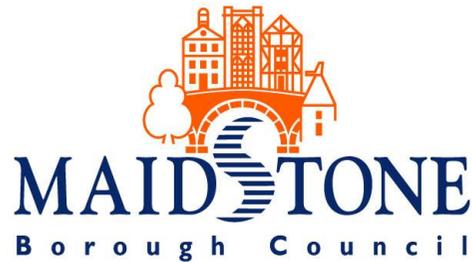


Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Phase 1: 2009 – 2014

HAP 12: Urban Green Space



Urban Green Space Action Plan

Table of Contents

Description	3
National status	5
Local status	6
Factors causing decline in biodiversity	9
Current action	9
Funding resources	11
National plan objectives and actions	11
Local plan objectives and actions	12
Maidstone’s objectives	13
Objectives and targets	14
Objectives and targets	19

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Description

- 1.1 Urban areas have their own biodiversity character. 'Green space' can be used as a generic term for all open land or water in towns and cities including remnants of countryside that pre-date urban development, railway land, road verges, formal parks, playing fields, rivers, ponds and gardens.
- 1.2 Urban Green space is a critical wildlife resource, and for many people such spaces present the most accessible and regular opportunities, near homes and places of work, to encounter and enjoy wildlife. The Urban Green Space habitat resource includes all urban open space, although the audit data referred to within this Habitat Action Plan is taken primarily from a study of publicly accessible sites within Maidstone Borough, as collected, analysed and presented in the Local Authority's Green Space Strategy (GSS)²⁰. The Borough's GSS identifies how to sustain, enhance, improve, protect and market Maidstone's green spaces, through a variety of policies, measures and recommendations.
- 1.3 Maidstone Green Space Strategy²⁰ recognised 8 types of green space, as described by Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17)²⁸ (Table 1).

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Table 1 Types of Urban Green Space in Maidstone

Green Space	Definition	Primary Purpose
Parks and Gardens	Includes urban parks, formal gardens and country parks	Informal recreation, community events
Natural and Semi-natural Green spaces	Includes woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (e.g. downlands, commons, meadows), wetlands, open and running water and wastelands.	Wildlife conservation, biodiversity, environmental education and awareness.
Green Corridors	Includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines.	Walking, cycling or horse riding, leisure purposes or travel opportunities for wildlife migration.
Amenity Green space	Most commonly but not exclusively found in housing areas. Includes informal recreation spaces, green spaces in and around housing and village greens.	Informal activities close to home or work, enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas
Provision for children and young people	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people.	Equipped play areas, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard areas, teenage shelters and 'hangouts'
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Natural or artificial surfaces either publicly or privately owned used for sport and recreation. Includes school playing fields.	Outdoor sports pitches, tennis and bowls, golf courses, athletics, playing fields (including school playing fields), water sports
Allotments and Community Gardens	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion. May also include urban farms.	Growing vegetables and other root crops N.B. does not include private gardens
Cemeteries & Churchyards	Cemeteries and churchyards including disused churchyards and other burial grounds.	Quiet contemplation, burial of the dead, wildlife conservation, promotion of biodiversity

1.4 This habitat category is not listed as a UKBAP Priority Habitat but sites may support UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats and Species.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

National status

- 2.1 There are no regular national surveys that monitor the quality of urban green space in the UK. This is further complicated as what work is undertaken tends to concentrate on specific types of public open space, such as parks and allotments. However, the 2001 Public Parks Assessment identified that nationally the majority of public parks and green spaces had suffered severe neglect, resulting in a poor and declining park stock. Based on 405 responding Authorities and nearly 3000 urban parks (accounting for approximately one-third of all urban green space), only 18% of the parks were described as good, compared to 69% in fair condition and 13% in poor condition.
- 2.2 The Central Government Urban White Paper explained the need for focused action to improve urban green spaces. It challenged all involved to think more imaginatively to find ways to make green spaces cleaner, safer and more attractive places that people will want to use for play and rest, exercise and sport, or for entertainment and lifelong learning. It gave the Minister for Regeneration responsibility for developing proposals for improving the quality of urban parks and green spaces and announced the setting up of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce to advise on this process. The Taskforce was established in January 2001 and published its final report, *Green Spaces, Better Places*²⁹ in 2006.
- 2.3 *Green Spaces, Better Places* identified a need for strategic thinking and Central Government is now working with CABESpace, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and Sport England to develop and broaden the scope of the Public Parks Assessment to cover a fuller range of green spaces.
- 2.4 Good quality, well-designed parks and green spaces make a critical contribution to our neighbourhoods, towns and cities and to people's quality of life and play an important role in creating a sense of place. The Government recognises the need for a diverse network of green spaces that meet a variety of needs and that such environments are fit-for-purpose: clean, safe, attractive and well-maintained. Urban Green Space includes both remnants of former countryside that have escaped development and also purpose made open spaces designed specifically for local people to enjoy. Diverse networks of quality green spaces have been shown to:
- Protect biodiversity and enhance the environment
 - Support the local economy, making neighbourhoods more desirable
 - Enhance physical and mental health
 - Benefit children and young people
 - Reduce crime and fear of crime
 - Support social cohesion
 - Aid movement between other spaces

Urban Green Space Action Plan

- 2.5 Central Government's vision is for a renaissance of England's green spaces, so that by 2008 the majority of local areas in England have at least one quality green space – with a Green Flag Award to prove it – and over 75% of people are satisfied with their green spaces.

Local status

- 3.1 In Maidstone there exists over 4733 hectares of urban and sub-urban green space with approximately 339 hectares managed or owned by Maidstone Borough Council.
- 3.2 A detailed summary on the number of sites and area covered by each type of green space in the borough in table 2.

Table 2 Summary of the amount of sites and area covered by the different green space types in Maidstone

Type of Green Space	Total Area (Ha)
Parks and Gardens	220
Natural and Semi- Natural	3719
Amenity	189
Provision for Young People and Children	13
Outdoor Sports Facilities	556
Allotments	35

[Green Space Audit Data (2005) updated in 2007 – next revision due in 2009]

- 3.3 MBC has adopted the Access to Natural Green Space Standard (ANGSt) developed by Natural England within its Open Space DPD³⁰ and Green Space Strategy²⁰ defining the following criteria on access to Natural Greenspace:
- No person should live more than 300 m from their nearest area of natural green space of at least 2 ha in size.
 - There should be provision of at least 1 ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population.
 - There should be at least one accessible 20 ha site within 2 km from home.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

- There should be one accessible 100 ha site within 5 km.
- There should be one accessible 500 ha site within 10 km.
- The 300 m standard (a straight-line distance) is based upon a requirement to provide green space within 5 minutes walk. Alternatively, it is possible to calculate actual distances covered within a 5 minute walk taking into account real walking routes.

3.4 A striking characteristic in the pattern of Maidstone development has been the outward expansion of the town in a linear fashion along the radial routes. This pattern of expansion has given the town a star shape with fingers of development extended to rural areas. The green wedges penetrate within or close to the town centre, and are also linked via corridors of green space in a radial pattern (Figure 1). These wedges and corridors allow people to connect with wildlife.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Figure 1 Green Wedges and Corridors in Maidstone Borough Urban Area



Urban Green Space Action Plan

Factors causing decline in biodiversity

- 4.1 Reclamation or re-development of disused land to a uniform land use reduces biodiversity.
- 4.2 Encroachment of development on to parks, old cemeteries, long abandoned sites and large established suburban gardens.
- 4.3 The specific targeting of brown field sites, which is often important wildspace habitat, for new development in accordance with Government policy.
- 4.4 Over-management of green spaces such as very regular mowing, clearing of shrubs and tall vegetation, filling in ponds or levelling of land as part of development.
- 4.5 Successional processes, which can result in the loss of rare species.
- 4.6 Alien species, which can dominate an area and reduce biodiversity.
- 4.7 Fly-tipping and vandalism.

Current action

- 5.1 Maidstone's GSS has assisted in retaining, improving and gaining green space in the borough and continues to play a vital role for this habitat.
- 5.2 Tree Preservation Orders can protect individual trees and groups of trees.
- 5.3 The Environment Act 1995 and much subsequent legislation relating to discharges and emissions of effluent to water and air, as well as waste disposal.
- 5.4 Maidstone Borough Council removes fly tipped waste from its own property.
- 5.5 Maidstone Borough Council has revised its cutting regime of selected areas to maximise biodiversity and Maidstone's Biodiversity Action Plan will ensure that management of UK priority BAP habitats in Maidstone will enhance biodiversity.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

- 5.6 A bird box scheme was run from 2006 until 2008 and bird boxes were placed at 11 sites in the urban area of Maidstone.
- 5.7 A number of Maidstone owned sites have had Phase 1 surveys completed in the last two years
- 5.8 Wildlife walks and events take place across the borough every year for example last year there were guided bat walks in Mote Park, wildlife picnics in the park, wildlife walk and litter clearing days.
- 5.9 A free tree scheme has given approximately 1500 free trees to residents in Maidstone each year since its launch in 2005.
- 5.10 Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) supports the tree warden scheme run by British Trust of Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) allowing members of the public to become trained in arboriculture.
- 5.11 MBC supports the pond warden scheme run by BTCV which teaches pond survey, management and creation techniques.
- 5.12 MBC has produced a Walks Pack which contains information on local wildlife and natural history.
- 5.13 MBC in partnership with MVCP and supported with The National Lottery has produced a River Walks Pack focused on the River Medway.
- 5.12 MBC Tree Planting Policy ensures that every council owned tree that is removed for safety reason is re-planted and that all trees planted are native to the South-East England or species that have a historical or cultural importance within Maidstone.
- 5.13 MBC is creating a 'green roof' on part of the office building.
- 5.14 Invasive plant species control. Chemical treatment of Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum japonicum*, syn. *P. cuspidatum*, *Fallopia japonica*, *Reynoutria japonica*) when notified of its presence on MBC land. Partnership project with MVCP to control Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), which under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981⁴, as amended is an offence to plant or cause Giant Hogweed to grow in the wild.
- 5.14 For UK priority habitats funding and advice on management, enhancement, restoration and creation is available through environmental stewardship scheme from DEFRA and FC.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Funding resources

- 6.1 Funding from developments via Section 106 can be used to improve urban green space for biodiversity.
- 6.2 Changes in the management of areas of habitat to encourage biodiversity would not cost any additional amount to the current grounds maintenance budget.
- 6.3 The Local Heritage Lottery Fund can be used to gain funding for projects on Local Nature Reserves
- 6.4 Awards for All, Groundwork Community spaces Grant, the Co-op Foundation, various banks and company trusts, can assist with community biodiversity project
- 6.5 Projects within a specific distance of historic or current Landfill site (SITA and Biffaward) are specifically aimed at biodiversity projects in urban green spaces.
- 6.6 The Naturesave Trust deals with those projects with a long term benefit which deal proactively with the root of a particular problem as opposed to merely reacting to the effects.
- 6.7 For UK priority habitats funding and advice on management, enhancement, restoration and creation is available through environmental stewardship scheme from DEFRA and FC.

National plan objectives and actions

- 7.1 There is no UK Action Plan for this habitat, however if a number of these areas will contain UK priority habitats and species which do have associated UK Action Plans.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Local plan objectives and actions

- 7.2 The Kent BAP does not contain this specific habitat, however the Built up areas and Garden Habitat can be considered similar enough for a local focus. The plan aims to maintain and improve urban green space and gardens for biodiversity and educate the public on the importance of biodiversity. The plan also aims to inform and influence the planning of existing and new public open space by encouraging the adoption of appropriate accessible natural green space standards (ANGSt) in all urban areas to ensure that biodiversity is adequately considered within open space strategies required by PPG17²⁸.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Maidstone's objectives

9.1 Maidstone's objectives are;

- 1. Determine the full extent of biodiversity, undertake all necessary research and monitoring, and ensure the amount of green space meets national and local standards and habitat action plan targets**
- 2. Manage and enhance biodiversity within urban areas and on MBC owned land**
- 3. Raise awareness of the importance of wild space for biodiversity and management techniques applied to enhance biodiversity**
- 4. Incrementally green Maidstone Town Centre through the introduction of street trees and naturalisation of green spaces such as amenity grassland flanking the River Medway.**

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Objectives and targets

Objective 1: Determine the full extent of biodiversity, undertake all necessary research and monitoring, and ensure the amount of green space meets national and local standards and habitat action plan targets

Target 1: Support the collation, monitoring and exchange of biodiversity data and ensure that green space is protected

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
1	Support the upcoming INTERREG bid by Kent Biodiversity Partnership to 1. Repeat the Kent Habitat Survey to assess the extent, condition and change in land cover across Kent and 2. Develop a toolkit for land searches specifically for biodiversity information to assist the planning process. The partnership will be looking for financial commitment from all partners, including local planning authorities.	2009	2012	ALL	Bid in progress. Planning Policy, and Parks and Open Spaces, have agreed to contribute to this bid (Development Control should also contribute due to the nature of the information being collected being required to assess planning applications). Requested that the Maidstone Area is prioritised for data collection so that this can be utilised in the open space DPD within the emerging LDF.
2	Develop a biodiversity and SWOT/Survey plan for all MBC owned sites with biodiversity potential and implement. Use data to inform and develop biodiversity enhancement improvement and projects plans and secure funding for these projects. Create a database to catalogue biodiversity data.	2009	2014	MVCP	Biodiversity surveys have been completed on 16 sites so far. Database in progress.
3	Where possible, ensure that development proposals incorporate 'green gain' so there is an overall benefit to wildlife as a result of developments and ensure that ANGSt criteria are met via the Green Space Strategy and the developing Green Infrastructure Strategy.	2009	2026	ALL	
4	Designate important examples of UK priority BAP habitat as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).	2009	2014	ALL	Five Acres and Wents Wood meets criteria for LWS designation based on survey data (Ancient Woodland). Mote Park proposed LWS designation, has been confirmed.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
5	Designate suitable sites as Local Nature Reserves where appropriate.	2009	2014	ALL	A LNR working group in council has formed and will be developing a process to ensure LNR standards are delivered in the borough.
6	Continue to implement MBC Tree Planting Policy to ensure that every council owned tree that is removed for safety reasons is re-planted and that all trees planted are native to the South-East England or species that have a historical or cultural importance within Maidstone.	2009	2026		
7	Examine the possible use of Biodiversity Performance Indicators as developed by the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency to monitor biodiversity success. Develop a KPI from these for MBC to monitor biodiversity success. Seek to include a performance indicator/s on biodiversity within the Strategic Plan as a Key a Performance Indicator	2009	2010		8 performance indicators have been developed, of which, 4 would show improvement in Maidstone Borough via implementation of the LBAP. 1 key performance indicator has been developed and included within the Strategic Plan.
8	Develop a biodiversity protocols and a toolkit for Developmental Control and arrange workshop to explain the protocol, toolkit and NERC duty.	2009	2014		GIS maps completed due to work for LBAP document need to develop protocol and arrange workshops.
9	Insist that developers plant native trees and shrubs of local provenance wherever possible within hard urban areas as part of street or estate character.	2009	2014		Landscape Character Assessments and Landscape and Conservation Planning Section ensure this is implemented
10	Ensure that Green Wedges and Green Corridors are maintained (Figure 1) when biodiversity evidence is available to support these as important ecological locations.	2009	Ongoing		Examine biodiversity current conservation effort, site designations and priority habitat maps (Figure 3 Introduction and Background Document) – implemented via action UGS 8 & 9.

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Objective 2 & 4: Manage and enhance biodiversity within urban areas and on MBC owned land

Target 2: Ensure appropriate assessment of land management practices are examined and that biodiversity data and knowledge is considered in all future land management

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
11	<p>Review and make recommendations on biodiversity issues within management plans for all MBC open spaces.</p> <p>Implement or negotiate management regimes that maximise biodiversity on managed sites where feasible.</p>	2009	2014		
12	<p>Write and implement management and improvement projects plans for natural and semi-natural sites of importance to biodiversity.</p> <p>Seek funding and community involvement via 'friends groups' and local schools for the long term sustainability of these sites.</p>	2009	2014		
13	<p>Review and make recommendations on MBC invasive species policy in light of any recent developments.</p> <p>Create GIS database to monitor the occurrence, control measures used and their time of application/s to best inform current national research efforts on the control of invasive species and also allow MBC to review the success and financial implications of the current measures taken.</p> <p>Look for possible external funding for invasive species control.</p>	2009	2014		

Urban Green Space Action Plan

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
14	Seek adoption of a Sustainable Urban Drainage policy (SUDs) for new developments within the LDF. Refer developers to the Kent Design Guide for information on the implementation of SUDs.	2009	2010	ALL	Green Infrastructure Strategy is assessing SUDs and water cycle mechanisms with respect to the urban expansion area.
15	<p>Negotiate that all new developments contain at least:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 insect box - 1 bat box - 1 bird box <p>per 10 dwellings within the landscaping, using information from the Kent Design Guide document.</p> <p>For large complexes (>20 dwellings) look to create swift bricks in addition to swift nest boxes and roosting areas for bats.</p> <p>Develop a simple method to monitor numbers achieved over total developments approved to include within AMR contextual Biodiversity evidence.</p>	2009	2026	ALL	Discuss with DC and Landscape and Conservation to ensure implementation.
16	Look to continue creating roadside nature reserves with the introduction of minimal cutting of roadside verges at new locations to allow connectivity for wildlife into urban areas	2009	2026	ALL KCC Highways	Saving – less cutting. KCC Highways to be invited onto LBAP steering group
17	Look for natural and semi-natural gain from developments via the creation, protection and enhancement of priority habitats, and in particular enhancing connections between existing UK priority habitats.				Look to use section 106 funds on natural and semi-natural improvement project plans.
18	Continue supporting the free tree scheme until 10,000 trees have been planted within the borough	2009	2020	ALL	Project started in 2005 and approximately 1500 trees are planted each year
19	Erect insect boxes and wood piles at suitable locations in MBC parks and open spaces	2009	2010		River Len LNR has a variety of insect boxes erected March 2009 – look to extend this to other urban parks

Urban Green Space Action Plan

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
20	Encourage and support the development of organic food initiatives via the allotments. Work to make the next new allotment site an organic allotment site by offering advice to the allotment committee via meetings, an information guide and an interpretation board on the site.	2009	2026		
21	Encourage gardening for wildlife and organise 2 events/workshops per year with the Museum to give talks on natural history and create insect, bird and bat boxes	2009	2014		Currently some events have had a biodiversity theme e.g. make a bee box for your garden workshop formalise this agreement
22	Ensure that biodiversity is considered within MBC Sustainable Procurement and within the developing Environmental Management System	2009	2014		Sustainable Procurement method is currently being developed and contains a question to assess possible impact on biodiversity.
23	Incrementally green Maidstone Town Centre through the introduction of street trees and naturalisation of green spaces such as amenity grassland flanking River Medway	2010	2015		

Urban Green Space Action Plan

Objectives and targets

Objective 3: Raise awareness of the importance of wild space for biodiversity and management techniques applied to enhance biodiversity

Target 3: Continue to raise awareness and community participation via documents, interpretation boards and events on biodiversity

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
24	Survey and report the public's reaction and views on biodiversity, specifically at biodiversity improvement and projects sites	2009	2014	KWT	KWT have completed a survey (2008) - awaiting Maidstone's data. Parks survey now includes biodiversity questions Sites where projects are planned will all survey local communities for feedback and to encourage inclusion.
25	Develop or consult a local bird/wildlife group to monitor the bird boxes in Maidstone's open spaces	2009	2010	MVCP BTCV KMBRC	Bird Boxes have been erected in different urban park areas.
26	Implement a school recycle bottle bird feeder wildlife campaign at 10 schools	2010	2011	MVCP	
27	Implement awareness campaign on biodiversity within local schools by arranging talks/workshops linking into the national curriculum	2009	2014		
28	Raise awareness of Maidstone's LBAP by creating a summary leaflet and webpage with up-to-date information on events and projects.	2009	2014		

Urban Green Space Action Plan

UGS	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
29	Continue to support tree and pond warden schemes. Develop a method to share contact details of wardens.	2009	2014	BTCV	22 tree wardens and 18 pond wardens are currently active in Maidstone. Supported by community development section.
30	Ensure all major projects include volunteer days/events to involve the local community in biodiversity action.	2009	2014	MVCP	Kent Goes Wild event was hosted at Mote Park on 26 th and 27 th September 2009
31	Support Wildlife on the Downs Days Which includes: wildlife safari, bat walk, bird walk, survival skills and activity or art	2009	2011	MVCP	Events Programme on the Downs Project run by MVCP. At least 5 events per year will take place per year in the Maidstone Borough