

March 2022



Survey of Scottish Local Planning Authority Ecological Expertise and Capacity

We recently conducted a survey in collaboration with the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE) to establish current Local Planning Authority (LPA) ecological expertise and capacity in Scotland.

We received responses from 26 of the 32 Local Planning Authorities and 2 National Park Authorities in Scotland (76%). We had multiple responses from some LPAs with 36 responses in total. Respondents occupied a range of job titles in LPAs, including but not limited to Planning Officers, Ecology/Biodiversity Officers, Team Leaders and Development Management Officers.

[Read the full report](#)

Chartered Institute of Ecology and
Environmental Management

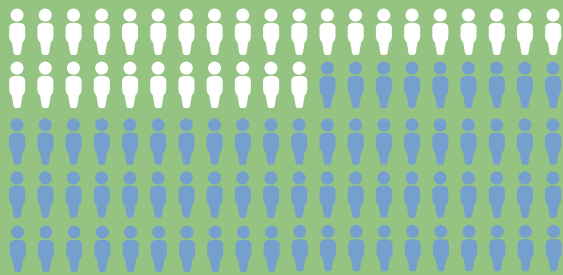
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Asked whether current resources will be adequate to assess whether an application will deliver positive effects for biodiversity under NPF4

22%

Said they have no current ecological resource or expertise available

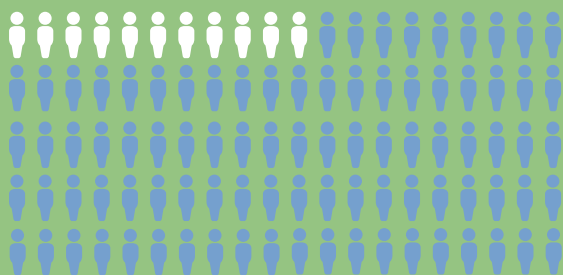
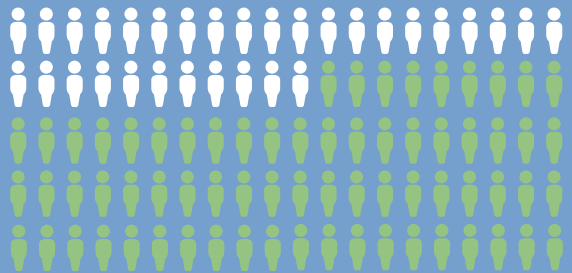


31%

Said they do not have adequate capacity to deal with the existing planning workload

31%

Said only if other biodiversity work within the council is reduced

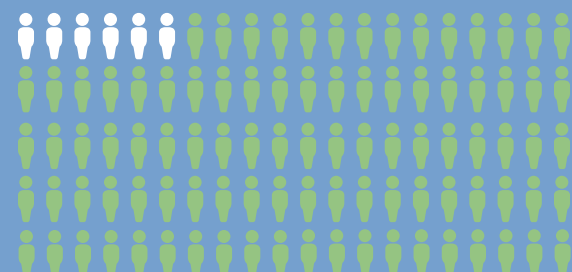


11%

Said current expertise and resources will be adequate

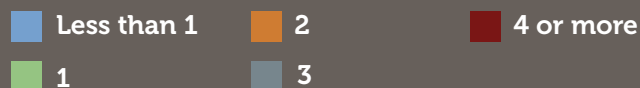
6%

Said capacity is increasing so will be able to provide more support and advice for planners and increased scrutiny of planning applications

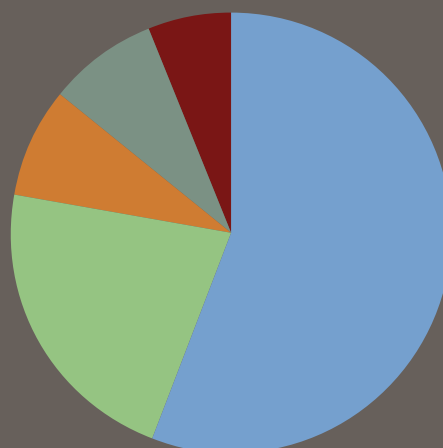


Capacity is very low; **over half of respondents (56%)** said that there is less than 1 full time equivalent (FTE) ecologist available for planning work.

Planning case work is only one component across a very wide portfolio of work, with capacity stretched thinly or areas of work not addressed.

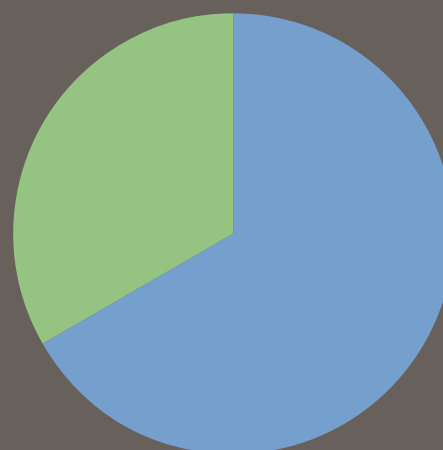


Current Ecological Capacity
(FTE ecologists available for planning work)



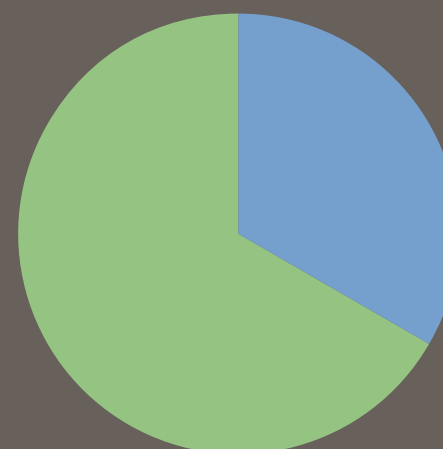
Two thirds of respondents rated lack of enforcement staff to ensure compliance as a high or very high risk to their LPA's ability to implement the forthcoming NPF4 and Positive Effects for Biodiversity.

It was also very apparent that planning applications are dealt with differently by each LPA in Scotland. Some LPAs have ecologists that routinely comment on planning applications whereas one fifth reported that they have no access to ecological expertise.



One-third of respondents said there had been cutbacks to ecological provision within their LPA (either staffing or resources) over the past 5 years

with many others citing that cutbacks had happened prior to this. Encouragingly a few respondents reported that there has been a slight increase in personnel in the last few years.



Without in-house ecological expertise in local authorities, positive effects for biodiversity cannot be assessed and delivered in a consistent way throughout Scotland.

What Action is Needed

Respondents to the survey called for the following Support and Guidance from Government:

Capacity and Expertise

Need in house ecological expertise and qualified planning staff with relevant biodiversity knowledge across most Local Authorities

- One respondent called for “resources to create staff posts to deliver on biodiversity gain, planning expertise and policy shifts” stating “we’re woefully under resourced.”
- More resources for Planning Enforcement Officers to ensure tree protection and biodiversity enhancement measures are realised.
- Upskilling via targeted cross-cutting training.

Policy

Policy needs clarity, consistency, measurability and integration with other land use policies

- Statutory backing for biodiversity enhancement in NFP4 supported by a realistic way of implementing this, for example, adoption of a standardised approach using Biodiversity Net Gain metrics that can be consistently applied across Scotland.
- Increased objectivity that comes with net gain type tools. The fear is that without this, every case becomes a battle where LPA’s are having to have significant intervention every time to secure the appropriate enhancements.
- Clear guidance on how positive effects should be measured, expectations from developers and how to monitor post implementation of any enhancement. What is appropriate/expected at what scale is really left open to interpretation.

Links to other policies

NPF4 must be fully integrated with other policies affecting biodiversity and land use.

- A requirement for a clear, resourced biodiversity strategy, and understanding of the different positions of Local Authorities.
- There must be a legislative requirement for LBAP’s and these must be funded.
- Greater recognition of and statutory protection for priority habitats and LNCS.
- Update of very outdated European protected species guidance.

Based on the findings of this report, we recommend that each Local Authority should have, as a bare minimum, ecologists and environmental planners who are adequately resourced and trained. The expertise and expectations of planning and ecological staff needs to be clear so that individuals are not having to make professional judgements outside their area of expertise and competence.

Training provisions are being developed across the sector, and access to these must be supported. CIEEM, NatureScot, RTPI, Landscape Institute, Scottish Government, Local Records Centres were all listed as potential delivery mechanisms for providing training, with joint training delivery proposed by some.