



School Grounds Habitat Action Plan

Scottish Biodiversity List habitat: No
UK Biodiversity List of Priority Habitats: No

Summary

All school grounds, large or small, are potential nature reserves. Within wider rural or urban areas in which wildlife is increasingly under threat, they have the potential to act as “wildlife corridors” and “stepping-stones”, allowing wildlife to migrate between larger areas of suitable habitat.

School grounds can support a range of wildlife, including: flowering plants; mosses and liverworts; lichens; fungi; small mammals; birds; insects; amphibians and reptiles. Flowers and shrubs provide food for butterflies and moths, whilst frogs, toads and newts may breed in school ponds.

The “Curriculum for Excellence”, together with the “Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning” firmly establishes the role of the outdoors in educating pupils. The curriculum encourages young people to study biodiversity within their school grounds, predominately through science and geography. However, natural habitats within school grounds can also provide a context for literacy, numeracy, information communication, technology and art. Therefore, developing school grounds for biodiversity can contribute positive action towards a range of objectives.

The “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity” builds on this, noting more needs to be done, particularly in Central Scotland, to make green space and contact with nature more accessible. The “Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning” (2010) recognises that school grounds are often the first step in taking pupils outdoors, and envisions creative and progressive outdoor learning being embedded in the curriculum. This can be done by building on the existing work that has been done, for example with Grounds for Learning, Eco Schools and the Forest Schools Programme.

There are clear opportunities to encourage North Lanarkshire’s youth to have direct contact with biodiversity, in a fun and educational way, and to learn how to look after and encourage wildlife

Current Status

Within North Lanarkshire Council area, there are 119 primary schools, 23 secondary schools, 13 special schools, 68 recognised private/voluntary nursery establishments and 105 nursery classes incorporated within mainstream educational establishments and family learning centres.

63% of school ground is land rather than buildings; this is a significant area of land and has the potential to make a large contribution to North Lanarkshire’s biodiversity.

A substantial amount of this land is managed open grassland used to play team sports. However, areas are being developed that focus on biodiversity.



Eco-Schools is the largest sustainable schools programme in the world with 19.5 million children, young people and educators engaged worldwide in 67 different countries. The hugely successful Eco School programme celebrated their 25 year partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful Scotland and Scottish Schools in 2019. Their most recent report 2017/2018 recognises there are currently 210 schools registered in North Lanarkshire with the Eco Schools programme; 68 that have Green Flag Awards, and 3 that have permanent awards, with 20 schools focussing on school grounds as a topic for their award.

Legislation and Site Designation

There is the potential to designate school grounds as Local Nature Reserves, this has been done in other Local Authorities.

Sharrow School in Sheffield has been designated as a LNR due to the school's green roof. This shows the massive potential schools have to be developed as nature reserves.

Current Factors Driving Outdoor Learning.

The Expansion of Early Years and Childcare in Scotland.

The Scottish Government piloted this ambitious new project in 2019. A key aspect of the vision is the free entitlement for Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), will be almost doubled to 1140 hours per year by August 2020. Scottish Government stipulate learning will take place in physical environments, indoors and outdoors. North Lanarkshire Council recognise and embrace a strong connection with the benefits of outdoor learning opportunities.

Education Scotland: The Responsibility of All. 3-18 Curriculum Impact Report June 2019, recognise the benefits of outdoor learning and the need for a more consistent and progressive approach.

Scottish Government: Growing up in Scotland and Obesity at age 10.

Recognising the drivers of overweight and obesity are complex, multi-faceted and shaped by a broad range of factors, the delivery plan for improving diet and weight sits alongside a wide range of government policy and action. Included amongst these is a priority to create 'a Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active'.

Becoming a Good Food Nation In 2020 Scottish Ministers remain committed to the concept and reality of achieving our vision of Scotland as a Good Food Nation. Alongside a range of benefits for physical and mental health, regular physical activity helps adults and children maintain a healthy weight. A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan (Scottish Government, 2018b) sets out the Scottish Government's ambitions for a Scotland where "more people are more active, more often".

Scotland, A Daily Mile Nation. This initiative is delivered within the school grounds. A biodiverse environment promotes the benefits of being physically active outdoors.



Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- Increase in pupil numbers leading to extension of school buildings and car parking facilities
- Loss or relocation of schools and sale of land for development
- Lack of appropriate management
- Vandalism
- Pressure for competing land use such as use for sports
- Lack of long term biodiversity action management plans and commitment may diminish the long term impact of biodiversity action
- Increase of woodland use for Forest Schools
- Increase demand for outdoor space for 1140 expansion

Current Action

- School grounds are areas of protected open space and cannot be put to alternative uses without special permission from the relevant government department.
- Eco Schools is a European-wide project designed to encourage action for the environment by the whole school community. It is a recognised award scheme, rewarding and accrediting schools (including primary, secondary, special and early years establishments) that have made a commitment to continuously improving environmental performance.
- The Eco School project includes a specific Biodiversity component as well as a topic focussing on School Grounds.
- Green flags must now be renewed every two years, encouraging ongoing action for the environment by schools.
- Management and maintenance of school grounds is carried out through Service Level Agreements between schools and NLC Land Maintenance.
- Support for the Eco School Awards is provided by the Quality Improvement Officer- Science Education.
- North Lanarkshire Council's Greenspace Development Service offers advice and support to schools wishing to enhance their school grounds for biodiversity.
- North Lanarkshire Countryside Ranger Service support Forest Schools, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education establishments to offer advice and support for



Outdoor Learning, in developing areas for biodiversity and environmental education including biodiversity improvements at Whitelees in Cumbernauld and working with Nurture groups at St Aidens High in Motherwell.

- Forest Schools in North Lanarkshire are required to sign an agreement with North Lanarkshire Council to confirm a code of conduct and environmental impact assessment.
- “Garden for Wildlife” leaflet produced, and available online, includes information for schools
- Numerous projects on school grounds and local biodiversity areas have been taken forward at local schools. For example, at St Stephen’s Primary School in Coatbridge the Countryside Ranger Service helped teachers and kids create a wildlife garden in an underutilised area of playground by building a bug hotel, providing wildflower seeds for planters, and advised on tree planting and bird feeders.
- Grounds for Learning provides support for outdoor play and learning with a variety of online resources which schools can pay a membership fee to access
- Every nursery in North Lanarkshire has a Forest Schools resource box.
- Awards for All Scotland funding is open to schools to apply for funding, with an option for projects that focus on improvements or additions to community buildings or play facilities.
- Educational packs produced by the Forestry Commission, including the Wolf Brothers Wildwoods resource pack, which aims to educate children through a story explored indoors and in woodlands
- Outdoor Woodland Learning (OWLs) provide downloadable resources and case studies of schools using innovative outdoor learning techniques

Proposed Objectives, Targets and Actions

Objectives

1. To raise awareness and knowledge of biodiversity, and encourage educational opportunities, especially amongst pupils, parents and school staff.
2. To ensure that school grounds within North Lanarkshire are appropriately managed to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Actions	Meets objective number	Action by	Target
Habitat Management and Protection			
1.1 Encourage the incorporation of biodiversity aims within new Service Level Agreements between schools and North Lanarkshire Council	2	NLC	2 new schools annually from 2023



Land Maintenance.			
1.2 Increase the number of North Lanarkshire Council Eco- schools focusing on the 'School Grounds' topic.	1,2	NLC	3 new schools annually from 2023.
1.3 Encourage and support schools to develop and adopt a school grounds biodiversity management plan.	1,2	NLC	1 new management plan annually from 2023.
1.4 Support schools in development of biodiversity areas.	1,2	NLC	3 biodiversity areas developed annually from 2023.
Advisory			
2.1 Offer advice and support to schools wishing to manage their grounds to conserve and enhance biodiversity.	2	NLC	Provide advice to at least 10 schools annually from 2023.
Future Research and Monitoring			
3.1 Encourage schools to undertake biodiversity audits of school grounds and participate in annual surveys (as part of the Eco-schools programme where appropriate), and encourage the submission of records to the Biodiversity Partnership or other appropriate record centre.	1,2	NLC	Develop a simple survey of key species for schools. Promote to schools annually from 2023.
Communication and publicity			
4.1 Develop a School Grounds Biodiversity Competition.	1	NLC	Develop annual competition with local schools from 2024.
4.2 Ensure new schools take on environmental enhancements	2	NLC	Encourage environmental additions such as wildflower meadows, swift boxes and green roofs where appropriate.

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Links with Other Policies and Organisations

- Statement of education improvement objectives 2004 - 2007
- Education service improvement plan 2004-2008
- Curriculum for Excellence, A refreshed narrative Sept 2019. Education Scotland, National Curriculum 3 – 18 year.
- Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning
- Grounds for Learning

Sources of Information

Jackson, D.L. 2000. Guidance on the interpretation of the Biodiversity Broad Habitat Classification (terrestrial and freshwater types).

Definitions and the interpretation of the Biodiversity Broad Habitat Classification (terrestrial and freshwater types): Definitions and the relationship with other habitat classifications.

JNCC Report No. 307. British Wildlife in Danger (Resource booklet for teachers-Key stage 2)



International Centre for Conservation Education

School Grounds Habitat Action Plan for Bexley

School Grounds Habitat Action Plan for Flintshire County Council

The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity

Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy: It's in Your Hands

Building Excellence: Exploring the implications of the Curriculum for Excellence for School Buildings (2007) 'Aiming for Excellence in School Grounds'

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning

Curriculum for Excellence

Grounds for Learning

Forestry Commission Scotland, 2013. Wolf Brother's Wildwoods, Imagining Mesolithic life in Scotland's forests and woodlands, *An Outdoor Learning Resource for Teachers of Curriculum for Excellence Level 2*

<https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/hwb14-summary-impact-report.pdf>

Abbreviations

LEA: Local Education Authority,

CSGN: Central Scotland Forest Trust

NLC: North Lanarkshire Council

RSPB: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Training opportunities for Outdoor Learning

SAOPE Supporting Learning Outdoors Course

A new course from the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education for anyone with a role in curricular based outdoor learning. This course will help participants to gain an understanding of the Curriculum for Excellence, and the framework for delivering this to pupils, as well as providing resources and ideas to assist good partnership working. To register and access the course [visit the SAOPE website](#)