

<b>Report on</b>	DAERA – Valuing Nature – A Biodiversity Strategy for NI to 2020. Report on the implementation of the NI Biodiversity Strategy
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	9th March 2021
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Raymond Lowry

<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To inform members of a request from DEARA on progress made by Local Authorities on the promotion and conservation of biodiversity through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process. This feeds into the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy, which is a requirement under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011 (the WANE Act).
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	Council have been requested (see Appendix 1) to report on progress made under Action 47 of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy – Review Local Biodiversity Action Plans to assist the promotion and conservation of biodiversity at a local level.
2.2	The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy forms the blueprint for conserving and improving biodiversity in Northern Ireland. Successful implementation of recommendations undoubtedly requires some means of ensuring that the strategy is translated into effective action at a local level. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are seen as a means by which this can be achieved.
2.3	Through the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan process, a biodiversity audit of the habitats and species that occur in Mid Ulster was undertaken. This identified those habitats and species most at threat in the area, and for which conservation action could be undertaken. The Biodiversity Action Plan sets out measures to support the conservation of these local priority Habitats and Species. It is the implementation of these actions that will help ensure the biodiversity of Mid Ulster is maintained and enhanced.
2.4	The current Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan is due to be renewed or updated. However, many of the actions are still important, are still working, and at least some of them will be carried through into any new Biodiversity Action Plan. The main delay in an updated Plan has been the delay in the new Northern Ireland Priority Species list that is to be produced by NIEA. When released, this new list will influence local action for local species. Until this, the current Mid Ulster

	Biodiversity Action Plan continues to be effective at making a positive contribution to conserving and enhancing the biodiversity resource in Mid Ulster.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	The Consultation request letter from DAERA is shown at Appendix 1. The draft response has been prepared (see Appendix 2) and is detailed as below.
3.2	As detailed in the Strategy, Local Authorities are the Lead Body for Action 47 – “Review Local Biodiversity Action Plans to assist in the promotion and conservation of biodiversity at a local level.”
3.3	In addition to fulfilling obligations under Action 47, through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process, Mid Ulster District Council is making positive contributions to a number of other Actions within the Strategy. This includes: (A43) - positive management of land for biodiversity benefit: (A45) - grassland conservation training: (A31) - contributing to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan: (A27) - management of non-designated land to maintain and enhance priority habitats and species: (A51) - increasing volunteer engagement in biodiversity management: (A52) - increasing the number of individuals actively involved in Citizen Science recording projects.
3.4	The Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan has been, and continues to be successful in delivering biodiversity gain in the Mid Ulster area. In addition to undertaking projects on council properties, partnerships have been established with public, private, voluntary and community sectors, to encourage and engage participation in action for our local biodiversity in the wider countryside.
3.5	In a typical year, twenty to thirty themed information, training and practical sessions covering habitat creation and management, species management, and biodiversity recording are organised through the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan process. Through this public engagement, local people are encouraged to learn about, enjoy, care for, and be inspired to take action for our local biodiversity.
3.6	Themed information events and guided walks encompass a wide range of topics including: woodland walks; winter tree identification; mammal tracks and signs; birdwatching for beginners; garden wildlife; bat nights; butterflies, bugs and bumblebees; urban biodiversity; an introduction to biodiversity recording.
3.7	It is recognised there is a lack of data on the presence and abundance of species throughout Northern Ireland. One of the underlying themes within the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan is to encourage local people to “record what you see”, and submit their records to the appropriate data centre. These records help build a better picture of what species there are in the area and where they are living. They help determine the status of a species (both at local and national level), and guide specific action to protect our most threatened habitats and species. A range of training events are held covering a variety of aspects of biodiversity recording, tailored to specific target audiences. This includes: General biodiversity records of species observed in gardens, parks, school grounds, etc.;

	participation in Citizen Science recording projects such as Big Garden Birdwatch, Big Butterfly Count, All Ireland Daubenton's Bat Survey; through to taking part in highly technical and specialised recording such as the Mid Ulster Bird Ringing Project.
3.8	Practical projects have included; woodland creation; hedgerow creation and management; grassland management; wetland management; urban habitat management for biodiversity; homes for pollinators; bird, bat and biodiversity boxes; growing native trees from seed; non-native invasive species management; etc. While these habitats may not be classified as Northern Ireland Priority Habitats, and some of the species benefiting from these projects are not all Northern Ireland Priority Species, they certainly make a positive contribution to biodiversity in the Mid Ulster area, with some even making a significant contribution on a Northern Ireland scale.
3.9	In addition to biodiversity gain undertaken through public participation, a number of actions identified in the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan have been incorporated into council systems. Where suitable, biodiversity areas are being created and managed on council sites. This includes, woodland copses, hedgerows, grasslands and wider wetland habitats. The provision of 'wildlife homes' is being implemented across a range of sites. Biodiversity enhancement is also considered for all capital projects, with appropriate actions incorporated wherever feasible.
3.10	Mid Ulster District Council is of the opinion that actions implemented through the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan process are a valuable mechanism by which a positive contribution is made to the promotion and conservation of biodiversity at a local level.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
4.1	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>
	Financial: Within budget for Technical Services
	Risk Management: Non-delivery will have adverse impact on Biodiversity
4.2	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/a
	Rural Needs Implications: N/a
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	It is recommended that Members consider the content of the attached draft response to the consultation and if in agreement, respond to DAERA as draft until Council ratification on 25 <sup>th</sup> March 2021.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>

6.1	Appendix 1 – Request from DEARA for response
6.2	Appendix 2 – MUDC Draft response