

## ANGUS COUNCIL

## PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE

28 February 1996

## SUBJECT: BIODIVERSITY - THE UK STEERING GROUP REPORT

## REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, TRANSPORT &amp; ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Abstract:** This report outlines the recently published report "Biodiversity - The UK Steering Group Report" which puts forward an approach to conserving and enhancing biodiversity at both the national and local level.

**1 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Committee -

- i notes the contents of this report;
- ii give, in principle, support to the development of a co-ordinated environmental/ biodiversity database and to the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and that the Director of Planning, Transport and Economic Development be asked to investigate ways of taking these forward;
- iii requests the Director of Planning, Transport and Economic Development keep a watching brief on developments surrounding the recommendations in the Steering Group's report and report back to Committee as appropriate.

**2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 At the Earth summit held in RIO in 1992 the UK Government along with 150 other countries, signed a number of conventions. Among those signed was the Convention on Biological Diversity. This was to demonstrate a shared belief that action must be taken to halt the worldwide loss of animal and plant species and genetic resources. They also agreed to draw up national plans and, programmes to help implement them. In 1994 the UK Biodiversity Action Plan was published. Proposals in the document included the setting up of a Biodiversity Steering Group to prepare costed action plans for plants, animals and habitats. It is the result of this group's work which is the subject of this report.

**3 THE STEERING GROUP**

- 3.1 The Steering Group was given the following tasks:-

- to develop costed targets for key species and habitats;
- to suggest ways of improving the accessibility and co-ordination of information on biodiversity;
- to recommend ways of increasing public awareness and involvement in conserving biodiversity;

- to recommend ways of ensuring that commitments in the Plan were properly monitored and carried out.

3.2 The Steering Group's report is in two volumes.

Volume 1: Meeting the RIO challenge

Volume 2: Action Plans (320 pages)

A copy has been made available in the Members accommodation at 7 The Cross.

3.3 Biodiversity is defined in the Biodiversity Convention as "*The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.*" But it is more commonly referred to as "the variety of life".

3.4 As the Steering Group's report explains human activities are changing and destroying habitats, natural ecosystems and landscapes on an increasing scale. What has taken hundreds of thousands of years to evolve naturally can be lost very quickly and cannot be recreated.

3.5 In the UK over 100 species are thought to have become extinct during this century. Action is needed to slow down this rate of loss.

3.6 In developing individual species and habitat action plans a number of common issues emerged which, if tackled, would in the view of the Steering Group make a major contribution to sustaining and enhancing biodiversity. Some of these will be of particular interest to local authorities;

- better advice for land managers on species and site management
- improved site protection;
- improved or maintained water quality or quantity;
- increased public awareness;
- sensitive development planning and control;
- measures to reduce emission of pollutants;

3.7 The Steering Group put forward the case for continued and vigorous implementation of existing measures and further development of the many policies which are beginning to incorporate biodiversity objectives. Their analysis however, also revealed a possible need for a change of direction in some areas.

3.8 The Steering Group report includes Action Plans for 116 of the most threatened and endangered species and proposals for action plans for a further 286 species within three years. Another 14 Action Plans have been prepared for key habitats and proposals for action plans for a further 24 habitats to be prepared within three years are also included. Habitat statements, 37 in all, have also been produced covering, for each: habitat type, current status, current factors affecting the habitat, current action (legal status, management, research and guidance), conservation direction. These are intended to help inform national and local policy and action. A considerable number of these are of direct relevance to the Angus area, for example,

cereal field margins, ancient and/or species rich hedgerows, reedbeds native pine wood, raised bog, sand dune and estuary.

- 3.9 To implement the UK Action Plan the Group propose that Local Biodiversity Action Plans should be produced and that these should include targets which reflect the values of local people. The Group also suggested that these plans should not be taken forward by a single organisation but that there was a need for one organisation to take the lead. Local authorities are seen as being "ideally suited to have this role, working with statutory conservation and countryside agencies, local and regional voluntary organisations, land managers, businesses, local record centres and specialist recorders. To be successful, the Plan should be owned by all the parties who have a key role in delivering the product." The report also recognises that Local Biodiversity Action Plans would contribute to the Local Agenda 21 process.
- 3.10 The report gives guidance in developing Local Biodiversity Action Plans from identifying lead organisations through collecting relevant data to delivering mechanisms and monitoring of progress. These LBA Plans need to reflect and implement national priorities whilst also recognising local considerations. However, the Group recognised the need for national co-ordination and a consistent approach.
- 3.11 In terms of public awareness the report suggests there are key sectors of society through which to work. Included amongst these are youth and community groups; the professions including architecture, planning, legal; all forms of education and local government. Many of the public awareness proposals earmarked for local authorities are currently being carried out by District and Regional Councils and will fall to Angus Council. The report proposes that each sector should have key messages to raise awareness, "champions" as lead players and examples of good practice.
- 3.12 Another aspect covered on the report is that of information and data. A UK biodiversity database is proposed with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee managing the network. At the local level a consortium approach is recommended whereby local data centres would receive funds for providing a service to a range of bodies, including local authorities.

#### **4 COMMENT**

- 4.1 The Steering Group commends its report "to all concerned - Government, local authorities, non Governmental organisations and other sectors alike". The report provides a systematic approach to conserving and enhancing biodiversity, which will provide the biodiversity component of Local Agenda 21.
- 4.2 As the report mentions, biodiversity can be considered as the litmus test of sustainable development. It will, therefore play an increasingly important role in decision making. In order to make informed policies and decisions there is a need for a sound data base of biodiversity material which is regularly monitored and updated and easily accessible. Much information is already available from a variety of sources and in various formats. There is a need to collate this information, identify and fill gaps, keep up to date and develop it to meet the needs of various projects and initiatives. These include on the statutory side the production of a Development

Plan and on the non-statutory side the Council's commitment to an Environmental Strategy and the Local Agenda 21 process. The Development Plan (Structure Plan and Local Plan) provides the Council with the statutory land use mechanism for developing and implementing wider environmental aims and priorities. This includes undertaking the process of a strategic environmental appraisal to ensure land use policies are carefully developed taking account of their impact on the environment. Biodiversity information is also required to assist in attracting EC monies as sustainability is increasingly becoming a component of eligibility criteria for funding. The Objective 5b Single Programming document, for instance, states "a pre-requisite to any action is a sound data base of environmental factors to allow a wide range of issues to be considered", ranging from recreational and tourist development, over grazing to the safeguarding of archaeological and historical sites.

## **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications resulting from this report.

## **6 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The following have been consulted in the preparation of this report; the Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration, the Director of Finance and the Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 It is important that biodiversity should be considered by decision makers across the Council as they all have a role to play in conserving and enhancing biodiversity. Further work would be required to assess the full impact of the recommendations in the Steering Group's report on Council resources, should they be accepted in their entirety.
- 7.2 There is a need to consider how best to take the provision of Local Biodiversity Action Plans forward. It is suggested that in principle agreement should be given to investigate these elements in particular.

## **NOTE**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/EH

Alex Anderson  
Director of Planning, Transport & Economic Development

22 February 1996