dieback on loss of hedgerow and woodland. Develop a management plan to cope with this disease.</p> <p>Deliver and encourage riparian planting projects along river courses to help reduce bankside erosion, improving water quality and providing connectivity to allow movement of flora and fauna throughout the landscape.</p>	<p>DAERA</p> <p>Woodland Trust</p> <p>Belfast Hills Partnership</p>
To adopt the “Plant a Million” Trees programme	<p>To plant (Council) and record up to 50,000 new native trees per annum within the Borough, via an open register.</p> <p>To support locally sourced and grown trees.</p>	<p>Local community groups and key partners – DfI, NIHE, Woodland Trust and Belfast Hills Partnership</p> <p>Local businesses</p>
To enhance the biodiversity value of all ancient and long-established woodland in the borough.	<p>Carry out controlled felling of non-native trees on Council-owned land (along with selective thinning and inter-planting where suitable) to create resilient woodlands.</p> <p>Retain fallen and veteran trees; control non-native species (e.g. salmonberry and cherry laurel) on Council-owned land.</p> <p>Commission management plans for key sites and species (subject to funding).</p> <p>Update ancient woodland map records, carry out baseline survey of the condition of ancient and long-established woodland in the Borough and support measures to improve their condition.</p>	<p>ANBC (Parks)</p> <p>Belfast Hills Partnership</p>





RED SQUIRREL

03 Built Up Areas and Gardens

(Urban)

Man-made structures throughout the Borough such as quarries, road verges, cemeteries, old mill sites, golf courses, and waste ground on industrial sites, provide food and shelter for wildlife such as the Swift – our Bird of the Borough. Brownfield sites are rich in invertebrate biodiversity, for example, butterflies and moths. The most important have nutrient-poor soil (gravel or sand). Derelict buildings can provide nesting and roosting sites for birds and bats. Older cemeteries are particularly rich in biodiversity as they are usually small and enclosed by species-rich hedgerows that include Yew trees, with larger, mature trees planted throughout.

As well as fundamental in maintaining and restoring biodiversity, urban planting provides screening, reduces noise-pollution and filters fumes from transport and industry. They also provide vital services such as soakaways, helping to reduce run-off into drainage systems during periods of heavy rain.

Gardens and school grounds provide sanctuaries for at least some of the more common species of flora and fauna - for example, flowering plants provide a source of nectar for pollinators such as bees and butterflies. They are also an important nature conservation education resource encouraging early engagement with the natural world amongst school-children. Meantime, many of the plant and animal species that struggle to survive on intensely managed farmland, find refuge on allotment sites.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES INCLUDE;

- **Plants** - Dandelion, Pollinator species
- **Mammals** – Hedgehog, Bat species
- **Birds** – House Sparrow, Starling, Swift
Swan, Tree Sparrow

Threats to Our Urban Areas

The development of species-rich brownfield sites, along with the planting of invasive non-native species such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam in our gardens, has resulted in the decline in biodiversity in our urban areas. It is further threatened by activities such as excessive grass cutting and use of herbicides and pesticides.

ACTIONS FOR URBAN AREAS

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To maximise the habitat potential of Council-owned man-made spaces: leisure centres, roundabouts, cemeteries, golf courses, parks, allotments, and caravan sites.	<p>Commission conservation management plan(s) for these sites, to include a baseline survey of their biodiversity quality (subject to funding).</p> <p>Deliver key components of the plan(s), with aim to improve sites' biodiversity value by 10% by year 3 (subject to funding).</p>	ANBC (Parks)
To seek to influence good practice throughout the Borough (e.g. quarries, waste ground in industrial sites, brownfield sites, school grounds and private gardens)	<p>Promote importance of biodiversity (social, economic and environmental) – via social media, signposting to funding opportunities (e.g. Biffa), and overseeing events and competitions - e.g. Ulster In Bloom and Best Kept awards.</p> <p>To encourage the planting and protection of trees and green spaces in urban areas.</p>	<p>Local residents</p> <p>Local schools/ groups</p> <p>Local business owners</p> <p>ANBC (Parks)</p>



04 Grassland and Arable Land

Hay meadows are managed in a more traditional way to produce hay rather than silage. This involves cutting the meadow later in the year, when most plants within the grassland have set seed. The result is a grassland which is more species-rich than grasslands managed more intensively for agriculture.

However, the vast majority of grassland in the Borough is improved grassland for agriculture, intensively managed with heavy applications of inorganic fertilisers, installation of drains and often reseeded with a high proportion of perennial rye grass, which is generally of low conservation interest.

Less productive grasslands are now mainly restricted to the wetter and thinner soils found particularly in the upland margins. Most of these grasslands depend on traditional farming practices and associated low stocking levels. This maintains the low fertility which benefits a diversity of short and slow growing flowering plants.

Arable land is scattered throughout the Borough, however, arable crops with their associated high levels of fertiliser, herbicides and pesticides, can have low conservation interest.

At a landscape-scale, our road verges inadvertently act as valuable wildlife corridors.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES INCLUDE;

- **Plants** - Common Knapweed, Red Clover, Ox-Eye Daisy, Common Birds-foot Trefoil, yellow Rattle and Lady's Bedstraw
- **Mammals** - Irish Hare
- **Birds** - Barn Owl, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Waders - Lapwing, Curlew, Snipe and Redshank

Threats to Our Grassland Areas

The intensification of agricultural practices has had a dramatic impact upon our grassland habitats. In Northern Ireland over the past 50 years, we have lost approximately 97% of our species-rich hay meadows. Many of our once-abundant wildflowers, as well as their pollinators are now much more localised and restricted to areas where soil nutrient levels are low.

ACTIONS FOR GRASSLAND AREAS

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To maximise the wildlife value of species-rich grasslands and meadows on Council-owned property	Record and develop changes in grassland management practices, in order to increase sward plant diversity.	All-Ireland Pollinator Plan
To seek to influence good practice with local community groups and relevant public and private landowners.	<p>Promote the biodiversity value of lowland meadows in our open spaces, through social media and events.</p> <p>Encourage the protection of existing priority habitats such as Lowland Meadows and Purple Moorgrass Rush Pasture.</p>	<p>Ulster Wildlife</p> <p>NIHE</p> <p>DFL</p> <p>Local businesses</p>



05 Coastal

The marine habitat on the shoreline of Belfast Lough, comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons, while the outer Lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays. The Lough has been designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Ramsar Site as it regularly supports internationally important numbers of migrating waterfowl and wildfowl. Belfast Lough has also been declared an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI).

In 2020, Scientists confirmed that European flat Oysters have re-established themselves in Belfast Lough, after a 100-year absence.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES INCLUDE;

- **Mammals** - Harbor Porpoise
- **Birds** - Redshank, Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit
- **Fish / Shellfish** - European Flat Oyster

Threats to Our Coasts

Marine litter is a global problem which poses an increasing threat to human health and safety, ecosystem services and sustainable livelihoods. There is concern about a growing number of non-native invasive species that have been accidentally introduced and are spreading in the local marine environment. These can take over

habitat and displace native species and cause other problems including fouling the hulls of ships and impacting aquaculture industries. Once established, marine invasive aliens are almost impossible to eradicate. The slipper limpet, a North American species, first appeared in Belfast Lough around 2005.

ACTIONS FOR COASTS

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To support the protection of the key marine habitat within our Borough - i.e. Belfast Lough and its various designations (ASSI, SPA, Ramsar Site),	Participate in best practice events and consultation programmes, at a regional level – e.g. the Marine Plan for NI.	ANBC (Planning)
To highlight the importance of our marine environment	Promote the biodiversity value of Belfast Lough, through social media, and events.	ANBC (Parks)



06 Peatlands

Peatland plants draw carbon dioxide from the atmosphere using it for growth and as the older parts of the plants die back they slowly turn into carbon-rich peat, locking away the carbon for thousands of years more. It's a massive amount of carbon – in Northern Ireland, around 45 years-worth of our current annual greenhouse gas emissions is locked away.

There are no sizable areas of peatlands left in the Council area. Most peatlands are small and fragmented. They have been cut-over and converted into fen or drained for farmland. Areas of lowland raised bog were found mostly to the east of the River Maine, but have largely been destroyed due to commercial peat extraction and much has been colonised by birch woodland.

Sluggan Moss was formerly a large lowland bog, now largely destroyed by commercial peat extraction, leaving exposed peat devoid of vegetation. A fringe of birch woodland surrounds the site. The hydrology of uncut areas has been disturbed by drainage accompanying peat cutting, although they remain important for wading birds.

The once extensive lowland bogs found in the meanders of the River Bann, have largely been lost through past cutting, drainage and straightening of the river. Several have been converted to fen, wet woodland or damp grassland, but there are areas of acid bog remaining. Upland heathland occurs on some higher summits of Tardree and Divis Mountains as part of a heath, bog and grassland mosaic.

ASSOCIATED SPECIES INCLUDE;

- **Mammals** – Irish hare
- **Birds** – Red Grouse, Skylark
- **Amphibian** - Common lizard
- **Invertebrates** - Marsh Fritillary

Threats to Our Peatlands

Major threats to heathland include loss to development or agricultural improvements such as drainage, over or under grazing and wildfires. Much of the blanket peatland has largely been cut-over. Fly-tipping is also a problem in some areas.

ACTIONS FOR PEATLANDS

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To identify upland heath sites for restoration	<p>Collaborate with relevant external partners, for biannual surveys to be carried out on the extent and condition of heaths (subject to funding).</p> <p>Collaborate with relevant external partners, for biannual monitoring of key target species, to be carried out (subject to funding).</p>	<p>Belfast Hills Partnership</p> <p>National Trust (Divis)</p>
To seek to influence the protection and/or restoration of upland heath and lowland raised bog habitats, with relevant landowners or land managers	<p>Deliver an awareness campaign, to promote the value of heaths and bogs in supporting biodiversity and to signpost to appropriate grant schemes to protect and restore them.</p> <p>Consider management to mitigate against wildfires, under grazing and impact of certain leisure pursuits.</p>	<p>Belfast Hills Partnership</p> <p>Woodland Trust</p> <p>National Trust (Divis)</p> <p>ANBC (Parks)</p>



07 Biodiversity Education and Awareness

Education and awareness is an important tool to promote the need to conserve biodiversity and use biological resources in a sustainable manner, and can produce long-term social change. It can help to inspire public understanding and voluntary activity.



ACTIONS FOR EDUCATION

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To promote the need to conserve biodiversity and inspire our residents to use resources in a sustainable manner.	Celebrate "International Day for Biological Diversity" each year (22 May) using social media and events.	ANBC (Parks)
To raise awareness of Biodiversity <i>within</i> Council	<p>Provide in-house training (Council staff and elected Members) on: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •the importance of protecting and enhancing biodiversity within the Borough, through careful planning and byelaws on Council sites where appropriate; •the threat of non-native species, particularly those that are considered to be "invasive" (and the law surrounding their eradication) – e.g. Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, and Zebra Mussel. •the risks associated with importing trees and plants – e.g. introduction of new pests and diseases from overseas. 	ANBC (Parks)
To raise awareness of Biodiversity <i>outside</i> Council	<p>Through Council's website signpost interested parties to:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Wildlife Law and You" (DAERA guidance booklet). 2.DAERA's "Water Pollution Hotline". 3."Invasive Species Ireland" website. 4. Available grants to help farmers and other private landowners to improve biodiversity on their land – including tree planting and woodland restoration 5. "Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland" – the Precautionary Principle <p>Install biodiversity-related interpretive signage on Council's key sites (subject to funding).</p>	ANBC (Parks)
To deliver Biodiversity Training - within and outside Council.	<p>Develop partnerships to deliver wildlife recording training and practical conservation volunteering opportunities, for our residents.</p> <p>Support the development of skills to produce locally sourced and grown trees and plants.</p>	Various NGO's (see partners list)

08 Designated Sites

There are a range of conservation sites of international, national and local importance in the Borough.

The sites have been designated to preserve a wide range of NI priority habitats and species.

Some of these habitats are on publicly-owned land such as within Forest Parks, Historic Parks and Gardens. The majority of these areas however are on privately-owned farmland or large estates.

Threats to Designated Sites

There are many more habitat fragments of high conservation value that remain unprotected in the wider countryside. The main threats to the wildlife habitats within both designated and non-designated sites are inappropriate agricultural and land management practices, infrastructure development, nutrient enrichment from domestic, industrial and agricultural sources, non-native species and also the impacts of climate change.

ACTIONS FOR DESIGNATED SITES

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To continue to favourably manage for conservation, any Council-owned designated sites.	<p>Obtain DAERA approvals from DAERA for any planned operations, confirming that they will not adversely affect the key features for which the sites are designated.</p> <p>Consider buffer planting and the removal of invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam, Rhododendron and Laurel along Lough Neagh shore, in order to help protect the (irreplaceable) ancient woodland.</p>	<p>ANBC (Parks)</p> <p>DAERA</p>

09 Landscape-Scale Conservation and Climate Change

(Ecological networks and habitat connectivity)

While the focus of biodiversity action is often on protected species and habitats, it is not just the rare and endangered that need to be protected and enhanced.

The protection and enhancement of all of the natural world, from the common place to the critically endangered is required. The complexity of local ecosystems must also be recognised.

The Plan will explore ways of better connecting our wildlife in order to strengthen ecological networks and encourage nature to thrive against the pressures of climate change, agriculture and development. Already, many roadside verges inadvertently act as valuable corridors for the dispersal of plant and animal species across the landscape.

ACTIONS FOR LANDSCAPE-SCALE CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Action	Action Brief	Councils' Key Partners
To improve wildlife corridors on Council properties, for key species (to allow adjustment to human pressures and spatial shifts caused by climate change)	Develop grassland and meadow corridors on Council properties to enhance pollinator habitat corridors.	ANBC (Parks)
To encourage private landowners to improve wildlife corridors throughout the Borough, for key species		Ulster Farmers Union
To reduce threat from invasive species and non-native pests and diseases	<p>Remove invasive species on Council properties that are limiting natural habitat regeneration, e.g. cherry laurel in Woodland (subject to funding).</p> <p>Use of locally sourced and grown trees and plants to reduce the risk of inadvertently introducing non-native pests and diseases.</p>	ANBC (Parks)

Species Action Plan

The following species have been selected for inclusion in the LBAP as they are Northern Ireland Priority Species, are of local significance, easily visible, iconic, and/or would encourage people to act by engaging in environmental activities which benefit biodiversity.

Many of these species will also benefit from the Habitat Action Plan, as it is habitat change, loss or fragmentation – e.g. agricultural intensification and new developments that are their key threats.

SPECIES OBJECTIVES FOR THE BOROUGH

- Establish key species population estimates;
- Maintain key species population estimates;
- Maintain and create habitat suitable for key species;
- Raise awareness of the ecosystem services provided by key species

IN ADDITION, COUNCIL WILL IDENTIFY, CONTROL AND MONITOR INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES ON COUNCIL MAINTAINED LAND. THESE WILL INCLUDE JAPANESE KNOTWEED, HIMALAYAN BALSAM, GIANT HOGWEED AND GREY SQUIRREL.

Wetland

Irish Ladies Tresses
 River Water Crowfoot
 River Lamprey
 Atlantic Salmon
 Pollen
 European Eel
 Otter
 Irish Dipper
 Kingfisher
 Smooth Newt
 Waders (Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank)
 Wildfowl (Mute and Whooper Swans, Teal, Gadwall,
 Great-Crested Grebe, Pochard)

Woodland

Badger
 Bat species
 Blackthorn
 Bluebell
 Guelder Rose
 Hawthorn
 Hedgehog
 Holly
 Oak species
 Pine Martin
 Primrose
 Red Squirrel
 Tree Sparrow
 Wood Sorrel
 Wood Anemone
 Wild Garlic

Urban

Bat species
 House Sparrow
 Dandelion
 other wider Pollinator species
 Starling
 Swift

Grassland

Barn Owl
 Cryptic Wood White (butterfly)
 Irish Hare
 Latticed Heath (moth)
 Lesser Butterfly Orchid
 Multiple Pollinators
 Waders – (Lapwing, Curlew Snipe, Redshank)

Coastal

Bar-tailed Godwit
 Curlew
 European Flat Oyster
 Harbour Porpoise
 Redshank

Peatland

Common Lizard
 Irish Hare
 Hen harrier
 Marsh Fritillary
 Merlin
 Kestrel
 Red Grouse
 Skylark



What You Can Do to Help Biodiversity?

The success of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan depends not only on the work of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and the partner organisations, but also the work that individuals and communities engage in to enhance our environment for biodiversity.



There are a number of ways you can get involved and play a vital role in conserving and enhancing Antrim and Newtownabbey's biodiversity:

1. AN INDIVIDUAL

Record Local Wildlife

Help build a better picture of local biodiversity and become a wildlife recorder! Record any sightings of important wildlife and report directly to the Ulster Museum's recording centre, CEDaR (Centre for Environmental Data and Recording)

<http://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/home>

Garden for Wildlife

Why not encourage wildlife in your garden? No matter how big or small, you can make a difference and help our local biodiversity. Why not put up a bird feeder and table, create a garden pond and log piles for insects, frogs and hedgehogs, and leave an area to 'go wild' to allow native plants to flower for our pollinators.

For more ideas on gardening for wildlife, go to www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk/index.aspx

For information on what food you can leave out for birds and how you can keep your feeding station hygienic and pest-free, go to www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/read-and-learn/helping-birds/feeding/

Report Wildlife Crime

Incidents that disturb or harm wildlife, should not be ignored, as they have an impact on biodiversity. Contact the following places if you suspect a wildlife crime has been committed:

Disturbance of a protected species should be reported to your local PSNI office. Tel 101 on a landline or visit their website for further details <https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>

Water Pollution Hotline for urgent issues. T: 0800 807060

Grounded or injured bats in your building, please call CEDaR
T: 028 9039 5264 or E: cedar.info@nmni.com

Further advice can be obtained from 'Wildlife Law and You'
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wildlife-management> or
The Wildlife Team at NI Environment Agency T: 028 9056 9602.

2. A SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY GROUP

Create a wildlife area

Wildlife areas within school grounds or community gardens are not just important for wildlife, they are often also great places to relax and are the perfect outdoor classroom. .

3. A BUSINESS OWNER

Environmental Policy

Develop an environmental policy which incorporates biodiversity
<https://www.bitcni.org.uk/>

Land and Buildings

Manage and enhance the conservation of land holdings and buildings. Start with an audit of what biodiversity you have and how it can be maintained, restored and enhanced.

Engage Staff

Increase staff awareness and involvement in biodiversity initiatives, such as staff volunteer days.

Reduce Impact

Reduce energy consumption, minimise emissions to land, air, or water and the production of waste.

4. A FARMER

Avoid Disturbing Nesting Birds

Cut hedges outside of the growing season. This will also ensure that fruit and seeds are available as a winter food source for wildlife.

Retain Hedges

They are important wildlife corridors. Also, leave a strip of uncut grass around field margins as a refuge for native plants and animals.

Eligible to Partake in an Agric-Environmental Scheme?

For example, the Environmental Farming Scheme -

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/rural-development/environmental-farming-scheme-efs>

Forestry grant schemes are also available, for the planting of areas of woodland on your land -

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/daera-forestry-grants>



Further information

To find out more about the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Biodiversity Action Plan or how you can help your local biodiversity, please contact your local Biodiversity Officer:

E: biodiversity@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk or

T. 0300 123 4568

Acknowledgements

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council would like to thank all those individuals and partner organisations, who helped to lay the groundwork for this Local Biodiversity Action Plan. We look forward to working alongside each of you to develop the actions laid out in this plan.

Council would also like to thank all the local schools and community groups that we have already had the pleasure to work alongside, to help raise awareness of, and improve habitats for, biodiversity in their local areas.

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