



Title: **NatureScot ambition for nature-rich towns and cities**

Date: 28 October 2020

Purpose:	Discussion - Narrative to accompany presentation.
How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change	Our ambition for nature-rich towns and cities will help deliver a range of benefits for people. It contributes to climate action and will support the new and proposed biodiversity targets at the EU and international level. The ambition will be taken forward through the proposed priority for next year's business plan – "NatureScot will champion the role of nature in transforming places where people live". It will also help shape our priorities for its 2022-26 Corporate Plan and help inform the messaging linked to Brand recognition for NatureScot.
Summary:	Proposals for "a nature-rich future" as the mission for NatureScot were considered by the Board in the 11 March Board paper (SNHBOARD 184/10). This paper and accompanying presentation focus on what that mission specifically means for our work in urban Scotland. Delivering this mission will help NatureScot realise the potential of nature-based solutions in urban Scotland. It will also make our work relevant to public and key stakeholders, most of whom live and work in urban areas.
Recommendations:	Board is asked to note and discuss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our ambitions for a more nature-rich urban Scotland • Current and future opportunities in urban areas to use nature-based solutions to support good placemaking.
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Purpose

1. To brief the Board on NatureScot's ambition for nature rich towns and cities.

Background

2. We want NatureScot to be recognisable to the general public as the organisation at the heart of how we deliver the transformational change needed to ensure a nature-rich future for Scotland. As set out in the "Nature-Rich Future" Board Paper, achieving a nature-rich Scotland requires action that
 - Enhances nature and the multiple benefits it brings for people; and
 - Utilises nature-rich solutions in responding to climate change.
3. This is as true for urban Scotland as it is for rural Scotland, but in applying this to urban Scotland, we need to recognise that the social, economic and environmental context is fundamentally different and therefore requires a different emphasis and approach. The traditional technical approaches to evaluating nature (based on e.g. naturalness, rarity and threat) are also of limited use in an urban context. In addition, the nature and places that are currently protected at a national scale are not necessarily those that most people in urban Scotland have immediate experience of, or directly benefit from.

The Urban context

4. 83% of Scotland's population live in towns and cities. At the same time, urban Scotland is more green than grey with 54% of land cover in settlements make up of greenspace. The potential of these assets for people and nature is largely untapped. In order to deliver more for people in urban Scotland, we need an ambition that better reflects their needs, values and experiences. We need to win the hearts and minds of people in towns and cities to help us persuade planners, developers, land managers and decision-makers across a range of policy sectors that nature is essential to tackling the big problems of health and well-being inequalities, as well as resilience to climate change and global pandemics. We should aim to inspire people to love the 'everyday' nature they experience and at the same time raise awareness of how much richer and beneficial to them urban nature could be beyond their immediate expectations.
5. Achieving more nature-rich towns and cities requires an understanding of the ecological conditions and processes that give rise to richness and applying that to the way we manage and enhance our urban environment. In the context of a net zero Scotland, our green infrastructure should also be designed to be low maintenance, with a net zero carbon footprint. This will sometimes involve challenging long-standing cultural norms around what our parks and other urban green spaces should look like and how, and for whom, they should be designed and managed. We need to persuade people that standing water habitats, dead wood and simply 'wilder' looking areas make for a healthier, nature-friendly and more 'playable' urban realm, rather than pose a danger. In an urban context, the particular species or habitats that benefit from our interventions are less important than the overall outcome of more nature-rich, liveable, resilient towns and cities and we need to recognise that non-native species can be an important cultural and ecological component of our urban realm.

6. The Board have agreed (SNH BOARD/ 184/10) that we should prioritise our resources on actions that address the climate emergency and the drivers of biodiversity loss while helping to connect people and nature. In an urban context, the key opportunities are likely to be related more to climate adaptation and resilience, rather than mitigation opportunities such as carbon capture and storage. However, when deployed at scale, nature-based solutions such as green roofs, green walls and street trees can make a significant contribution to lowering GHG emissions, managing air pollution and urban cooling. Our 'Actions for a Green Recovery' and advice to SG from the UK Climate Change Committee highlights the economic and social benefits of investing in urban green-blue infrastructure, and path networks for recreation and active travel.
7. From a national perspective, urbanisation has been a much less significant direct driver of biodiversity loss than other changes in land management and land use. However the dramatic scale of biodiversity loss in the wider countryside means that urban greenspace (54% of our urban area is greenspace) and in particular private gardens (and sometimes our homes) assume greater importance as wildlife refuges. The continued growth and renewal of our towns and cities provide opportunities to establish a built environment that is more nature-rich than the intensively managed farmland that it often replaces.
8. More nature-rich places can support positive behaviour change such as a shift to more walking and cycling, community growing, environmental volunteering, wildlife-friendly gardening, waste reduction and other pro-environmental behaviours that in turn can lead to better health and well-being outcomes, community cohesion and resilience. Providing regular opportunities for people to connect with nature in their everyday lives is fundamental to encouraging a broader sense of stewardship for it. This in turn can influence some of the consumer choices that ultimately drive some of the direct causes of biodiversity loss. In increasing first-hand experience of nature, our work with the health, education, play and transport sectors to promote green health, outdoor learning and active travel opportunities also has an important role to play here.
9. Our commitment to reducing inequality means a strong focus of our urban work must be on areas of multiple deprivation and areas where the urban environment is currently nature-poor. In an urban context, using our investment in nature to deliver better health and well-being and more outdoor learning is as important as the need to address climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our ambition for nature-rich towns and cities

10. In line with [the Place Principle](#), a nature-rich future for one town or city will and should look different to another. However, there are some common principles that should apply to all our towns and cities and therefore we suggest our strategic ambition should be expressed as follows:

Our towns and cities are places where

- *Everyone regularly experiences, enjoys and derives multiple benefits from everyday contact with nature where they live, play, work or go to school.*
- *A diverse range of habitats and species are highly connected and integrated into the urban fabric at a range of scales. Green networks provide functional and visible links through and between town and country, enabling people and nature to move easily between the two.*
- *Multi-functional urban nature-based solutions are the basis of healthy and resilient communities. They enable people and nature to adapt to our changing climate by cooling the urban environment and managing extreme rainfall events. They also support behaviours that enhance nature and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.*
- *Non-living components of our urban realm such as roads, paths, utilities and buildings are designed in a way that complements and maximises the benefits from the living components.*

Recommendation

Board is asked to note and discuss

- Our ambition for a more nature-rich urban Scotland
- Current and future opportunities in urban areas to use nature-based solutions to support good placemaking.