



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scottish Parliament Biodiversity Statement 2021



parliament.scot

Foreword by the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Alison Johnstone MSP

Drawing inspiration from the surrounding landscape, the flower paintings by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and the upturned boats on the seashore, Enric Miralles, one of the world's premier architects, developed a design for the new Scottish Parliament that he said was a building "growing out of the land".

His vision was for a landscape planted with indigenous Scottish wildflowers, trees, and shrubs. He specified the use of wild grasses and trees already found in the area as well as trees representing those found across Scotland, tying in with and connecting to the aesthetic of the adjacent Salisbury crags, and representing the wider Scottish land.

The Parliament is striving to ensure that its grounds, and the way they are managed and used, have a positive impact in tackling the related biodiversity and climate emergencies.

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body continues to maintain its grounds with the aim of supporting and encouraging the biodiversity of the area.

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We published a statement during 2018/19 demonstrating our compliance with the biodiversity duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 which places a statutory duty on all public sector bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity.

Here we set out the progress we have made and our ongoing plans to enhance the biodiversity around the Scottish Parliament.



Biodiversity Management at the Scottish Parliament

All living things create a balance in their own communities, or ecosystems, and it is this variety of life that we call biodiversity.

Biodiversity is vital for our survival and is a key measure of the health of our planet. It is therefore important that the Scottish Parliament can grow and support biodiversity in any way that it can.

The Scottish Parliament is built on a brownfield site, the site of the old Scottish & Newcastle brewery, and so avoided the use of greenfield space. Since its arrival the Parliament has increased the biodiversity of the site.



Landscaping

To realise the conceptual idea of the Parliament building growing out of the land, many of the structures have been turfed and 'concrete branches' covered in grass.

As well as the areas of public landscaping, native meadow grasses, similar to those found in Holyrood Park, also partly cover the Parliament's underground car park and basement structures. The landscape is largely grass with granite seats built into the contours and areas of paving.

A notable recent project involved the planting of fifteen new trees around the Parliament perimeter.

Soft landscaping, such as by means of trees, performs a valuable function at many levels - it supports biodiversity, especially if it is local species that are planted. Grasses and shrubs are as effective at converting carbon dioxide as are trees. Soft landscaping has the added advantage of reducing the movement of groundwater to minimise erosion.

No pesticides, fertilisers, or peat are used onsite by our contractors.

Left. Aerial view of the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh looking from Salisbury Crags over the ponds and landscaping on Horse Wynd.



Wildflower planting

Bees, butterflies, and other insects rely on wildflowers for vital food supplies. Wildflower meadows have decreased dramatically in Scotland, and so the planting of wildflowers in urban areas is a great help to wildlife. As well as making it a pleasant environment for people to be in, it also reflects a continued dedication on the part of the Scottish Parliament to support and encourage biodiversity.

A large area of the Scottish Parliament's landscape area has been planted with indigenous Scottish wildflowers, shrubs, wild grasses, and trees. The wildflower meadows have been designed to contrast with the cut turf lawns and feature plants such as Common Rock rose, Sticky Catchfly, Dropwort, and Meadow Cranesbill.

Working with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Parliament staff volunteers have planted Foxglove, Red and White Campion, Viper's Bugloss and Cowslip. We plant Yellow Rattle seeds to help control the grass and give other wild plants the opportunity to flourish. Our wildflower planting increases biodiversity in the area, providing a habitat which helps to attract increased numbers of insects during the summer months.

Right. Grasses and wildflowers in the Scottish Parliament Grounds.



Trees

The Parliament grounds are home to a variety of trees, from large species such as Oak, to smaller ones like Birch, Apple, and Rowan.

The Isle of Arran is home to three Rowan tree species, Arran Whitebeam, Arran Service-tree, and Catacol Whitebeam, all of which are unique to the Isle. These species have evolved on the island since the last glaciation, about 10,000 years ago. They are among the most endangered tree species in the world. In partnership with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Arran Rowan trees have been planted on the Parliament estate, to help protect and save the species.

It is critical that all trees are preserved and sustainably managed, not least in urban settings, they give us oxygen, store carbon, stabilise the soil, and support wildlife.

We will increase wildflower planting in the area around the Parliament's beehives.



Butterfly Project



In 2005, the Northern Brown Argus butterfly, 'Edinburgh's butterfly', was rediscovered at Holyrood, having disappeared by 1869 due to over-zealous collecting and land use changes at Holyrood, including the building of a road through the last remaining population strongholds of the species.

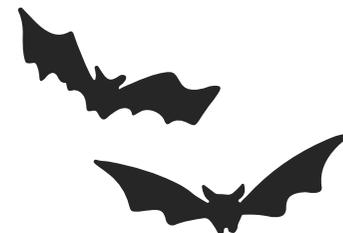
Conservation of the Northern Brown Argus has been helped by the 'Square Metre for Butterflies' project. A 'Square Metre for Butterflies' is a partnership between the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and Butterfly Conservation Scotland. The project involves the planting of the Common Rock rose, the favourite food plant of the butterfly caterpillars, on green roofs surrounding Arthur's Seat and further afield to encourage the existing population in the Royal Park to expand and colonise in those newly created habitats.

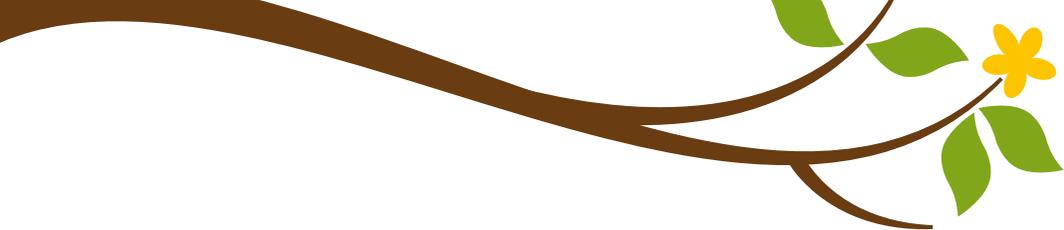
Common Rock rose is planted on one of our green roofs, helping to increase the number of Northern Brown Argus caterpillars.



Bird and Bat Boxes

Several bird and bat boxes have been installed in the canopies of trees around the Parliament estate, with a review and plans for additional boxes to be installed. A survey of bats will also be conducted in the grounds.





Beehives

As the world's most important pollinator of food crops, bees are vitally important. It is estimated that one third of the food that we consume each day relies on pollination mainly by bees, but also by other insects, birds, and bats.

In 2014 the Scottish Parliament became the first legislature in the UK to have beehives. We now have 12 beehives onsite. The bees have good access to all the foliage across Holyrood Park and Arthur's Seat, as well as the plants and flowers within the Parliament's Gardens and wildflower meadows. The bees and beehives are managed on our behalf by a family run, local business. The Smith hive, a hive suitable for Scottish weather conditions is used at the Scottish Parliament.

The beeswax (which is a by-product of beekeeping) is used to fill the Great Seal of Scotland and seal acts of the Scottish Parliament.

Waste and Recycling

The Scottish Parliament has a comprehensive recycling system in place, with our aim to be a Zero Waste Parliament, in other words to eliminate the waste that ends up in landfill. In line with Scotland's Circular Economy strategy, we are making the move from 'take, make and dispose' to 'reduce, reuse, repair and recycle'.

The Parliament's green waste is composted and applied to grazing fields in the West Lothian area.



Right. Former Presiding Officer Tricia Marwick holding a frame of bees.





Catering

Our catering contractor demonstrates best practice in support of the Scottish Parliament and the enhancement of biodiversity. Their responsible purchasing policy includes only purchasing sustainable palm oil, the coffee they purchase is triple certified, sourced from the Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade and organic certified growers. They actively promote schemes, such as providing staff with the opportunity to collect used coffee grounds for garden composting, helping reduce the onsite waste stream. They purchase 'wonky vegetables' to use in their food production which historically were rejected in food procurement, ending up as waste.

Our caterers encourage a move away from single-use plastics, for instance the introduction of a levy on single-use hot drink cups, in turn helping to reduce water and chemical consumption within the dishwash area.

Working with our contractor we are looking at additional ways to improve how the catering services operate sustainably, for instance how to further minimise food waste and reduce single-use plastics.



Sustainable Procurement

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body has a policy to minimise adverse impacts on the environment by carrying out its purchasing activities in an environmentally responsible way.

A key aim is the review of the contracts and suppliers to Parliament to establish the impact on biodiversity of the Parliament's purchased goods and services. This includes how we can maximise the value from biological resources in our supply chains and minimise negative ecological impacts in these supply chains through sustainable procurement practices, as well as how we can maximise the Community Benefits requirement in our Landscape contract in partnership with our contractor.



Interpretation

It is important that we engage with the public and visitors to the site at Holyrood, with the aim to increase the level of understanding and connection between people and nature. We will increase the number of interpretation boards in the landscape areas, providing additional information on the variety of flora and fauna around Parliament.

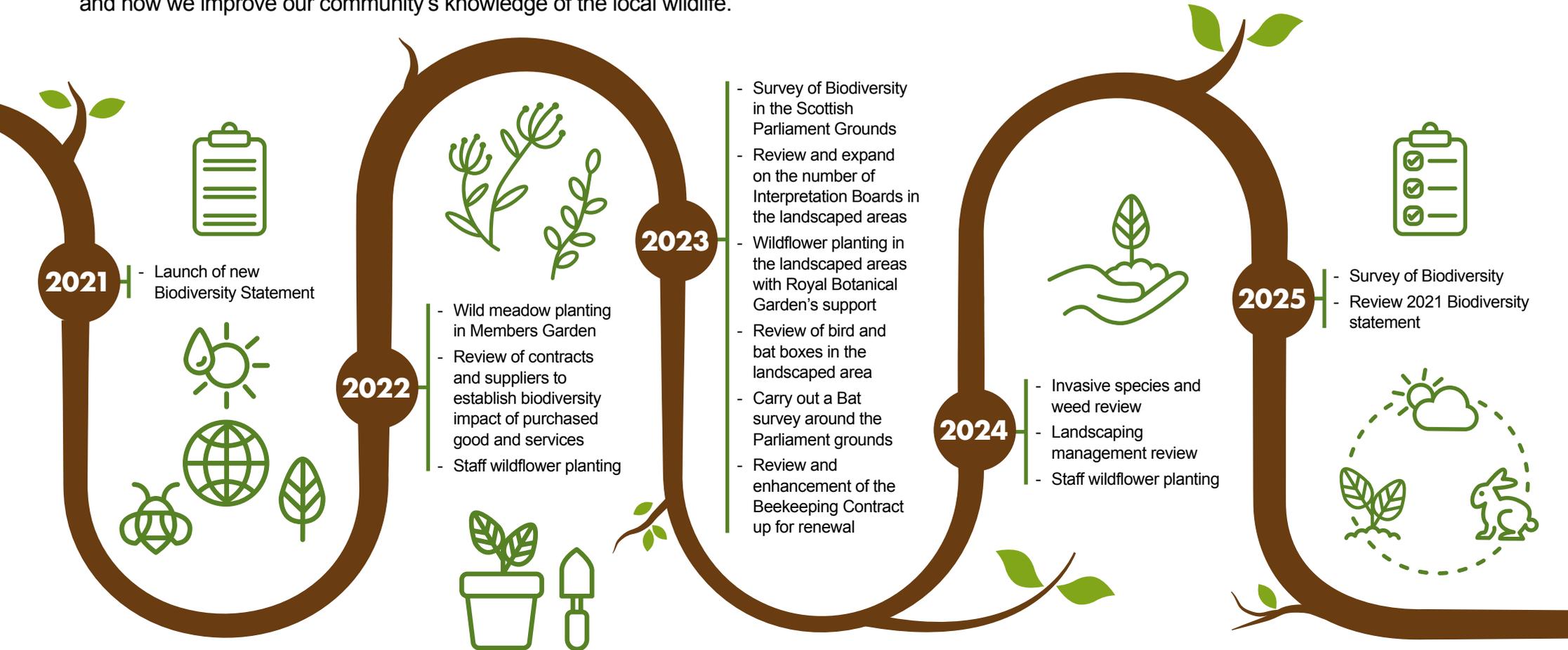
Sustain Network

The Sustain Network is an informal staff network which provides a forum for staff interested in environmental and sustainability issues to discuss and promote more sustainable working practices and to help the Parliament reduce its environmental impact and emissions. The Sustain Network seeks to promote opportunities for staff to learn more about sustainability issues and what actions they can take personally and collectively as a workplace to improve biodiversity. The Network also aims to provide opportunities for staff to volunteer in activities that enable staff to contribute to biodiversity enhancement while accessing nature and improving wellbeing.



Biodiversity Route Map

How we enhance and support the biodiversity on our site, how we can minimise our impact on biodiversity globally, and how we improve our community's knowledge of the local wildlife.





Key Actions and Deliverables for 2022-2025



Survey of current plant life, followed by additional wildflower planting in the Parliament's grounds



Invasive species and weed review



Conduct a survey of biodiversity in the Parliament's grounds



Landscape management review



Review of bird and bat boxes in the landscape area, additional boxes



Review of the Parliament's contracts and suppliers to establish impact on biodiversity



Conduct a bat survey in the grounds



Development of a 'Circular Economy' approach with the emphasis on waste prevention and using resources more efficiently



Review and enhancement of the Beekeeping contract



Expand interpretation boards, additional information for visitors on the biodiversity in the area

