Topic 6: Nature and Biodiversity

Engagement version March 2025

Requirements addressed in this section:

Information required by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, regarding the issue addressed in this section

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended

Section	Requirement
Section 15(5)(a)	the principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district,
Section 15(5)(b)	the principal purposes for which the land is used,

National Planning Framework 4

Biodiversity

LDPs should protect, conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in line with the mitigation hierarchy. They should also promote nature recovery and nature restoration across the development plan area, including by: facilitating the creation of nature networks and strengthening connections between them to support improved ecological connectivity; restoring degraded habitats or creating new habitats; and incorporating measures to increase biodiversity, including populations of priority species.

Natural Places

LDPs will identify and protect locally, regionally, nationally and internationally important natural assets, on land and along coasts. The spatial strategy should safeguard them and take into account the objectives and level of their protected status in allocating land for development. Spatial strategies should also better connect nature rich areas by establishing and growing nature networks to help protect and restore the biodiversity, ecosystems and natural processes in their area.

Soils

LDPs should protect locally, regionally, nationally and internationally valued soils, including land of lesser quality that is culturally or locally important for primary use.

Forestry, Woodland & Trees

LDPs should identify and protect existing woodland and the potential for its enhancement or expansion to avoid habitat fragmentation and improve ecological connectivity, helping to support and expand nature networks. The spatial strategy should identify and set out proposals for forestry, woodlands and trees in the area, including their development, protection and enhancement, resilience to climate change, and the expansion of a range of types to provide multiple benefits. This will be supported and informed by an up to date Forestry and Woodland Strategy.

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Links to Evidence

Biodiversity

- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045: Tackling the Nature Emergency in Scotland
- Scottish Biodiversity Delivery Plan 2024-2030
- Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill
- State of Nature Report 2023
- National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Scotland
- Scottish Biodiversity List
- Scotland's Environment Web
- North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBIP) 4- year strategic plan 2022-2026
- Nature Networks Toolbox
- Biodiversity Duty Report
- Biodiversity Records Data (NatureScot)
- Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC)
- NESBReC
- NatureScot SiteLink
- Natural Environment Report
- Environmental Web Planning Application (Aberdeen City Council Portal) – used for identifying locations of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)
- Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels
- Important Invertebrate Areas (Buglife)
- Wetland Bird Survey (British Trust for Ornithology)
- Swift Mapper
- Species on the Edge

Natural Places

- Dynamic Coast – Coastal Erosion in Scotland
- Assessing Climate Change Impacts on the Water Quality of Scottish Standing Waters (CREW – Scotland's Centre of Expertise for Waters)
- Scotland's National Marine Plan
- Marine Protected Areas
- River Basin Management Plan for Scotland 2021-2027
- State of the Coast – East Grampian Coastal Partnership
- SEPA Water Scarcity Report
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance: Ramsar Sites

DRAFT

- The Town and Country Planning (National Scenic Areas) (Scotland) Designation Directions 2010: National Scenic Areas
- Wild Land Areas Map (NatureScot)
- The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000: National Parks
- Special Areas of Conservation
- Special Protection Areas
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Local Nature Reserves
- Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS)
- Country and Regional Parks
- Parks and Gardens
- Open Space Audit
- Community Planning Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Locality Plan Engagement Report

Soils

- Land Capability for Agriculture in Scotland
- Peatland ACTION Project
- Carbon and Peatland Map 2016
- Scottish Bare Peat Viewer
- Scotland's Soils website
- Land Capability for Agriculture in Scotland
- Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutions (SEFARI) – Healthy Soils for a Green Recovery
- Carbon and Peatland Map 2016
- Scottish Bare Peat Viewer
- SEPA Flood Risk Management Maps

Forestry, Woodland and Trees

- Scotland's Forestry Strategy
- Scottish Government's Policy on Woodland Removal
- National Inventory of Woodland and Trees
- Native Woodland Survey of Scotland
- Tree Preservation Orders
- The Granite City Forest – Tree and Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan 2022-25
- Scotland's Woodlands and the Historic Environment
- The Right Tree in the Right Place – Planning for Forestry and Woodlands

Topic 6: Nature and Biodiversity

DRAFT

- Native Woodland Survey of Scotland
- National Inventory of Woodland and Trees
- Scottish Forestry Open Data
- Biological and Environmental Evaluation Tools for Landscape Ecology (BEETLE)
- Scottish Forestry Open Data
- Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024: Main Report
- Tree Preservation Orders

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Summary of Evidence

Policy context

Purpose and Scope of Evidence Report Chapter

Biodiversity and the natural environment, including soils, forestry, woodland & trees are vital for ensuring a healthy planet, and helping Scotland to achieve its net zero targets. The protection, conservation, restoration and enhancement of natural places can play a critical role in flood control and drought resilience, as can the use of nature based solutions.

The Summary of Evidence section is structured in the following order:

- Biodiversity
- Natural Places
- Soils
- Forestry, Woodland & Trees

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Biodiversity

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045: Tackling the Nature Emergency in Scotland

This strategy outlines the ambition "for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045." It seeks to ensure that the natural environment, ecosystems and species will be diverse and thriving and resilient to climactic variations. Regenerated biodiversity will bolster the economy and support communities to thrive.

It is supplemented by 6-year delivery plans (the first of which was published in tandem with the overall strategy on 27 November 2024).

Scottish Biodiversity Delivery Plan 2024-2030

The Strategy includes 31 priority actions intended to stop and/or reverse biodiversity loss. These actions are part of an overarching series of outcomes that intend to protect nature on land and sea, protect and support the recovery of vulnerable species and habitats, attract investment in nature, and tackle indirect drivers of biodiversity loss (among others).

Also included within the Strategy is a commitment to protecting 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030 as part of the 30 by 30 policy. Currently, 18.2% of Scotland's land and freshwater is afforded protection.

Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

Published on 19 February 2025, the bill consists of four main parts. These include:

Part 1 – Targets for improving biodiversity
Part 2 – Power to modify or restate Environmental Impact Assessment legislation and habitats regulations
Part 3 – National Parks
Part 4 – Deer Management

Parts 3 and 4 are likely to be less relevant to Aberdeen given the absence of any national parks, and the predominantly urban nature of the local authority boundaries. Parts 1 and 2 will influence future biodiversity targets for inclusion within a subsequent Local Development Plan. However, depending on when new statutory targets are agreed upon; it may be too late to account for in the proposed 2027 plan and instead be accounted for in the subsequent Local Development Plan.

State of Nature Report 2023
A headline report detailing the best estimate of the status of nature within Scotland, based on all current data. It measures species abundance, distribution and the extinction risk for native species and summarises the changes in each of these criteria.

As of the 2023 report:

- There is a recorded average decrease in species abundance (across 407 terrestrial and freshwater species) of 15% since 1994.
- There has been a 49% decline in the average abundance of Scottish seabirds since 1986.
- There has been an average 15% increase in the distribution of invertebrate species since 1970.
- Since 1970, there have been decreases in the distribution of flowering plants (by 47%), bryophytes (by 62%) and lichens (57%), this is compared to the 27% of flowering plants, 25% of bryophytes and 34% of lichens that have experienced increases in distribution.
- 11% of the 7,508 species in Scotland that have been assessed using the IUCN's Red List criteria are classified as being threatened with extinction from Great Britain.

The report speculates that the declines in biodiversity may be due to a warming climate, overgrazing and overfishing, as well as the intensification of agricultural and forestry land uses. Some species are increasing in number however, with a warming climate creating a wider range of habitat for some species.

There may be scope within Aberdeen to target particular species or habitats for protection that are (or have historically been) present within the Local Authority boundary. The presence of Pine Marten can deter grey squirrels, which could in turn assist populations of red squirrels. Northern brown argus and water voles are also species that Aberdeen potentially has the habitat to support.

National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Scotland
This forms part of Scotland's environment web network and hosts data on UK species and habitats collated from various sources. It can be used for carrying out detailed data analysis due to the specificity of some of the available data sets. Furthermore, it facilitates the interrogation of "species records, habitat, climate and soil information, geographical boundaries and to use extremely powerful mapping

tools through a single portal." It can also be used as a resource to help inform on the distribution of particular species over an area.

Such information can be used to make informed decisions on areas of land that may be in need of additional protection in future, due to the presence of particular species. This can also tie-into wider strategic considerations of how (and where) to establish more effective nature corridors that better support habitats and species.

Scottish Biodiversity List
This catalogues a list of the habitats, plants and species that are deemed to be of the greatest importance for future biological conservation efforts in Scotland. The list also includes broad categories of action which can be implemented or used to inform wider strategies to protect and preserve those species and/or habitats.

Scotland's Environment Web
The website hosts 229 mapping overlays that can be applied to an interactive map. The data hosted is shared by a variety of contributing partners such as Marine Scotland, Nature Scot, SEPA and the Scottish Land Commission. These include, but are not limited to, overlays showing protected areas for drinking water, air quality monitoring sites, country parks, core paths, woodland inventories, wetland inventories, Marine Protected Areas, RAMSAR sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The site can be used as a core resource with which to find data sources on a variety of ecological assets including a number of the ones discussed below.

North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBIP) 4- year strategic plan 2022-2026
This partnership between representatives of Local Authorities, statutory bodies, environmental charities, research institutes, landowners and environmental partnerships operates on the principle of delivering under three objectives:

- Delivery through collaboration
- Information exchange
- Awareness and positive action

Likewise, a number of strategic priorities have been agreed by the members a number of these will be relevant to the development of the Local Development Plan.

Nature Networks Toolbox
This resource includes case studies, examples of best practice as well as guidance on the management of habitats and species. It also provides links to tools and data sources that can assist in formulating a nature network. It can be utilised as a consolidated hub of information for Aberdeen City Council to inform future policy decisions on nature networks and woodland strategies. A Natural Heritage Strategy is being developed for Aberdeen, this will include information on nature networks. It is anticipated a draft document will be completed by late Summer 2025

Biodiversity Duty Report
Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies in Scotland have a duty 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 provide a publicly available report every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.

Aberdeen City Council report outlines how the Council has fulfilled its biodiversity duty over the period 2021 to 2023. In relation to specific planning measures, the report highlights the current work streams that Aberdeen City Council are undertaking to protect and enhance biodiversity, tied to the extant Local Development Plan and its associated guidance.

Biodiversity Records Data
A list of national and local biodiversity data sources can be found via Nature Scot's webpage on where to find data. The most relevant local data source for Aberdeen City would be North-East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC), and information can be supplemented with information found on Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC). It also includes links to the Butterfly Conservation, British Dragonfly Society and the Bat Conservation Trust (among others). These data sources can be utilised to help identify the type of habitats present on specific areas of land, as well as recorded sightings of protected or vulnerable species within those areas.

NESBReC – Species Distribution Maps
NESBReC can provide data at a regional level that would identify sightings of protected species, as well as general habitat classifications. Recognising the repeated and frequent presence of Protected Species could help inform future management strategies for those species and guide decision on future land

allocation. Other local level information on particular species may be obtainable through BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland).

NatureScot SiteLink
SiteLink provides data and information on Protected Areas throughout Scotland. Information on designations from local to national and international levels can be found, as well as detail on the boundaries, features and condition of those sites. This resource can be used to identify and recognise sites of local, regional or national significance that can be targeted for protection and/or future enhancements within the next Local Development Plan

Natural Environment Report
The Natural Environment Report is to be an annual report produced by Aberdeen City Council that will essentially succeed the Biodiversity Duty Report. It is anticipated that it would be of similar value and function in informing future policy decisions. Please refer to the Biodiversity Duty Report for further information in this regard.

Green Space Network
Green Space Network is a strategic network connecting various habitats and species, urban and rural green spaces to each other and the communities around them. It offers a wide range of social, health economic and environmental benefits.

Aberdeen City's Green Space Network comprises of a number of 'cores' which represent the largest areas of green space within the city. These are supplemented by 'links' which are generally corridors of green space that act as linkages to larger or more expansive areas of green space. 'Links' may be along streams, rivers and other waterbodies, follow tree belts or include paths and wildlife corridors that provide some form of habitat value. Finally, there are also 'stepping stones' which reflect more isolated pockets of green space. These would ideally link up to other green spaces as part of a wider network but may be fragmented due to topographical factors or intervening land uses. Despite this, they are recognised as still having a role to play in supporting habitats and species, and can contribute toward a Green Space Network.

Invasive Non-Native Species
There are concentrated areas where Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are prevalent in Aberdeen. These are primarily located along the banks of the River Dee and Don, as well as their tributaries. Other areas with concentrations of invasive

weeds include Bucksburn, Newhills, Burn of Mundurno and Den Wood. As INNS are recognised as a top driver of biodiversity loss, control of their spread is essential as a means of preventing further loss of habitat.

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels
A partnership project that seeks to monitor and preserve the red squirrel population in Scotland. The website includes an interactive map showing the plotted locations of all recorded sightings of red (and some grey) squirrels in Scotland within the current year.

This resource can be used to monitor the locations of sightings and infer where there may be established populations of red squirrels. This in turn aids the Local Authority in making more informed decisions on future actions relating to habitat enhancement, preservation or enlargement.

Important Invertebrate Areas (Buglife)
Important Invertebrate Areas (IIAs) are home to nationally or internationally significant invertebrate populations and habitats. There is one IIA within Aberdeen; (Dee IIA). The broad IIA catchment area appears to cover the majority of Aberdeen before extending south-west and west, roughly forming a corridor around the A90 and A93 heading towards Banchory.

In future this resource will allow us to view the species, habitats and threats within the Dee IIA, and enable the Council to make better informed judgements on future land allocations and designations within that area. This can also aid in the targeted support for addressing habitat and biodiversity loss as well as building resilience to climate change.

Wetland Bird Survey (British Trust for Ornithology)
WeBS monitors the populations and trends of the UK's internationally important non-breeding waterbirds. Once per month, wetland sites are counted for waterbirds including ducks, geese, swans, waders, rails, divers, grebes, cormorants and herons. Gulls and terns may also be included within counts in some areas. These records contribute towards an annual report which highlights trends, indices and headline figures. This data source can provide more specific data on waterbirds than may be available in other resources, and the annual update reports ensure that the data is contemporary. Such information can be invaluable in determining whether proposed developments would impact upon such populations of birds, and help inform what measures can be taken by the Council to better understand and protect those habitats. From a local perspective, this resource can be used to provide information pertaining to potential development around Loirston Loch.

Swift Mapper
Swift Mapper is built upon a prior Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Swift Survey. It has been developed with the assistance of various partners (including RSPB, Action for Swifts, Swift Conservation, and others).

This is a conservation mapping tool that hosts records of swift sightings on an interactive map. The four types of records collected include the recorded sightings of occupied nests, previously occupied nests, nest boxes and screaming parties. This data can be used as a preliminary indication as to whether there are patterns in the sightings of swifts within an area and help inform future conservation efforts.

Species on the Edge
A programme involving Nature Scot and seven other nature conservation charities that seeks to improve the fortunes of 37 priority species along Scotland's coast and islands. It has identified seven different landscape-scale projects for action. The East Scotland Coast area includes Aberdeen City's coastline, with a particular focus on supporting the following species:

- Arctic tern (Sterna paradisaea)
- Bordered brown lacewing (Megalomus hirtus)
- Common tern (Sterna hirundo)
- Little tern (Sternula albifrons)
- Northern brown argus (Aricia artaxerxes)
- Purple oxytropis (Oxytropis halleri)
- Small blue butterfly (Cupido minimus)

None of the proposed project sites are within the city boundary, although several approximate project locations are to be situated between Stonehaven and Marywell. There is potential for a more co-ordinated effort to protect these species and their associated habitats. To that end, Aberdeen City Council are currently in discussions with Aberdeenshire and Angus Councils to develop a Coastal B-Lines for pollinators. The aim is to bolster and support populations of Small Blue and Northern Brown Argus for the city, with Northern Brown Argus populations already having been recorded along the coast at Cove.

Natural Places

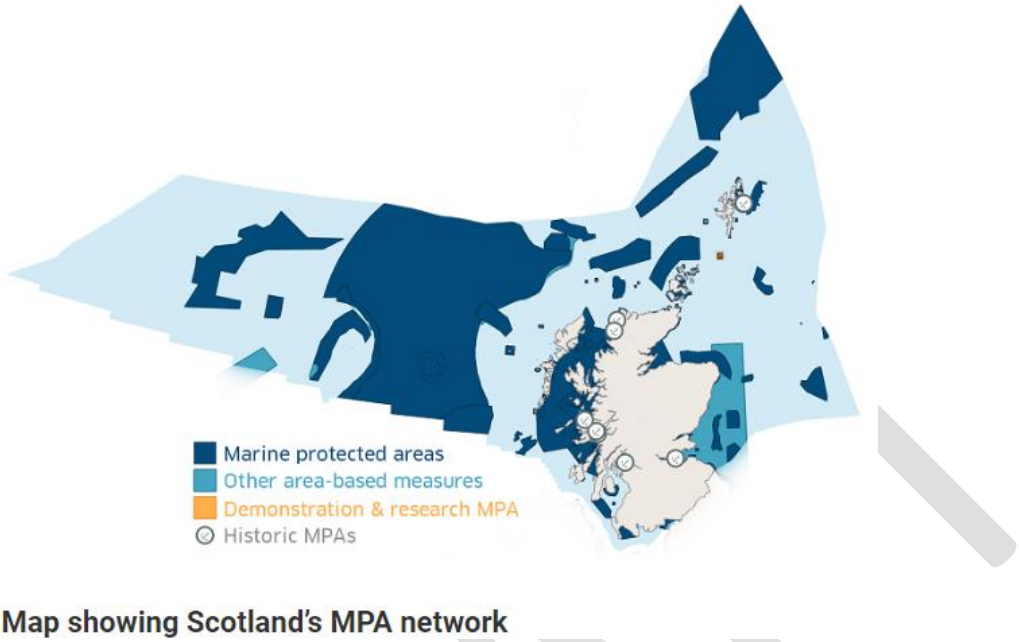
Dynamic Coast – Coastal Erosion in Scotland (CREW - Scotland's Centre for Expertise for Waters)
This report on coastal erosion in Scotland, updated in 2021, indicates that coastal erosion affects 46% of soft shorelines in Scotland. This is an increase of 8% since the prior 2017 report.

Aberdeen's entire eastern Local Authority boundary is coastal, therefore data on the management of coastal erosion is important for the future planning on how to combat the loss of coastline due to flooding events, storms or landslips. There are existing groynes along Aberdeen beach that partially combat the loss of material and provide some resilience, but the impact and adequacy of these measures would need to be monitored to inform future decision making on how to preserve the visual amenity and ecological value of the coastline in the long-term.

Assessing Climate Change Impacts on the Water Quality of Scottish Standing Waters (CREW – Scotland's Centre of Expertise for Waters)
This report identifies the vulnerability of Scottish standing waters to the impacts of climate change, and how increases to water temperature and variations in nutrient concentrations could impact upon their future functionality and capacity to support biodiversity. Although the data gathered does not appear to include any lochs or lakes within the Aberdeen City boundary, it is still possible to extrapolate the findings to inform on future decisions on the management of bodies of standing water.

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Marine Protected Areas



Map showing Scotland's MPA network

Figure 1: The Scottish Government map below shows the location of Scotland's Marine Protected Areas network

Marine Protection Area designation types include Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) with marine components, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) with marine components, Nature Conservation MPAs and national MPAs in Scotland.

Aberdeen's coastline includes the southern portion of the Special Protection Area for Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch. The northern, and significantly larger, portion of the designation falls within Aberdeenshire Council's administrative area. The area is primarily designated due to its importance in the support of breeding populations of birds, in particular waterfowl.

The nearest other SPA to the City boundary is that of Fowlsheugh near Stonehaven. Although outwith the City boundary, it is not implausible that select future development within the city could impact upon an area designated due to its importance for a number of bird species congregating there through breeding season.

River Basin Management Plan for Scotland 2021-2027

The river basin management plan for Scotland can support decision making on Natural Places by offering data on the pressures impacting water quality within Aberdeen's water courses. It seeks to promote the enhancement of water courses, remove man-made barriers to fish migration and improve the ecology within the rivers.

The Den Burn and River Don have impacted physical condition and water quality, and the Bucks Burn similarly has impacted water quality primarily through rural diffuse pollution. Both the River Don and Den Burn are identified as poor for fish barriers. There is currently a project to restore 2.3km of the Den Burn and re-meander an open section within the city. The project aims to improve biodiversity, connect people to nature and promote active travel.

State of the Coast – East Grampian Coastal Partnership

This report compiles and assesses a wide range of social, economic, and environmental data related to the East Grampian coast (extending from Kinnaird Head in Fraserburgh, to the mouth of the River Esk by St Cyrus). It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of the coastline, identify trends, and highlight areas requiring improvement, and compare these (where possible) to the Scottish average. It serves as a baseline for future decision-making and coastal management, offering recommendations and action points to address identified issues. It also aims to inform stakeholders, guide the work of the East Grampian Coastal Partnership, and ensure the sustainable use and preservation of the coastal environment for future generations. The State of the Coast (SOTC) is working towards updating this information at present. Consequently, any future publications with updated data can be used to better inform strategies for the protection of particular species, habitats and/or coastal features.

SEPA Water Scarcity Report

This data source can be used to monitor areas of water scarcity within Scotland at fairly regular intervals. Times of moderate and significant scarcity (if regular) would be a cause for concern and could indicate that future development pressure would present a threat to existing ecosystems. Water abstraction can be restricted in such circumstances which can impact upon irrigation schemes and fish farming operations.

The Don and Dee rivers are the two most substantive rivers running through Aberdeen City, which also extend through neighbouring Local Authority boundaries.

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Consequently, any scarcity experienced by Aberdeenshire (for example) may have an indirect impact on Aberdeen City as a result. The Autumn 2024 Scarcity Report notes Scotland has seen drier than normal conditions this autumn which has resulted in low river levels. Water storage in both lochs and groundwater are generally normal for this time of year, however, the dry autumn has resulted in some locations being low or very low.

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance: Ramsar sites
Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention to promote their conservation and sustainable use. There are no RAMSAR sites in Aberdeen.

The Town and Country Planning (National Scenic Areas) (Scotland) Designation Directions 2010: National Scenic Areas
National Scenic Areas (NSAs) are areas that have been identified as having outstanding scenic value in a national context, and as such require special protection measures through the planning system. There are no NSAs in Aberdeen.

NatureScot Wild Land Areas map
Wild land areas are the most extensive areas of high wildness. They are identified as nationally important in Scottish Planning Policy, but are not a statutory designation An interactive map showing the 42 wild land areas within Scotland, following a NatureScot survey in 2014. There are no wild areas in Aberdeen.

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000: National Parks
Scotland currently has two national parks: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, and Cairngorms National Park; with the possible addition of a Galloway National Park in 2026 (pending further investigation). These are executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) established under the provisions of the above act.

There are unlikely to be any changes to National Parks, or designations of new National Parks, that will directly impact upon Aberdeen City due to its geographic distance from any of the respective park boundaries.

Special Areas of Conservation
The only site within Aberdeen City's boundary is the River Dee, which terminates at the river mouth on the east coast of Aberdeen into the North Sea. This SAC is protected due to its role in supporting populations of Atlantic Salmon, Freshwater Pearl Mussels and Otters.

However, a number of other sites within Aberdeenshire have the potential to be impacted by development within the city. The nearest of these sites would include Garron Point (north of Stonehaven), Red Moss of Netherley, and Sands of Forvie.

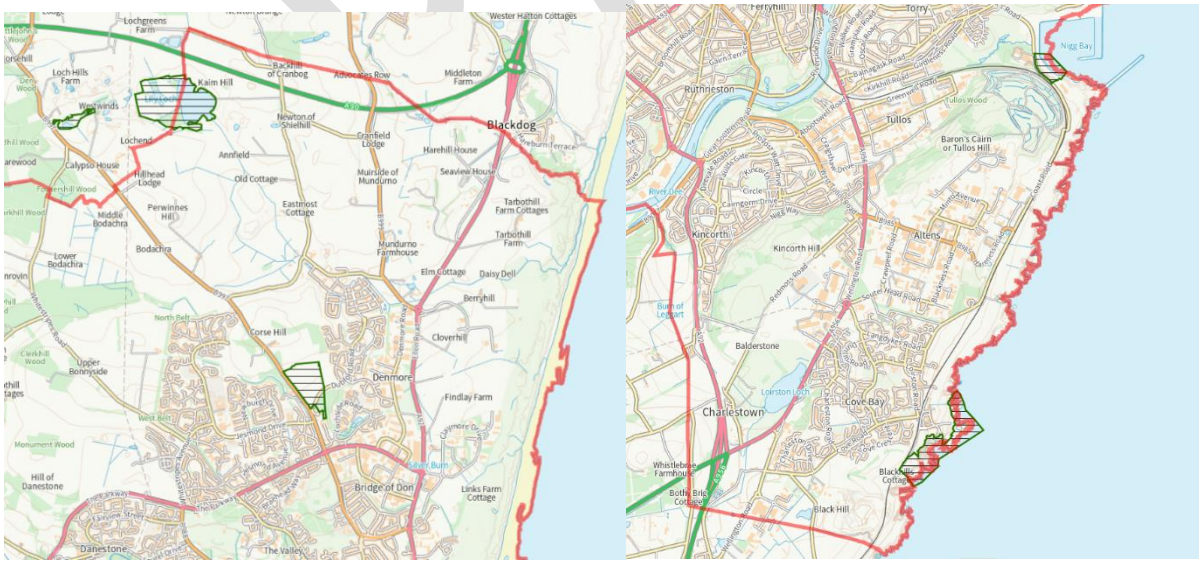
Special Protection Areas

There is one Special Protection Areas (SPAs) within the Aberdeen City Boundary. The Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch SPA extends down the east coast of Aberdeen as far at Footdee, and nearly as far north as Cruden Bay (within Aberdeenshire). The SPA has a site area of 7062.03ha, with the majority of that site area located within Aberdeenshire. It also overlaps with another SPA for Buchan Ness to Collieston Coast, which continues north-east, almost as far as Peterhead.

The nearest other Special Protection Areas to Aberdeen are the Loch of Skene (a 121.76ha site to the west of Westhill), and Fowlsheugh (a 1303.34ha site to the south of Stonehaven). Each of these sites is located entirely within the neighbouring Aberdeenshire Council local authority boundary.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are areas of land and water that are deemed to be the best examples of natural heritage resulting from a combination of their flora, fauna, geology, geomorphology or any outstanding examples of these criteria individually. Aberdeen's four SSSI's are displayed below (north and south).



Figures 2 & 3: These show the northern and southern boundaries of Aberdeen City Council respectively, (marked by the red line), with SSSIs shown in the green hatched areas.

The four SSSIs within Aberdeen City are:

- Corby, Lily and Bishops Lochs
- Cove Bay
- Nigg Bay
- Scotstown Moor

Local Nature Reserves
Aberdeen has four local nature reserves. These include:

- Den of Maidencraig
- Donmouth
- Kincorth Hill
- Scotstown Moor

These are shown by the areas outlined in dark red below, with the lighter red line showing the extent of Aberdeen City's administrative boundary.

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Figure 4: The map below shows the location of all four of Aberdeen's Local Nature Reserves outlined in dark red, with the city boundary shown in a lighter shade of red

Local Nature Conservation Sites

There are also a further 45 Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) within Aberdeen City. A review of these sites will be underway in 2025 which will include the prospective removal of Old Manse Wood. Consideration will be given to the addition of new LNCSs in 2026.

These sites are identified as having local importance for their biodiversity and geodiversity, with the designation of LNCS providing a means of safeguarding them. Among the forty-five sites within Aberdeen City are ten that cross boundaries into the neighbouring Local Authority (Aberdeenshire Council). These are:

Site no.4 – Balgownie/Blackdog Links
Site no.8 – River Dee Corridor
Site no.9 – River Don Corridor
Site no.14 – Corby Loch
Site no.18 – Den of Leggart
Site no.57 – Culter Burn
Site no.61 – Kinaldie Den
Site no.61 – Culter Compensation Dam
Site no.65 – Leuchar Moss
Site no.67 – Aberdeen – Inverness & Kittybrewster Railway Line

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Figure 5: Map showing the locations of the Local Nature Conservation Sites within Aberdeen (marked by the acid yellow-coloured polygons).

Country and Regional Parks

The designation was created to enable the coordinated management of recreation and other land uses such as farming and forestry. Regional parks often include landscapes of regional importance. They may also provide important havens for wildlife. Aberdeen City has no regional parks.

Parks and Gardens
Aberdeen has 14 public parks and gardens within the Local Authority area. It also has numerous nature reserves, trails and 3000 acres of publicly accessible woodland. A total of 8 locations within Aberdeen also hold Green Flag Awards.

While the parks provide relaxation, leisure and play opportunities, they also provide areas of greenspace and habitat potential within urban spaces and can support various types of insects, small mammals and birds. These spaces contribute towards the wider Green Space Network, and provide more expansive spaces between linkages such as hedgerows, tree belts and other narrow wildlife corridors.

Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024: Main Report
The Aberdeen Open Space Audit is used to assist with protecting and enhancing green spaces through the planning process and by supporting blue and green infrastructure policies. The audit provides key information on the types, quality and accessibility of open and green spaces in Aberdeen.

This resource can be used to help inform future decisions on the formation of nature networks by providing a tool that can be used to view the distribution and pattern of types of green space throughout Aberdeen City. Combined with the use of other mapping overlays, it can be used to ascertain the quantity, accessibility, and quality of provision of green spaces across the city or at an electoral ward level.

The Audit also includes biodiversity and habitat connectivity scores at site and ward level. The data could be used to identify corridors of greenspace and potentially identify locations where gaps could be bridged in future to create more effective nature corridors.

The Audit Public Survey also highlighted that 82% of respondents said they would like to see more green spaces managed in a more natural way for the benefit of wildlife and nature in Aberdeen. Respondents also highlighted the critical role that green spaces play in promoting overall health and well-being, with physical exercise or health reasons, to be in nature and to socialise given as the top three reasons why people use open spaces

The assessments undertaken as part of the audit also give an indication as to the quality of available open space which could influence future decisions on what and where future enhancements to existing spaces are directed, as well as any areas of land that could be protected or reserved going forward. Please see the Wellbeing and Community Topic Paper for more information.

Place Standard Assessments

Between 5 October and 6 November 2023, 470 participants took part in online and six in person Place Standard assessments for Community Planning. The full results and more information on this are found in the Place Topic Paper. The Place Standard assess places and is split into 14 themes. Places are assessed, awarded a score out of 7, and people asks for comment on what is good now and what can be improved about their local area. The results for Aberdeen are split into north, south and central, with "all" noting where these comments were present on all three areas. The results from the Place Standard are paramount for assessing quality of place and understanding the positive and negative perception of local areas. The Place Standard assessments were completed with adults and children.

The Natural Space theme of the Place Standard is relevant here. The results are as follows: A score of 4.71 out of 7 was achieved, and the comments submitted are noted below.

Place Standard Theme	"Good" now	"Improve" for the future
Natural Spaces	• Good access to, and availability of, green and blue spaces. These generally include parks, the beach and riverside walks. (All)	• Improvements to the maintenance of green and blue spaces (All) • Increasing cleanliness – more bins and be strict on irresponsible dog owners (All) • Better accessibility to and increasing number of green spaces available (South and Central) • More seating (North) • More public convenience (North) • More wild flowers, more food growing and allotments (Central)

Table 2: Comments relating to good aspects and what can make Aberdeen better. Summary of Community Planning Aberdeen's Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Locality Plans for North, South and Central Refresh Engagement Report 2023.

While the majority of these comments resonate more clearly with the topic of Play, Recreation and Sport (included within the Wellbeing of Community Topic Paper),

Topic 6: Nature and Biodiversity

improvements to the maintenance of green and blue spaces, improving accessibility to such spaces and increasing the quantity of wild flowers are targets that directly relate to this Nature and Biodiversity Topic Paper.

The children and young people results noted: 60% felt they were okay, 14.3% felt they were not good, and 25.7% felt they were great.

Place Standard Theme	What is good now?	Percentage	What would make it better?	Percentage
Natural Space	Parks	38.7%	Better parks	44.3%
	Trees	34%	Welcome animals	34%
	Woods	32.1%	More trees	24.5%

Table 3: Top 3 responses for 'What is good now' and 'What would make it better?' Extract from Community Planning Aberdeen's Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Locality Plans for North, South and Central Refresh Engagement Report 2023

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Soils

Prime Agricultural Land

Land capability for agriculture provides information on the types of crops that may be grown in different areas dependent on environmental and soil characteristics. Soil classes range from Class 1 (land capable of producing a wide range of crops) to Class 7 (land of very little agricultural value). Land within Class 3 is subdivided to provide further information on potential yields; Classes 4 and 5 are further divided to provide information on grasslands; Class 6 is divided on the quality of the natural vegetation for grazing. Four of the classes have sub-divisions within them however, Class 1 land is recognised as having the highest potential flexibility of use, with Class 7 the poorest flexibility. Prime Agricultural Land is defined as being Class 1, Class 2 or Class 3.1 land.

As a primarily urban Local Authority, Aberdeen has comparatively little Prime Agricultural Land. Notwithstanding this, there is Class 3.1 land to the east and south-east of Blackburn, around Inchgarth Reservoir, and along part of the north bank of the River Dee in the following locations:

- South-East of Milltimber
- South of Murtle Estate
- Bieldside
- Cults

Peatland ACTION Project

Peatland Action is a national programme undertaken by NatureScot and funded by the Scottish Government that supports peatland restoration activities across Scotland. It offers funding for restoration activities that may include installation of peat dams or peat hag re-vegetating (among other techniques) that can stabilise eroded peat and increase water levels.

The restoration of peatland can help reduce carbon dioxide emissions, due to peatland's capacity to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Peatland and Carbon-rich soils

The Carbon and Peatland map 2016 can be used to identify locations of carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat. Classes 1 and 2 are identified as being a nationally important resource and areas that are likely to be of high conservation value.

Within Aberdeen, small areas of Class 1 land can be found on land adjacent to Gough Burn (north-west of Kepplestone) and at Leuchar Moss (south-east of

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Garlogie). There is no Class 2 within the city boundary. There is only one recorded location of Class 3 land (referring to Leached Soils), which is of poorer quality than Class 1 and 2 land, and is largely covered by the southern edge of the Prime Four Business Park at Kingswells.

There are multiple areas of Class 5 (Organic Soils) within Aberdeen located at Grandhome Moss, land at Burn of Mundurno, Lily Loch, Corby Loch, South Mains of Charleston, and land to the South-East of Lochside Academy.

Scottish Bare Peat Viewer

This map shows larger extents of bare peat as classified from Sentinel 2 imagery obtained in Summer 2018. There is only one pixel (covering an area of 10m x 10m) within Aberdeen City Council's boundary. This is located within a field to the south of Newmill Hill Forest and 1.5km south-west of Peterculter.

Scotland's Soils website

The mapping portal includes soil maps, capability maps, thematic maps, point data and risk maps. Some of these data sets can be viewed elsewhere (such as the land capability for agriculture), although the risk maps are particularly relevant for the identification of risk profiles for areas of soil erosion and compaction.

The subsoil compaction risk map outlines the vulnerability of subsoils to be compacted by traffic. As most of Aberdeen is an urban developed area, much of the city is excluded due to the focus of the mapping on Scotland's cultivated agricultural land area. Almost all of the area within the City boundary that has data is either classified as extremely or very vulnerable.

The topsoil compaction risk map indicates the risk of topsoil being compacted due to the passage of machinery (primarily on cultivated land). The risk profile of low/medium/high is based on the drainage class of the soil and its texture.

Soil Compaction/Sealing

The Topsoil compaction risk map seems to show that the areas of highest risk are located primarily along the coastline, and south-west of the city of Aberdeen. Most of the surrounding land appears to be at low or moderate risk.

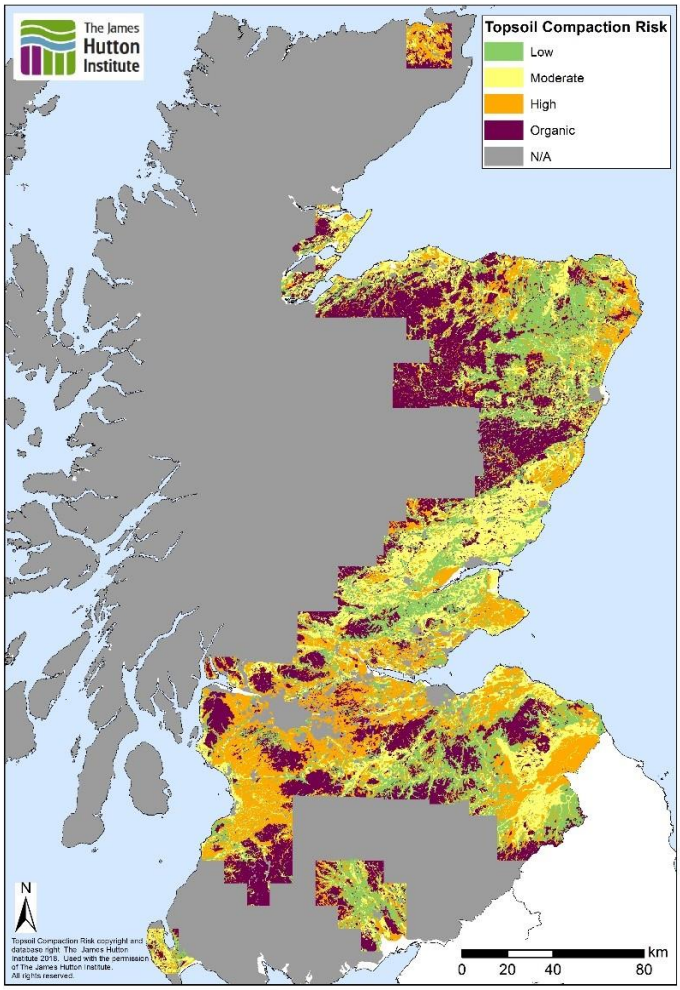


Figure 6: Map from the James Hutton Institute showing the topsoil compaction risk of soils in Scotland

The risk of subsoil compaction is considerably greater however, with much of the surrounding area of Aberdeen City identified as being “extremely vulnerable” to subsoil compaction.

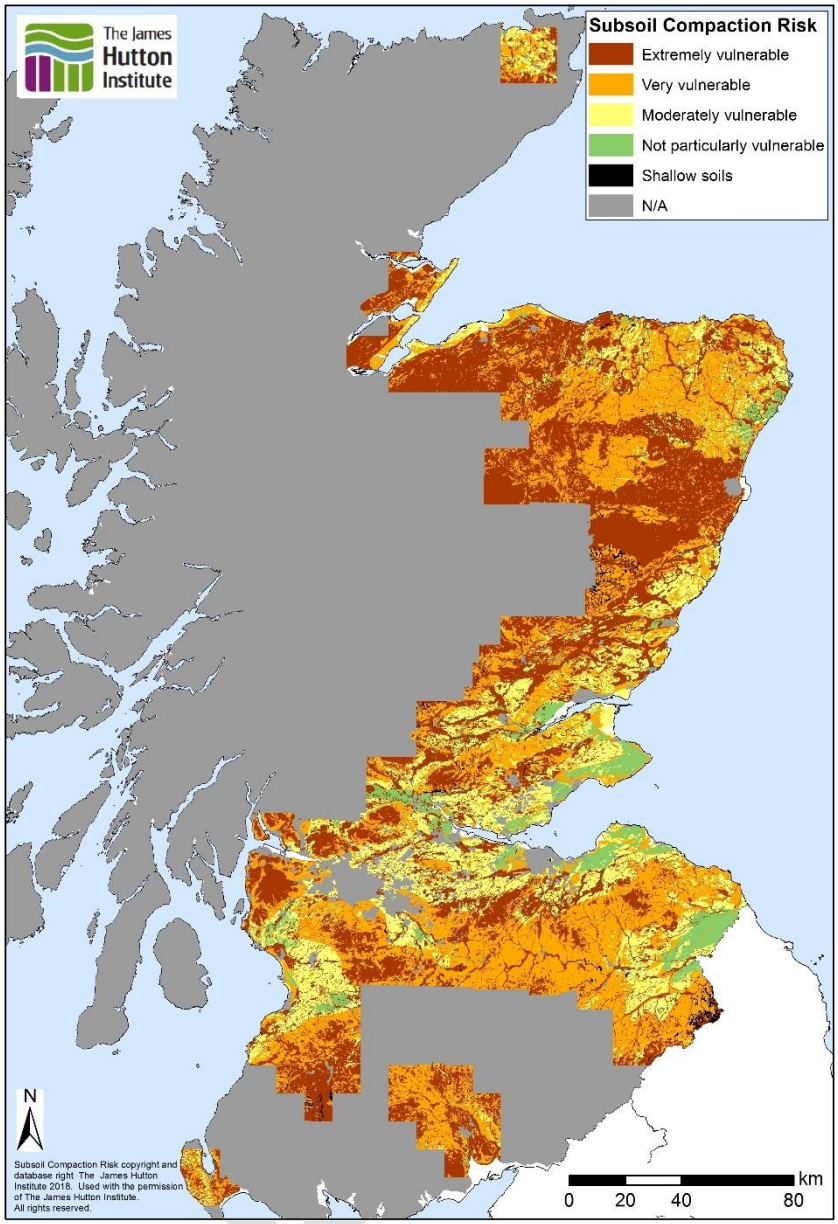


Figure 7: Map from the James Hutton Institute shows the Subsoil Compaction Risk of soils within Scotland.

The map on soil erosion risk indicates the risk of bare soil, with an organic surface layer, being eroded under sustained periods of precipitation. As is the case with the other map layers, the majority of the city does not feature data due to the urban environment, however, the majority of land within the remainder of the City administrative boundary is at medium risk, with a notable area of low risk along the northern half of the City's coastline.

Topic 6: Nature and Biodiversity

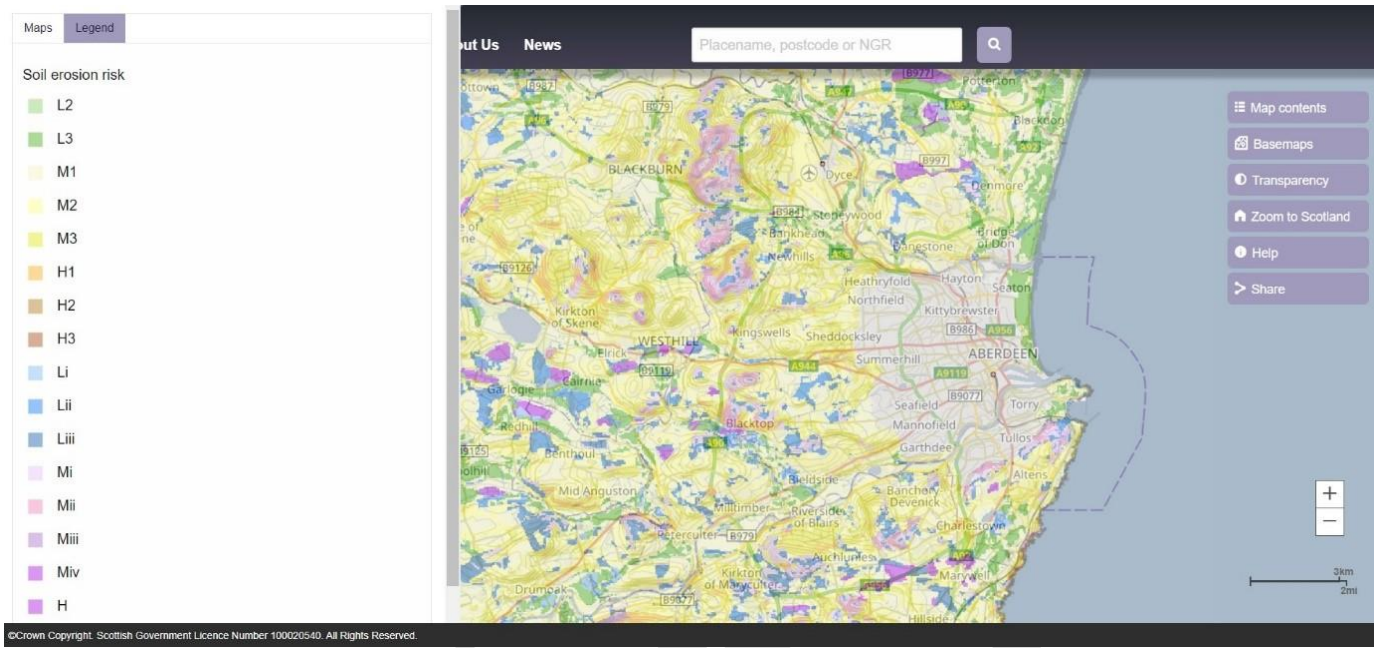


Figure 8: The below screenshot shows Scotland's Soils mapping portal, with the soil erosion risk categories shown in the legend on the left-hand side.

SEFARI – Healthy Soils for a Green Recovery

This research project seeks to obtain further information and insight on Scottish soils in order to better understand their ecological benefits. This in turn helps to inform work towards formulating strategies to mitigate degradation of the soils, prevent the loss of soils that are ecological assets, and assist in the enhancement of soil health. The project is undertaken in collaboration with the project partners: James Hutton Institute (JHI) and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).

SEPA Flood Risk Management Maps

These maps are used to gauge the vulnerability of the land to surface, coastal or pluvial flooding events. While these would primarily be used to inform of where not to develop land (due to the increased risk profile within certain areas of the city), it can also be used to identify where there is capacity for controlled flooding as part of mitigation and resilience measures. Understanding the potential areas most likely to be impacted by flood events will also assist wider strategic efforts to restore degraded habitats that may partially contribute to flooding events.

Forestry, Woodland and Trees

Scotland's Forestry Strategy
In 2070, Scotland will have more forests and woodlands, sustainably managed and better integrated with other land uses. These will provide a more resilient, adaptable resource, with greater natural capital value, that supports a strong economy, a thriving environment, and healthy and flourishing communities.

Objectives

- Increase the contribution of forests and woodlands to Scotland's sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- Improve the resilience of Scotland's forests and woodlands and increase their contribution to a healthy and high quality environment
- Increase the use of Scotland's forest and woodland resources to enable more people to improve their health, well-being and life chances

Priorities

- Ensuring forests and woodlands are sustainably managed
- Expanding the area of forests and woodlands, recognising wider land-use objectives
- Improving efficiency and productivity, and developing markets
- Increasing the adaptability and resilience of forests and woodlands
- Enhancing the environmental benefits provided by forests and woodlands
- Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands

Scottish Government's Policy on Woodland Removal
Used to guide policy decisions when considering the removal of woodland in Scotland, it emphasises a strong presumption against woodland removal, and identifies that woodland loss should "be allowed only where it would achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits." It provides guidance on mitigation measures, in instances where woodland is to be removed as well as identifying criteria to be used in the assessment of the acceptability of woodland removal. Future Council Local Development Plan policy on forest and woodlands would align closely with the approaches outlined within this document.

National Inventory of Woodland and Trees
This Forestry Commission Report published in 2003 is comprised of two surveys: The Main Woodland Survey (MWS) and the Survey of Small Woodland and Trees (SSWT). While there are more contemporary data sources, it is still useful as a means of tracking patterns of change in woodland cover, woodland type, principal species and forest ownership in the decades since the report was published. It also has value as a means of tracking the progress in the reinstatement of native species within Scottish woodlands as opposed to faster growing and commercially preferred species such as Sitka Spruce.

Native Woodland Survey of Scotland and Ancient Woodland Inventory
An inventory of the location, type, condition, and extent of native woodlands in Scotland that was launched in 2014. 22.5% of woodlands were surveyed (or 4% of Scottish land area). It identified that the main threats to the condition of native woodland is excessive herbivore impact (such as deer), as well as the competition from non-native shrub and tree species.

The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland has a data explorer which allows users to examine:

- Woodland type (native/nearly-native/PAWS (plantations on ancient woodland sites*)/Open land habitat)
  *“they are ancient semi-natural woodlands on which the original, “natural” woodland was cleared, and replaced by a plantation of either native or exotic species.” (Forest Research)
- Species structures (identifies specific species found within that woodland as well as their state of maturity and their approximate stocking density)
- Habitat components (colour codes woodlands by dominant woodland composition, while showing % breakdown of that composition. E.g – pinewood/birchwood/wetland/blackthorn scrub/non-native/clear fell etc.)
- Canopy structures (outlines in % the composition of the canopy – e.g mature/pole immature/shrub/regeneration etc.)
- Herbivore impact (identifies source of herbivore impact – e.g deer/hare/rabbit/livestock etc.
- Invasive species (identifies invasive species within the woodland and approximate densities as a % of the woodland)
- Other traits (may include things like diseases/dumping/fire damage/windthrow etc.)

Ancient Woodland
There are 109 records on the Ancient Woodland Inventory within Aberdeen.

Aberdeen has 3 recorded sites of Class 2a woodland. This is defined as woodland that is semi-natural woodland which was recorded on maps in 1860, and has been continuously wooded up to the present day. It has no Class 1a sites (which are distinct from 2a sites in appearing in maps from 1750).

The vast majority of recorded sites are identified as Long-established woodlands of plantation origin (LEPO). 12 sites are identified as plantation from maps of 1750 (and therefore being Class 1b sites), and a further 82 sites appear on the 1860 maps (resulting in Class 2b categorisation).

There are 8 Class 3 sites, which are sites that do not appear as wooded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps, but do appear as woodland on the older Roy maps (of 1750). Such sites "have, at most, had only a short break in continuity of woodland cover and may still retain features of Ancient Woodland." Such sites in Aberdeen are located to the north of Peterculter, to the South-East and East of Dyce, and immediately north of the Hillhead Student Village (on the south bank of the River Don).

The spread of these sites can be viewed on the map below.

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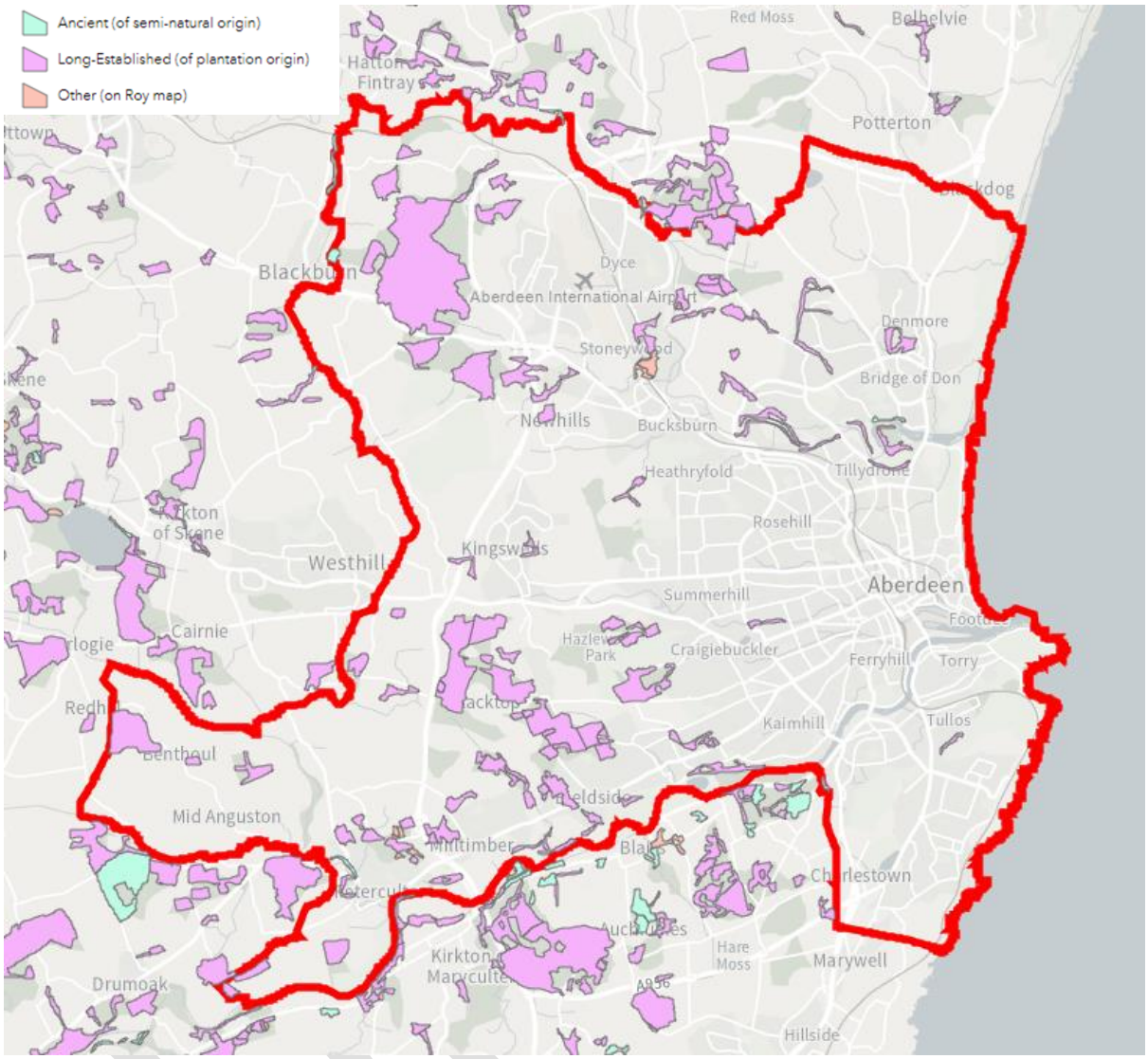


Figure 9: Map showing the authority boundary of the city of Aberdeen in red, and all areas of ancient woodland within the city

Forest Parks

There are no Forest Parks within Aberdeen.

Tree Preservation Orders

Aberdeen has 168 recorded Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). TPOs are shown in the blue hatched areas below. The 11 Conservation Areas within Aberdeen (coloured areas) also afford protection to trees within their respective boundaries. This information outlines the areas of trees and woodland that are deemed to be of greatest significance to the city. There is a greater proliferation of sites along the A93 corridor south-west out of the city, however other recorded sites could offer opportunities for greater connectivity in green corridors in future, as stepping stones within a wider network.

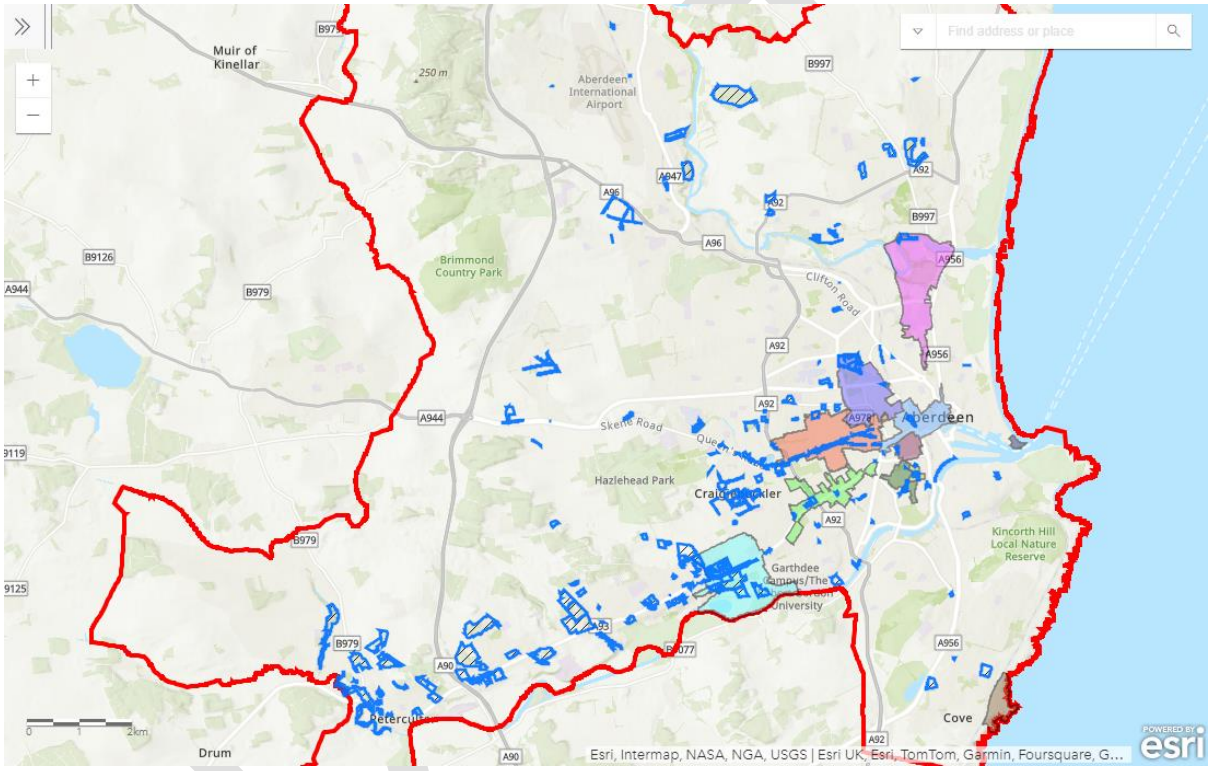


Figure 10: The below shows the location of Aberdeen's TPOs in the blue hatched polygons, with the city boundary outlined in red.

The Granite City Forest – Tree and Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan 2022-2025
The Plan covers the period 2019 – 2044, and seeks to expanding woodland coverage within the city boundary to 600 hectares in area over the next 25 years, and a further 300 hectares by 2070. It is expected to be updated every 5 years.

The overall strategy includes four strategic priorities:

1. Promoting the role of our trees and woodlands in mitigating and adapting to climate change.
2. Expanding the Granite City Forest.
3. Protecting our trees and woodlands.
4. Contributing to the City's green infrastructure and the well-being of our people.

Sites have been identified in the Aberdeen and rankled as preferred, potential, potential with sensitivities, sensitive and unlikely to be suitable. The categories are broad-brush and further investigations will be required to screen out areas that are clearly not suitable for planting and others, such as built-up areas, which might be suitable for street trees.

Although this document addresses a number of the components of a forest and woodland strategy, it does not satisfy planning legislation on this matter. A forestry and woodland strategy is being developed as part of a wider Natural Heritage Strategy. It is anticipated a draft document will be completed by late Summer 2025.

Scotland's Woodlands and the Historic Environment
A policy statement that seeks to communicate how forests and woodlands contribute to Scotland's historic environment. It endeavours to promote appreciation of the contribution woodlands and forests have towards our cultural heritage, as well as their value as tourist attractions. This includes encouraging the support and conservation of "significant evidence of the historic environment in Scotland's woodlands, including historic landscapes". Such elements can include burial mounds, hillforts, saw pits, charcoal hearths, remnants of farmsteads among other features.

The Right Tree in the Right Place – Forestry Commission Scotland
Part 3 of this guidance replaces Circular 9/1999 on Indicative Forestry Strategies (IFSs) which has since been withdrawn.

Scottish Forestry Open Data
This portal hosts twenty datasets covering a variety of topics ranging from areas approved for long-term forest management plans, data on tree health and species conservation, felling licences and restocking obligations (among other datasets).

Biological and Environmental Evaluation Tools for Landscape Ecology (BEETLE)
The tool is intended to assist and support management actions as opposed to the prediction of species dispersal or viability. Such tools can be used to gauge the impact of management interventions within a prescribed woodland or landscape environment, when combined with additional "environmental, economic and social information." The tools do rely on assumptions, although these are based on accepted ecological theories. Examples of the use of BEETLE are provided via the Forestry Research website which includes case studies in Falkirk and Glasgow and the Clyde Valley.

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Summary of Implications for Proposed Plan

Biodiversity

The Proposed Plan will be informed by the Natural Heritage Strategy. Nature Networks, including the requirement for 30 x 30 for biodiversity improvement will have influence on the spatial strategy.

The emphasis on biodiversity enhancement will impact on development proposals; this should be included in site selection criteria.

Development of the Nature network, including the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure will impact on land use, existing policy and legislation.

With a detailed policy now included in National Planning Framework 4, consideration will need to be given on the continued need or amendment of local policies

The Proposed Plan will recognise the value food growing has on biodiversity. Consideration will be given to how the Proposed Plan can help to further support food growing.

Biodiversity improvements will also be delivered through other policy and strategy mechanisms i.e. Forestry and Woodland Strategy, Open Space Strategy etc.

Natural Heritage

The Proposed Plan spatial strategy will identify and protect Aberdeen's local, regional, national and international designated and protected sites.

The Proposed Plan site selection process will be informed by designated sites; this should be included in site selection criteria.

With a detailed policy now included in National Planning Framework 4, consideration will need to be given on the continued need or amendment of local policies.

Forestry, Woodland and Trees

The Proposed Plan will be informed by Forestry and Woodland Strategy, which is being developed as part of the wider Natural Heritage Strategy.

The Proposed Plan should look for opportunities to improve and strengthen existing woodland, and should identify place-based opportunities for woodland expansion and enhancement.

With a detailed policy now included in National Planning Framework 4, consideration will need to be given on the continued need or amendment of local policies

Soils

The Proposed Plan will protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development.

The increased emphasis on protection of soils will impact on development proposals and should be considered as part of the site selection process.

With a detailed policy now included in National Planning Framework 4, consideration will need to be given on the continued need or amendment of local policies.

Marmot Principles

Aberdeen, along with North Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire, has been confirmed as one of three Marmot Places in Scotland. Aberdeen will seek to embed the eight Marmot Principles within the Proposed Plan. The table below identifies where the topic paper align with the Marmot Principles.

Principle	**Potential implication for the Plan**
Give every child the best start in life.	
Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and control over their lives.	
Create fair employment and good work for all.	
Ensure a healthy standard of living for all.	X
Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.	X
Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention.	X
Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes.	
Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together.	X