

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR LEISURE AND CULTURE

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT
AND REGULATORY SERVICES**

Report prepared by: Jason Taylor
27 October 2011

1. MAIDSTONE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the adoption of the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan

1.2 Recommendation of the Assistant Director for Environment and Regulatory Services

That the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) is adopted and that the Biodiversity Projects be instigated.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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.

1.3.3 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.

1.4 The Biodiversity Framework

1.4.1 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.

1.4.2 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.

1.4.3 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.

1.4.4 The following principles 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 led. 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 principle, that is, where decisions are complex or insufficient knowledge or information exists to understand biodiversity impact, then precautionary conservation measures are necessary.

- 1.4.5 Following the publication of 'Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan', the UK Biodiversity Steering Group was established to advise the government on how to fulfil its commitment to delivering the Plan.
- 1.4.6 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 and 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.
- 1.4.7 **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).
- 1.4.8 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 these in a local context hierarchy linking into county, regional and national action plans.
- 1.4.9 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.

1.4.10 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.

1.5 Maidstone LBAP

1.5.1 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

1.5.2 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**)

Due to the large size of this document only the two most important sections have been enclosed as appendices with this report. A copy of the complete LBAP document is on the Parks Pages of the MBC website

([http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/leisure and culture/parks and op en spaces.aspx](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/parks_and_op en_spaces.aspx))

1.5.3 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. Much of the work carried out will be through volunteers, these are currently recruited locally by MVCP. There will be opportunities for local residents to get involved with the management and maintenance of their local wildlife sites.

- 1.5.4 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.
- 1.5.5 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.
- 1.5.6 The table below identifies the projects that the £15,000 MBC funding will be used to implement. Projects identified in 2010 have already been completed and funded from existing budgets.
- 1.5.7 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 projects such as the Mote Park Regeneration Project are contributing towards reaching Biodiversity targets.
- 1.5.8 Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) invited the Cabinet Member for Communities and Leisure Cllr John Wilson and Parks and Leisure Manager Jason Taylor to discuss the Bio Diversity Action Plan following its inclusion in the Forward Plan (May to August 2011) on 12th July 2011. To enable any feedback received from COSC to be included in the LBAP the decision to adopt the report was delayed until now. Following the discussion the following recommendations came from COSC:
- The Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan should be adopted; and
 - The work and achievements of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership should be promoted in the Borough Update.

Project	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
MBC Funding					
Weaving Heath					
TAVR Nature Area	£500				£500
Dove Hill Woods					
Ponds Project	£3,000				£3,000
Biodiversity Monitoring	£500	£500	£500	£500	£2,000
Communication Plan					
Bird Feeder scheme					
Insect Box scheme					
Events and MBC staff volunteer days		£750	£750	£750	£2,250
Whatman Park Lowland Meadow Area	£500	£1,600	£400		£2,500
Part Funded by MBC - Look for external funding sources					
Senacre Wood		£140			£140
River Len Nature Reserve		£140			£140
Five Acres and Wents Wood		£137			£137
Already Funded by MBC					
Free Tree Scheme					£0
Pond and Tree Warden Scheme					£0
Bird Nesting Box Scheme					£0
Partner led projects to be supported financially					
Orchards for Everyone	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£8,000
Ponds on the Downs	£1,000	£1,000			£2,000
Wildlife on the Downs	£500	£500			£1,000
Kent Habitat Survey	£1,333	£1,333			£2,666

Funding required to implement LBAP	2010	Minimum 2011	2012	2013	MBC Total 2011-13
	£9,333 Already committed from existing budgets	£8,100	£3,650	£3,250	£15,000
Funded by another project stream within MBC					
Mote Park Restoration project					£15,000
Developer Contributions					
Palace Wood					£16,000
Working towards good biodiversity management					

1.6 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.6.1 Alternative action could be to not adopt the LBAP or instigate the Biodiversity Projects, this is not recommended because the opportunity to lead and be directly involved in protecting and enhancing the borough's biodiversity and raising awareness of biodiversity issues would be lost.

1.7 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.7.1 The corporate objectives which the adoption of the LBAP and the instigation of the Biodiversity Projects has the most impact on are:

- Reduce the council's carbon footprint and improve the use of other natural resources, whilst ensuring that the council is adapting to climate change;
- Enhance the council's parks, green spaces and natural habitats;
- Maintain a clean and pleasant environment for people who live in and visit the borough.

1.7.2 Using Medway Valley Countryside Partnership's expertise and experience to administer the LBAP on MBC's behalf is a good example of partnership working being used to "save money and improve services".

1.8 Risk Management

1.8.1 The risks that are involved with the decision or actions resulting from the decision are:

- The Council could be criticised for not leading by example and showing land owners in the borough how to manage its land in a way which encourages biodiversity;
- The Maidstone LBAP forms part of the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan which was produced by the Kent Biodiversity Partnership, this in turn contributes to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, if Maidstone were to fail to contribute towards the LBAP it could be seen by its partners in the Kent Biodiversity Partnership to not take Biodiversity seriously;
- Failure to implement the LBAP could result in opportunities being missed not only to improve habitats for diversity on

council land, but also to influence others to do the same on their own land.

1.9 Other Implications

1.9.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

1.9.2 Financial Implication – The Council already contributes ££6000 to the Medway Valley Conservation Partnership. The £15,000 in the Green Spaces Strategy Capital Budget has been allocated to implement the LBAP. Further projects will only be undertaken when additional external funding is identified.

1.9.3 Staffing – The implementation of Biodiversity Projects would be done using existing Parks and Leisure Team members and through partnership working with Medway Valley Conservation Partnership, using the existing identified budget.

1.9.4 Environmental/Sustainable Development – The LBAP would provide direction and be an example to developers.

1.10 Relevant Documents

1.10.1 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Maidstone’s Biodiversity Strategy Phase 1: 2009-2014. Background and Introduction.

Appendix 2 - Biodiversity Strategy Phase 1: 2009-2014.
Biodiversity Projects.

- 1.10.2 Background Documents
UK Biodiversity Action Plan
Kent Biodiversity Action Plan
Maidstone LBAP

How to Comment

Should you have any comments on the issue that is being considered please contact either the relevant Officer or the Member of the Executive who will be taking the decision.

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IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

This report first appeared in the forward plan in June 2011 but was delayed due to Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee invitation to discuss at their meeting.

This is a Key Decision because: More than 1 ward in the borough will be affected

Wards/Parishes affected: All.....

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