

Introduction

Partnership is at the heart of what we do at NatureScot. We must forge alliances to unlock the benefits to all of a substantially regenerated natural world. With that nature restored we will be well on our way to a thriving, low carbon, wellbeing economy in Scotland.

This is the third annual business plan of our four-year corporate strategy. The strategy works towards a nature rich future for all. Our purpose is to protect, restore and value nature. In doing that we want to ensure that the benefits of positive changes in the natural world are shared fairly across Scotland.

In thinking about our work programme for 2024 and 2025, we must consider several

factors. They include a tightening public purse, new legislation where we are leading delivery and significantly increased demand for our science-led advice on the rapid ramping up of Scotland's renewable power capacity. We could go on, and this business plan goes into a lot more detail. Rightly, people expect better outcomes and making every penny count. The desire to do so will drive us, especially where it requires close working relationships with other public sector bodies.

We also expect an exciting national gear change later this year with the launch of the Scottish Government's biodiversity strategy and its five-year delivery plan. Again, we expect to be at the heart of its delivery. We recognise that anxiety is a very human response to change. That Scotland needs to change to take on the nature-climate crisis is inarguable. Driving our approach to partnership follows a key principle: we must work to share the benefits of that change and support those who may struggle with that change. We will listen, our work will be shaped by you. Then we will see the benefits of renewed partnership.

Colin Galbraith
Chair, NatureScot

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2024/25 Focus

Right across Scotland we see people working together to protect, restore and value nature. To build our resilience, to adapt to what climate change is throwing at us and to work with nature.

This business plan is in many ways a celebration of that collaboration. At the Plan's heart is a drive to renew partnerships, to build on the work so far so that Scotland tackles effectively the nature-climate emergency in Scotland. We know only a whole society approach will do, where the benefits of the shift to a nature-rich, zero carbon Scotland are shared fairly across the nation.

We have a vision for tackling the climate and nature crises. By 2045 Scotland will have restored and regenerated biodiversity across our land and seas Looking forward, the Scottish Government's **Biodiversity Strategy** will set the focus for a national effort towards the restoration and protection of nature. The Strategy writes into Scotland's mission a call to concerted effort across the whole public sector and society to tackle the nature-climate emergency. NatureScot has a critical role in mobilising action and a key role in forging the partnerships needed to make things happen.

The task ahead invigorates us. The 2030 target of halting the loss of biodiversity requires a national endeavour to save nature. We see the same internationally.

value nature.

International agreements on climate change and reversing biodiversity loss are an annual occurrence and are ramping up the pace of nature positive action. They shape our vision and activity in Scotland. Acted on, they also establish our responsible global citizenship. We will continue to strengthen ties with friends around the globe to protect, restore and

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This coming year does not represent the first step in a journey. The actions we will take build on vitally important work already in train across Scotland, from land owners and managers to farmers and crofters, fishermen and small business to academic establishments and tech innovators. It's vital that the whole of society participates.

That's why this year is best described as a 'national gear change', moving us into full delivery mode. We will strive to get everyone behind the first Scottish Biodiversity Strategy five-year delivery plan and get to work immediately on arresting the decline in biodiversity in Scotland.

So, what does this mean for NatureScot? Inevitably, the call is to focus on high impact, quick but lasting action that targets the most critical activities that boost the pace and scale of nature restoration in Scotland.

Whilst this business plan presents a range of key

actions as they relate to

our current corporate plan, cumulatively they represent a heightened focus on four key areas.

In 2024/25 we will work with managers of the land and sea to gear up their contribution to a nature rich future for all. Simultaneously we will strengthen the existing natural resource, building pathways for nature to reach beyond our precious protected areas. We will target our resource to drive us towards a net zero future and ensure that the necessary support framework strengthens to secure a nature rich, resilient future. We will provide evidence led advice to Ministers and planning authorities on the rapid ramping up of onshore and offshore wind farms. We set these four areas out in the following way (further detail is in the relevant corporate plan objective referenced):

- A focus on agricultural transformation and land use change, working with all land managers so that a renewed partnership ensures the benefits of nature restoration are fairly shared and strengthens the resilience of the rural economy (Objective 8).
- Directed effort into nature expanding out from land and marine Protected Areas, where safeguarding 30% of Scotland's special nature locations by 2030 including at least one new National Park

- provides added strength to the network so that we build resilience into our existing natural assets and response to climate change (Objective 1).
- We will work to create the conditions for increasing public and private nature finance in Scotland, essential to stopping nature's decline by 2030. Important will be our support for cutting edge high integrity investment models and projects and to developers meeting obligations for positive effects on biodiversity (Objective 10).
- Strengthened approach to species management such as deer, beaver, and invasive species for positive nature

outcomes. We will work in partnership to secure a resilient rural economy whilst ensuring the necessary regulatory framework is in place to underpin nature recovery (Objective 2).

In addition, our resources will continue to support our digital transformation to deliver innovation in the services we provide for our customers. This will help support our wider efforts towards Public Service Reform. Sharpened priorities, pace and partnership are key marks of this plan, Scotland will see a gear change in restoration participation from the few to the many.



Protecting Nature

Strengthened protection of existing biodiversity.

The degradation of nature contributes to the climate emergency and threatens our society and the wellbeing of future generations. A nature-rich future starts with halting biodiversity loss by protecting what we have now.



30x30 land and sea

Protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030 together with at least one new National Park will contribute to a coherent, robust and effective nature network of protected areas and other areabased conservation measures supporting and integrating with our restoration objectives and sustainable use of our land and sea.

In 2024/25 we will

- Publish criteria for 30x30 sites and establish the process for recognition of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).
- Support the Natural Environment Bill Protected Areas legislative changes.
- Approve and operate new flexible management approaches.
- Pilot an Ecosystem Health approach to monitoring.
- Implement our new site condition monitoring system "InformedInsight".
- Work with the National Nature Reserve partnership to increase the contribution of National Nature Reserves (NNRs) to nature restoration and landscape-scale action for nature.
- Ensure that the Nature Networks toolbox is live, providing information and support to Local Authorities, developers, communities, and others involved in implementing local Nature Networks and that the CivTech Nature Networks tool is available to all local authorities to map networks and opportunities.
- Undertake reporting on the statutory proposal for Scotland's next national park(s).

Objective

Modernise Wildlife Management and Licensing

Through leadership across wildlife management and an effective licensing function we will gear the management of uplands to meet Scotland's emission reduction and biodiversity targets. We will endeavour to reduce conflict between people and species, provide advice for mitigation and management and advocate for the appropriate balance between incentive and regulation in order that Scotland's people can safely and sustainably coexist with wildlife.

- Support Scottish Government to develop new deer legislation and proactively regulate wild deer management.
- Develop and publish new codes of practice and guidance for grouse moor management and muirburn.
- Co-ordinate delivery of Scotland's Beaver Strategy and Beaver management framework.
- Deliver an effective and expanded licensing service which includes a new online system and the conclusion of licensing review as requested by Scottish Ministers.
- Deliver the sea eagle management scheme and a revised approach and rationale for goose schemes in Scotland.
- Support development of a Scottish Plan for invasive non-native surveillance, prevention and control, and carry out a strategic review of the Hebridean Mink Project.

Engage and Influence Planning and Regulatory Systems

We will influence planning and other regulatory systems to help deliver positive restoration of nature and nature networks. Our engagement in development and regulation safeguards existing nature. It will aid investment in nature based solutions and engagement with other stakeholders to invest in the assets on which they depend.

In 2024/25 we will

- Influence new Local Development Plans and other strategic plans to increase nature positive outcomes.
- Develop and promote a biodiversity metric for Scotland to enhance biodiversity in planning.
- Engage with developers and Scottish Government to deliver the On-shore Renewables Sector Deal.
- Roll out Informed Decision across the organisation to streamline casework using Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- Participate in Department for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) Inquiries on relevant cases.
- Fulfil our statutory duties in responding to individual development management applications likely to have an impact on nature of national interest.

Objective

Coastal and Marine Transformation

Transforming marine management will ensure that new frameworks for managing Scotland's seas are underpinned by strong objectives on nature and climate. This will help protect and restore coastal and marine biodiversity; and contribute to net zero targets and adaptation to climate change.

- Support the development of strong policies for nature and climate within a new National Marine Plan.
- Provide robust advice to help steer marine energy development proposals, including ScotWind and Innovation and Targeted Oil and Gas offshore wind developments.
- Influence a strengthened and streamlined regulatory framework for aquaculture.
- Build our capacity and evidence base to influence future coastal change adaptation, marine protection, survey and monitoring.
- Complete advice on Fisheries Management Plans and on the national status of Priority Marine Features.
- Progress work on Marine Protection Areas (MPA) and Priority Marine Features (PMF) management measures and coastal and marine habitat enhancement.
- Contribute to strategies and plans for seabirds, dolphins and porpoise, blue carbon and marine and coastal ecosystem restoration.

Additional Performance Metrics

NatureScot's success is measured through a suite of key performance indicators which, together with the milestones, provide evidence of NatureScot's impact on delivery of our corporate plan outcomes. These have been assessed against our objectives and can be cross cutting, evidencing the improvements we seek to make in a number of areas. The key performance indicators are shown below each of the individual sections of Protect, Restore, Value and NatureScot Way.

We Have Protected Nature

Corporate Plan Objective	Result	Business Plan Performance Indicators
Build stronger collaboration reducing the impacts of deer and modernise our wildlife management and underpinning licensing functions to enable a net zero and nature positive future	 Licence holders comply with conditions of their licence Reduced conflict from beavers' presence 	 Number and types of licences that are processed through the online system Number of catchments with established beaver populations
Engage and influence planning and other regulatory systems to ensure they deliver for nature and climate	- Nature is in a better state than before development.	- Proportion of holding objections for formal planning applications
Influence the transformation of marine management through new marine planning, protection and fisheries management frameworks, and working with the marine renewable energy sector	 We can help meet net zero targets through marine renewable energy avoiding major impacts on nature People understand, promote and engage with marine protection commitments 	 Stakeholder interest in MPA Information (hits on webpages) Number of restoration projects for which we've provided advice Number of marine renewable energy consultations we provide advice on avoiding impacts on nature

Restoring Nature

Halt the loss of Biodiversity by 2030 and restore nature by 2045.

Protecting the nature we have will not be enough to secure or maintain net zero, or to turn the corner into a nature positive future. We must also restore nature's complexity and connectivity across land and seascapes.



Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

Leading the development and delivery of the 25-year Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) including large scale restoration measures to regenerate biodiversity, building complexity and connectivity across landscapes, including farms and forests, to better manage the impacts of a changing climate.

In 2024/25 we will

- Help Scottish Government to finalise, then publish, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) 25 year plan and delivery plan.
- Complete the development of draft targets for the Natural Environment Bill.

Objective

Peatland Restoration

Through our leading Peatland ACTION programme, we will manage an accelerated delivery of peatland restoration. This restoration makes an important contribution to tackling climate change by enhancing the functioning peatland resource and securing the benefits for biodiversity, carbon stores, water management and amenity. We will inspire wider interest for investment and delivery by others and target the most degraded areas.

- Restore 6100 hectares of degraded peatland.
- Put in place foundations to deliver over 10,000 ha of peatland restoration in 2025/26.
- Introduce a Peatland Standard to provide guidance on protection, restoration and management of peatland habitats.
- Develop the available peatland workforce.
- Promote case studies to demonstrate the multiple benefits of peatland restoration.

Nature Restoration

Promoting a collaborative approach to the planning, development and delivery of restoration projects across Scotland. This approach will prioritise place-based and thematic areas for nature and climate restoration to make better use of scarce resources.

In 2024/25 we will

- Launch the next round of the Nature Restoration competitive fund.
- Publish evidence of the impact the Nature Restoration Fund is having on nature restoration.
- Identify strategic themes and areas for priority development funding for the Nature Restoration Fund based on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy delivery plan.
- Develop closer working relationships with potential funders.
- Deliver species, habitat and geodiversity duties to complement our effort on the climate-nature crisis.

Objective

Transforming Land Use

Working with others to transform agriculture towards regenerative, low input, high nature methods, we will help to promote soil health, reduce emissions from the land, extend complexity and connectivity to reduce vulnerability to climate risks and protect and improve biodiversity.

- Put the foundations in place to put nature at the heart of future rural support including by advising on the development of Agricultural legislation.
- Set out the nature requirements of new agricultural reform measures to be introduced in 2025.
- Lead the development of the Biodiversity Audit and accompanying FarmBioScot App.
- Complete Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) 2024 scheme assessments and approvals to provide multimillion funding into sites and species of highest conservation concern.

We Have Restored Nature

Corporate Plan Objective	Result	Business Plan Measure
Co-lead the production of the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and develop targets to include in a new Natural Environment Bill	- An invigorated approach to Biodiversity is developed alongside targets for inclusion in the Natural Environment Bill	- SBS is published in 2024-25
Scale up Peatland Restoration by delivering Peatland ACTION funding to projects	- Tackling climate change through restoring peatlands to lock in carbon	- Area (hectares) of peatland included in peatland restoration projects.
Lead, enable and convene others around the development of ambitious and coherent actions to restore nature. Deliver a major Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) targeted at high impact nature recovery projects and seeding greater investment from the private sector	- We have increased investment for nature restoration	- NatureScot is in partnership with new recipients
Demonstrate how agriculture can be transformed with new approaches to deliver targeted outcomes for nature and climate	- Agricultural land managers are motivated to take action to improve nature and climate	- Number of individual farms that have completed a biodiversity audit



Inspire People to Connect with Nature

By raising awareness of the work of NatureScot and building people's connection with nature we will enable a wider audience to value Scotland's natural environment and establish life-long connections between people and nature that lead to positive climate and nature behaviours and support our efforts to protect and restore nature.

In 2024/25 we will

- Build the reach and impact of the Make Space for Nature campaign.
- Undertake survey work to learn more about changing attitudes and behaviours towards nature.
- Work with local authorities and other partners to co-ordinate and support the delivery of the urban nature actions in the SBS delivery plan.
- Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code through strategic leadership, provision of advice and campaigning activity.
- Undertake visitor management on National Nature Reserves and provide on-going national leadership with VisitScotland on visitor management and monitoring.
- Develop our strategic approach to volunteering, outreach and engagement on our National Nature Reserves.

Objective

Stimulate Private Sector Investment into Nature

Helping to establish a strong pipeline of investible nature-based projects, priming values-based, high-integrity environmental markets is a necessity to delivering a just transition to a net zero, nature-positive economy, and rebuilding natural capital.

- Deliver the Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS).
- Develop and grow the Scottish Marine Environment Enhancement Fund (SMEEF) to bring corporate funding to marine nature restoration and natural capital projects.
- Work with partners to deliver multi-million pound investment to expand native woodland.
- In the Flow Country, deliver the first pilots of blended public/ private investment under FIRNS.

Natural Capital

Driving the establishment of Natural Capital as an integral part of public and private business planning and investment decisions at national, landscape and landholding/business scales. We will achieve a Scotland in which all parts of society understand our relationship with and reliance on natural capital which leads to action for its protection and restoration.

In 2024/25 we will

- Develop the tools and toolbox to support putting Natural Capital into practice.
- Embed Natural Capital in policy, plans and strategies.
- Update Natural Capital accounts for NatureScot's land to inform decision-making.

Objective

Skills and Capacity

Developing new skills and jobs to significantly grow and develop a workforce of salaried employees and volunteers in Scotland across the nature based sector to support our efforts to protect and restore nature. This will also require the growth in climate and nature literacy to support new ways of working in long established sectors.

- Better understand the nature and scale of key skills gaps related to SBS outcomes for NatureScot and our key partners.
- Establish and promote pathways to a wide range of naturebased jobs.
- Ensure that demonstration projects to address skills gaps related to SBS outcomes are underway or have been successfully delivered.
- Contribute to the development of the SBS national frameworks for volunteering and citizen science and grow our volunteer activity across NatureScot.
- Do more to champion ethnic diversity in nature based skills and jobs.
- Develop the capacity of our cohort of Stem Ambassadors to champion nature literacy in schools and colleges

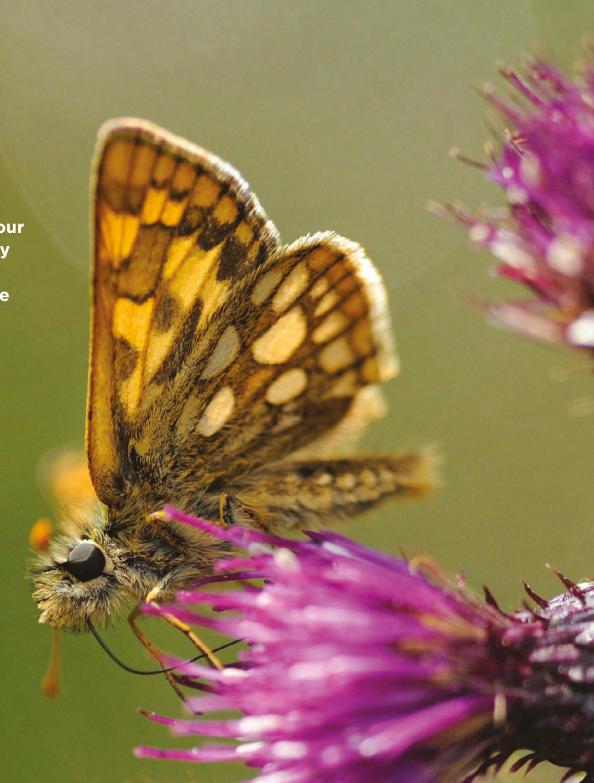
The Value of Nature is Recognised

Corporate Plan Objective	Result	Business Plan Measure
Inspire people to connect with nature, increasing appreciation of nature's value through impactful delivery and communication of our work	- More People visit nature	Engagement rate on Make Space for Nature WebpageNational Nature Reserve online engagement
Influence the regulatory, policy, market and institutional infrastructure needed to stimulate private sector investment into nature	- There are more hectares of nature restored through funding from private investment	- External funds raised by SMEEF and the amount allocated to projects
Drive the establishment of Natural Capital as an integral part of public and private business planning and investment decisions at national, landscape and landholding/business scales	- The full benefits of nature are included in decision making by public at all scales	- Number of Landscape partnerships that NatureScot is involved in that use a natural capital approach
Promote understanding and awareness of skills and capacity needs for the nature based sector	- There are more nature based skills in the Scottish workforce	 Nature-restoration jobs and skill development opportunities created through our activity

The NatureScot Way

Our passion, inspiration and expertise will put nature at the heart of Scotland's future.

The NatureScot Way describes our corporate culture, our values and how we act towards each other- it's the way we do things. We want NatureScot to have a fantastic reputation, not just for what we deliver, but also for the way we work to Protect, Restore and Value nature.



Deliver new ways of working to stimulate achievement of our ambitions

Transforming NatureScot's ways of working to ensure we are fit for the future creating a green, agile and flexible organisation in order to underpin successful delivery of our ambition.

In 2024/25 we will

- Energise our new operating model to become the flexible and agile organisation we need to be in order to direct all of our resources to address the climate and nature crises.
- Embed a new Project Management Office so that we can target our effort to secure benefits across our transformation effort.
- Implement year 2 of our Estates strategy so that our ways of working and net zero ambitions are supported by collaborative and connected workplaces.
- Continue to innovate to ensure our digital capabilities are optimised through online services, cloud GIS, power BI and an online funding portal, so that we have the necessary infrastructure to aid our ambition.
- Continue to invest in ensuring websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that they are accessible to all.

Objective

Transform our individual and collective leadership capability Transforming NatureScot's leadership capability; being bold and ambitious so that we become more influential leaders in biodiversity.

- Engage in Public Service Reform so that we optimise our collaborative effort towards halting the loss of biodiversity.
- Ensure our leaders are equipped and supported to deliver their roles so that our leadership approach enables NatureScot to achieve our corporate objectives and ultimately deliver for nature.
- Develop our future workforce requirements so that we have the right people, with the right skills, and right culture in the right place at the right time to support our priorities.

Sustain our focus on developing a happy and resilient workforce Enabling NatureScot to be an employer of choice, with a happy and resilient workforce which is empowered, diverse, inclusive, productive, skilled and motivated.

- Deliver an organisational learning eco-system which enhances career development so that it supports the development of the future skills we need.
- Ensure EDI continues to embed in our culture so that we continue to grow as an inclusive organisation which values and celebrates people's differences and better reflects the society we serve.
- Deliver wellbeing initiatives which support our workforce with a focus on our safety culture and building resilience.

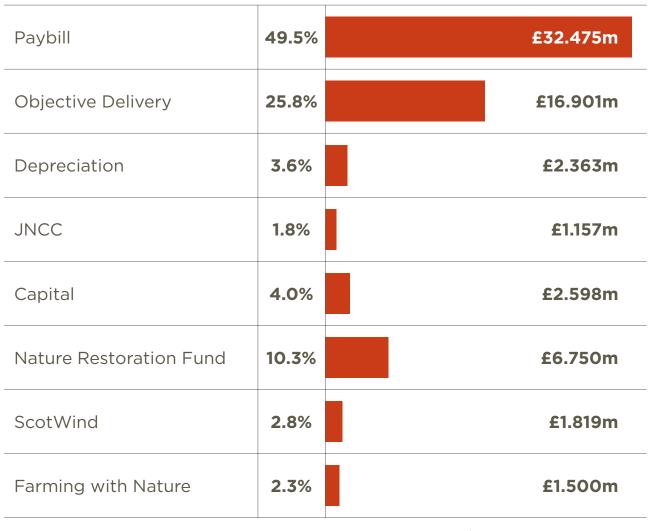
We Have Transformed How We Work

Corporate Plan Objective	Result	Business Plan Measure
Deliver new ways of working to stimulate achievement of our ambitions	We have transformed our ways of working including adopting new digital technologies to deliver for our customers	 Carbon Emission reduction Right-sizing of workstation provision to support hybrid working and space reduction Increase in number of services delivered through digital solutions
Transform our individual and collective leadership capability	 Leaders and emerging leaders equipped to deliver their roles for NatureScot and contribute to wider Public Service Reform 	 Pulse survey scores in relation to leadership show improvement Efficiency savings contributing to front line delivery
Sustain our focus on developing a happy and resilient workforce	- A diverse and inclusive workforce	 Workforce Diversity representative of wider society - Age, Ethnicity, Disability (Annual metric) Reduction in stress indicators (pulse survey scores and stress related absence levels)

Our Resources

Our funding comprises our Grant-in-Aid of £65.563m. This includes investment in key areas through funding for Nature Restoration, Scotwind licensing, FIRNS and Farming with Nature. Further funding expected for Peatland ACTION will boost our investment in peatland restoration significantly advancing our efforts to tackle climate change.

Our Budget



Our total Grant-in-Aid from Scottish Government for 2024/25 is £65.563m

Resourcing Our Plan

Each year we set out to deliver the priorities set out in our Corporate Plan. To do this our resources are allocated through the activities we undertake. These activities provide the conduit for flexible working across the organisation. The tables below show the budget and resource allocation by these activities for 2024/25. The budget settlement has enabled us to heighten our focus on our 4 priority areas set out in the Focus Section of this plan.

The key areas of increased investment include:

- £1.72m increase in spending on priority areas 2 and 4 (directing efforts into nature and strengthened approach to species management), a 39% increase on 2023-24. This extra investment will support NatureScot to deliver new legislative requirements in regard to deer, grouse and muirburn management and support the Natural Environment bill. In addition, there is a further £1m for staff related investment to support ScotWind.
- £0.79m extra investment in priority area 1 (a focus on agricultural transformation) an 82% increase on 2023-24 to support our programmes of work in transforming land use to regenerative, low input, high nature methods, including agricultural reform.
- £0.56m extra investment in technology and digital services to underpin our digital transformation, in particular the adoption of Al technologies to assist with rapid casework turn over related to protected areas.

We will retain flexibility throughout the year to deploy extra funds that become available through our efficiency programme and re-prioritisation that we undertake as part of our 90 day business planning process which allows us that flexibility to support our 4 key priority areas.

Protecting Nature	£m	FTE
Marine Ecosystems/sustainable Coasts and Seas	1.680	85
Protected Areas	1.218	70
Supporting Good Development	0.843	60
Wildlife Management	2.484	82

Restoring Nature		
Biodiversity & Geodiversity	1.765	49
Natural Resource Management	0.262	80

Valuing Nature		
People and Places	2.750	79

NatureScot Way		
Workplace Facilities and Services	2.198	23
People and Organisational Development	0.600	31
Finance, Planning and Performance	0.035	23
Information and Cyber Security	0.597	22
Technology and Digital Services	1.927	40
External Funding	0.000	21
Communications	0.330	24
Executive Governance	0.115	9

Total	16.901	697

