

**REPORT TO: PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE –
3 DECEMBER 2001**

ARTS AND HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 17 DECEMBER 2001

**REPORT ON: RIVER HABITATS SURVEY OF DIGHTY BURN AND ITS
TRIBUTARIES**

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION

REPORT NO: 705-2001

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To report back the key findings of the River Habitats Survey of the Dighty Burn and its tributaries.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committees:

- a Agree that the findings are taken into account in the Review of the Dundee Local Plan 1998. This will ensure better integration between biodiversity conservation, open space management and maintenance, watercourse management and drainage systems, public access, and development within the Dighty catchment.
- b Agree that the Council's Public Open Space Strategy Implementation Group has regard to the findings, to promote sympathetic management and maintenance of open space within and adjacent to the Dighty.
- c Agree that those recommendations concerning the enhancement of public access are brought to the attention of the Council's Paths for All Implementation Group.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications associated with this Report.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The River Habitats Survey completes the resurvey of non-statutory Wildlife Sites designated in the Urban Nature Conservation Subject Local Plan 1995, as a second phase to the Habitats and Species Survey 2000. It provides state of the environment information including the physical characteristics of the burn channel, banks and adjacent areas; habitats and species diversity/rarity; ecological communities and habitat continuity. This will assist the future management of the Dighty catchment.

4.2 The Survey appraises the conservation status of the Dighty to ensure its appropriate protection through the Local Plan. It also recommends ways in which the community

value of the Dighty can be enhanced, with particular emphasis on public access improvements and habitat creation or restoration.

4.3 The following key themes of Local Agenda 21 are of direct relevance to the Survey:

- The diversity of nature is valued and protected,
- Diversity and local distinctiveness are valued and protected,
- Places, spaces and objects combine meaning and beauty with utility,
- Opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation are readily accessible to all, and
- Health is protected by creating safe, clean, pleasant environments and health services which emphasise prevention of illness as well as care for the sick.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Dighty Environment Group was approached during the Survey to accommodate local knowledge and obtain feedback on the future management and protection of the area. Wider public consultation will take place during the Review of the Dundee Local Plan 1998.

6 BACKGROUND

6.1 The Dighty watercourse and adjoining land is designated as a "Category A" Wildlife Site and Wildlife Corridor in the Urban Nature Conservation Subject Local Plan (1995) and the Dundee Local Plan (1998). "Category A" Wildlife Sites represent the higher-grade nature conservation sites of local importance within the Council's administrative area. Wildlife Corridors support the movement of species between the network of Wildlife Sites across Dundee. There is a significant overlap between the Dighty Wildlife Corridor and open space allocations in the Local Plan.

6.2 The River Habitats Survey was commissioned to revisit the conservation status of the Dighty and its tributaries, and to define the physical parameters of any revised non-statutory designations that currently apply. This required assessment of the ecological value of the Dighty catchment including:

- flowering plant and other notable species present, their relative abundance and rarity,
- ecological communities adjacent to the watercourses,
- identifying physical barriers to habitat continuity, along with suggestions for remedial action,
- current habitat management practices.

6.3 The community value of the Dighty was also assessed in respect of public access and accessibility, public amenity and education facilities, and the extent of community based habitat enhancement or clean up activities.

6.4 The fieldwork was undertaken in July and August this year by "NAIAD" Environmental Consultancy. The Consultant liaised with a variety of Council Officers, Abertay University, the Dighty Environment Group and the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership to ensure a multi-disciplinary approach.

6.5 The Survey Report is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides details of the brief, methodology, key findings and recommendations. Part 2 represents the supporting

technical information, including habitat survey maps, site descriptions and species lists for significant areas of habitat, and site management opportunities. A composite opportunities and constraints map has also been produced to highlight key issues graphically. Data has been fed into a national database network administered by the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

6.6 The Survey highlights five significant areas of semi-natural habitat with sufficient nature conservation interest to warrant non-statutory designation as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). A plan highlighting these areas will be displayed on the night of the Committees. They are as follows:

- the Dighty, Fithie and Murroes Burns
- land north west of Trottick,
- open space south of Longhaugh Quarry,
- open space west of Baldovie Industrial Estate, and
- land east of Panmurefield.

Whilst flowering plant data collected by the Consultant supports recommended SINC status for the latter four areas, the Council will require detailed fisheries' data from SEPA before it considers SINC designation for the Dighty, Fithie and Murroes Burns through the Local Plan Review.

6.7 These recommended sites are additional to the 7 sites adjoining the Dighty and its tributaries that were recommended for SINC designation in the Habitats and Species Survey 2000:

- Bentley's Fields, Marsh and Treeline, Trottick;
- Trottick Ponds Local Nature Reserve;
- Dens O'Mains;
- Longhaugh Quarry;
- Dundee Environmental Society Site;
- Pitkerro House Woods; and
- Drumsturdy Pond/Woods

6.8 No European protected flowering plant species were found within the survey area. The more natural, gently flowing sections of the Dighty are characterised by marginal swamp vegetation. The faster flowing sections typically have narrow wooded banks with broad-leaved species. Several areas adjacent to the floodplain have swamp, tall ruderal and scrub vegetation, succeeding to semi-natural broad-leaved woodland. Sizeable areas of wet woodland are very rare within the survey area, the exception being on land north west of Trottick, which contains significant willow and alder species.

6.9 The semi-natural areas referred to in paragraphs 6.6 and 6.7 above are interspersed with areas of open space, the vast majority of which are amenity grassland and of relatively low nature conservation value. However, with sympathetic management these amenity grassland areas could make a greater contribution to the biodiversity of the Dighty catchment, acting as corridors to assist species movement and ecological transfer. One way of achieving sympathetic management may be to reduce the frequency of grass cutting.

- 6.10 The Consultant has recommended that the Wildlife Corridor designation should relate to the Dighty, Gelly, Fithie and Murroes Burns, generally extending a minimum of 15 metres either side of the waters' edge to coincide with the functional flood plain and areas of open space. The Local Plan Review should consider whether the Wildlife Corridor designation should be retained, or whether revised open space policies can effectively achieve the same objectives.
- 6.11 Integrated drainage systems serving residential and employment areas upstream speed up water flows and can impact on river hydrology downstream, causing flooding in low-lying areas. Channel realignment and reshaping (using revetments and bank stabilisation or enforcement) is likely to impact on the physical characteristics of the Dighty. In turn, this could destroy marginal and aquatic vegetation that supports the freshwater life.
- 6.12 Under the provisions of the draft finalised Dundee and Angus Structure Plan, land will only be considered for development purposes within areas at risk from flooding where it can be demonstrated that there are no suitable alternatives, the intended development can be protected in an environmentally sensitive way without causing problems elsewhere and without compromising other policies in the Plan. This approach will be reflected in the Local Plan Review. Land at Pitkerro, north of Arbroath Road may provide future opportunities for flood containment, particularly within the natural floodplain, eg Sainsbury's development.
- 6.13 There are a number of opportunities for public access to be designed, planned and negotiated to help improve the community value of the Dighty. This includes land immediately adjacent to the Dighty between Baldovie Road and Balmossie Bridge.
- 6.14 Other issues raised by the Consultant include diffuse pollution, litter and fly tipping and vandalism.
- 6.15 It is important to emphasise that semi-natural habitats do not stop at administrative boundaries. Two semi-natural areas recommended for SINC designation in paragraph 6.6 above extend into Angus Council's administrative area. Upstream management of the Dighty will have a direct bearing on its physical characteristics downstream. Liaison between Dundee and Angus Councils, SEPA and SNH will be essential to assist the sustainable management of the Dighty watercourse and its tributaries. The Consultant has recommended that the City Council considers the preparation of a Catchment Management Plan for the Dighty and its tributaries, in liaison with partner agencies.
- 6.16 The key findings will be subject to discussion both internally and externally, via the Local Plan Review consultation process. Appropriate land use policies will be brought forward to regulate future management and maintenance of the Dighty catchment. Particular regard will be given to promoting better integration of biodiversity conservation, open space management and maintenance, sustainable watercourse management and drainage systems, public access and development within and adjacent to the Dighty. Key issues will be raised as appropriate via the Council's Public Open Space Strategy Implementation Group, the Paths for All Implementation Group, the Local Agenda 21 Officer Group, Angus Council and SEPA.

7 CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Support Services, Director of Corporate Planning, Director of Environment and Consumer Protection and the Director of Neighbourhood Resources and Development have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this Report.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 Planning and Transportation Committee Report No 330-2001 provides the background to the Consultant's River Habitats Survey.

Mike Galloway
Director of Planning & Transportation

Keith Winter
Policy and Regeneration Manager

22 November 2001

KW/LAH/LP16

Dundee City Council
Tayside House
Dundee