

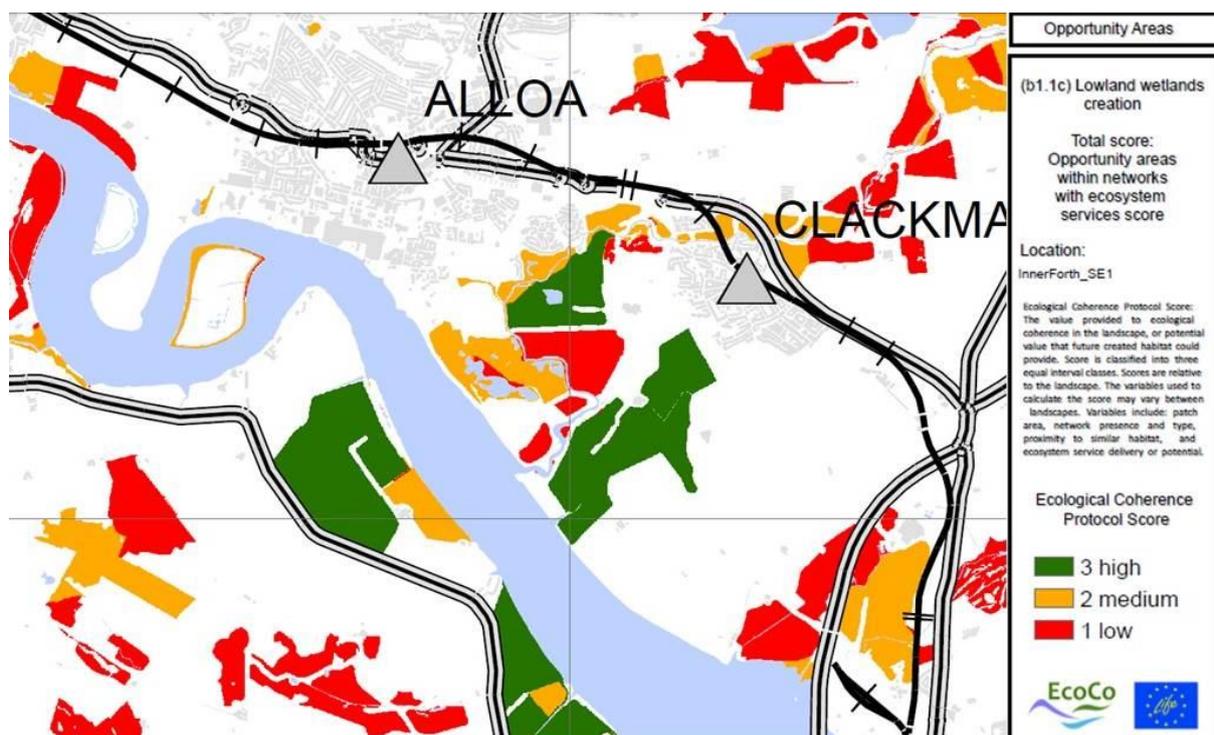
## EcoCo LIFE Scotland - Implementation of integrated habitat networks to improve ecological coherence across the CSGN LIFE13 BIO/UK/000428

### Key lessons learnt

- **“Ecological coherence” is a challenging yet useful concept to apply in practice;** it has drawn partners together to consider a more meaningful way to prioritise actions and think through aims and objectives, and establish a central focus beyond mere site-focused interventions.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency has to be kept in balance!** The rigour of scientific and intellectual analysis has to be tempered with the need of such a project to deliver practical and timely actions on the ground.
- **Communication is vital.** Partnership approaches can yield some really rich results in joined-up thinking at a number of levels provided that communication whether through face-to-face, workshops or well-structured e-dialogue is maintained.
- **Project management structures are important** and should be in place to achieve the level of scrutiny, reporting and control required, but should be flexible enough to allow partners freedom to deliver and accommodate agility and changes. Don't let the tail wag the dog!

### Background

**EcoCo LIFE** aims to improve ecological coherence and the climate resilience of habitats and species across the Central Scotland Green Network area (**CSGN**) by addressing habitat fragmentation. The CSGN area is Scotland's most heavily fragmented lowland area comprising 13% of Scotland's land area, 70% of Scotland's population and most of Scotland's industry and built environment. Hence there are multiple demands on the area's land use and significant pressures on the CSGN's ecological coherence. The project will identify the most beneficial places to implement habitat



Inner Forth Landscape Lowland Wetlands Opportunity Map © Scottish Natural Heritage

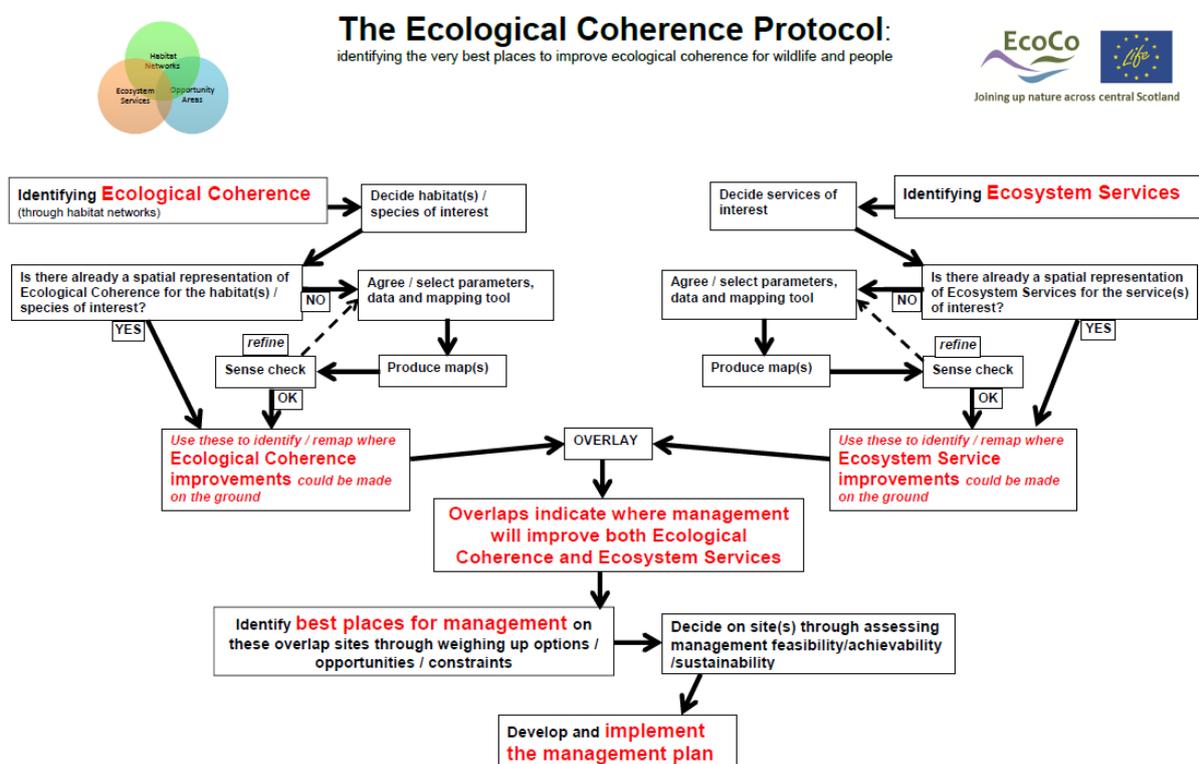
restoration, creation and improvement through application of an Ecological Coherence Protocol. Management interventions in these areas will make habitats better connected, more diverse, and improved in quality and functionality across landscapes. EcoCo specifically addresses four broad habitat types; peatlands, wetlands, freshwater and open mosaic habitat (brownfields, vacant and agricultural land). The project comprises 12 management zones containing a number of sites, each of which can be viewed as a “project”.

The Ecological Coherence Protocol assesses potential sites through habitat networks and opportunity areas GIS mapping and modelling, evaluation of wider ecosystem benefits and socio-economic impacts to prioritise places for practical intervention. It has been developed using science and stakeholder information and its outputs are expressed as maps and project-level peer reviewed evaluations. EcoCo takes a broader “landscape scale” approach to address the impacts of demands on land for development and other uses, and a loss of good quality habitat especially outwith the Natura 2000 network and other national designated areas.

Funded under LIFE+ Biodiversity, EcoCo LIFE is coordinated by SNH in partnership with Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, East Ayrshire Coalfields Environment Initiative, RSPB, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

### How does the project anticipate its sustainability once EU funding has stopped?

The impact of on-the-ground project actions is intended to endure well beyond the investment period of the project and so monitoring of project sites is planned to continue well into the future. Project actions such as re-wetting of bogs, raising water levels in drained wetlands, reconnecting floodplain and reprofiling land forms will create conditions for the desired restorative measures to happen. The project is informed through medium to long term management plans and land management agreements with landowners.



Schematic of the Ecological Coherence Protocol © Scottish Natural Heritage

Volunteers are a key component for ongoing hands-on management work and have been useful in the project's monitoring aspects. This will be continued ensuring that volunteer events are stimulating, engaging and useful.

Many of the partners have a dynamic, creative approach to funding and it is expected that on a project by project basis within each management zone, partners will continue to secure necessary funding where required.

### How will the project ensure the results are replicated / transferred across the UK and Europe?

Engagement with other LIFE projects is a core component of EcoCo and networking with similar projects is built into the project. Dissemination to the rest of the UK and EU through the website and one-to-one contact is an ongoing project activity that has engendered a number of enquiries. EcoCo plans an exchange with a suitable "sister" EU LIFE project in 2017.

Scottish Natural Heritage is adopting the GIS team and others allied to EcoCo's efforts to hard wire methods and techniques for ongoing application to landscape scale conservation approaches. This adds to the multiple contacts SNH has with others in sharing and promoting the project's innovations. The combined reach of EcoCo partners throughout the UK and beyond has been evident in promoting the projects findings. EcoCo held an interim conference that had representation from UK national institutions and Natural England in June 2016, and plans a final conference with a broader reach in summer of 2018.

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Grangepans Falkirk wildflower meadow  
© Scottish Natural Heritage



East Ayrshire Schoolchildren Bog "star species" exercise © East Ayrshire Coalfields Environment Initiative



Grangepans volunteers planting plugs © Buglife