

## **Maidstone Tree Planting Project**

### **Commission to provide a baseline for tree cover in Maidstone**

#### **Terms of Reference**

##### **Background:**

The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024 was released in May 2021 and sets out the government's long-term vision for the treescape it wants to see in England by 2050 and beyond.

An action is to publish guidance for local authorities to develop their own local tree and woodland strategies.

Whilst the England Trees Action Plan provides some guidance it does not put tree planting in the context of the government's Nature Recovery Network, which has not yet been published and will not be available until the end of the year. The Government's new Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery Schemes are due to provide the main mechanism for publicly funded woodland creation after 2024.

The Policy and Resources Committee adopted its Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan on 21 October 2020 and includes four key actions which relate to trees:

- Action 6.1 - encourages tree planting in new developments
- Action 6.3- supports and signposts community groups on tree planting and aftercare.
- Action 6.9 - where feasible increase tree cover to 2/3 on our estate. This is linked to the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emission strategy which includes development and implementation of a strategy to establish 1.5 million new trees (or their carbon sequestration equivalent) in Kent and Medway. An emphasis has been placed on expansion and reconnection of existing woodland (including urban woods) and the Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy envisages a landscape-scale approach, which implies looking at the borough as a whole. The development of our Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery Schemes will be integral to achieving this.
- Action 6.12- audit trees on council land and create a maintenance plan. Safety audits have been carried out on the Council's tree stock over the past few years providing a database for management purposes.

##### **Objectives:**

Tree Planting Project:

To increase tree cover across the borough, ensuring the right trees are planted, in the right place for the right reasons.

This commission:

To assess available information and provide a baseline for current tree cover within Maidstone Borough. Provide a methodology for identifying new areas for tree planting and a strategy to monitor and review the success of this tree planting initiative.

##### **Scope:**

Identify existing tree canopy cover in Maidstone Borough by defined area using GIS and other available data. If information is lacking, establish a cost-effective way of providing quantitative and qualitative information, enabling distinction by type and value.

Produce a methodology which enables a sieve of land within the borough to optimise the benefits of new tree/woodland planting. This should consider land identified in current biodiversity and infrastructure strategies and where new planting would achieve the most benefits. Sites should be located to enable connectivity and should be appropriate in terms of current biodiversity value, landscape character, topography, geology/soil type, historical setting and land use. Areas to be discounted from this search should include:

1. Designated/protected sites
2. Key habitats
3. Other unsuitable land such as sports pitches, golf courses, residential gardens, other areas of existing woodland, water bodies etc.

### **Methodology**

Undertake desktop assessment of information already available, including the Urban Canopy Cover Map, Maidstone Ancient Woodland Inventory, MAGIC maps, GIS mapping layers, MBC tree safety audits etc.

### **Reporting/program**

1. Draft report on baseline and methodology for approval
2. Final report

### **Key stakeholders:**

Kent Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, KCC Ecology, KCC Highways

### **References:**

England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024

Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy

MAGIC maps

Ancient Woodland Inventory

Urban Canopy Cover Map (<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/i-tree-eco/urbancover> )

Kent Downs AONB Management Plan

Maidstone Local Plan

Maidstone Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidelines

Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study

MBC tree safety audits, produced by Tim Moya

*Communities, Housing and Environment Committee report, England Trees Action Plan Update, August 2021*