

## BIODIVERSITY POLICY

### 1.0 Context

1.1 The University of Aberdeen's 2040 Strategy establishes sustainability as one of four strategic pillars alongside inclusive, interdisciplinary and international. The four environmental sustainability commitments included as part of that strategy are:

- encourage everyone within our community to work and live sustainably, recognising the importance of our time, energy and resilience
- educate all our students and staff to be leaders in protecting the environment
- excel in research that addresses the climate emergency, enables energy transition and the preservation of biodiversity
- achieve net zero carbon emissions before 2040

1.2 This policy aims to build on those sustainability commitments and to enhance the high-level biodiversity commitment first set out in the University's Environmental Sustainability Policy (as amended in December 2013). That policy committed the University to "*protect and promote biodiversity on the University campus*". The policy will also support our institutional commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 15 "Life on Land".

1.3 The University recognises that, amid the twin climate and biodiversity crises, how we manage our estate is increasingly important. Our operational impacts have both direct and indirect impacts on biodiversity. We need to manage these impacts effectively, embracing an approach that goes beyond limiting negative impacts, to focus on achieving quantifiable biodiversity improvements on our campus.

1.4 The development of this policy has been informed by the findings of our inaugural Climate and Sustainability Assembly in March 2023. It has been further informed by the work of an undergraduate summer internship (June-August 2023) that saw the Sustainability team host an internship to undertake ecological surveys of six of our largest sites in the north-east of Scotland. This work enabled the University to map and quantify some ~94ha of land, identifying ~59ha of greenspace and providing basic habitat mapping of the sites for the first time. Please see **Appendix A** for Site Mapping.

### 2.0 Policy Scope

2.1 This policy applies to the greenspaces, grounds, land and property owned and operated by the University at its main campuses in Aberdeen and at other remote satellite sites in Scotland. These sites include those already mapped i.e. Old Aberdeen, Foresterhill, Hillhead, Balgownie, Newburgh (National Decommissioning Centre), and Kintore (Hall Forest), as well as currently unmapped sites at Cromarty, Bettyhill, and land on the former Rowett site. The University also works alongside the Cruickshank Botanic Garden Trustees to oversee and maintain the Garden and its collections.

2.2 The policy fits into a wider national policy and strategic framework. This framework sets out our legal obligations in relation to the management of land and the protection of species, including where appropriate, sanctions for any breaches. The framework includes:

- the [Nature Conservation \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#), which places a duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity.
- the [Wildlife and Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Act \(WANE Act\) \(2011\)](#) which introduced a further requirement for all public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.
- the [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#) which has set national spatial principles and regional priorities for national planning policy. It sets out new requirements for all developments to deliver '*positive effects for biodiversity*' (often referred to as Biodiversity Net Gain in England) proportionate to the nature and scale of the development.

2.3 The Scottish government has also endorsed several international and national commitments to sustainability, climate change, biodiversity and nature, that include:

- the [Paris Agreement](#), a legally binding international treaty on climate change;
- the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Post-2020: Statement of Intent](#), that includes a proposal to extend the area protected for nature to at least 30% of Scotland's land area by 2030;
- the [Leader's Pledge for Nature](#), which in November 2021, saw the First Minister endorse a global commitment to reverse nature-loss by 2030 and deliver a nature positive world;
- the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(GBF\)](#) negotiated at COP15 in 2022, which aims to address biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems, and protect indigenous rights;
- the [Tackling the Nature Emergency - Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045](#) which will be implemented through a series of 5-year delivery plans. This Strategy aims to conserve biodiversity for the health, enjoyment, and wellbeing of the people of Scotland now and in the future.

### 3.0 Stakeholders

This policy acknowledges that several institutional stakeholders have a role to play or an interest in the implementation of this policy. These include but are not limited to:

- University of Aberdeen Staff
- University of Aberdeen Students
- Contractors working on behalf of the University of Aberdeen
- Local residents living in proximity to the sites and campuses of the University of Aberdeen
- Members of the public visiting the University of Aberdeen's sites and campuses

### 4.0 Objectives

The primary objectives of this policy are to ensure that the University:

- Complies with all relevant UK and Scottish legislation and statutory guidance relating to biodiversity, including working with the appropriate local authorities and the [North-East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership](#) to support local biodiversity priorities;
- Undertakes regular monitoring of our habitats and species diversity across all our main campuses and land-holdings, aiming in particular to:
  - identify and manage any invasive non-native species present on our sites;
  - identify and monitor the presence of vulnerable or protected species e.g. Red IUCN listed species such as red squirrels;
- Conserves and strategically enhances our existing greenspaces, including the creation of new habitats and the identification of opportunities to support biodiversity enhancement e.g., connecting and improving habitats across our sites in order to provide important linkages and habitat corridors to the wider environment;
- Reviews and revises our routine grounds maintenance practices, including those undertaken by in-house Grounds staff and external contractors, working to identify and reduce any negative environmental impacts;
- Embeds the principles of [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) in our campus planning and development activity, aiming to secure biodiversity improvements through Planning and acknowledging that there is now an obligation on us to include appropriate measures to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity when submitting planning applications;

- Encourages our operational and research colleagues to exchange information and identify mutually beneficial collaborations, exploring opportunities to enhance research, and utilising our grounds and greenspaces as the location for living laboratory projects;
- Continues to raise awareness of biodiversity with our staff, students and the public, enhancing biodiversity engagement, encouraging the responsible use of our greenspaces, and showcasing our Aberdeen Biodiversity Centre and Cruickshank Botanic Gardens;
- Work with Aberdeen University Students' Association on grounds and greenspace projects, working collaboratively to facilitate mutually agreed nature-positive projects;
- Builds connections with relevant local stakeholders, including the local community, local authorities, and NESBiP, to enable sharing of biodiversity knowledge and resources, and supporting collaborative action for biodiversity in the local community.

## 5.0 Initial Actions

- Establish a Biodiversity Review Group to provide oversight of the development and implementation of a Biodiversity Action Plan;
- Develop a Biodiversity Action Plan and associated KPIs covering an initial three-year planning period;
- Target accreditation with the Nature Positive University Alliance; including yearly reporting on progress towards the Action
- Establish a programme for the regular monitoring of our species and habitats across all our main campuses and land-holdings;
- Establish a target for the net increase in biodiversity we will aim for as part of major capital projects;
- Embed the principle of Biodiversity Net Gain as part of the University's Design Guidance for capital projects;
- Support the Cruickshank Botanic Gardens in the development of educational interpretation and engagement materials and signposting in and around the Cruickshank Botanic Gardens;
- Work with the Alumni Relations team to identify possible opportunities for biodiversity related alumni projects and initiatives;
- Establish one or more campus locations for community litter stations i.e. openly accessible boxes containing litter picking equipment for community use;
- Work with our Grounds team within Estates and Facilities to identify and quantify suitable areas for on-going biodiversity enhancement, working in support of the Scottish Government proposal to extend the area managed for biodiversity to 30% by 2030;
- Review Grounds management practice with a view to, where appropriate;
  - ensuring we are peat-free in our land-management practices, including landscaping associated with new capital projects;
  - utilising only organic fertilisers for use on sports pitches;
  - reducing the use of herbicides and algicides to as low a level as practicably possible and aiming to ultimately restrict their usage to tackling invasive non-native species (in line with Scottish legislation and best practice guidelines);
  - continuing our existing practice of not using pesticides;
  - increasing the proportion of UK and Scottish native species in current and future planting schemes, with native seeds and plants sourced locally where possible;
  - using water conscious planting practices including selecting plants that have low water requirements, planting in shade, using mulch, and minimal watering of plants;
  - increasing habitat creation opportunities around campus e.g. standing dead-wood, creation of habitat piles, reduced grass-mowing, the addition and maintenance of suitable animal homes;
  - managing trees on our sites through regular tree surveys and committing to a protocol of 2-for-1 replacement wherever trees have to be removed.

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