

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES**

Decision Made: 04 November 2011

#### **MAIDSTONE LOCAL BIO DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider the adoption of the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

##### **Decision Made**

That the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) be adopted and Maidstone's Biodiversity Projects Plan, as set out below, be instigated.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

Biodiversity (Biological Diversity) describes the amazing richness and variety of life around us. Biodiversity refers to diversity between and within ecosystems and habitats, the variety of different species and also to genetic variation within individual species. The intricate network of ecosystems, habitats and species comprising biodiversity provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It is the most important indicator of the state of our environment.

Maidstone borough is rich in biodiversity and contains 10% of the county broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland representing 12% of the borough's land cover. Maidstone's landscapes have influenced and shaped local culture. Maidstone borough is made up of characteristic areas defined by differences in rock type, topography, soils, slope and drainage, which in turn resulted in a great variety of habitats. Most of Maidstone falls in to the North Downs, Wealden Greensand and the Low Weald landscape natural areas. In both rural and urban areas wildlife makes an important contribution to the quality of life. Biodiversity conservation is central to maintain a healthy countryside and townscape.

The past ten years have seen significant changes relating to the environment particularly in terms of planning policy, legislation, and practical action and the need to balance social, economic and environmental aspirations. This Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan provides the opportunity to review current activities and issues, identify aims and set specific objectives and targets for action by a wide range of internal and external partners. It provides a much-needed overarching strategy for everyone involved in safeguarding and enhancing Maidstone's natural environment.

##### **The Biodiversity Framework**

The National Response: In 1992 Biodiversity became a global agenda when 150 governments signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It called for national strategies and action plans to be created and enforced which would conserve, protect

and enhance biological diversity and was the first time a legal framework was applied to biodiversity.

In 1994 the 'UK Biodiversity Action Plan' (UK BAP) was launched, endorsing a multi-organisational approach to biodiversity conservation with an agreed set of targets and objectives. The overall goal of the UK BAP is to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms.

The UK BAP main objectives are:-

1. To conserve and enhance:
  - The overall populations and natural ranges of native species and the quality and range of wildlife habitats;
  - Internationally important habitats and species;
  - Habitats and species (natural and managed) that are characteristic of local areas;
  - Natural and semi-natural areas that have declined in recent years.
2. To increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving biodiversity.
3. To contribute to the conservation of biodiversity on a European and global scale.

The following principles apply to the national UK action plan and are also applicable at a local level:

- The sustainable use of biological resources;
- The cautious use of non-renewable resources;
- The promotion of a multi-agency approach to biodiversity conservation, including individuals and communities and not just government led. This is being championed through Local Biodiversity Action Plans;
- Biological conservation should be based upon a sound knowledge base;
- The conservation of biodiversity should be integrated within government programmes, policy and action
- Decisions should be guided by the precautionary principle, that is, where decisions are complex or insufficient knowledge or information exists to understand biodiversity impact, then precautionary conservation measures are necessary.

Following the publication of 'Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan', the UK Biodiversity Steering Group was established to advise the government on how to fulfil its commitment to delivering the Plan.

In 1995 'Biodiversity: the UK Steering Group Report – meeting the Rio challenge' was produced, which set out how to achieve this through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process. The most recent list of priority species and habitats was produced in 2007 and contains 1149 species and 65 habitats. The Steering Group also set up guidelines, with the Local Authority Association and the Local Government Board that could be used at a local level. Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) is one of 152 Local Biodiversity Action Plans in England.

The Regional Response:

The Maidstone borough forms part of the County of Kent in the South-East region. The Kent Biodiversity Partnership support biodiversity conservation via the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (Kent BAP). The Kent Biodiversity Partnership forms part of the larger South-East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF).

The South-East Biodiversity Strategy targets and strategic biodiversity opportunity map and the Kent BAP targets and actions are currently under revision, however through consultation the Maidstone LBAP will contribute towards these in a local context hierarchy linking into county, regional and national action plans.

In 2003 the Kent Biodiversity Partnership released an audit of the distribution of UK priority habitats in Kent. This audit contributed to the Kent BAP and listed 28 priority habitats of importance to the County, of which 27 were of UK priority importance.

Eight Local performance Indicators have been developed to examine Biodiversity with respect to Local Authority actions by the National Audit Office and the Development and Improvement Agency. The Maidstone LBAP would improve on four of these local performance indicators.

#### Maidstone LBAP

This strategy and action plan for biodiversity allows the council to be strategic in determining where to apply its own resources in delivery. The development of the Maidstone's Biodiversity Project Plan is a leading and novel approach at local authority level, in that it clearly defines a programme of projects that cover a range of work including research, monitoring, protocol development and capital one-off site projects. These projects show how the Council will lead and be directly involved in protecting and enhancing the borough's biodiversity and raising awareness of the issues. Maidstone's Biodiversity Projects Plan clearly describes the localness of our approach as a governing body in the biodiversity framework highlighting our innovative approach to delivering better services to local people

The complete LBAP comprises of the following sections:

- I. Background and Introduction
- II. HAP 2: Lowland and Dry Acid Grassland and Heath
- III. HAP 3: Lowland Meadows
- IV. HAP 4: Lowland Beach and Yew Woodland
- V. HAP 5: Wet Woodlands
- VI. HAP 6: Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland
- VII. HAP 7: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland
- VIII. HAP 8: Traditional Orchards
- IX. HAP 10: Ponds
- X. HAP 11: Rivers
- XI. HAP 12: Urban Green Space
- XII. Biodiversity Projects

A copy of the complete LBAP document is on the Parks Pages of the MBC website

([http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/leisure\\_and\\_culture/parks\\_and\\_open\\_spaces.aspx](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/parks_and_open_spaces.aspx) )

The Maidstone LBAP has been produced jointly by Maidstone Borough Council Parks and Leisure Section and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP). MVCP are partly funded by Maidstone Borough Council and provide expertise and project management in biodiversity and environmental projects. As MVCP possess the relevant expertise and experience it is proposed that they continue to manage the LBAP and also implement the Biodiversity Projects on behalf of the Council. Much of the work carried out will be through volunteers, these are currently recruited locally by MVCP. There will be opportunities for local residents to get involved with the management and maintenance of their local wildlife sites.

The mapping used in the LBAP showing Local Wildlife Sites was produced in 2008 and consequently some sites are not shown. Kent Wildlife Trust are currently updating this series of maps and these will be added to the LBAP once available.

The production and implementation of a LBAP was an objective of the Green Spaces Strategy 2005, and as such £15,000 was kept in reserve from the Capital budget to enable the implementation of the LBAP and Biodiversity Projects. It is proposed that this money is used by MVCP to not only carry out the projects but also to attract additional funding. A number of other longer term projects are identified in the LBAP and if additional funding could be found in the future these projects would also be initiated.

The table below identifies the projects that the £15,000 MBC funding will be used to implement. Projects identified in 2010 have already been completed and funded from existing budgets.

As well as identifying how available funding with partnership funding will be used to implement projects in the borough, the table also shows how other projects such as the Mote Park Regeneration Project are contributing towards reaching Biodiversity targets.

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) along with the Parks and Leisure Manager Jason Taylor and myself, discussed the Bio Diversity Action Plan following its inclusion in the Forward Plan (May to August 2011) on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2011. To enable any feedback received from COSC to be included in the LBAP the decision to adopt the Action Plan was delayed until now. The following recommendations came from COSC:

- The Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan should be adopted; and
- The work and achievements of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership should be promoted in the Borough Update.

Project	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
<b>MBC Funding</b>					
Weaving Heath					
TAVR Nature Area	£500				<b>£500</b>
Dove Hill Woods					
Ponds Project	£3,000				<b>£3,000</b>
Biodiversity Monitoring	£500	£500	£500	£500	<b>£2,000</b>
Communication Plan					
Bird Feeder scheme					
Insect Box scheme					
Events and MBC staff volunteer days		£750	£750	£750	<b>£2,250</b>
Whatman Park Lowland Meadow Area	£500	£1,600	£400		<b>£2,500</b>
<b>Part Funded by MBC - Look for external funding sources</b>					
Senacre Wood		£140			<b>£140</b>
River Len Nature Reserve		£140			<b>£140</b>
Five Acres and Wents Wood		£137			<b>£137</b>
<b>Already Funded by MBC</b>					
Free Tree Scheme					<b>£0</b>
Pond and Tree Warden Scheme					<b>£0</b>
Bird Nesting Box Scheme					<b>£0</b>
<b>Partner led projects to be supported financially</b>					
Orchards for Everyone	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	<b>£8,000</b>
Ponds on the Downs	£1,000	£1,000			<b>£2,000</b>
Wildlife on the Downs	£500	£500			<b>£1,000</b>
Kent Habitat Survey	£1,333	£1,333			<b>£2,666</b>

Funding required to implement LBAP	2010	Minimum 2011	2012	2013	MBC Total 2011-13
	£9,333 Already committed from existing budgets	£8,100	£3,650	£3,250	£15,000
<b>Funded by another project stream within MBC</b>					
Mote Park Restoration project					<b>£15,000</b>
<b>Developer Contributions</b>					
Palace Wood					<b>£16,000</b>
Working towards good biodiversity management					

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

Alternative action could be to not adopt the LBAP or instigate the Biodiversity Projects, this is not recommended because the opportunity to lead and be directly involved in protecting and enhancing the borough's biodiversity and raising awareness of biodiversity issues would be lost.

### **Background Papers**

UK Biodiversity Action Plan  
Kent Biodiversity Action Plan  
Maidstone LBAP

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: <b>11 November 2011</b>
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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES**

Decision Made: 04 November 2011

#### **YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider Kent County Council's (KCC) proposed changes and reductions to youth provision within the borough, particularly the proposals to withdraw from two of its three youth centres, and to feedback to KCC the views of stakeholders, young people and residents.

##### **Decision Made**

1. That KCC is asked to re-consider its proposals for Maidstone regarding the reduction in the number of youth centres from three to one and the decrease in detached youth work.
2. That the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre rather than Infozone be identified as the "hub" for Maidstone if youth centre reductions are made.
3. That KCC ensure that Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is given the opportunity to jointly commission youth services in future, from voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

MBC acknowledges the challenging financial climate for all councils following the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010. The proposed changes to the youth service amount to an overall £900,000 funding reduction across Kent commencing in April 2012. However, MBC is concerned that cutting youth services at a time when youth unemployment is rising, will have a lasting and negative impact on Maidstone Borough's young people and communities. In addition, Maidstone has the second largest youth population in Kent and the proposed reductions will therefore have a disproportionately adverse impact on the borough's young people.

There is strong support from residents for increasing rather than reducing youth provision. MBC's Community Development Team has recently consulted young people, parents and other stakeholders on-line and at a number of youth events in the borough since August.

- There were 916 respondents with 81% currently users of a youth facility in the borough.
- 59% use youth centres to hang out/meet friends or to have fun and only 7% to get advice. Although the percentage for getting advice is lower than expected, they do get information while having fun/meeting friends.
- When asked the question: 'KCC are proposing to withdraw from Shepway Youth and Community Centre and Lenham Youth Centre and operate from a hub at Infozone. Do you agree with this proposal?' 74% either 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the proposal, 6% either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', while the remaining 18% stated 'don't know'.
- When asked the question: 'Do you think you would use the proposed hub Infozone', 27% said they would, while 47% said they wouldn't.
- Asked about alternative uses for the buildings that KCC would be withdrawing from, 44% supported them being taken over by or sold to another youth organisation or charity.
- Nearly 90% of the respondents were under 18 years old.

These results are reflected in previous consultations that have informed other plans and strategies within the borough including the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for Maidstone Borough 2009-20:

- In the SCS, 43% of respondents listed 'Increase youth facilities and services' (p27 4.4.4) within their top three priorities, more than any other objective.
- 41% of respondents to the Place Survey identified activities for teenagers as 'most in need of improving', placing this priority only third behind road and pavement repairs and traffic congestion.
- 'Youth issues and ASB' were the highest priority (27%) for residents responding to PACT surveys carried out by the police in 2007/8.

The SCS also states (p40): 'During 2008 Maidstone had the fourth highest number/rate of entrants into the youth justice system of any district in Kent, and experienced a significant increase in numbers between 2007 and 2008. There are some areas which have significantly higher numbers of young offenders. High Street ward has the highest rates, followed by South and Park Wood wards. Park Wood and High Street had respectively the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of any wards in Kent of young people known to the Youth Offending Service (May 2007). Shepway North and Shepway South Wards also appear in the worst 10% of wards in Kent.'

These priorities are reflected in KCC's report 'Transforming Kent's Youth Service' Appendix 6<sup>1</sup> which states: 'The Draft Local Children's Trust Board Children and Young People's Plan 2011 - 2014 for Maidstone identifies the rate of teenage conception, the proportion of NEETs and the engagement of young offenders in suitable education and training as key issues under the theme of Adolescent Engagement.'

MBC is concerned that cutting youth services in Shepway and Lenham may exacerbate anti-social behaviour by young people, youth

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<sup>1</sup> <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/KYS%20Transformation%20Consultation%20Full%20Document.pdf>

unemployment and teenage conceptions, undermining the ability to achieve key shared priorities.

When reviewing the approach that KCC took to scoring the current youth centre provision as set out in its Frequently Asked Questions paper<sup>2</sup> (p6), the difference in the scores was minimal with Infozone scoring 69 and Shepway 67. In other parts of Kent a score of 67 would have been sufficient to be chosen as a hub. Further, it is felt that the scoring failed to take account of a number of advantages that the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre has over Infozone not least that it is the only significant youth facility on the estate. According to information provided by KCC, Shepway also has slightly lower running costs £88,500 compared to Infozone £92,600. It is also felt that the 'availability and quality of youth work space' at Shepway is greater than at Infozone. There is also greater security of tenure with Shepway as the facility is owned by MBC whereas Infozone has been earmarked for disposal by KCC - albeit that disposal may not take place for a while during the current property recession. The facilities at Shepway that aren't available at Infozone include:

- a substantial sports hall;
- an outdoor multi-use games area/ball court;
- access to open space including football pitches;
- substantial free off-street car parking;
- as well as youth club facilities that are at least equal in scope and size to those offered at Infozone.

Further, while MBC would rather KCC maintain both facilities, on balance it feels that there is already significant alternative and improving provision within the town centre where Infozone is based. It is felt that the commissioning budget could be better utilised in the town centre to enhance existing provision and detached youth work. These facilities include:

- Switch Youth Café;
- Connexions;
- Porchlight (homeless charity);
- VSU (volunteering agency for young people) at the Howard de Walden Centre, Blewett Street;
- A range of commercial and not-for profit outlets catering for young people including a multi-plex cinema, coffee shops, bowling alley, recording studio/rehearsal rooms, theatre and youth theatre.

KCC's proposals also include a commitment to retain a street based/detached youth work team in Maidstone Borough. While this is a reduction from the current two teams (rural and urban), the council will continue to support the work of this team and support the proposal to have a Community Youth Tutor – possibly based at the Senacre Skills and Community Centre – encouraging young people from the neighbouring deprived areas to access this centre with its focus on skills and training.

It should be noted that a petition has been submitted to MBC by 421 residents from Shepway stating: 'We the undersigned petition the council

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<sup>2</sup> [https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/Kent%20Youth%20Service%20Transformation\\_FAQ.pdf](https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/Kent%20Youth%20Service%20Transformation_FAQ.pdf)

to re-consider its proposal to withdraw services to the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre, Maidstone. This facility is vital to the youth of the area and it is envisaged withdrawal would lead to increased anti-social behaviour.'

While the formal closing date for the submission is 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011, KCC have said that they will give an extension until 4<sup>th</sup> November to allow for our decision making process to take its course.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

The council acknowledges that as it owns the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre, it may be possible, to commission a third party provider to continue to run and even expand the centre potentially utilising some of the proposed KCC commissioning budget. However, this is not considered to be the best use of the reduced resources available for Maidstone borough.

There is concern that KCC's proposed commissioning budget of £1.2 million will not be allocated appropriately across the Kent districts. Maidstone Borough has the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest population of young people of any district in Kent which does not even represent 1/12<sup>th</sup> of the total budget (12 Kent Districts). It is anticipated that the commissioning budget is likely to be in the region of £80-90,000. There is also concern that commissioning budgets will be vulnerable to future cuts as local authority budgets are further squeezed. Positively KCC officers have stated that their ideal commissioning framework is that youth services will be commissioned with a minimum three year Service Level Agreement as commissioning on an annually renewable contract/SLA will not give third party providers the security to enable them to employ staff, seek grants or provide certainty to users and local communities. This intention has not yet however been confirmed.

### **Background Papers**

The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009 to 2020.

Transforming Kent's Youth Service, a Vision for the Future, KCC, August 2011 <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/KYS%20Transformation%20Consultation%20Full%20Document.pdf>

<p>The Cabinet Member determined his decision was urgent because the closing date for submission of the KCC's Consultation is 04 November 2011. In accordance with Paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure rules of the Constitution, the Mayor, in consultation with the Head of Paid Service and the Chairman of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, agreed that the decision was reasonable in all the circumstances and should be treated as a matter of urgency and not be subject to call-in.</p>
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