

Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Helen Miller, Overview and Scrutiny Officer Biodiversity and Climate Change
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The report sets out the outcome from the consideration of the Council motion, from April 2019, on the twin emergencies of biodiversity and climate change. The outcomes are from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Work Group appointed by Policy and Resources Committee.

The report presents the Targets, Strategy and Action Plan for agreement as well as principles for the resourcing and Governance of their delivery. This will ensure the Council fulfils its role in addressing the significant challenges of biodiversity and climate change and provide a robust platform for future decisions and actions to address these issues.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Council commits to the following:
 - (a) A carbon neutral Council estate by 2030
 - (b) A net zero Borough by 2050
 - (c) An ambition of a carbon neutral Borough by 2030, if technology and national policy changes allow;
2. That the Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy be adopted;
3. That the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan be adopted as a living document recognising it will be updated as needed to deliver the Strategy and targets;
4. That the funding for the plan be delivered from the £1m pot, previously identified for this purpose, recognising that it will need to:
 - (a) Deliver invest to save initiatives where possible that pay back to the pot for further Biodiversity and Climate Change investment; and
 - (b) Prime projects to be in a position to secure 'shovel ready' funding and any other available sources of external funding; and

5. That the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance be requested to bring a report to Democracy and General Purposes Committee outlining the Committee structure options for Biodiversity and Climate Change functions, including a dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or having Overview and Scrutiny functions embedded in the Communities Housing and Environment Committee.

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Policy and Resource Committee	21 October 2020

Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve Safe, Clean and Green corporate priority.</p> <p>By adopting a Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan the overall priority for these matters will be increased significantly.</p>	<p>Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The report recommendations support the achievement of the Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected cross cutting objective by agreeing an action plan that will protect and increase biodiversity in the Borough.</p>	<p>Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>
Risk Management	<p>See section 5</p>	<p>Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>
Financial	<p>The expenditure for the Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer to support this work was agreed as part of the MTFs and reaffirmed at the last P&R meeting.</p> <p>The planned expenditure will be from the agreed £1m pot set aside for this purpose but will need to spent on an invest to save basis where possible to be reinvested in action plan and to prime projects in order to bid for external funding.</p>	<p>Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client)</p>
Staffing	<p>We will deliver the recommendations with the appointment of a Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer reporting to the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance. The need for this post was confirmed at P&R Committee on 16 September 2020. This action plan will impact on all services and biodiversity and climate change must be embedded across the Council. The new</p>	<p>Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>

	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer will not be able to deliver this plan alone and there will be requirements for staff across the council if this plan is to be delivered successfully.	
Legal	<p>Local Authorities have a duty under Section 40 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 in exercising their functions to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Council’s intention to create a Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan demonstrates compliance with the statutory duty.</p> <p>The Policy and Resources Committee are responsible for all policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other committee or to Council as part of the policy framework. As such it is for the Policy and Resources Committee to approve the strategy.</p>	Keith Trowell, Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	No impacts on Privacy and Data Protection identified as a result of the report and recommendations.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	A high level Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and further assessments will be made as part of the delivery of the action plan.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	The actions of this report will have positive benefits on the health of the local population. They will enhance local green spaces that can have a positive effect on mental and physical wellbeing. Adaptation to climate change will lessen the likelihood and severity of negative impacts of climate change including heatwaves and flooding. Local air quality will improve with the transition away from fossil fuels for transport and power to electricity.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder issues to note.	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Procurement	There will be significant ongoing procurement implications arising from adopting the strategy and plan as BDCC will be a procurement consideration for all future	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications

	procurement activities.	and Governance & Section 151 Officer
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In April 2019 the Council approved a motion recognising global climate and biodiversity emergencies and requesting the Policy and Resource Committee to;
- undertake a short review of Maidstone Borough Council’s governance policies and progress aimed at addressing locally these twin threats and to report on findings;
 - consider a target date of 2030 for the whole of the Borough of Maidstone to be carbon neutral;
 - consider how the Council can strengthen local protection and enhancement of species, habitats and ecosystems services under available powers.

Target Date

- 2.2 The target dates for the Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy have to consider multiple factors – the dates need to be deliverable but ambitious, they need to reflect scientific consensus and national and international political commitments, they need to consider technology and policy frameworks and they need to understand the urgency of the climate change crisis whilst reflecting the elements under the Council’s control. As such the target date in the motion from Council was considered and is recommended to be the following:

- (a) A carbon neutral Council estate by 2030
- (b) A net zero Borough by 2050
- (c) An ambition of a carbon neutral Borough by 2030, if technology and national policy changes allow

These targets reflect the balancing of competing priorities set against the realism of the Council’s finances and influence. It is fully recognised that they are extremely ambitious and will require significant work and commitment to deliver, as well as relying on positive developments in factors outside of the Council’s control.

- 2.3 The Working Group determined that when all reasonable actions were taken with current technology, and within current government policy, no action plan could be created that would ensure the Borough would be carbon neutral by 2030. It recommends the targets be revised to a net zero borough by 2050, with an ambition of 2030 if technology and national policy changes allow. These revised targets would align us with the Government’s and Kent County Council’s targets of 2050.
- 2.4 The element of the target most under the Council’s control is the emissions from its own estate. The Working Group recognised the importance of showing leadership on the climate change agenda by making the Council’s

estate, fleet and activities carbon neutral by 2030. The Carbon Trust was commissioned to measure the current emissions and produce a Carbon Reduction Plan. The Carbon Reduction Plan identifies actions that, along with the expected decarbonisation of the national electricity grid, would reduce the Council's carbon footprint from 1232 tCO₂e to 564 tCO₂e which is by 54%. The Working Group recommends that the council commit to having a carbon neutral estate by 2030 and offsets any residual carbon emissions.

- 2.5 The Council's own emissions count for less than 2% of the overall carbon reduction required. The targets for elements outside the Council's direct control include procured services, where the carbon output far exceeds our own estate, but this is where the Council can influence outcomes though not directly control them, for example through its procurement processes and giving priority to biodiversity and climate change in all that it does. In order to deliver on the targets embedding the right culture throughout the organisation is a critical part of the Strategy.

The Strategy

- 2.6 The Working Group recommend that the Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy, Appendix 1, which sets out the rationale for acting on biodiversity and climate change and a suite of themes that present the basis for decisions on the action plan and future development of it. The Working Group researched what it could control and influence for emissions within the borough. It sought expert advice, intelligence from the Climate Change and Biodiversity Residents Survey 2020, Appendix 3, and from an event for land managers on biodiversity. It used this to identify the themes of transport, buildings, renewable energy, waste, adaptation, biodiversity, communications and governance. It established an aim for each theme and developed actions to make real change with input from Heads of Service to ensure the actions were relevant and deliverable and the action plan has had input from Wider Leadership Team.
- 2.7 The Strategy, action plan and targets all recognise that the subjects of Biodiversity and Climate Change are global and constantly changing. National and international policies and technologies are constantly developing. It is also recognised that the scale of the problem is global and that Maidstone Borough Council is a small player in its contribution. However, the way to tackle the biodiversity and climate change emergencies is not just on the macro level, but on the micro too with everyone and every organisation contributing to making an impact. This is why a Strategy is presented, which allows an action plan to be put in place and then constantly developed so that it can be proactive and reactive to the changing biodiversity and climate change context in accordance with the agreed themes.

The Action Plan

- 2.8 The actions were modelled to estimate the reduction of carbon emissions for the Borough by 2030. The actions, and other government policies including decarbonising the national grid, would reduce emissions by 35%.

Other actions were modelled, and it was determined that if unlimited resources were assigned the Council would not be able to reduce emissions below approximately 55%.

- 2.9 The Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan, Appendix 2, shows the actions the council will take to make a meaningful difference in the borough. It indicates the service areas carrying out the action and any costs. The costs for the borough are £1.75m-1.79m. It recommends the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan be adopted as a living document, recognising it will be updated as needed to deliver against the Strategy and targets.
- 2.10 Along with the action plan being a living document, every action within the plan will need to be assessed as it is implemented. All due processes will be followed to ensure value for money and maximum impact on biodiversity gain and carbon reduction. This is particularly important in the shifting environment of new technology and policy. However, it is crucial to understand the principle that carbon saved now is more valuable than carbon saved in the future.

Resourcing the Strategy and Plan

- 2.11 A £1 million pot has previously been identified to address biodiversity and climate change within the borough. It is important that these funds are used solely to cover the additional costs arising from carrying functions in a manner that reduces emissions, or protects biodiversity, and not for business as usual costs of core functions. £1 million will not be enough to deliver against the targets. The £1 million pot will therefore need to be used to deliver invest to save initiatives, where possible, that pay back to the pot for further Biodiversity and Climate Change investment. These could include energy efficiency works on our estate that reduce running costs as well as carbon.
- 2.12 The external funding environment is extremely fluid with multiple funding streams open for short periods. Examples of current funds include the Green Homes Grant Scheme which provides 75% of the costs up to £5k per home to improve energy efficiency and could significantly reduce the funds required to improve energy efficiency of our temporary housing stock. The Renewable Heat Incentive is available for low carbon heating systems on our estate and makes quarterly payments based on the amount of heat generated for 20 years providing a financial as well as carbon payback on investment.
- 2.13 With the number and availability of grants the pot will need to be used to prime projects, including scoping and feasibility studies, to allow us to be in a position to secure 'shovel ready' funding and any other available sources of external funding.
- 2.14 Listed below are the headline cost estimates from the plan. A significant amount of further work will be required when implementing the actions to ensure costs are robust and accurate. As such the costings below should be taken as being for estimate purposes only. It is important to recognise that whilst investment from the pot will look for invest to save, as

biodiversity and climate change principles are prioritised across the Council it may be that in some instances services need to choose a more expensive option to gain biodiversity and climate change benefits. However, for our own estate, as a lot of carbon reduction comes from energy efficiency savings; carbon savings and cost savings go hand in hand.

Summary of Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan costs

Item	Amount £
Install rapid charging points for electric taxis,	Up to £156k
Consultants for modelling recycling contracts	£10K
Address fly tipping	£40K
Subsidise home composting bins	£20K
Wetlands project creation	£50K
Tree planting, including buying land	£529-565K
Go Green Go Wild grants	£10K
Enhance biodiversity on our land	£10K
Improve energy efficiency of temporary accommodation	£103K
Replace remaining conventional car park lighting with LED	£15K
Make our estate carbon neutral by 2030 (Carbon Reduction Plan)	£807k
Total	£1.75m-1.79m

- 2.14 The costs in this table are indicative only, do not take into account payback, the availability of grant funding, assume that the electrification of the council's fleet is done on a replacement basis, and are subject to change and evaluation at the point of delivery.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 That the Policy and Resource Committee approves the Targets, Strategy and Action Plan and endorses the spending principles for the funding pot as set out in this report. The Committee are also recommended to consider how governance of Biodiversity and Climate Change are carried out in the Committee system.
- 3.2 That no action is taken on biodiversity and climate change and no further action is needed. This is not recommended as the Full Council approved a motion recognising the global climate and ecological emergencies in April 2019 and Maidstone Borough Council has its role to play in addressing these.
- 3.3 That the Policy and Resources Committee amend and adapt the proposals as recommended to them by the Group.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Policy and Resources Committee are recommended to adopt the Targets, Strategy and Action Plan put forward by the Biodiversity and Climate Change Working Group and are recommended to review the Governance of Biodiversity and Climate Change within the Committee system going forwards, considering the Group's preference for an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and how that would fit into the current system.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan addresses the motion recognising the global climate and ecological emergencies declared in April 2019. The Working Group has found that the council is unable to ensure the borough is carbon neutral by 2030 yet created a plan that will deliver significant improvements in the next decade and allow the Borough to play its part in the country being net zero by 2050.
- 5.2 There is the potential for loss of reputation in stating the council is unable to ensure the Borough will be carbon neutral by 2030. However, it is important that the Council is transparent and honest it is approach and takes all the actions it can to reduce emissions.
- 5.3 If climate change is not addressed by the Council we miss the opportunity to take action to prevent the serious consequences of uncontrolled climate change as described by the International Panel on Climate Change. This organisation highlights the negative impacts of climate change on the increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, on biodiversity and food security. It stresses the need to strengthen the response to climate change to keep global warming below 1.5°C to avoid the seriously escalating consequences of a greater increase in temperatures.
- 5.4 If biodiversity loss is not addressed by the Council biodiversity will continue to decline in the Borough. Biodiversity provides ecosystem services including clean air, clean water, food and severe weather mitigation as well as its own intrinsic value.
- 5.5 Interest in biodiversity and climate change is high nationally and locally as indicated in the Climate Change and Biodiversity Residents Survey 2020.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 On 22 April 2020 the Policy and Resource Committee resolved that the delay in reporting the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan to the Committee be noted and that the Action Plan be reported to the Committee as soon as it is practicable.
- 6.2 An online residents survey was run from 7 February 2020 to 20 March 2020. Over 1200 responses were received and used to inform the nine themes and actions of the action plan. Key findings included

- residents felt they had a good understanding of climate change with over 80% agreeing that reducing their impact on the environment was a personal priority
- residents felt they had a good understanding of biodiversity with over 80% agreeing that they were very concerned about the loss of the natural environment
- many residents were already adapting their behaviour around food, travel, energy efficiency and waste and more were willing to make change

When presented with a list of 14 actions around climate change and biodiversity and asked to identify their top five in order of priority the top three priorities were;

- plant trees and create other habitats for wildlife
- Invest in active travel infrastructure including cycle routes and pedestrian crossings
- Put in place more electric vehicle charging points

The Survey report is Appendix 1

- 6.3 On 13 March 2020 an event focused on biodiversity was run with land managers, farmers, developers, parish councils and information giving organisations. Over 40 people participated and 26 made pledges on what they would do including providing areas for wildlife, working in partnership and with the public, discussing biodiversity with planners, and links were made between habitat creation and flood management. An action will be added to the action plan regarding working with land managers and farmers after further liaison for clarification.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The need for a communications strategy has been identified in the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. The Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer will work with Heads of Service to ensure that the action plan is adapted and delivered and will provide regular updates.
- 7.2 A report to Democracy and General Purposes Committee will consider the best Governance arrangements for Biodiversity and Climate Change to ensure that Members are fully engaged in the Council's commitment to delivering against the Targets and Strategy.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy 2020-30
- Appendix 2: Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan 2020-30
- Appendix 3: Climate Change and Biodiversity Residents Survey 2020

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Carbon Trust's Carbon Reduction Plan