

# Nature Recovery Declaration

## Maidstone Borough Council recognises that:

Nature is in long-term and accelerating decline. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth, with one in six species of our animals and plants at risk of being lost from these islands. With 41 per cent of wild species in decline nationally, and most of the important habitats for the UK's wildlife in poor condition. Due to human activity the UK now has less than 50% of its historic biodiversity remaining\*. Time is running out if we are to stop this nature decline and ultimately reverse it.

We recognise that:

- Nature provides us with vital life support systems ['ecosystem services'], and severe declines in biodiversity are undermining nature's productivity and adaptability, posing excessive uncertainty and risks for our economy, health and wellbeing
- A thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, happy, resilient and prosperous society
- The impacts of climate change are contributing to nature's decline, while restoration and protection of natural habitats provides a wide variety of cost-effective benefits that can effectively mitigate and enable adaptation to the impacts arising from a heating planet and associated increases in severe weather events
- Many of our services across our Borough can have profound impacts upon nature, both positive and negative, and we have responsibilities to ensure our decisions protect and enhance the natural world

## This Council further acknowledges that:

To address the nature crisis and aim to achieve the multiple environmental benefits that nature can bring to people, the 'Bigger, Better, More and Joined-up' principles of the 2010 Lawton Report - 'Making Space for Nature' - should be followed to help rebuild nature:

- There must be more space provided for nature
- Existing wildlife spaces must be expanded
- The quality of existing wildlife spaces must be improved by better habitat management choices
- Connectivity between wildlife spaces must be enhanced

In order to support a genuine recovery of nature across Maidstone Borough, and in recognition of new obligations under the Environment Act 2021, this Council commits to:

1. Actively improving and protecting the Borough's natural habitats and seeks to strengthen their resilience to climate change, by means such as improved connectivity and appropriate investment in natural solutions to reduce atmospheric carbon, better manage flooding, tackle urban heat island impacts and other severe weather risks, all while sustaining vital eco-systems

2. Prioritising the restoration of natural habitats in accordance with Maidstone Borough Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan and overarching UK Biodiversity Action Plan
3. Formulating a tree cover policy, underpinned by Nature Recovery Plan objectives, to reconnect the fragmented woodland and hedgerow network across our local authority area, informed by landscape restoration and "right tree, right place" principles. Recognise that tree planting is inappropriate in certain situations, such as downland, heathland, unimproved grassland and some wetlands
4. Managing and enhancing council-owned land to benefit nature and actively support and encourage projects that restore lost native species and natural processes, including through rewilding and river restoration initiatives
5. Embedding Local Nature Recovery into all strategic plans and policy areas, not just those directly related to the natural environment. Ensure the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Making Space for Nature Kent) is well understood across the authority and complements other relevant Council plans and strategies
6. Working with partners, demonstrate leadership by supporting and engaging with the parishes, businesses, communities and the wider public to take action to facilitate Local Nature Recovery
7. Designating the Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Transition and Nature Recovery as portfolio lead and also identifying a senior officer to co-ordinate the Council's operations across Local Nature Recovery
8. Engaging positively and proactively with the operation of Biodiversity Net Gain, supporting optimal gains for natural habitat restoration and connectivity across the Borough
9. Working positively with farm businesses, landowners and rural communities to deliver meaningful gains for nature from Environmental Land Management (ELM)
10. Where appropriate, and in accordance with the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan, investing in nature-based solutions to climate change, in order to tackle the nature crisis and climate emergency together
11. Negotiating an arrangement whereby Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors the Local Nature Recovery work and the Council's action to support biodiversity and Local Nature Recovery on a regular basis
12. Working closely with Maidstone Borough's partners to promote Local Nature Recovery on their landholdings and through their wider policy and practice