

Maidstone Borough Council

Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 12 July 2011

Maidstone's Draft Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)

Report of: Parks and Leisure Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Biodiversity (Biological Diversity) describes the amazing richness and variety of life around us. Biodiversity refers to diversity between and within ecosystems and habitats, the variety of different species and also to genetic variation within individual species. The intricate network of ecosystems, habitats and species comprising biodiversity provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It is the most important indicator of the state of our environment.
- 1.2 Maidstone borough is rich in biodiversity and contains 10% of the county broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland representing 12% of the borough's land cover. Maidstone's landscapes have influenced and shaped local culture. Maidstone borough is made up of characteristic areas defined by differences in rock type, topography, soils, slope and drainage, which in turn resulted in a great variety of habitats. Most of Maidstone falls in to the North Downs, Wealden Greensand and the Low Weald landscape natural areas. In both rural and urban areas wildlife makes an important contribution to the quality of life. Biodiversity conservation is central to maintain a healthy countryside and townscape.
- 1.3 The past ten years have seen significant changes relating to the environment particularly in terms of planning policy, legislation, and practical action and the need to balance social, economic and environmental aspirations. This Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan provides the opportunity to review current activities and issues, identify aims and set specific objectives and targets for action by a wide range of internal and external partners. It provides a much-needed overarching strategy for everyone involved in safeguarding and enhancing Maidstone's natural environment.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to consider the draft Local Biodiversity Action Plan (Appendix A) which is due to be approved by Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, Councillor John A Wilson on 29 July 2011.

- 2.2 Members are advised that this an opportunity to evaluate the document in its draft form. The committee will have the opportunity to interview the responsible Jason Taylor, Parks and Leisure Manager and Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, Councillor John A Wilson to gain and understanding of the document and its objectives and make recommendations where relevant.
- 2.3 Members should consider the draft Local Biodiversity Action Plan against the national and local context as detailed in this report.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 The Biodiversity Framework, the National Response.
In 1992 Biodiversity became a global agenda when 150 governments signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It called for national strategies and action plans to be created and enforced which would conserve, protect and enhance biological diversity and was the first time a legal framework was applied to biodiversity.
- 3.2 In 1994 the 'UK Biodiversity Action Plan' (UK BAP) was launched endorsing a multi-organisational approach to biodiversity conservation with an agreed set of targets and objectives. The overall goal of the UK BAP is to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms.
- 3.3 The UK BAP main objectives are;
1. To conserve and enhance:
 - The overall populations and natural ranges of native species and the quality and range of wildlife habitats
 - Internationally important habitats and species
 - Habitats and species (natural and managed) that are characteristic of local areas
 - Natural and semi-natural areas that have declined in recent years
 2. To increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving biodiversity
 3. To contribute to the conservation of biodiversity on a European and global scale
- 3.4 The following principals apply to the national UK action plan and are also applicable at a local level;
- The sustainable use of biological resources
 - The cautious use of non-renewable resources
 - The promotion of a multi-agency approach to biodiversity conservation, including individuals and communities and not just government lead. This is

being championed through Local Biodiversity Action Plans

- Biological conservation should be based upon a sound knowledge base
- The conservation of biodiversity should be integrated within government programmes, policy and action
- Decisions should be guided by the precautionary principal, that is, where decisions are complex or insufficient knowledge or information exists to understand biodiversity impact, then precautionary conservation measures are necessary.

3.5 Following the publication of 'Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan', the UK Biodiversity Steering Group was established to advise the government on how to fulfill its commitment to delivering the Plan.

3.6 In 1995 'Biodiversity: the UK Steering Group Report – meeting the Rio challenge' was produced, which set out how to achieve this through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process. The most recent list of priority species and habitats was produced in 2007 contains 1149 species and 65 habitats. The Steering Group also set up guidelines, with the Local Authority Association and the Local Government Board that could be used at a local level. Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) is one of 152 Local Biodiversity Action Plans in England.

3.7 The Regional Response.

The Maidstone borough forms part of the County of Kent in the South-East region. The Kent Biodiversity Partnership support biodiversity conservation via the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (Kent BAP). The Kent Biodiversity Partnership forms part of the larger South-East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF).

3.8 The South-East Biodiversity Strategy targets and strategic biodiversity opportunity map and the Kent BAP targets and actions are currently under revision, however through consultation the Maidstone LBAP will contribute towards this in a local context hierarchy linking into county, regional and national action plans.

3.8.1 In 2003 the Kent Biodiversity Partnership released an audit of the distribution of UK priority habitats in Kent. This audit contributed to the Kent BAP and listed 28 priority habitats of importance to the County, of which 27 were of UK priority importance.

3.9 Eight Local performance Indicators have been developed to examine Biodiversity with respect to Local Authority actions by the National Audit Office and the Development and Improvement Agency. The Maidstone LBAP would improve on four of these local performance indicators.

3.10 Maidstone LBAP

This strategy and action plan for biodiversity allows the council to be strategic in determining where to apply its own resources in

delivery. The development of the Maidstone's Biodiversity Project Plan is a leading and novel approach at local authority level, in that it clearly defines a programme of projects that cover a range of work including research, monitoring, protocol development and capital one-off site projects. These projects show how the Council will lead and be directly involved in protecting and enhancing the borough's biodiversity and raising awareness of the issues. Maidstone's Biodiversity Projects Plan clearly describes the localness of our approach as a governing body in the biodiversity framework highlighting our innovative approach to delivering better services to local people

- 3.11 The complete LBAP comprises of the following sections:
- I. Background and Introduction (**Appendix 1**)
 - II. HAP 2: Lowland and Dry Acid Grassland and Heath
 - III. HAP 3: Lowland Meadows
 - IV. HAP 4: Lowland Beach and Yew Woodland
 - V. HAP 5: Wet Woodlands
 - VI. HAP 6: Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland
 - VII. HAP 7: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland
 - VIII. HAP 8: Traditional Orchards
 - IX. HAP 10: Ponds
 - X. HAP 11: Rivers
 - XI. HAP 12: Urban Green Space
 - XII. Biodiversity Projects (**Appendix 2**)
- 3.12 The Maidstone LBAP has been produced jointly by Maidstone Borough Council Parks and Leisure Section and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP). MVCP are partly funded by Maidstone Borough Council and provide expertise and project management in biodiversity and environmental projects. As MVCP possess the relevant expertise and experience it is proposed that they continue to manage the LBAP and also implement the Biodiversity Projects on behalf of the council.
- 3.13 The mapping used in the LBAP showing Local Wildlife Sites was produced in 2008 and consequently some sites are not shown. Kent Wildlife Trust are currently updating this series of maps and these will be added to the LBAP once available.
- 3.14 The production and implementation of a LBAP was an objective of the Green Spaces Strategy 2005, and as such £15,000 was kept in reserve from the Capital budget to enable the implementation of the LBAP and Biodiversity Projects. It is proposed that this money is used by MVCP to not only carry out the projects but also to attract additional funding. A number of other longer term projects are identified in the LBAP and if additional funding could be found in the future these projects would also be initiated.
- 3.15 The table below identifies the projects that £15,000 MBC funding will be used to implement. Projects identified in 2010 have already been completed and funded from existing budgets.

3.16 As well as identifying how available funding with partnership funding will be used to implement projects in the borough, the table also shows how other project such as the Mote Park Regeneration Project are contributing towards reaching Biodiversity targets.

3.17 The amounts shaded in yellow are already committed to projects.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

4.1 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the following Council priorities:

- 'Corporate and Customer Excellence' and 'For Maidstone to be a decent place to live.'

4.2 The Strategic Plan sets the Council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the Council's priorities. Actions to deliver these key objectives may therefore include work that the Committee will consider over the next year.