

**Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan update**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Georgia Hawkes, Head of Transformation and Property
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Helen Miller, Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**Executive Summary**

The Policy and Resources Committee adopted the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action plan on 21 October 2020. This report provides an update on implementing the plan.

**Purpose of Report**

Noting

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. That the Policy and Resources Committee notes the report.

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Corporate Leadership Team	15 June 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	23 June 2021

# Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan update

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities.	Georgia Hawkes
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	The report recommendations support the achievement of the Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected cross cutting objective by providing an update on the biodiversity and climate change action plan that will protect and increase biodiversity in the Borough.	Georgia Hawkes
<b>Risk Management</b>	Please refer to paragraph 5.1	Georgia Hawkes
<b>Financial</b>	£1m funding has already been allocated to the action plan and this report does not request further funding for implementation. We will continue to bid for external funding to help achieve the aims of the strategy.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Georgia Hawkes
<b>Legal</b>	There are no legal implications associated with the recommendations set out in the report which is to note the update on the action plan and not for decision. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. The duty is an integral part of policy and decision making in relation to all the council functions, services and actions of the Council.	Team Leader Corporate Governance
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	No impacts on Privacy and Data Protection identified as a result of the report and recommendation.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	A high level Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the action plan and further assessments will be made for relevant projects.	Senior Equalities and Engagement Officer
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise that implementing the biodiversity and climate change action plan	Public Health Officer

	will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	There are no Crime and Disorder issues to note.	Georgia Hawkes
<b>Procurement</b>	There will be significant ongoing procurement implications arising from implementation of the action plan as biodiversity and climate change will be a procurement consideration for all future procurement activities.	Georgia Hawkes & Section 151 Officer

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Policy and Resources Committee adopted the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action plan on 21 October 2020. This report provides a progress update laid out by the nine themes of the action plan and highlights grant funding being sought. Appendix 1 is the action plan with status and RAG rating columns to give a more detailed update on progress per action. Almost all actions that were due have been started with one action rated red and seven rated amber. A more detailed update on progress in each theme is outlined below. A £1m budget is assigned to this action plan.
- 2.2 The Economic Development Team have been, and continue to be, exceptionally busy delivering COVID-19 related grants to businesses. They will be able to devote time to supporting businesses adapt to the demands of climate change as we move into the recovery phase. In the meantime, information has been provided to businesses on a range of relevant topics via social media and the Business in Maidstone newsletter.
- 2.3 Good working relationships are being formed, or strengthened, with delivery partners to enable us to deliver the action plan and take advantage of opportunities presented by external funding, technology and national policy.
- 2.4 Theme 1 is Transport with the aim to support the shift from cars to active and mass transport and enable the transformation from fossil fuels to no tailpipe emissions. Achievements include;
- The Local Plan Review supports the use of active and mass transport and includes a policy for charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in residential and non-residential developments;
  - We have used the report from the Energy Saving Trust to draft our staff travel hierarchy to encourage the use of technology, virtual visits and meetings, active travel and low carbon forms of transport, to be introduced when COVID-19 safe working allows;
  - Staff surveys showed the majority who had been working from home wish to do some working from home post COVID-19 and this will be supported where possible; and
  - Promoting the Government workplace vehicle charging grant scheme in the Maidstone in Business newsletter.
- The Licensing Committee did not agree a date for requiring new taxi vehicles to have zero tailpipe emissions. We will seek guidance from the

Chair of the Licensing Committee on this matter. We will not progress the related action on providing charging points for taxis until it is resolved.

- 2.5 Theme 2 is Buildings with the aim to support the change from heating and cooling buildings using fossil fuels to low carbon technology and reducing energy needs by increasing energy efficiency. Achievements include;
- The Local Plan Review supports district heat and power schemes;
  - We have submitted a proposal to lever in £452k of government Green Home Grant Local Authority Deliver Scheme (LAD2) funding to address the most fuel poor homes;
  - We promoted LoCASE grants to help businesses address energy matters;
  - We promoted the renewable heat incentive to help residents access government funding for renewable energy installations;
  - Actively pursuing a programme to ensure privately rented homes with and EPC rating of F or G are brought up to a suitable standard; and
  - We promoted free measures to increase water efficiency on social media.
- 2.6 Theme 3 is Generating Renewable Energy with the aim to take every opportunity to generate renewable energy across the Borough. Achievements include;
- The Local Plan Review includes a policy on sustainable design that requires that applications should demonstrate how consideration has been given to the incorporation of on-site renewable or low carbon energy production;
  - The Council participated in the Kent wide Solar Together collective solar panel buying scheme for small businesses and households. Two have installed so far with the remainder expected in July; and
  - The Business in Maidstone 11 January newsletter promoted LoCASE grants that can be used by businesses for installations to generate renewable energy.
- No community energy groups have sought support from the council.
- 2.7 Theme 4 is Reducing waste and energy spent processing waste with the aim to reduce the amount of domestic waste created, increase the proportion re-used, recycled and composted to at least 60% by 2030 and reduce the carbon emitted from processing waste. Progress includes;
- A communications strategy addressing recycling and reducing contamination of recyclables including bin hangers, leaflets in maternity units and messages on social media;
  - Issuing new waste and recycling guidance for new developments;
  - Re-routing the garden waste collection round to reduce mileage;
  - Promoting home composting in May in conjunction with other Kent councils; and
  - Improving the process for reporting fly tipping online and being updated on progress on its resolution.
- 2.8 Theme 5 is Adapting to climate change with the aim to build resilient landscapes, communities and services. Progress includes;
- The Local Plan Review requires that new developments be designed to respond to, or allow for, future adaption to the impacts of climate change over its lifetime;

- Flood risks are considered in the Local Plan Review;
- The Council agreed in March 2021 to provide funding for three natural flood management schemes, to be delivered by the South East Rivers Trust, covering the School Stream (Headcorn), the River Beult catchment, and run-off water from Maidstone fruit growers' polytunnels. These will help reduce flood risk as well as providing wider social and environmental benefits;
- We are reviewing our arrangements around severe weather as part of the business continuity management activities.
- The impacts of severe weather events are collated and added to the Severe Weather Impacts System; and
- We are supporting parish councils to build resilience to flooding.

2.9 Theme 6 is Enhance and Protect Biodiversity with the aim to use every opportunity to protect, enhance and increase biodiversity in the borough. Progress includes;

- The Local Plan review includes a requirement for developments to achieve biodiversity net gain;
- We are working with Kent Wildlife Trust to promote their Gardening for a Wilder Kent Scheme and including a biodiversity friendly category in the new Maidstone in Bloom scheme;
- We participated in, and promoted, No Mow May;
- Tree cover on our estate has been augmented by 300 trees planted at Allington, at Parkwood and at Hudson Quarry sites and we consider each funding opportunity carefully and apply where feasible;
- Go Green Go Wild work continues with community groups awarded funding before Covid-19 now able to use money assigned;
- Trees on our land are being assessed in a four year rolling programme with an emphasis on functional risk management that identifies the maintenance needed; and
- We are assessing the non-operational land we own so we can assess the appropriate ways to manage them to support biodiversity.

Partners await Royal Assent on the Environment Bill, and guidance on delivery from DEFRA and in the meantime progress on the Nature Recovery Strategy has been limited. The Nature Recovery Strategy will be used to inform delivery of the wetland, landscape scale initiations and tree planting initiatives when available. In the meantime, we will have regard to nature based solutions and priority habitats and species as laid out in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Community tree planting activities have been affected by practical COVID-19 safety requirements. It is also possible that planting of larger standard trees will be limited this year as there appears to be a shortage of trees in bio-secure UK nurseries. The England Tree Action Plan 2021 to 2024 has been released and sets out the Government's vision for trees, woodland and forests. A report on tree planting will be taken to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

2.10 Theme 7 is Making our estate carbon neutral with the aim to reduce emissions from our estate to as close to carbon neutral as possible by 2030. Progress includes;

- Using the Energy Saving Trust's report on our fleet to draft a vehicle replacement plan;

- Seeking quotes for feasibility studies on how to provide electric vehicle charging infrastructure at the depot;
- Buying three electric vans and one light utility vehicle and installing electric vehicle charging points at the depot, part funded by the workplace charging grant;
- Collating EPC data on commercial buildings we let to enable us to identify energy hotspots;
- Starting in house driver training to improve fuel efficiency as recommended in the Carbon Trust's Carbon Reduction Plan; and
- Including our less energy efficient homes, used as temporary accommodation, in our LAD2 proposal to balance the average costs as required by the scheme.

As the landlord the council would be required to contribute 1/3 of the costs of the works to improve the energy efficiency of our homes used as temporary accommodation under the Green Home Grant Local Authority Deliver Scheme (LAD2) proposal. As this scheme would provide 2/3 of the costs it does represent good value for money. It enables the council to create the blend of costs required to be eligible for the scheme so unlocking government funds for homes in the private sector. Sufficient funds are allocated to improving the energy efficiency of homes we let in the action plan.

2.11 Theme 8 is Implement a communications strategy with the aim to enable residents, businesses and partner organisations to make informed decisions on climate change and biodiversity and access any funding available. Progress includes;

- Implementing a written communications strategy with messaging started on reducing water use at home, the green home grant, the Big Garden Birdwatch, sensible behaviour on footpaths and farms and the increase in the national plastic bag tax;
- Increasing staff awareness and knowledge of biodiversity and climate change through a webinar the induction package and a Team Talk; and
- Messages for businesses on grants via our newsletter and social media.

The council is also working with Kent County Council on the communications plan for the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy that was endorsed by the council on 24 March 2021. This will inform how we address the action on informing partner organisations and residents about the threats from climate change and the ways to adapt to its impacts. Individual Parish Councils have requested information about biodiversity and climate change and an officer will be attending the quarterly liaison meeting to discuss opportunities for joint working and support.

2.12 Theme 9 is Decision Making Processes and Governance with the aim to ensure that climate change and biodiversity are part of all decisions made. Progress on this theme includes;

- We are providing training on biodiversity and climate change to all staff via a Team Talk and also as part of the induction process;
- We are adding climate change to the report template for the new constitutional year;
- Governance arrangements to ensure biodiversity is protected and climate change is considered were safeguarded as the Democracy and

General Purposes Committee recommended that they remain with the Policy and Resource Committee; and

- The service design toolkit has been updated to ensure opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and mitigating and adapting to climate change are taken.
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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 That the Policy and Resource Committee notes the report.
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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That the Policy and Resource Committee notes the report.
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### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 There is a risk that the council may not deliver the action regarding a new taxi licensing policy to reduce the number of taxis using fossil fuels, and so the supporting action to ensure there are sufficient charging points for these vehicles. This could result in 270 vehicles not being tailpipe emission free by 2030 which is a very small proportion of the cars in the borough, yet these vehicles generally do higher daily mileage than privately owned cars. This impact is not significant in the council's aim of a carbon neutral borough by 2030.
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### **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 None
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### **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 The Committee will be updated every six months.
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### **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 Action Plan with status and RAG rating
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