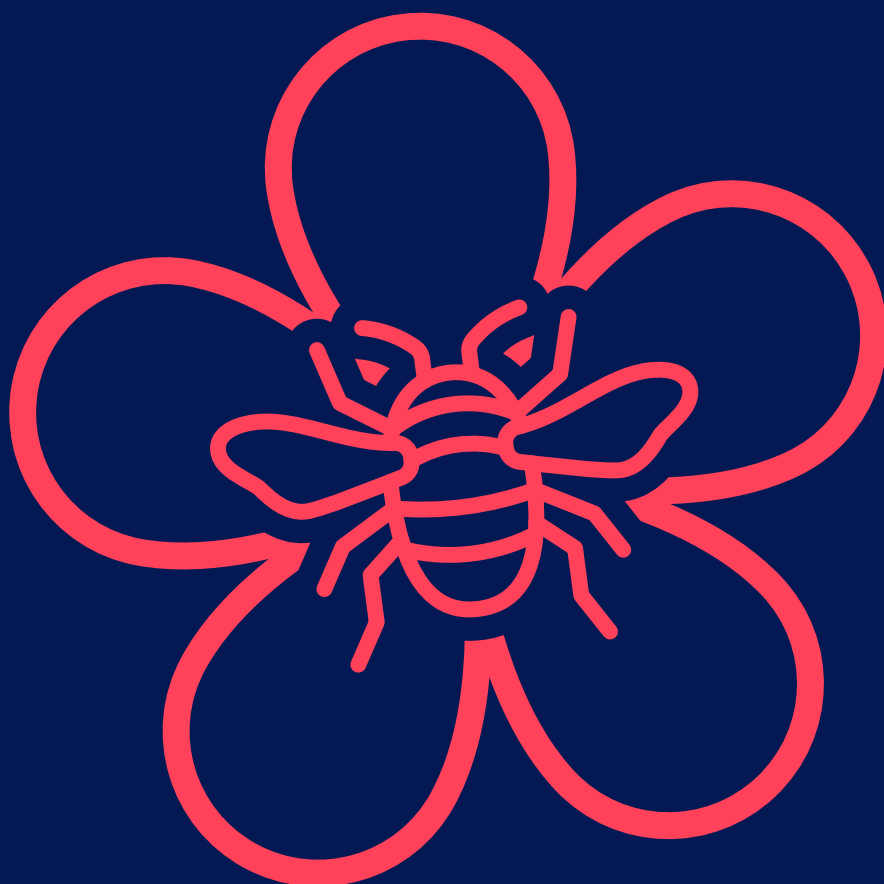


Biodiversity Duty Report 2021-2023



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Introduction

This report has been prepared in line with the Scottish Government's Biodiversity Duty Reporting Template for Level Three Organisations. Level Three Organisations are defined as "Public bodies that do not engage directly or indirectly with communities, young people or the public and do not own or manage land, regulate land use, or have responsibilities linked to biodiversity".

The report co-ordinates information on actions taken across our organisation to support biodiversity conservation during the 2021-23 reporting period, which runs from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2023. In addition to capturing new developments that have occurred during the current reporting period, the report also re-iterates and clarifies pre-existing policy and delivery mechanisms.

Where measures have already been set out in other documents, these are signposted.

Section 1: Introductory Information About Organisation

“Please describe your organisation’s role and purpose, including any particular environmental responsibilities.”

Registers of Scotland (‘RoS’) compiles and maintains public registers relating to land, property, and other legal documents in Scotland; our work is demand-led and is influenced by fluctuations in activity within both the housing and commercial property sectors. RoS’ headquarters are situated in Meadowbank House (‘MBH’) in Edinburgh, a building owned by RoS where over 1,000 staff are based. RoS also operates from a smaller premises at St Vincent Plaza (‘SVP’) in Glasgow, an office rented by RoS where over 200 staff are based. In response to the Covid pandemic, RoS adopted a hybrid working approach which continues to operate.

While the biodiversity implications of RoS’ day-to-day service delivery are relatively small, we recognise that we have opportunities to conserve biodiversity locally and further afield, and that under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 we have a duty to realise these opportunities. These responsibilities and opportunities are managed within the wider context of our commitment to sustainability. The Sustainability Team, which sits within the Corporate Services Directorate under the Estates Department, has the lead responsibility for sustainability policies and projects, including those related to the conservation of biodiversity. However, a range of other business areas contribute to the agenda, as outlined in our SCCS.

The collective sustainability-related work of these various business areas is overseen by the Environmental Management Group (EMG), which aims to help ensure that the required direction, support, and controls are in place to achieve the objectives of the SCCS. The EMG is attended by the Corporate Services Director, who represents and reports back to the Executive Management Team. Various key business areas are also represented on the EMG, including Estates, Registration, Finance, ICT, Communications, Procurement, Programme & Change, HR and the Union.

Other governance structures in RoS also play a role in relation to sustainability. The Policy and Practice Group, which is responsible for approving annual updates to RoS’ Environmental Policy, Green Travel Policy and Sustainable Procurement Policy. RoS’ Risk Management Framework also provides a governance route, with the Audit and Risk Committee playing a role in assuring delivery of strategic sustainability commitments.

At a more operational level, RoS’ Environmental Working Group (EWG) holds responsibilities relating to biodiversity and wider sustainability. Chaired by the Sustainability & Climate Change Manager and comprising representatives from a variety of RoS business areas, the EWG supports the work of the EMG by recommending projects and undertaking awareness-raising work. The EWG plays an important role in connecting RoS’ wider workforce on sustainability issues.

Section 2: Actions to Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

“Please describe and explain any actions that your organisation has undertaken alone or as part of a partnership to benefit biodiversity directly, to tackle the main drivers of biodiversity loss, or to achieve wider outcomes for nature and people.”

We recognise that one of the ways in which we can support biodiversity is via on-site measures at our two office locations.

At our MBH headquarters in Edinburgh, various measures have been taken to help promote biodiversity locally and further afield, mainly via our outdoor areas:

- We have a large planter which extends along the length of the building’s south wing, and further planter arrangements (‘door tubs’) at each entrance. These planters are filled with a mixture of evergreen plants and wildflowers, including specific Scottish wild plants such as mixed heathers and achillea; many of these plants were chosen to encourage biodiversity and in particular bees and butterflies. These planters are regularly maintained by our landscape contractor, GP Plantscape.
- We have a mixed sedum roof which is regularly maintained by GP Plantscape. This was enhanced in the summer of 2023 with wildflower plugs planted, with the premise that these should be self-sustaining into the future. The wildflower population on the roof will be further enhanced in spring 2024 via seed-scattering. Sedum roof spaces are a good environment to encourage biodiversity, and in particular bees, butterflies, lacewings, and ladybirds - the flowering sedum provide nectar and also provide habitats for other insects, which in turn encourage birds and other predators to the area. Having a mixture of species extends the period over which flowering can occur, which benefits nectar collectors for longer. Sedum roofs can also help prevent heat loss from buildings and can aid rainwater management, providing wider sustainability benefits.
- Wildflower seeding was carried out during the summer of 2023 in a shaded ground area, to add to the shade-loving summer-flowering perennial plants which were already established there. The seeds did not grow, so it is planned that the area will be re-seeded next year at an earlier point; earlier-flowering species will be selected to extend the period over which the area as a whole offers benefits to nectar collectors.
- Habitat/nesting boxes for birds, bats and insects were installed in late spring 2023 - 3 boxes for smaller birds, 1 box for larger birds, 2 bat boxes and 2 insect hotels. The 4 new bird boxes replaced 4 existing ones which had fallen into disrepair. While these were not considered fit for on-site purpose, it was determined that they may be re-usable following the appropriate maintenance; as such, they were donated to local ornithology enthusiasts.
- We have indoor planters at MBH, containing tropical displays; while these do not contribute to the local ecosystem, they are beneficial in a wider sense by encouraging colleagues to appreciate and feel connected to the natural environment.

- Where compost is required (for internal and external planters), it is sourced from a stockpile of recycled, organic, peat-free compost produced in-house by GP Plantscape; alternatively, a peat-free (coir-based) product is purchased from a commercial supplier. GP Plantscape close the loop by donating their green waste to a commercial producer of organic, peat-free compost.
- An invasive non-native species (INNS) survey is carried out annually by GP Plantscape, with measures being taken where a need is identified; currently, the area is being treated for Japanese knotweed (via spraying) and giant hogweed (via stem injection). Treatment chemicals are selected using the COSHH 'Hierarchy of Control' process (which considers efficacy, safety, and the environment) and are only applied by trained staff.
- Aside from INNS treatments, chemical use on site is minimal. Fertilisers are only used in tubs (which are 'contained environments' where less natural replenishment of nutrients occurs); in such circumstances, a slow-release fertiliser is typically used and is applied in line with the manufacturer's instructions and with the COSHH assessment carried out for any products or substances which fall within the current regulations. Herbicides are used, but only on hard-standing areas and only where weeds cannot be removed manually; weeds found in vegetated areas are generally considered to be ecologically beneficial and are therefore left to grow. Pesticides are not used regularly. No chemicals (fertilisers, pesticides, or herbicides) are used on the sedum roof; weeds are all removed by hand.
- Tree surveys are carried out annually by GP Plantscape, with action being taken based on recommendations in the reports. Where branches are removed (and where, in extreme cases, trees are felled), suitable logs are retained and stacked in the woodland area to support biodiversity.
- During the reporting period, we have installed outdoor seating and pods which encourage colleagues to appreciate and benefit from the outdoors during their working and break times.
- In 2023, NatureScot became tenants at MBH and collaborative work began to explore opportunities to enhance external and internal green infrastructure to promote biodiversity with climate change adaptation and colleague wellbeing co-benefits (see Section 4 for further details).

In our last report, we highlighted an intention to install beehives on the roof of MBH. Feasibility work has now been carried out and has highlighted concerns around costs and maintenance access; laterally, it has been identified that the roof space may be best-used for heat pumps, to help us deliver on our net zero commitments.

Our other office, at SVP in Glasgow, is a rented space and therefore one where we have less control. However, several on-site measures have been taken to support biodiversity and to encourage colleagues to engage with the outdoors, including some initiatives where we have played a lead role:

- ‘The 39 Steps’ – a paved area which sits between SVP and its neighbouring building and which is used by occupants of both buildings and by members of the public – is managed by GP Plantscape on behalf of SVP’s landlords. It is bordered on each side by pollinator-friendly species which are subject to a regular maintenance schedule.
- There is also a small outdoor area on the other side of SVP, containing a cycle shelter with a sedum roof and planters containing pollinator-friendly species. These are also subject to a regular maintenance schedule. This area also contains 3 picnic benches, which were purchased by RoS in the spring of 2023 to encourage colleagues to enjoy the outdoors. These benches replaced 2 older benches and a small wooden table, which had fallen into disrepair. While they were not considered fit for on-site purpose, it was determined that the materials were salvageable; as such, they were donated to a colleague for upcycling.
- Work was undertaken by RoS during 2023 to investigate opportunities to install habitat/ nesting boxes for birds and insects in the small outdoor area; supplier restrictions precluded delivery at the time, but it is intended that the boxes will be purchased and installed in time for the 2024 breeding season.
- Our office space at SVP benefits from considerable indoor tropical planting; as with our MBH indoor planters, these are considered beneficial to biodiversity in that they encourage connection to and appreciation of the natural environment and the many services offered by plants. At SVP, these services include noise absorption – moss panels have been installed for this purpose. It is anticipated that RoS colleagues will soon benefit from indoor planting in common areas of SVP – as part of a planned refurbishment, living wall panels are due to be installed.
- Work was also undertaken by RoS during 2023 to develop relationships with other tenants at SVP, with a view to creating a building-wide sustainability working group. It is intended that the remit of this group will include a discussion on additional opportunities to support onsite biodiversity.

GP Plantscape have a regularly-updated Environmental Policy and a ‘Pathway to Net Zero’ which sets out forward-thinking achievements and plans to reduce operational emissions. Such arrangements provide assurance that the biodiversity-supporting services that they provide at both of our sites are delivered in a way that considers ecological health in a holistic way.

In addition to these more direct measures, we also support the conservation of biodiversity by taking a wide variety of measures to reduce carbon emissions and other environmental impacts associated with energy use, transport, and waste generation. Key achievements during the current reporting period include: the installation of LED lighting across MBH; progressive strengthening of travel governance via our annually-updated Green Travel Policy; ongoing re-use of surplus office furniture and IT equipment; and a workplace emissions survey carried out across the workforce to gain a better understanding of home working emissions and commuting behaviours. We have also continued to support cycling in line with our Cycling Friendly Employer status, which we gained at the end of 2020. These achievements are set out in more detail in our annual Public Bodies Duties Climate Change Reports and our annual SCCS reviews, which are published on our website. Related to these achievements are procurement and colleague engagement arrangements, which are discussed in Sections 3 and 5.

Section 3: Mainstreaming Biodiversity

“Please outline any steps your organisation has taken to incorporate biodiversity measures into its wider policies, plans or strategies. This should include decision-making structures and staff and organisational roles and responsibilities.”

Our Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy (‘SCCS’) is a key document; launched in 2021, it sets out our pledge to achieve net zero direct emissions by 2040 and net zero indirect emissions by 2045. The SCCS highlights the relationship between climate change and biodiversity conservation and makes specific commitments relating to protection and enhancement of biodiversity onsite and further afield, including via partnership working with our landscape contractor and external stakeholders.

RoS’ Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027 reflects the central role that sustainability plays in organisational planning and decision making, by setting out RoS’ ambition to “deliver increasing value and benefits for Scotland’s people, economy and environment”, helping “the Scottish economy to be stronger, greener and fairer.” This builds on the long-term commitment made in the 2021 to 2026 Corporate Plan, which set out an aim for sustainability to be embedded across organisational activity. The sustainability ambition of the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027 is reflected in its Strategic Objective 5 (of 6) which quotes RoS’ carbon reduction target, as set out in the Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy.

RoS’ Corporate Services Risk Register also contributes to the conservation of biodiversity by including a Climate Change Duties risk, which details the implications of failing to deliver on mitigation and adaptation responsibilities and which sets out a series of control measures.

RoS also has three policies which embody the aspirations of the SCCS and provide focused governance in relation to key areas of organisational activity: a Green Travel Policy, a Sustainable Procurement Policy, and an Environmental Policy. All three policies play a role in conserving biodiversity, and the Environmental Policy includes a specific commitment to “protect and enhance biodiversity on our estate and contribute further afield”, mirroring the biodiversity aspiration set out in the SCCS.

Procurement is another area that we consider plays a strategic role in supporting biodiversity beyond the direct measures that we employ on site. By encouraging biodiversity – and wider sustainability – impacts to be built into the considerations that underpin our purchasing decisions, we can generate benefits across the supply chain and throughout the life cycle of the products and services that we procure.

At a strategic level, we are committed to sustainable procurement via our SCCS, our Procurement Strategy and our Sustainable Procurement Policy. Our Sustainable Procurement Policy is subject to annual reviews, which have allowed an incremental strengthening of our commitments. We are now committed to embedding sustainability at all stages of the procurement cycle.

Various measures are in place to translate our commitments into action. Our tender process was updated during 2022/23 to include a Climate Emergency Statement and associated scored question in our Invitation to Tender document for procurements of £50,000 or over, requiring prospective suppliers to support RoS in tackling the climate emergency. In line with our Sustainable Procurement Policy, we have also begun to apply the Scottish Government's Sustainability Test to procured products and services of a value of £50,000 or over. Where significant potential impacts are identified, appropriate specifications are included in the tender documentation and are reflected in the tender evaluation and contract management process, with the Sustainability Team being involved closely at all stages. Contracts which have benefitted from this approach during the current reporting period include our multifunctional devices, hard services, catering and cleaning contracts. Our Grounds and Internal Plant Maintenance contract is another example of biodiversity conservation being supported by the procurement process; the inclusion of sustainability and biodiversity requirements in the Specification of Requirement has supported the achievements set out in Section 2. Sustainability is also addressed in relevant lower-value contracts; examples include the purchase of sustainable products for use at events, such as seed kits to celebrate our 'Grow Our Own' colleague development agenda.

We also require/encourage community benefits to be delivered through our procurement process; a Community Benefits Statement and associated clause is included in contracts above £1m, and this is extended to other contracts where appropriate to the value and nature of the contract. Our hard services contract is an example of what this approach can achieve: with the contract's community benefit commitments delivering a litter pick event, which is described further in Section 5.

As an organisation with our own corporate social responsibility commitments, we have a community benefits programme which has funded various community groups. During 2022/23, this included provision of financial support to Friends of Newlands Park in Glasgow, who ran a community fete in celebration of recently-confirmed land rights and historical information gained through the purchase of a Deed from RoS.

During the reporting period, work commenced to examine opportunities to embed sustainability considerations more fully into organisational decision-making. In addition to identifying Finance as a key business area, several other organisational functions were highlighted as having an important role to play, including Procurement, the Secretariat and Communications. These opportunities will be further examined in the future via collaboration with other public sector bodies through the Sustainable Scotland Network, and availability of grant funding will be investigated to support the delivery of any identified projects.

Section 4: Nature-Based Solutions, Climate Change and Biodiversity

“How has your organisation integrated biodiversity into nature-based solutions to the climate emergency and other socio-economic outcomes?”

As described in Section 2, RoS has sedum roofs at both of our buildings which offer benefits including the attenuation of rainfall to provide climate change resilience, in a way that protects and enhances biodiversity. The other on-site measures described in Section 2 act as nature-based solutions too, by providing social benefits through biodiversity conservation.

During 2023, we began to advance our thinking around onsite nature-based solutions via the NatureScot collaboration mentioned in Section 2. Following an initial site survey of MBH by NatureScot, we have held internal discussions to examine a variety of opportunities to install green infrastructure to help provide resilience against the effects of extreme weather and to enhance the wellbeing of building occupants and visitors. Following these discussions, we have made a shortlist that NatureScot is currently considering. This year, we also began to consider our potential role as an organisation to help others across Scotland to adopt nature-based solutions; this is discussed further in Section 6.

Section 5: Workforce Development

“Workforce skills and training”

Colleague engagement is a key aspect of our journey towards sustainability, and we employ various measures to encourage understanding and engagement across our workforce. During the current reporting period, we have undertaken various communication exercises some of which have focused specifically on biodiversity and all of which have linked to biodiversity.

One key development was the publication of ‘Nature’s Guide’ in 2022. Produced via collaboration between the Sustainability Team, EWG members and colleagues across the wider workforce, the illustrated digital resource highlights the crucial role of biodiversity, the threats that it faces and the way that it is intrinsically linked to other priorities including climate change. The concept of rewilding is introduced, and advice is provided to help readers protect and enjoy biodiversity throughout the seasons, including a variety of practical tips on activities such as managing gardens, growing food, building ponds, identifying and recording animals and plants, and participating in conservation volunteering.

The publication of ‘Nature’s Guide’ is part of a wider programme of regular sustainability communications which has resulted from the move to digital communications following the pandemic and the adoption of hybrid working. Replacing our previous bi-annual ‘Go Greener’ campaigns, our new approach helps to ensure that sustainability maintains a regular presence in colleagues’ minds and it involves monthly engagement activities ranging from blogs and business notices to online workshops. We also host an online Sustainability Forum that includes threads dedicated to wildlife and nature, which colleagues regularly post on. In addition to digital communications, we have reintroduced in-person events. Our sustainability communications programme has been formalised during 2023 by the creation of a Sustainability Communications Work Plan, developed and delivered as a partnership activity between the Sustainability Team, the Internal Communications Team, and EWG members. Highlights from the current reporting period include:

- Sustainable Christmas guides produced in collaboration with the EWG, encouraging a variety of ethical purchases and clear-outs, including home-made eco-friendly glitter, re-usable living trees and creation of log piles from cut trees.
- In-office plant and seed swap events in 2022 and 2023, where a variety of indoor and outdoor plants, seedlings and seeds were shared between RoS colleagues and our wider building tenant organisations.
- Online workshops run in collaboration with Keep Scotland Beautiful, Zero Waste Scotland and Home Energy Scotland aligned with national biodiversity-related campaigns such as World Environment Day and Climate Week.
- Hosting and promotion of in-person ‘Dr Bike’ events to provide free cycle maintenance checks and repairs at both our buildings.
- An online Climate Conversation workshop to launch our SCCS and provide practical tips for colleagues to reduce their own impacts.

- Blogs (sometimes co-produced with EWG members) to inspire and empower colleagues to take action on a number of fronts including waste reduction, single-use plastics, carbon reduction, active travel and sustainable food choices. This included promotion of an app to help users identify toiletries containing marine pollution-causing microbeads. We also issued a blog to celebrate Pollinator Week 2022 by highlighting how to support pollinators.
- In partnership with our hard services contractor, Mitie, we held a conservation day in 2022 at Holyrood Park in Edinburgh, alongside Historic Environment Scotland. Many colleagues took part, helping to clear litter to improve the environment for people and wildlife.

During 2023, collaboration began between the Sustainability Team and the Learning and Development Team, to examine opportunities to better-embed sustainability into training for new and existing employees. This will build on elearning opportunities, which have already been undertaken by certain groups over the current reporting period: EMG members have undergone climate literacy training provided in-house using materials from Transport Scotland, and Procurement colleagues have undertaken the Climate & Procurement Forum's 'Climate Literacy eLearning for Procurers'.

Section 6: Research and Monitoring

“Describe any research activities that your organisation has undertaken that may be relevant to biodiversity or nature.”

While RoS’ day-to-day activities present limited opportunities to contribute to research and monitoring on a scale that would benefit wider society, some of the activities detailed elsewhere in this report are underpinned by research and monitoring. An example of our monitoring work is that corporate carbon emissions are recorded monthly and reported quarterly to our Executive Management Team via our internal Carbon Footprint KPI reporting process. Benefit realisation work has also begun recently, to more closely examine the carbon reduction achieved by specific projects. Colleagues have also been encouraged to monitor activity relating to the new habitat boxes described in Section 2 and we recently undertook a collaborative exercise with NatureScot to consider opportunities for green infrastructure at our headquarters (see Sections 2 and 4 for further details).

In addition, during 2023 we signed a Social Impact Pledge making a public commitment to investigate opportunities to use our unique position within Scottish society to encourage and support others to achieve net zero emissions. While this work is still in the early stages, it is anticipated that carbon sequestration via nature-based solutions will be a key focus. This will build on work previously carried out to explore opportunities to make better use of the greenspace data we hold, to benefit the wider society.

“What follow-up actions or monitoring have you undertaken to assess the impacts of the actions you have taken? How have you measured this?”

Please see above.

Section 7: Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges

“Describe your organisation’s main achievements for biodiversity over the reporting period and what you are most proud of (this can include processes, plans, projects, partnerships, events and actions).”

We consider the following achievements, detailed in the previous sections, to be our ‘top 5’:

On-site biodiversity enhancements including wildflower planting at our headquarters

- Introduction of regular, in-depth colleague communications including the creation of ‘Nature’s Guide’
- Extensive work on corporate carbon reduction
- Consideration of our role in supporting biodiversity conservation in wider society
- Partnership working with Mitie, NatureScot and SVP tenants

“Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main challenges over the next three years?”

As a public body, we face similar budget pressures to others in the Scottish public sector. We also face similar challenges in the elements of our work that involve relying on others, who in turn may be facing their own resourcing challenges. As stated previously, our organisational remit presents limited opportunities in comparison to other public bodies. However, we are committed to doing what we can with the opportunities available to us, and we are committed to thinking creatively to extend these opportunities where possible.

